

DEMONGROUND

Reflections of a Darker Future

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In this Issue:

Time for Ceremony

Cover Art by Kano

Dark Conspiracy:

The Unholy Land

Milieu by Eyal Faingersh

Ocean Color Scream

Adventure by Lee Williams

Call To Darkness - Part 1

Fiction by Mike Marchi

Dark Matter:

The Lazarus Pits

Plot Hook by Chris Carpenter

All Flesh Must Be Eaten:

Grave Impact

Preview by George Valisakos



DEMONGROUND Issue 8

Table of Contents

Cover Art	1
<i>Time for Ceremony</i> by Kano	1
Editorial/Opinion	3
<i>The Y2K Conspiracy, Revealed</i> by Mike Marchi	3
<i>Weapons Development: The Case Against Caseless Ammunition</i> by Reece Wardrip	4
Milieu	5
<i>Grave Impact</i> by George Vasilakos	5
<i>The Unholy Land</i> by Eyal Faingersh	8
Dark Races	13
<i>Grendel's Children</i> by Lee Williams	13
Adventure	14
<i>Ocean Color Scream</i> by Lee Williams	14
House Rules	19
<i>Running Man</i> by Mitchell K. Schwartz	19
Art Gallery	20
<i>Eat This</i> by Eyal Faingersh	20
Plot Hook	21
<i>The Lazarus Pits</i> by Chris Carpenter	21
Fiction	25
<i>Call to Darkness Part 1</i> by Mike Marchi	25
The Loose Ends	29



THE Y2K CONSPIRACY

REVEALED

Welcome to the First DEMONGROUND of the New Millennium. Yes, the Millennium. Personally, I don't understand why some people insist that the Millennium starts in the '01 year. The fact is, the calendar was created, modified, reworked and reset several hundred years after the fact. It was an arbitrary designation. Face it, they messed up. Let's just chalk it up to tribal superstition, and fix it now. Can't people just step back and say "you know, it makes a whole lot more sense if we just agree that the millenniums and the centuries and the decades all start the same way." After all, wasn't 1990 the start of the 90's? Isn't 2000 the start of the.... Hmm... Have they come up with a name for this decade yet? The "Oughts"? The "Zeroes"? The "O's"? They all seem a little lacking.

Maybe they should just ask us what to call the new decade. Those of us, who make the modern conspiracy/horror genre our virtual home, can pretty much tell them what decade it is. This is it. This is when all the crap really goes down. This is when the unseen forces that have been waiting in the wings make their intentions known. This is when a few good men and women band together in secret to thwart the dark forces. This is our playground!

And DEMONGROUND is your window into that playground. The realm of darkness, shadow, the unseen and the unseeable. As the readers of our last issue know, we've made a bit of a change to our focus. The magazine that started out lending support to a single game system (Dark Conspiracy) has extended the branch of support to many of the other games in this genre as well. Right now, in addition to Dark Conspiracy, we support All Flesh Must Be Eaten, Call of Cthulhu, Conspiracy X, Dark*Matter, Delta Green, Unknown Armies, Witch-

craft. Apparently people are impressed with the face we put on the magazine, and want to be involved in it.

Which brings me around to my next point: involvement. DEMONGROUND is first and foremost a fanzine. That means we take submissions from fans of the genre, and present them to other fans of the genre. The key element in that mix is submissions. If you enjoy reading DEMONGROUND, then show your support by adding to it! In this issue, we have a representative sampling of Dark Conspiracy, Dark*Matter and All Flesh Must Be Eaten, the latter being an actual excerpt from the AFMBE rulebook that the guys at Eden Studios were kind enough to let us show you. However, there is a significant lack of material from the other systems! If you want to see things in DEMONGROUND for the game systems you love, then you have to send us something for the game system you love. It's as simple as that.

If you have an idea banging around in your head, and are afraid we wouldn't like it, then send one of us an e-mail and let us know what you're thinking. If you'd like to dedicate your services in the art department - send us a sample of your work, and let us know. More and more, our goal is to put art in the magazine that is relevant to the articles. That means we need to read an article, and then ask someone to do a picture for it - and get it in before we do layout. Fun stuff! It's going to be an interesting year for the horror/conspiracy game. The most surprising news in recent weeks has to be the announcement that the new kid on the block, Dark*Matter will be moved to non-supported status at the end of the year. Those of us who have stood by Dark Conspiracy all these years can relate - but offer these words of encouragement. Dark Conspiracy survived its downtime, and is coming back with a new, improved

version 2.5 next month! Don't give up on it, and until then, remember that DEMONGROUND is here for you too!

Until next time,
Mike Marchi

DEMONGROUND NEWS

Download Record

Did you know that well over 900 people had downloaded DG7 at the time this was written? Did you know that less than half that many even gave us their names? I guess the world is still a pretty cynical place. We PROMISE we won't send your e-mail or name to anyone else! Honest. We just want to know who you people are, so we can notify you when things go wrong - or right for that matter!

A New DEMONGROUND Editor

With the expanded focus of the magazine, we realized that the three of us just don't have the experience in all the games we'll be supporting. We acknowledged a need for additional editing help, and have asked Chris Carpenter to join the regular editorial staff. Chris has written a number of articles for the magazine, and shown an excellent aptitude for fixing other people's grammatical mistakes. We're certain that Chris will not be the last to join our ranks.

Personals

In other news, please join us in congratulating DG founding editor Marcus Bone and his new wife, Emma, on their recent nuptials. With that simple act, Marcus has given up his status as the only DG staff member who isn't married. Now, about those kids....

And speaking of kids, founding-editor Mike Marchi and his wife, Becky, are expecting their second child this August. ❖

WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE AGAINST CASELESS AMMUNITION

by Reece Wardrip

This information is provided for GM's who wish to maintain some realism in their gaming universe or like to develop new weapons and equipment for their games. It should be understood from the start that at the time DC was written and published, caseless ammunition was supposed to be the next technological advancement in firearm technology. As you are about to learn, this never came to pass. I will outline a few of the major obstacles that prevented caseless ammunition from being adopted and used in military small arms.

At the present time caseless ammunition for small arms is still just a concept. There have been some attempts at creating working models, but nothing has ever been adopted or gone beyond the prototype stage. The H&K G11 is the most widely known example but it was never adopted by the German Army or any other army for that matter.

There are several reasons why cartridge-firing weapons will remain the standard for the foreseeable future. First and foremost is economics. It would be very expensive for any nation to scrap its entire inventory of standard issue rifles and ammunition to purchase a completely

new weapon system. The benefits gained over conventional small arms would not justify the cost. Most militaries would much rather spend the amount of money involved on high-profile systems that would have a much greater effect on the battlefield. More bang for the buck, as the saying goes.

The next problem faced by using caseless ammunition is strictly technological. The chemical reaction that propels the projectile out of the barrel of a gun creates a great deal of heat. When a gun is fired at a high rate of fire this heat builds up rapidly. The cartridge case in a conventional firearm acts as a heat sink, removing most of the heat that is generated by the powder combustion when the case is ejected. This prevents a condition called cook-off, which occurs when the heat inside the chamber reaches a level that ignites the powder inside the cartridge before the primer is detonated. Anyone that has ever had this happen to them (the author included) will attest to the fact that this is a very unpleasant experience. Also, the repeated heating of the receiver will effect the integrity of the material used to build the weapon. The result of this would be a loss of reliability or worse. In order to overcome this problem better heat-resistant mate-

rials will have to be used to manufacture the weapon and the propellant/case.

The last problem is that the focus of the requirements for the next generation of combat rifle has shifted from reducing the weight of the weapon/ammunition (the main benefit of caseless ammunition) to increasing the hit probability of the weapon. With this shift in focus also goes the R&D resources needed to overcome these deficiencies. It is unlikely that a company or government will dedicate the resources necessary to a concept that will yield only a marginal improvement in the function and capability of the weapon. It would be possible, with enough resources, to eventually overcome these problems. But it is highly unlikely to happen; the limited resources available would be better spent on more productive systems.

GM's should feel free to use this information as a general guide for every aspect of their game systems. The problems discussed apply to all technological advancements, not just caseless ammunition. When developing a new weapon or piece of equipment that uses a new or future technology ask the following questions:

Is the benefit or increase in capability outweighed by the costs involved in developing the technology? Could better results be achieved at less cost developing a different system? Will some other technological advancement make your item obsolete?

If you answer no to all of these then continue on. But if you answer yes to any of them then you may want to scratch the original idea and develop something else. ❖



I have just informed the United Nations and our NATO allies of a recent discovery made by American scientist in Flagstaff, Arizona. A previously unidentified planetoid is on a collision course with earth. Unless we find a way to prevent this body from impacting on our world, life as we know it will cease to exist. Fortunately, our best scientists and technicians at NASA and in the United States Military have been working on solutions to this problem for several years. My advisors assure me that we can avert disaster. Rest assured, life will go on and we will emerge from this crisis better and stronger.

-Presidential Speech, October 12, 1999

I am proud to be the first to tell the world to breathe easily. Operation Gaia's Shield has succeeded and the Earth is safe! At 17:23 Eastern Standard Time, combined U.S., Russian, and Chinese missiles impacted with the Nemesis comet, effectively shattering it into hundreds of thousands of harmless pieces. Over the next few days, we can expect to see no effects more noticeable than brilliant but harmless meteor showers around the globe. This incident proves that we can work together for the safety of all humanity. God bless us, every one.

-Presidential Speech, May 28, 2000

I'm here this evening at Arlington National Cemetery, where Memorial Day remembrances have been going on throughout the day. This evening a large crowd has gathered for a free evening concert and fireworks display, a tribute to our brave men and women who died protecting this country. The occasion is made all the more special by the spectacular meteor shower that is lighting up the sky even as I speak. The President is

scheduled to start speaking in just a few moments . . . Hold on a second . . . there seems to be some sort of commotion down by the graves . . . people running and screaming . . . let's get over there Tom. Alright, I'm standing here overlooking the cemetery, there appears to be some sort of brawl going on . . . Oh my God! Sweet Jesus what is that?!?

-CNN Live, May 29, 2000

space, unbeknownst to anyone, on a direct collision course with Earth.

American scientists detected the incoming chunk of rock, although they had no clue as to its true origins or deadly purpose. Fearing the end of life on Earth, the nuclear powers of the world combined their arsenals, modified their missiles, and sent millions of megatons flying into space. Already eroded by millions of other impacts in its long history, the zombie planet burst apart under the nuclear onslaught. The Earth thought itself safe.

Then the irradiated pieces of the planet came hurtling down to Earth, burning up and dissolving into the atmosphere. As a result of prevailing winds and the widespread dispersal pattern of the dust, hardly a corner of the planet escaped exposure. As the dust settled to the ground it began immediately to seep into the soil, water, and even the air. The result was all too horrible and predictable — the ancient powers awoke the dead from their eternal rest.

Without a doubt the most dramatic and public instance of the living dead rising from their graves occurred at Virginia's Arlington Cemetery during the year 2000 Memorial Day services. With over 200,000 dead soldiers

dating back to 1864 buried there, the cemetery became an instant army of the dead, counting skeletal civil war generals, badly maimed soldiers from a over a century of warfare, and even some ex-presidents among its number. All sense of patriotism long gone from their dead brains, these cadaverous warriors clawed their way to freedom with just one thing in mind: consuming the flesh of the living. Best of all, it happened on live television.



**A special ALL FLESH MUST BE EATEN
excerpt by George Vasilakos**

History

Millions of years ago and hundreds of light years from our own world, an ancient civilization toyed with forces better left undisturbed. Their own dead rose up against them as the result of a series of diabolic necromantic experiments. The only way they could save themselves was to literally blow a chunk of their world off into space, ridding the planet of any trace of the zombie taint. Ever since then the zombie planetoid has traveled through



While the president and his staff escaped unscathed, thousands of others died in the ensuing mayhem. The roads out of the cemetery became clogged with traffic and the zombies had free reign to slay the attending veterans and their families. All over the world similar scenes began to play themselves out. The horror had just begun. The army moved in on Arlington to try and seal the area off. Despite what they had seen with their own eyes, at first no one wanted to believe the truth about what was really going on in.

All found out the truth soon enough, however. The army's, and everyone else's, guns were almost useless against the mindless, walking corpses. Contrary to popular movies, shots to the head did nothing to stop these monsters. The only way to stop them was to burn them. Surprisingly flammable, except when wet, the army soon figured out that the desiccated bodies caught fire and burned completely in a matter of minutes. Unfortunately they remained animated until the fire destroyed them.

As a result, these walking torches spread the cause of their own destruction with them. Well meaning citizens using homemade fire bombs ended up causing more damage to their homes than the zombies. Many of the major and minor cities suffered from fires that swept through block after block. In many places, the firefighters could not do their job for fear of the ever-growing zombie population. Thousands more died in house fires and flaming apartment buildings. The worst part was that, those who weren't totally consumed in the fires soon rose up themselves.

As The World Turns

The national infrastructure has collapsed. Telephones, power, and even water are all off-line or on their way to being so. The flaming cities became deathtraps for millions, caught on congested roads by either fire, or zombies, or both. With many cemeteries located on the outskirts of towns, zombies have already flooded into rural areas and suburbs. There seems to be no way of stop-

ping this endless tide of walking dead. It simply grows larger and larger with every passing hour.

The military has begun making tactical air strikes against large concentrations of zombies. While this seems to have been somewhat effective at destroying the monsters, it also has caused significant damage to the surrounding buildings. Also, it has exacerbated the fires raging in these areas. The most panic-stricken among the politicians and military personnel have begun talking about using nuclear weapons against the creatures. Fortunately, saner minds have realized that any such use would kill as many citizens as zombies. As the zombie scourge drives out the living from certain areas, "life-free" zones are created and nuclear weapon use becomes more viable.

The President has declared martial law and begun to order the establishment of safe zones where the living can seek refuge. With so many of the country's cities in flames, most of these safe zones are in rural areas. It is now widely known that anyone who dies will soon rise again unless their body is cremated immediately. Everyone has begun to stockpile gasoline and the military is trying to concentrate all of its incendiary weapons in the safe zone.

One problem with these rural safe zones, at least in some parts of the country, is that they are threatened by another danger besides the zombies. The zombie invasion happened to strike at a time of severe drought in many areas of the world. Particularly in the western United States, forest fires and brush fires have consumed many areas. These massive fires may help curtail the zombies, but they continue to cause significant damage since there are few fire fighters willing and able to contain them.

Some of the safe zones are already at their maximum capacity and the soldiers and civilian volunteers guarding them are refusing to admit any more refugees. This has led to several instances of violence and even murder as those trying to escape the zombies clash with frightened guards inside the safe zone compounds.

The zombies created by the disinte-

grated planetoid are of the slow and stupid variety. They cannot think past making a straight line towards any source of living flesh they see, hear, or smell. They move slowly and stiffly but are incredibly strong. Once one of these mindless monsters gets its hands on a victim, it is almost impossible to escape. The most dangerous thing about them is that they are almost impossible to kill with anything but fire. Hacking them to pieces just leaves you with a lot of animated pieces, which might seem harmless but can actually cause significant damage. The pieces also hinder the living in the face of other, more complete, zombies.

Once a zombie latches onto a victim, it begins to consume the poor soul's flesh while the victim is still alive. Eventually the victim dies of shock or blood loss, but is usually horribly mutilated afterwards. The zombies immediately lose interest in the victim once he dies. Anyone who dies anywhere on the planet that has been exposed to the planetoid dust (meaning anywhere but sealed rooms) rises from the dead within ten minutes to an hour of their passing on. Those who actually die from a zombie attack turn into one of the undead almost immediately. Those who somehow survive an attack continue on as normal (although other diseases might infect them).

Story Ideas

We Are the World

This zombie scenario works well with a rather specialized evening of roleplaying in mind. The GM should hide the true nature of the evening's entertainment from the players. Have them generate characters as normal, but instead of making up fictional personas, have them create themselves. This in and of itself can be fun as the play group discusses each person's statistics and skills. Once the players have defined themselves in game terms, let the fun begin.

Start off the story with the impending destruction of the comet by the nuclear assault. Make the players think that the adventure is going to center around



what they would do if a giant asteroid were about to strike the earth (something we've all thought about of late no doubt). Then, once the asteroid is destroyed, move on to the Memorial Day party the next day. Where are the players when the meteor showers begin? Perhaps they gather at a friend's house to view the magnificent light show.

Then, of course, the dead start to rise. Since the adventure is set wherever you and your players live it should be easy to set the scene. Get a map and find all the local cemeteries and hospitals. Now the chaos really begins as sporadic reports come in. If they are watching television, they can see for themselves just what happens at the Arlington National Cemetery. Being overly imaginative, gamers they no doubt see the possibilities and repercussions and start doing their best to prepare for the worst. From there it's just a matter of following the players' lead and throwing zombies and dead friends, teachers, and employers at them as they try to reach safety.

The President's Daughter

For those who want a little more action and heavy firepower in their evening's entertainment, the players can make soldiers tasked with journeying into a city to rescue someone, the President's daughter for instance. Armed with flamethrowers, incendiary grenades, and other weapons, the heroes must fight their way through zombies, burning buildings, and God knows what else to save the hapless girl before the walking dead rip the flesh from her body and make her one of their own.

Just finding her should be hard enough, and then they have to get her back out alive. What happens when they



return to find their former base overrun by zombies or the President himself turning into one of the living dead? Perhaps it is left to them to fire the tactical nuke that will take out the city, killing many innocent living people but destroying millions of zombies in the process. If they survive and escape, somewhere, somehow, there's got to be a place where they feel safe, if only they can find it.

Grave Impact Zombies

Strength 4	Constitution 2
Dexterity 1	Intelligence -2
Perception 2	Willpower 2
Life Points 15	Speed 2
Endurance Points n/a	Essence Pool 9
Attack: Bite damage D4 x 2(4) slashing	

The zombie first attempts to grab the victim. Unless the Cast Member is surprised, this requires a Resisted Dexterity Test. Zombie Masters should assign modifiers to the Cast Member's roll depending on the number of zombies crowding around (-1 per), and the number of zombie parts interfering with the Cast Member (-1 per). Once the zombie grabs the victim, the Iron Grip strength takes over.

Weak Spot: None; Fire Any damage inflicted is ignored (other than graphic

descriptions) unless it is fire damage. Severed limbs, heads and bodies remain active and seek to interfere with any victims nearby. Five points of fire damage to a limb or head will destroy that part.

Getting Around: Slow and Steady

Strength: Strong Like Bull; Iron Grip

Senses: Like the Living

Sustenance: Who Needs Food?; All Flesh Must Be Eaten

Intelligence: Dumb as Dead Wood

Spreading the Love: Only the Dead

Anyone who dies anywhere (except in sealed rooms) from any cause rises from the dead in D10 x 6(30) minutes. Those who die from a zombie attack turn into one of the undead in D10 minutes.

Power: 23 ♦

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Artwork by Michael Osadciw.

THE UNHOLY LAND

by
Eyal
Faingersh

Introduction

This is a milieu for playing the game of Dark Conspiracy in the state of Israel and its surrounding areas in the early years of the 21st century. I tried to be as specific as possible with issues that can give a clear picture of life in the area, but tried to avoid issues like politics and relations with the Arab states, since such things are sensitive and may offend some people. As for issues that I could not expand on a specific basis, I have tried to give templates and advice that the Referee could use to easily construct a setting that works with his or her own campaign.

If you are a Player, stop reading now; this text should be read only by Referees. While most of the following would be common knowledge to the players, some of the information is sensitive and includes the seeds of secrets and conspiracies that should only be revealed over time.

Welcome to Israel

Few regions of the world have, or would want to have, the historical focus that the Middle East (specifically the Israeli region) has experienced. Established in 1948, she is surrounded by those who would seemingly devour her, the Arab states. Four major wars were fought during the 20th century, in 1948 (immediately after proclaiming itself a state,) 1956, 1967 and 1973, with Israel holding it's own against superior numbers, aided by the United States in 1973.

The War of Principles

The failure of the peace process in the early 21st century encouraged both sides in the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict to take extreme measures in order to change the power balance in the area. When the "War of Principles" began, the intention of the rivals was only to achieve minor geographical victories in order to use them in further negotiations. Within days, the fighting had escalated to include chemical and biological long range surface to surface missiles, unleashing poisonous gases and killer bacteria over the Israeli civilian population. In reply, Israeli bombers commenced with nuclear attacks all over the Middle East. Several major cities of the Arab world were reduced to rubble.

In an attempt to end what had quickly grown out of control, the Israeli and Arab states signed a cease-fire, ending immediate hostilities. One more attack was pending, however, led by renegade Iraqi officers just after the agreements for cease-fire were signed. These officers launched all of the chemical and biological warheads under their command towards Jerusalem. The Israeli military was not able to deploy their anti-SSM (Surface to Surface Missiles) batteries in time (since the war was technically over), enabling more than 20 non-conventional missiles to impact inside the Ancient City (see below,) and ten more onto the surrounding areas. The rest were destroyed or fell into the sea or onto neighboring countries.

For the survivors of the war a new era has begun: it's name is "Cold Peace."

Cold Peace

The Cold Peace is a result of an inability to fight; both sides are too busy with their own problems from the chemical/biological/nuclear exchange. Although the current situation is still officially a cease-fire, tensions remain high.

As the years went by, and governments around the world fell under the power of the Megacorporations, opportunities to conduct business and gain profit have supplanted the official non-relationships policies held in the region. The present Arab-Israeli international relations, however, do not involve tourism, culture or any exchange of sympathy. It is mainly business and industry, involving products of necessity and transactions directed by US influence.

The general population of the warring states still carries a lot of bitterness and hatred towards each other, and a foreigner visiting another country could easily find himself in a life threatening situation. Thus, a businessmen away from his home often surrounded themselves with a large ring of bodyguards.

The official regional cease-fire terms have not changed much in the intervening years. The tension is still at a critical level and armies are yet being constantly prepared for a full scale war.

Though not necessarily announcing their actions, secret military projects and new developments are constantly being made.



The Environment

Israel has become the most polluted state in the Middle East. The coastline is flooded with industrial waste from dumps, the inland natural lakes are non existent (except for the Dead Sea which is used for salt mining) and almost all natural life there is long since dead. The Kinneret, the largest natural lake has been dried out. All water reserves are now stored in man made facilities. Most of the water come from rivers that used to flow into the Kinneret and are often muddy and polluted. These waters are provided to lower classes of civilians who are being encouraged to boil them before drinking, if they're lucky enough to get running water into their homes at all.

Those who can afford it, are buying their clean water supply from desalination and purification facilities that draw water from the sea. Most people blame the Arab states for the destruction due to their use of chemical and biological weapons, few are aware of the significant amount of pollution that comes from Israeli industrial centers. Other environmental problems are mostly to do with inland pollution. Many diseases are being spread because of careless disposal of toxic wastes.

Cancer has spread like a plague: nuclear radiation, toxic waste, even microwave radiation (from transmitter antennas) is blamed. The short distances between population centers and industrial areas only exacerbate the problem. Due to the rise of man made diseases, the cures for diseases like cancer and even AIDS have advanced by great lengths. Cancer of any form is almost as common as the flu once was, and the treatment is successful in most cases, though still painful, long and expensive. Those who can afford it, however, can be treated in the most comfortable sanitarium conditions.

Some nature reservations have been transformed into cities and industrial areas, while other are still not habitable, being rumored to be occupied by weird people, creatures and plants, spreading diseases authorities cannot figure out. These areas have been declared "off limits" due to bacterial contamination, but minion hunters suspect these are actually Demonground. Such areas can be up to five kilometers in diameter.

The Cities

The cities are crowded and squalid due to population growth and the decline of the services that municipal authorities used to provide. Since Israel is a small country, the distances between cities are small, and neighboring towns can be seen from the outskirts of almost any given city. The two major cities are the Gush metropolplex, and Jerusalem, the capital.

Old neighborhoods from the beginning of the 20th century consist of two or three story buildings, usually in a very bad shape. These neighborhoods can be found in the inner cities. Most of the buildings in these areas however, have four stories and four apartments of three to four rooms in each story. These buildings are usually occupied by the lower classes.

The streets in and around these blocks are a reflection of the buildings, garbage is scattered all around and the stench of everything from rotten food to rotten flesh is in the air constantly. Between the buildings, dark alleys roofed by wild, mutated vegetation are used as homes for those who live in the streets. They use junk like old car parts or furniture to form walls for their fragile homes. Many people disappear from such "homes", nobody investigates though, and others usually occupy that space immediately afterwards. Another type of residence in the inner cities is on the roof of the lower buildings.

Driving a vehicle through one of these streets might be a problem due to the many obstacles that lie on the narrow one lane roads. Some streets have two lane roads and most are still usable, though not many cars move through these areas anyway.

From the mid 1990's, the newer buildings have been built with seven to sixteen stories, with four to six apartments in each. These buildings can be found on the outskirts of the cities, occupied by Mikes.

Another typical housing style on the outskirts, for Mikes who can afford a little more, is a small cottage. These cottages are

private or shared with a neighbor or two and are built in congested blocks of similar buildings. The municipal authority maintains reasonable services within such neighborhoods.

The Gnome areas of the city are much like any other districts of the upper classes all over the world. Most live on the highest floors of the corporation Citadels, while others own mansions inside and outside of the city. The Citadels and most mansions are connected with private freeways, like the Gush's





white road.

The Gush is the only metroplex in Israel. It is actually a number of cities that have grown together into one big Metropolis, centered in Tel-Aviv. "Gush" means "Block", and is nicknamed after the "Dan Block", which is the name of the cities that surround Tel-Aviv nowadays. "Gush" can be also referred to as a lump stuck in one's throat, choking him and compelling him to throw up at once.

The population of the Gush is over 1.5 million people. Two thirds of them are poor and hungry proles. Unlike the other metroplexes around the world, the headquarters of the corporations and gnome citadels (surrounded by mike neighborhoods) are located at several spots inside and on the outskirts of the Metroplex, near the industrial areas (which can be found both inside and outside of the Gush), and not in the center of the city.

Most Freeways are in a pretty bad shape, but in the areas where middle and higher classes reside, the roads are much better kept. Two notable turnpike systems are the "White Road" in Gush and the Nation Cross Highway, which is a turnpike network in a very good shape that runs from Haifa (northern Israel) to Eilat (southern Israel). The Nation Cross is accessible through manned stations and several pirate access stations, though there is a special police force to deal with the illegal ones. Unless stuck in a traffic jam, a trip (by car) from Gush to Jerusalem, Beer-Sheeva or Haifa takes 90 minutes. From Beer-Sheeva to Eilat takes 5 hours, from Nazareth to Haifa or Tiberius takes 90 minutes, but the longest travel time will be probably spent inside Gush.

A trip from the southern part to the northernmost exit point takes 30-60 minutes in theory, though nobody was ever lucky enough to drive smoothly without traffic jams and annoying traffic lights that add at least 40 minutes to the trip. If taking 'shortcuts' on sidewalks and using a police/ambulance siren, the additional 40 minutes can be ignored though. Experienced drivers used to say: "If the road is not jammed, you're not in Israel".

The Country

The life of a farmer is harder then ever. The soil is bad and water is expensive. The reason why there are still farms in Israel is because of the "Kibbutz" farms, communities that rely on sharing of resources. Unlike the historical and patriotic farming settlements, the new generation of the Kibbutz members have formed their own agricorps, to compete with the larger corporations who want a bite of their market, and it is a dirty war. The only advantage Israeli farming has got is advanced technology and the use of genetic engineering to enhance their crops and domestic animal species. Another source of food is the neighboring states, who are willing to sell their own agricultural products which are lower in quality and may be contaminated, but also cheaper.

The Desert

It is a few years since the war, but few are aware of what is going on in the deserted areas and nuked cities of the Arab world. The vast plains and deserts are rife with ruin and disease. New communities have risen into this region, both static and nomadic. Many have sworn vengeance on those who have brought them into this miserable life of post nuclear holocaust. A few have found new and powerful allies, who promised to aid them in return for "favors." Fewer still see these entities for what they truly are and have started fighting back. Overall, it is a strange, alien world where brute force rules and trust is hard to earn. Very few venture into such areas willingly, even fewer come back.

Life In Israel

Israel is a land where people come in all colors, shapes and sizes. The population is very diverse (though Asian appearance is not as common as the other European-Mediterranean-African looks) and skin color does not necessarily reflect social class. Racism does exist, though it is based on nationality and religion rather than appearance. The average Israeli civilian might seem very different from the typical American or European. The Israelis are famous for their disregard of politeness, their direct approach, loudness and suicidal driving style. The average Israeli is a secular Jew who can speak and read Hebrew and English or Arabic (or all three) along with partial knowledge of some other languages from the Languages List below (due to family origins.)

The average civilian has served in the armed forces for 3 years and learned to use firearms (even non-combatant soldiers have minimal skill levels).

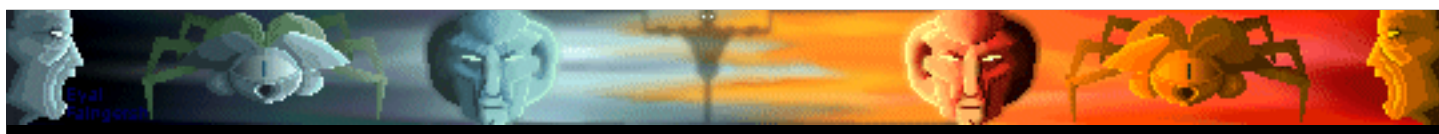
Since there was no passing of a voting rights law in Israel, the Israeli lower classes are somewhat different from the ones in the US. First, the Prole and Mike Classes are not much different and many civilians can be seen as falling into both categories, making the difference hard to define. A Prole is usually unemployed, or unable to support himself or his family financially.

A Mike is employed and can earn a decent living, though only a few can afford to save some money in the bank.

Culture and Religion

Many cultures have been mixing with each other for centuries in the area, while others have kept themselves isolated and are intolerant of outside influence.

The main aspect of all cultures in the area is religion. A 11 of the world's three main religions exist. While many people have abandoned religion, others have become even more orthodox or even fanatical. Most of the civilians are secular and may carry out only symbolic religious gestures out of respect to their origin. Most of the seculars, though, have relatives who are true believers. Such relationships can provide a trustworthy contact in a religious society. Jews of all varieties make up



75% of the population.

The largest religious groups have formed their own societies, being almost totally independent and impervious to outside influence. Such groups can resemble the isolated cultist communities found in the US, growing militant and occupying an isolated ranch in the desert. Others own several companies or even head corporations that takes care of all of their material and monetary needs. In Israel, the only independent societies that achieved significant power are of Jewish faith, and they are based over corporations they run from their separate districts.

In the surrounding Arab states, Islamic and Christian societies were formed in order to isolate themselves from the sinful world, or out of a need for defense from the horrors of the deserts, wild areas and cities.

Military

The glory of the Israeli military is world famous, though Israeli soldiers are not superhuman or backed by super hi-tech weapons.

In order to generate military characters, use the standard system of the Dark Conspiracy books. Advancement in the military, for enlisted (3 years compulsory service) is to the rank of staff sergeant or less, and money earned for these years is \$5,000 (100,000 NIS, see below), half that for non-combatant soldiers. Since the compulsory service term is 3 years, and not 4, the PC will get three-quarters of the skill levels of the equivalent four year terms in the rule books. Officers can be recruited as regulars, and go to military academy during their service. For that they serve at least one more year, during which they may earn additional money according to the rules (divided by four for each one year term.) The rest of the military careers are the same as in the rule books.

Every Israeli citizen must serve the military, unless unable to do so due to health problems.

Even university graduates must do so, at least symbolically. A graduate will serve as 'professional officer' (symbolic rank) in their own field of expertise, for three years and earn the pay of a regular soldier. Professional officers may advance to be regular officers by going to military officers academy. They will advance to higher positions but remain in their field of expertise. Additional service and money are calculated the same as for regular officers.

Weapons and the Law

Israel has been through many wars, therefore weapons are cheaper and easier to obtain. A civilian is allowed to carry two firearms (under licence, only pistols, shotguns, sub-machine

guns and hunting rifles. 1000 NIS/\$50 each weapon) and melee combat weapons (under a law stating that the owner will use these weapons for self defense only) into Prole areas. In Mike areas, melee weapons are forbidden and in Gnome citadels no weapons are allowed (except for pistols, or special licences as for Security/Police/Military personnel.) Weapons are cheaper, but most NATO weapons are imported, so prices for weapons listed in the rule books work out the same as in the US. Weapons like the UZI or GALIL are cheaper, down to 75% of the listed price.

Economics

20 NIS (New Israeli Shekel) = 1 Dolmark (the Dolmark is a unit of currency used in the United States, based on the Stackpole "Fiddleback" Dark Conspiracy novels. It is equivalent to the Dollar). Prices are the same as in the US. In Israel, the banking system allows civilians to have negative accounts, allowing them to keep their accounts active and even borrow more money (up to a limit) when they owe the bank already. Many people are living with a constant "minus" in their account, while the banks feed off the interest rates of those paying off their negative accounts. A Gnome character would be able to borrow from the bank, down to a "minus" that equals 10 times her starting money. A Mike character would be able to borrow down to -3 times her starting money. A Prole character will not be allowed from the bank.



Business

Unlike foreign Megacorps, the Israeli corporations are not based on one dominant business. Instead, they own several

companies, hold stocks in others (including companies owned by the government and foreign corporations) and import goods from abroad.

The typical corporation is owned by a single powerful family, or a cartel of several businessmen. Also, unlike foreign Megacorps, the Israeli corporations do not control their own piece of land or employ a police force, though they have compelled the government to pass rules that allow them to retain almost absolute authority in their own buildings and blocks of industrial areas. Most of the corporation income comes from the government, which relies on the services and products of the corporations, while the government itself feeds off heavy taxes they have implemented on the civilian population.

Corporations in the Arab world are basically the same. Wealthy families who built their power bases from the oil wells they own, have now increased their power at the expense of governments and kings. The financial considerations have pushed back nationality considerations, enabling trading of their land's natural resources in exchange for Israeli technology. Their main difference from Israeli corporations is that Arab corpora-



tions control large areas of land, sometimes larger the state of Israel itself. These areas, however, are mostly barren deserts that are not even being patrolled regularly, a fact that allows Demonground to be established there.

Israel and America

The Israeli government owes the US government and corporations more than 200 billion Dolmarks (the situation with neighboring states' debts is more or less the same), and US Megacorps have enough power to pressure the Israeli government and corporations (who can put pressure on the government themselves) to do their bidding. In this way, the US has considerable power in Israel's internal policies and financial affairs, and it is used often. Another notable debt of the Israeli government to American power is the US veto on the embargo over Israel that Arab UN members tried to apply after Israel's use of nuclear weapons.

Israel and Palestine

Palestine is an independent state - which is dependent on Israel. Even in times of peace, Israel still maintains a significant amount of control over this much smaller country. Most of the territorial disputes are still being negotiated (The War of Principles changed the geographical and political situation in the area) while issues like Jerusalem are almost irrelevant (the city is no longer habitable, see the below section about Jerusalem.) There are still nationalists from both sides that act violently against each other's state. Suicidal terrorists and fanatical settlers try to penetrate major cities and occupy lands by brute force, while covert military strikes are constantly being prepared in each government's security council. Israel is still able to "shut down" Palestinian areas, and also controls the passageways between both parts of Palestinian authority.

The Lands and Places of Interest

These are the main parts of Israel:

North: Galilee and Golan Heights

Center: Gush area and Jerusalem

South: Negev (a desert)

Territories' (currently Palestine): West Bank, Gaza Strip

Jerusalem

The capital of Israel is the Holy City, (or unholy as some may describe it.) It is a city where more than 2000 years of blood have been spilled in order to conquer and maintain control over it. It is a city that three major religions claim ownership over and where believers, pilgrims and weirdos roam the streets in search of non-corporal things a mortal cannot understand, or perhaps should not.

The Ancient City

See http://www.comandcom.com/israel/jerusalem/old_city.htm for a map of the ancient city.

The Ancient City is over 3 millennia old. It is a place where empaths of ancient eras have spoken to beings from beyond time and space, and where hundreds of thousands have died in their gods names. The Ancient City of the present is a hostile environment. It remains contaminated and uninhabitable for any terrestrial life form, and will remain that way for another millennium unless treated.

For unknown reasons, the chemical and bacteriological contamination resist cleanup efforts. The official government line is that the contaminants aren't spreading either, but this is something of a lie, as it grows, albeit slowly, by meters a month. The whole area is under quarantine, easy enough to maintain since most of the Ancient City is surrounded by a thick, high wall, and the entrances are guarded by the military in order to make sure that no unauthorized people are granted access. Proper protection (gas mask, environmental suit) and exit decontamination is mandatory, several decon booths are set up at main entrances, akin to a shower. A doctor is always present at the decon areas in order to spot those who may have been infected by the strange bacteria (the symptoms are easily noticed.) A person who is believed to be infected is immediately turned back into the city, even if they are a foreign civilian. Anyone who tries to escape is hunted down and killed.

Last Notes

Thanks to Lee Williams for helping me with this document, by fixing my horrible spelling errors, and reviewing the setting from a foreign (non-Israeli) point of view. ♦



By Lee Williams

The creatures nicknamed Grendel's Children are one of the most vicious and deadly life forms to have been discovered in the proto-dimensions. They are driven to kill and feed off their prey purely by biological reflex alone. This makes them more frightening than many of the fully sentient Darklings, as they are devoid of any emotion and are completely deadly.

They were discovered accidentally by a Reptilian ET scout mission, who opened a long-forgotten portal that led to a planet orbiting the star we know as Tau Ceti. An exploration party was sent to investigate. During one night on the planet, the entire ET party were brutally slain. When the progress reports ceased, another party was despatched through the portal to find out what was wrong. They found a few remains of their companions, who had been slashed and bitten literally into pieces. They also found the corpse of a fearsome creature, which they took back with them for analysis. When they realised what the creatures were capable of they captured a number of these beasts and attempted to re-program their behaviour in order to turn them into warriors. This project failed, and the beasts are now at large in several proto-dimensions.

Physically, Grendel's Children are like something seen in a nightmare after watching one too many "Aliens" style movies. The average adult specimen is between 4 and 5 metres in length and weighs around 250 kilos. They are a neutral greyish-green in colour. They have plate-sized eyes that are extremely sensitive and can see some way into the infra red spectrum. The eyes seem to glow a golden colour in the darkness. They are four-limbed, and have huge webbed feet with four razor sharp claws on each. The front limbs are not "hands" however, though they are used to slash and tear at the prey.

The skin is very thick and is capable of deflecting small arms fire. The head is bullet-shaped with long powerful jaws containing many teeth, which are meant for killing live prey and stripping the flesh from the bones. This creature is not really equipped to eat anything other than fresh meat. They possess extremely acute olfactory senses also, and apparently can sniff out prey from several kilometres away. Even the tail can be used as a weapon, and it has a spiked club-like protrusion at the tip similar to that of the dinosaur species Ankylosaurus. These spikes can also be "fired" from the tail at close range, doing damage equivalent to a firearm. This is a last resort tactic, as the spikes do not grow back very quickly. Their brain is in the head, but there are several large clumps of nerve ganglia running along the spine and into the lower back. It is thought that these aid in reflexive control of the limbs and tail.

The other deadly thing about Grendel's Children is their natural "supercharger". In the creature's abdomen there are a pair of sacs attached to special glands. These glands produce an oxygen-rich substance, which is then stored in the sacs ready for use. Whenever the creature requires an extra burst of energy the sacs are emptied into the blood stream, increasing its running speed and reflexes by an enormous amount. The only major drawback to this is that immediately after one of these bursts of speed the creature must cool down, or it will collapse and die within a few minutes. This ability also makes the creature easily visible in the infra-red, due to the immense amount of biological heat generated in the process. This heat build up means that they tend to stay within easy reach of open water. At maximum speed however, it would be either very brave or totally stupid to get between one of these and its intended destination.

A favoured tactic of Grendel's Children is to lay in wait underwater, breathing through an extendable snorkel tube, then leaping out and attacking when prey comes to the shore. This is due to their amphibian origins.

In their home dimension the adults reproduce by spawning, in much the same way as Earthly frogs and toads do. However, as the eggs develop into tadpoles the adults will happily feed on them, leaving only a few to escape. These eventually grow into the next generation of adults. The reason that the ETs failed to change the behaviour of these creatures enough to train them is that in their natural habitat each adult requires a great deal of territory in which to hunt. When pressed together they will fight each other to the death, except during the mating season. This made them too volatile for the ETs to use.

Grendel's Children

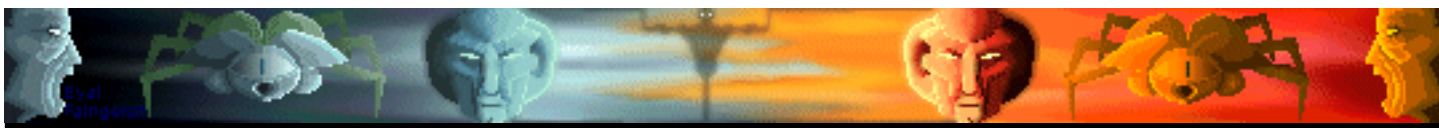
Special: Number appearing depends on what circumstances the creatures are in when encountered. Normally there will be only one in a given area, but if the local adult is killed then next time the location is visited there could be as many as 20 competing for the territory. The extra tough skin offers an Armour Value of 1 at all locations.

Movement rate of 150 and Initiative of 10 are available only when the creature uses its "supercharger" glands.

Damage is 1D10 for each claw and 2D10 crushing damage for the tail.

When dealing with a tail spine attack, consider it as a Small Arms combat. The spines do not grow back quickly, and are used as a last resort defence.

Inspired by the novel "Legacy of Heorot" by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes. ♦



The former Britannia 7 gas supply platform has gained a reputation as a sort of immobile Flying Dutchman. Since its abandonment by the ConOilEx corporation it seems that anyone setting foot on board has not returned, or at least returned alive. Now it is time to discover what secrets the Britannia 7 may hold...

OCEAN COLOR SCREAM

By Lee Williams

Recently, the post-Recovery government of the Republic of Britain has been in negotiations with the giant ConOilEx Corporation. These talks have been about the possibility of striking a deal where the London government and ConOilEx will both profit. The government will rebuild the on-shore facilities for the pumping of oil and gas from the North Sea, hiring them out to ConOilEx. In return, ConOilEx gets full permission from the government to use British ports for its operation to reclaim its platforms, now self-declared independent settlements (see DEMONGROUND Issue 7 for details).

As ConOilEx is a huge and rich corporation they can afford the best, and so they have hired the Leviathan Deep Operations Company (LDO) to assist with the preliminary surveys on these platforms. LDO are specialists in ocean floor and deep-water missions, and have recently completed an archaeological operation on a prehistoric site in the eastern Caribbean area.

The player-characters may know as much (or as little) of the information given in the article 'FAIL- Life in the North Sea Settlements' as the referee wishes them to know. However, they will not know anything of Britannia Seven's reputation to start with, unless they are platform dwellers themselves.

The PCs may be hired as backup personnel by LDO, especially if they have prior experience of vessel use or undersea operations. They may also be taken on as extra security or computer staff, depending on the needs of LDO as determined by the referee.

If any of the characters are from the FAIL settlements, then their superior local knowledge will make them prime candidates for LDO. This could cause some friction between ConOilEx and LDO, as ConOilEx see the settlers as trespassers. Whereas LDO just require people willing to do the job. However, even if accepted by LDO, they will be subject to a higher level of scrutiny than non-FAIL settlers would.



Referee's Information Only

The Britannia Seven, though owned by ConOilEx, was hired out to another company concerned with new methods of accessing fossil fuel deposits. This company, Buddro Inc., was run by a Darkling who used their resources to build a portal to let others of his kind through. He disguised this as a super high tech drilling machine. Unfortunately for him, when the SPP gained power in Britain their policies drove ConOilEx away from the North Sea. With his funding and supplies of parts cut off, the Darkling attempted to use his portal before it was properly ready, to take him home.

Sadly, the control devices were the last things awaiting completion.

Instead of taking him away, the portal opened into a random and previously unknown proto-dimension, consisting almost entirely of water. One of this dimension's native creatures came through, and immediately feasted upon the hapless Darkling and his unwitting human assistants before escaping into the sea. The creature is fiercely territorial, and has made its lair among the support legs of the Britannia Seven platform. It will prove a fearsome adversary for those who disturb it, such as an ocean floor survey team...

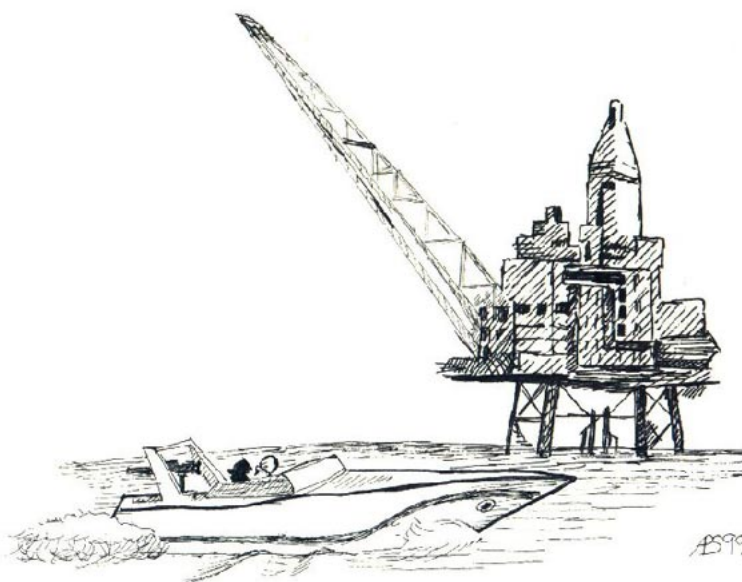
Also, the inrush of water damaged the incomplete control mechanism of the gate. It now randomly opens portals into other proto-dimensions at irregular intervals. As the gate is built into the structure of the platform, complete destruction of the Britannia Seven would be necessary to make certain of closing it.

The First Survey

Surveying will form the main part of LDO's contract for ConOilEx. In the constantly shifting North Sea, it is most important to keep accurate maps and charts of the ocean floor. In some places

the North Sea is less than 50 metres deep, in others over a mile. In the shallower parts the mud and sands of the seabed shift with the weather, especially after the rise in sea levels and the damage done to the East Coast of Britain.

The first survey will be carried out by one of LDO's own submarines, the *Behemoth*, along with two Minnow class submersibles. *Behemoth* is a small nuclear powered sub, purchased by LDO after the US Navy was unable to meet the build costs. Minnows are small mini-submarines, capable of carrying only two people. After the first survey is complete, the LDO undersea base will be positioned in



a stable area to act as a base for ConOilEx repair crews working on the rigs.

The first survey itself will reveal no big surprises, at least until the area around Britannia Seven is checked out. A rise in background radiation is detected, and a thick sticky weblike substance can be seen drifting in the water nearby. If the *Behemoth* or a Minnow moves within two kilometres of Brit 7, there will be a sudden unearthly rumbling heard in the area. Some of the more experienced crewmembers will say that it sounds like whale song, but scans will reveal nothing. The first survey will take about a week to conduct, by which time the Sea Base will have been towed into position.

LDO Sea Base

Sea Base is almost always positioned underwater, as this makes it less susceptible to weather problems. The LDO Sea Base is constructed of highly advanced materials and is designed to handle immense amounts of pressure.

Those assigned to the base will be brought down gradually, to acclimatise their bodies to the pressure. In order to return to the surface from the base, people must undergo several hours of decompression to avoid severe injury or death.

The interior of the structure is actually quite comfortable. The atmosphere of the base contains a special gas, which replaces the nitrogen of air (and it doesn't make people sound like Donald Duck, which was common when helium was used). There is a plan of the Sea Base at the end of this article.

The Britannia Seven

Originally designed and built in the early 1990s, Britannia Seven was a natural gas production platform. It also housed several laboratories, mainly researching new methods of production and ways of improv-

ing safety for those involved in these processes. It consists of eleven separate modules, each one having a different purpose. The production module is on the opposite side of the complex from the accommodation and servicing modules, for safety reasons.

Brit 7 was originally made to take a full crew of 2,000, but now lies deserted. If anyone on the LDO team becomes curious as to why this huge installation has not been colonized by FAIL, they may wish to contact them. If they do so, they will get a reply along the lines of "It's your business, but if I were you I'd keep well away from Seven. People have been lost over there." No more details will be



forthcoming about this, probably due to the hostility towards ConOilEx that bubbles just under the otherwise cheery surface of the FAIL settlers.

Further Exploration

Sooner or later, someone from LDO will send a remotely operated camera drone to search amongst the legs of Britannia Seven. This is much safer than sending divers to explore the mess of cables and general detritus that has accumulated under the platform over the years.

As the drone enters the center area the unearthly howling will be heard again, this time loud enough to cause actual pain to those within 500 metres of the Brit 7. All contact is lost with the drone, but this seems to become a secondary consideration as the sea begins to heave and boil. The howl echoes once more, and a monitor displaying the view from a camera aboard one of the Minnow submersibles will show a huge shape lifting itself slowly from the seabed. The crew will be transfixed by the sight, and find themselves unable to tear their eyes from the apparition on the monitors (A successful Willpower test at Formidable level can avoid this).

The shape resolves itself as it rises to the surface. It seems to be a reptilian creature of some sort, but it is unbelievably massive. It is over 25 meters long, with four powerful flippers and a huge head with jaws wide enough to accommodate a saloon car parked sideways. It casts a baleful glance at the nearby Minnow before moving away, out into the North Sea. Ship's instruments shows the thing moving out at over 30 knots, before turning almost on the spot and accelerating back towards the Brit 7 in a straight line. This obviously causes a great deal of alarm among the crew, and the *Behemoth* is engaged at flank speed in an attempt to rendezvous with the Minnow.

Sadly this is not to be the case. At enormous speed, the thing dives a little further down and comes up on the Minnow from beneath. Before anyone really understands what is happening, the crea-

ture scoops the Minnow up in its huge jaws and races away once more. The turbulence from its passing causes the *Behemoth* to lurch violently (Formidable test of Agility to avoid falling). The screams of the Minnow's pilot are cut off by a horrendous metallic rending and tearing, after which the radio is silent. The creature is no longer visible to any of LDO's detection systems.

The Hunt

The loss of a friend and crewmate weighs heavily on the heads of the LDO team.

Eventually Sally King, the Project Director and de facto captain of Sea Base will call a meeting of all security personnel. She and Captain Olafson of the *Behemoth* have concocted a plan to hunt down the creature, and in her own words "minimise the risks to our operations here." This will be met by general approval from the crew.

The plan is pretty simple; try to lure the thing into an area underneath the Britannia Seven that will be bounded by unbreakable anchoring cables, and shut the door on it. These cables are the type used to secure drilling platforms to the ocean floor and are unbelievably strong. Then, using deepwater mining charges, blow the beast up and sell the pieces to research organisations. This thing must be worth a lot to scientists somewhere after all.

The second Minnow will be used as bait, as it appears that the creature has a taste for them. To help close the trap, LDO will arm its tele-presence operated repair drones (TORs) with spear guns. The TORs will hopefully prod the thing in the right direction. There will also be armed personnel in hardsuits and personal submarine suits (PSS), who will also help to guide the thing's path.

If any of the PCs have Vessel Use Boat, they will be asked to pilot a speedboat that will attempt to shadow the beast. They will also be issued with one of the explosive charges, which is to be used as a last resort if the creature tries to turn away at the last second to escape the trap.

Resolution

A number of conclusions are possible, and I have deliberately given no fixed ending. The trap can work as intended, and the creature's corpse sold off by LDO to the highest bidders. The Britannia Seven might also be destroyed by the explosion, which will seal the gate. The creature may get away, and return to haunt your players in future. Something else may even slip through the gate during the adventure, to cause even more havoc.

As can be seen, I have not tried to make this short adventure too difficult. The individual referee can throw more at their players should they wish. Don't forget that this area of ocean is usually stormy and very cold.

Also there are vicious pirates out on the North Sea, and while they will not go for the Sea Base or the *Behemoth* they consider small boats and other civilian shipping fair game.

New Equipment

Cousteau Class Submarine

Just before the economic collapse, the United States Navy contracted with Bath Iron Works in Maine to produce a nuclear powered, water jet propelled submarine. BIW completed three of the power plants and propulsion systems before the Navy cancelled the contract.

Luckily for BIW, LDO purchased the plants and propulsion system, and ordered three submarines built using them (the Cousteau, the Leviathan, and the *Behemoth*).

Each vessel is equipped with docking ports that match those on the LDO sea bases as well as two Minnow class minisubs. Each vessel is also equipped with extremely advanced sensor equipment, including military grade sonar and is capable of operating at extreme depths due to its special reinforced alloy hull. The vessels are used in a variety of roles: mobile undersea bases, underwater cargo vessels, underwater cranes and so forth.

Displacement:	2400 tons
Fuel Type:	Nuclear



Cruise Speed: 15 knots
 Propulsion: Water Jet
 Armament: None
 Min./Optimum Crew: 10/60

Minnow Class Mini-sub

The Minnow class mini-sub is a standard two person, deep-water mini-sub. The mini-sub has an extremely strong hull and its diving performance capacity exceeds that of main line military submarines.

Minnows are equipped with two medium manipulator arms and two small manipulators as well as a light array, a camera, and a sample basket. Power and life support is good for eight hours of operation. The mini-sub looks very much like a small jet fighter with stubby wings.

Price: \$960,000 (R/R)
 Armament: None
 Length: 1
 Draft: 1m
 Speed: 3
 Turn: 4
 Pumps: 1
 Night Vision: White Light spotlights
 Load: personal gear, can carry 3,000 kg

Min./Optimum Crew: 1/2
 Cruise Speed: 5/5
 Fuel Cap: 220
 Fuel Cons: 5

Fuel Type: Battery Pack
 Config: Flush Deck
 Tonnage: 10
 Hull Armor: 2
 Waterline Armor: 2
 Propulsion: Water Jet
 Size: 1

Personal Submarine Suit (PSS)

A PSS is an armoured suit constructed out of advanced alloy materials that enable a person in a PSS to operate at depths of 400+ meters.

It includes a complete, self contained life support system with air and power for six hours, a distress beacon, a 75 kilometre radio, and lights. The suits arms and legs are servo equipped and the arms

can lift almost 100 kg each. Each suit comes standard with a propulsion system (including depth control) that can propel the suit at a cruise speed of 2/2. Some models replace one manipulator arm with a specialized tool arm. Such modifications are custom built.

A PSS, with its advanced servo system, is actually easier on its operator than a Hardsuit. A PSS operator can use his or her PSS for CONx30 minutes before becoming exhausted. Like the Hardsuit, all AGL and STR-based tasks are increased one level in difficulty while using a PSS (of course, crude brute strength operations will be much easier in a PSS).

A PSS has an armor value of 2.
 Wt: 100 KG
 Price: \$200,000 (R/R)

New Beastie

Evolved Lypluridon

The original Lypluridon was a creature that was plentiful on Earth during the age of dinosaurs. However, it was not native to this dimension, but arrived here through the machinations of one of the earliest Dark Ones.

A savage carnivore, Lypluridon was the largest predator ever seen on planet Earth. Measuring up to 30 metres long and weighing in at 150 tons, these ocean dwelling creatures could devour animals the size of a dolphin in one mouthful.

The one seen in the North Sea is somewhat different from its Jurassic era antecedents, as the species continued to slowly evolve in its home dimension after all the Earthly examples died out with the dinosaurs.

They have evolved the ability to sense living prey using a crude but effective form of empathic life detection, even if the prey is inside an object such as a submarine. Also, the evolved version is no longer strictly an air breather like his ancestors, having developed gill-like organs to use oxygen from the water as do fish. It retains the ability to breathe air as well, possibly to enable survival in shallow waters where its massive size makes it unable to submerge fully.

Evolved Lypluridon

Strength: 120
 Constitution: 100
 Agility: 8
 Initiative: 6
 Move: 25/50/120
 Skill/Damage: 6/10d10 (bite)
 Attack: 80%
 Hits: 200/400
 # Appear: 1
 Special: Empathic Life Detection, 5 kilometres range.

NPCs

LDO Project Director Sally King

Level: Experienced
 Skills: Small Arms (pistol) 3, Mechanic 2, Swimming 9, Vessel Use(submarine) 7, Vessel Use (PSS) 5, Electronics 2, Willpower 6, Business 6, Computer Operation 3, Leadership 7

Initiative: 3

Physical Description:

Director King is a tall woman with short black hair streaked with grey. She appears to be in her mid forties.

Personality/Motivation:

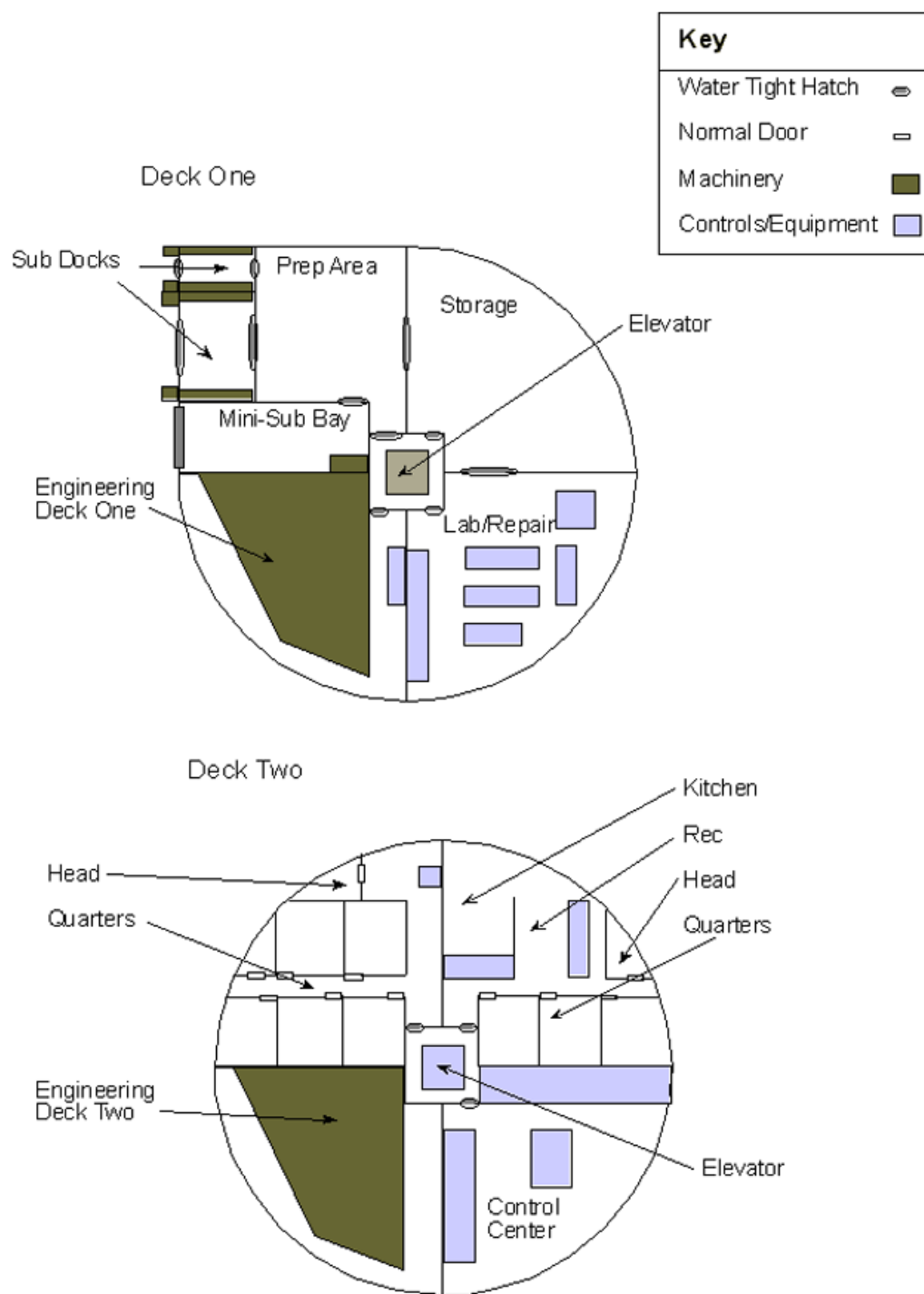
Director King is the LDO Project Director for this operation and as such she is considered the captain of the Sea Base, with all the associated authority. She has been working for LDO since its beginning and it has been her inspired leadership that has helped make LDO what it is today. Her loyalty is to LDO and the people on her team. While she is not aware of the extent of the dark conspiracies threatening the world, she has brushed against them on occasion.

Equipment:

Wildevy Wolf with two clips

Captain Knut Olafson

Level: Veteran
 Skills: Heavy Weapons 2, Melee Combat (unarmed) 2, Small Arms (pistol) 2, Swimming 5, Vessel Use (submarine) 7, Navigation 4, Willpower 5, Computer Operation 3, Leadership 6



LDO FLOOR PLANS

Initiative: 4

Physical Description:

Captain Olafson is a tall, thin man with short blond hair. He appears to be in his mid 50s and is in excellent physical condition.

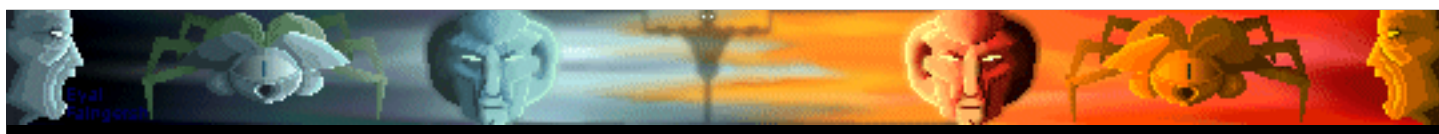
Personality/Motivation:

Captain Olafson is a former European naval officer who was forced to leave the service under circumstances that he will not discuss. The incident involved the infiltration of the Navy by Dark Minions and Olafson, though innocent of wrong doing, was forced to resign his commission. Olafson got offered the chance of commanding a supply vessel running to the North Sea rigs, but the decline in the industry forced him out of work. He was down to his last few pennies when LDO hired him. Once he was back in command, he immediately proved himself a highly competent officer. Since he hates Dark Minions, he will be all for destroying the creature. Olafson is currently the captain of the *Behemoth*.

Credits

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Michael C. LaBossiere for his kind permission to use the material concerning the Leviathan Deep Operations Company.

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RUNNING MAN

by Mitchell K. Schwartz

We create characters different from each other for variety. Whether you depend on luck of the dice roll or some flavor of character design, some characters are stronger, some are larger, some are more agile, some are weaker and less graceful. So how come they all run at the same speed? After all, you and the joker in the next office or dorm room probably do not run at the same speed. And when you're running from a pack of minions, isn't it interesting to know who runs slowest?

The book states that all persons crawl at 2m, walk at 8, trot at 15m and run at 30m. This article describes an optional system to provide a little variety to movement speeds. Possible variables include a character's attributes and skills. I chose not to concentrate on skills because as a skill, "Running" would include techniques and tactics to running races, but not enough else that I would label as a separate skill.

(I have nothing against adding new skills - except that existing characters are at a disadvantage to gain them and in this case, there seems to me too little skill to warrant a new skill. In my opinion, a skill should represent an area of knowledge or training that requires some specialization and is not covered by an existing skill. Running faster does not match that standard IMHO.)

How people train to run faster in real life? They build up their strength (Str) and wind (End), the latter more for distance than for a sprint.

During character creation, STR-AGL is used to deter-

mine weight by producing a scale of "grace." Where strength wins out, this translates as bulk, whereas more agile characters are lighter. I also think that STR-AGL makes a good modifier for running speed. This allows high Strength characters the chance to carry their bulk if they have the agility to match, and for lighter characters to run fast since they are not carrying as much bulk as heavier characters. Bulkier people don't run as fast, just like real life.

To make this system match the book, an average character's stats need to produce the values described in the book. I'd suggest the following formula to determine a character's Trot speed:

$$10 + \text{STR} - (\text{STR} - \text{AGL})$$

Let's look at some sample characters (see table 1, below). Dara and Herbert are taken from the (V1.0) Dark Conspiracy book; Joe is your average Joe. Their stats are listed in the second column. The formula applied to them in the third column. Running and Walking speeds are listed in the fourth and fifth column.

Running speed is twice Trot speed. Walking speed is half of Trot, rounded up. Walking speed won't be all that different between people. But run for a few rounds and Dara will pull noticeably ahead of Herbert - or Joe.

Notice that:

- Dead Average Joe's movement matches the book.
- Dara, somewhat stronger than average but without the grace to match her bulk, is a bit faster than normal.
- The Cyborg has his tek-enhanced reflexes added to his strength, making him run much faster.
- Herbert's strength slows him a little, and being klutzy doesn't help him much.
- The Dancer, while weaker than Herbie, has the grace to make up for her lack of strength (and has less bulk to move), and can pace Dara.

Want more? Think there's more to running than just the physical?

OK, let's assume that trained athletes run faster than untrained normal folks of equal physical ability and look for reasons why.

There isn't a skill for general athletics (DC v1.0; please correct me if there is one for v2). You could modify the Trot speed as +1 for (terms as Athlete)/2 (round up) to represent learning a few techniques for more efficient running during the course of professional training. For example, if Dead Average Joe had been a professional athlete for three turns, his Trot speed would be modified +2 (3/2 rounded up) - but then you would expect someone who has been a professional athlete for 12 years to know how to run better. (This could also be applied

TABLE 1 - RUNNING SPEED COMPARISONS

Character	Stats	Trot = (10 + S - (S - A))	Run (x2)	Walk (x1/2)
Dead Average Joe:	(S5, A5)	10 + 5 - (5 - 5) = 15	30	8
Dara Schwartz:	(S8, A6)	10 + 8 - (8 - 6) = 16	32	8
Cyborg:	(S8, A12)	10 + 8 - (8 - 12) = 22	44	11
Herbert Vahn:	(S4, A3)	10 + 4 - (4 - 3) = 13	26	7
The Dancer	(S3, A6)	10 + 3 - (3 - 6) = 16	32	8

to any sport skill the character has not specialized in, but this should be used judiciously; riflery should not suddenly become a sport.)

Alternatively, you could add a cascade skill "Athletics," that includes every (professional) sport that is not already covered by a separate skill (like archery or climbing). Thus Athletics might include soccer, American or Australian football, baseball, tennis, golf, as well as Running! For every two points in Running skill, add

+1 to trot speed. Why? A professional athlete will be better coordinated when switching sports than an amateur, week-end jock would.

Of course, within this cascade, you can do some weird things, like vary the attribute used depending on the sport. For example, if a tennis pro (agility based sport) tries to use his Athletics cascade to apply American Football (strength based sport) to tackle an opponent fleeing a melee, he gets to use half his tennis

skill added to his Strength attribute. He is welcome to try, though the results might not be pretty. Personally, I doubt many characters will put too many skill points into a Running skill (or any particular sport skill); not much bang for the buck.

The sports that already have distinct skills (swimming or acrobatics) could be "shadow members" of the cascade for the purposes of applying "Athletics." But all that, little Adam, is another story. ❖

ART GALLERY

Every now and again, DEMONGROUND gets sent some really great artwork that seems to have a fairly specific story that goes along with it. We'd really like to use some of it, but because we don't have any articles that match the story in the picture, we usually tend to leave it out.

This ends up with the problem that the artists are putting in a lot of work to create pictures for us, that we may never get around to using.

To try and get around this problem, we'll be including some of this art in upcoming issues of the magazine, in a more or less standalone way. This way, we can use some of these great pieces to show we really do appreciate the hard work that goes into them.

Who knows, some of these pieces might inspire someone to write an article that goes along with the story the picture is telling.

This is a piece from DEMONGROUND's longest serving artist, Eyal Faingersh, entitled "Eat This".



Eyal Faingersh 1999



THE LAZARUS PITS

"...And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, "Loose him, and let him go."

- John 12: 43-44

As mystical places go, the Lazarus Pits are among the strangest. They are tied to an unusual natural phenomenon, a secret cult, and perhaps the wellspring of the human race.

Deep beneath the surface of the Earth lie pools of pure primordial ooze - the stuff of creation. It is a perfect life form, the color and consistency of olive oil, existing on the Earth's own heat and slowing metabolizing organic and mineral compounds. A colony life form, it has no need for sunlight or significant quantities of water, and is never seen on the surface. In fact, if not for the Egyptians, it might remain secret to this day.

In 2470 BC, during a dig at a stone quarry in ancient Tura (near the Giza pyramids), a gang of laborers worked a cut limestone block out of a deep recess of a mine. From behind the block, a massive cavern network opened up. Not being immediately supervised, the eldest of the workers was sent in with a torch to investigate. Stumbling through the tight caves, the old Egyptian shouted for the others, but his plea was followed by a splash, and frantic screaming. Fearing reprisal from the work-gang foreman for

ordering the elderly man to his apparent death, the workers pushed the block back into place, cutting off the man's cries for help.

The next day, believing the man was dead, the stone was pulled out again. Standing before them (to the dismay of the workers) was the man, but different; his work-worn skin and hands were full and healthy, his back was no longer bent but straight and tall. It seemed impossible, but true: the man had come back from the dead, and was young and healthy again! The work-gang fell to their knees, and groveled before him, pleading for their very lives. They felt sure the Gods were responsible for this, as only they could bring back the dead.

The man, no fool, took the workers as his own personal entourage and quickly set forth to escape the drudgery of the quarry and their cruel foreman. The first order of business was sealing the mine, which was accomplished by simply burning the wooden support columns, allowing the roof to collapse. The foreman, one of the few people who could clearly identify the entire work-gang was quietly murdered behind a tent and buried in the sand. Gathering up as much food and water as they could carry, they set out into the desert, planning never to return.

As the years passed, the man, who took the name Khafra, would tell of his strange experience in the cave to select members of his party. A new plan was begun to one day return to the mine and exploit the magic waters, making them all as gods, immortal and in their prime!

Upon their return, they set about clearing the mine entrance, anticipating weeks or even months of hard labor, working under the cover of night removing the stones that blocked the passage.

by Chris Carpenter
(as inspired by the
Batman cartoons)

They discovered, however, after only a few meters of digging, the opening had already been cleared out, *from the inside*. Exploring the cave, the Egyptians discovered a lair of rogue Kinori warriors, prepared for battle. Khafra, wise as ever, struck a treaty with the Kinori, ensuring their mutual interest in keeping the cave a secret from all outsiders, human or Kinori.

A village was set up outside of the mine, and over the years temples and other stone buildings and monuments were erected, disguising the nature, and eventually the location of the cave. The followers of Khafra (including the Kinori) were allowed to bathe in the healing waters of the magic pool, but its location was never revealed to those who would later settle there, and before long the region was absorbed by what would become Cairo. During this time, Khafra understood more and more how such a resource could be exploited and abused, and he vowed not to use the pit for personal gain, but to help his short-lived brethren in subtle ways whenever possible.

For centuries each of Khafra's men and Kinori slowly amassed great personal wealth, but never notoriety. While the Kinori would stay in the caves proper, the humans sought fortunes elsewhere, returning every 20-50 years to refresh their aging bodies, and then set forth once more to travel the world with fresh, young eyes.

At the time of the birth of Christ (1 A.D.) the world had become a much dif-



ferent place; most of Khafra's men and Kinori were gone or dying. The magic pool no longer seeming to work for their ancient bodies. It was decided a new generation of guardians would have to be inducted from the population, so trustworthy priests from the local temples and disaffected Kinori were chosen. They were brought into Khafra's confidence and instructed to do as had been done for so many years: never reveal the location of the pools, never seek notoriety or fame, and never allow those who aren't of Khafra's choosing to benefit from the healing powers of the waters. Within 3 decades, the last of the original Egyptians were dead, and a new leader, Genubath, a Hebrew priest was chosen.

In an encounter that some would say was more than chance, Genubath met and spoke at length with a carpenter and his wife, traveling with their baby son. He was enamored with their stories of visitations by angelic creatures, and their flight from Jerusalem, and decided to follow the pair upon their return east, as was his free will to do so. Unlike the priests and guardians before him, he took (in secret) a large clay jug of the healing waters with him. Over the years he became a follower of Jesus, learning from his teachings, as well as showing him the curative powers of the waters. Centuries would pass, during which time Genubath spread the gospel of Jesus across Asia and Europe, returning to Cairo occasionally for spiritual and physical rejuvenation.

Currently, Millennial fever has captured the Middle East, even more than the rest of the world. Jerusalem, Cairo, and other historically significant locations are hotbeds for loonies, prophets, and doomsayers. Many claim the time of Christ's return is at hand, and Genubath is more than a little concerned. While he was never sure of the time of Jesus' return, he is positive that Jesus is not here yet, and goes to great lengths to discredit those who claim to know Him, or even *be* Him.

"Khafra's Chosen" became something of keepers of history, watching, and occasionally interfering with the use of

the magic water, but never revealing it's source. Of primary concern to the Chosen, is the loss of a significant portion of the water which is being shipped to an undisclosed laboratory for study and possible use (in small quantities) in a cosmetic cream. One man in particular may hold the key to it's disappearance, as he has been performing "miracles" of healing in view of the public by "rubbing his wet hands over the afflicted." Such a person could wield great strength in these uncertain times, and if a fraud, must be rooted out.

The Lazarus Water

While the immediate value of the water is apparent, its properties are still unclear. The ooze is alive, but exhibits no signs of intelligence or even the ability to reproduce, yet in almost 4000 years of use the main pool has not dropped one centimeter in level. Each individual cell is perfect in form and function, with no variances or permutations. Cells collected from different pits look and act exactly the same, merge without complaint, and separate without difficulty or stress to the organism. Strangest of all, we share 99.5 % of it's genetic makeup, as do the Kinori.

The healing effects seem to be good for about 2500 years on any one individual, less on non-human races. It is theorized that the pool acts as a reverse mutagenic compound, restoring living cells to their original genetic program. Age is simply a breakdown in the genetic program, and the waters correct those flaws. A body is placed in the fluid, where it grows hot, and the skin becomes loose and delicate; as it is absorbed into the pores, elasticity, muscle tone and worn joints are restored. This procedure is as painful as it is beneficial, subjects have had to be restrained by being tied to a special wooden pallet. The internal organs benefit from this as well, but studies are inadequate at best, due to the secretive nature of Khafra's Chosen. The human body appears to be about 20 years of age after restoration, but then ages as normally after this.

The fluid may be a long-term pana-

cea, but it does not make one immortal, or impervious to injury. One of Khafra's own men was attacked on the streets of Memphis, Egypt, only to bleed to death, just out of reach of the pool; another fell from a great height. Strong disease and even recent death can be cured, but only by total immersion. It is theorized that if Jesus in fact raised Lazarus from the dead with the waters, it is possible that Lazarus was only in a coma or other death-like condition poorly understood by the medicine of the day.

Use of the fluid as a healing balm (a small quantity, say 5 ml) adds 1d4 wound damage healed to any other medical aid being applied, 10 ml restores 2d4 additional wound points, and so on. Drenching oneself in the fluid gives all health points back at a rate of 2/2/2 (2 stun, 2 wound, 2 mortal) per 30 seconds. Only total immersion in the Lazarus Pit itself can restore a person's youth and vitality.

Notable Characters

Genubath

Leader of "Khafra's Chosen"

Level 20 Human Diplomat (Free Agent)

Str 8

Dex 10

Con 10

Int 13 [+2]

Wil 10

Per 11

Durability 11/10/6/5

Action Check 13+/12/6/3

Move Sprint: 18

Run: 12

Walk: 4

Swim: 4

Easy Swim: 2

#Actions: 3

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Last Resorts: 2

Perk: Photographic Memory, Second Sight

Flaw: Primitive (1)

Achievements: Extra Action, Increase Dexterity, Increase Intelligence, Stun Rating Increase, Mortal Rating Increase, Observant



Attacks

Sling	13/6/3	Li/O	d4s/d4+2s/d4w
Bow, Short	11/5/2	Li/O	d4w/d4+2w/d4+3w
Dagger	4/2/1	Li/O	d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w

Defenses

+2 Int resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Skills

Athletics [8] *climb* [9], *throw* [10]; Unarmed Attack [8] *brawl* [10]; Manipulation [10] *prestidigitation* [12]; Ranged Weapons, Primitive [10] *bow* [11], *sling* [13]; Stealth [10] *hide* [12], *shadow* [11], *sneak* [12]; Movement [10] *swim* [12]; Stamina [10] *endurance* [11], *resist pain* [12]; Survival [10] *survival training, desert* [12]; Business [13] *small business* [15]; Knowledge [13] *deduce* [14], *first aid* [15], *language (ancient Egyptian)* [16], *language (English)* [15], *religious doctrine* [17]; Navigation [13] *surface navigation* [15]; Administration [10] *management* [11]; Animal Handling [10] *animal riding* [13]; Awareness [10] *intuition* [12], *perception* [11]; Investigate [10] *search* [11], *track* [11]; Resolve [10] *mental resolve* [12]; Teach [10] *teach religious doctrine* [12]; Culture [11] *diplomacy* [13], *etiquette (ancient Egyptian)* [13]; Entertainment [11] *musical instrument (flute)* [12]; Interaction [11] *bargain* [13]; Leadership [11] *command* [12], *inspire* [13].

Genubath was born in 30 B.C. and ordained a Hebrew priest, but lived a quiet, unassuming lifestyle. In 1 A.D. he was chosen for his virtual anonymity to join the select few who knew of the curative powers of the magic waters of the Lazarus Pit by Khafra himself. Gradually taking on more administrative duties of Khafra's Chosen, he has seen the last of the original Egyptians die, losing more than 2000 years of eyewitness history. Determined not to let this tragedy repeat itself, Genubath started chronicling the contemporary news of the day, using his fellow acolytes to gather stories from across the known world.

The next 2 millennia were a whirlwind of changes and Genubath honed his skills accordingly, learning a smattering of new languages, local etiquette, and the ability to make himself scarce when things looked bad. One aspect he never could grasp though, was

that of modern technological data storage, namely computers. Living 2000 years without a computer has left Genubath somewhat biased towards pen and paper, and he suffers accordingly.

As the "leader" of Khafra's Chosen, he is more of a coordinator, setting assignments, recruiting new members, and finding new ways for the Chosen to remain financially solvent without exposing themselves to outside scrutiny. The latest endeavors have bent the rules of the Chosen, however. Following the advice of a young, eager acolyte, they have sent a quan-



tity of the Lazarus water for an independent scientific study, only to have it lost in transit, stolen from an elder Chosen while en route to the St Gregory University. Because of this, his time is divided between finding the stolen Lazarus water, and rooting out false prophets who are feeding the fires of the millennial fever.

Khafra's Chosen acolytes

Free Agent

Str	9
Dex	11
Con	9
Int	11
Wil	11
Per	10

Durability 9/9/5/5

Action Check 14+/13/6/3

#Actions: 2

Attacks

Pistol	9 mm	13/6/3	Hi/O	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m
Power Martial Arts:	10/ 5/ 2			d6s/d6+2s/d4w

Skills

Armor Operation [9] Athletics [9] *climb* [10]; Unarmed Attack [9] *power martial arts* [10]; Ranged Weapons Modern [11] *pistol* [13]; Stealth [11] *sneak* [12]; Vehicle Operation [11] *land vehicle* [12]; Movement [9] *swim* [10]; Stamina [9] *endurance* [10]; Survival [9]; Knowledge [11] *computer operations* [12], *deduce* [13], *language (English or Arabic)* [13], *language (French or Latin)* [13]; Creativity [11] *journalism* [12]; Investigate [11] *search* [13]; Street Smart [11] *Deception* [10] *bluff* [11]; Interaction [10] *interview* [11].

Equipment

20 ml of Lazarus fluid in a crush-proof flask, 9 mm pistol, cell phone, laptop computer with Internet connection, various specialty job-related tools, such as lock pick kits, binoculars, and recording devices.

Those who serve Khafra and protect the secrets of the Lazarus pits are acolytes. Most serve in an administrative capacity, circling the globe, doing field research, filing historical reports and culling data from local news services. They are drawn from all walks of life, not just the clergy, but for their respective skills and talents. As the majority are many centuries younger than Genubath, and have no aversion to the new technologies, most have even mastered the Internet and all its nuances. They carry weapons when abroad and are prepared to defend themselves, but normally do not stroll the streets armed, and definitely don't seek trouble.

Kinori Knight

The Kinori have served in an exceptional capacity over the years, providing the muscle necessary to keep the Lazarus Pit secure, sharing their knowledge of ancient history, and enjoying the security of a long life away from the Kinori masses. The flip-side of this is that the Knights are wanted criminals within the Kinori society, and are attacked on sight for continuing to help the humans they consider to be invaders to the Kinori caverns (even though the humans have never explored beyond the Lazarus Pit itself.) The Kinori accept this, knowing they will ultimately outlive their pursuers, and keep to their own, occasionally going above ground to run errands or do things the generally peaceful acolytes don't have the stomach for. Their statistics are identical to those found on pages 215 and 258 of the Dark.Matter campaign book, (under Nest Guardian.) Kinori Knights start with the Powerful Enemy (1) flaw, due to their strained relationship with the main Kinori society, but receive no bonus points during character creation

Khafra's Chosen as an Illuminati

Headquarters and Branches: Cairo, Egypt is the main Lazarus Pit, 2 others have been discovered in the middle east, 2 more are suspected throughout northern Africa and western Asia

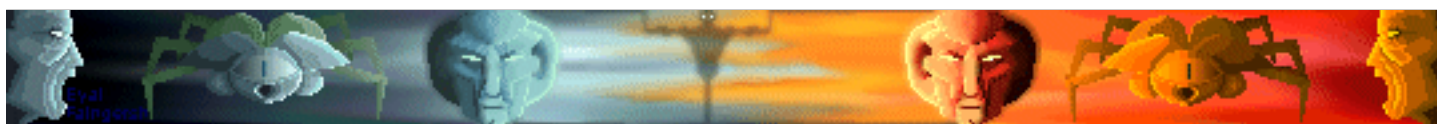
Power and Resources: With acolytes all over the globe, a member can be anywhere on Earth (save the Arctic and the Antarctic) within hours. Most of the financial solvency of the organization comes from profits of investments through dummy corporations, but other legitimate means of income are always being explored.

Followers: More than 50 acolytes, 35 Kinori warriors, and hundreds of lay people, unaware for whom they really work.

Secret Knowledge: Extensive library of correct historical data, complete knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Primary Goal: Watchers, but members may take on personal crusades with permission of the leader, such as Genubath's interest in the Christian millennial events.

Common Missions: Discovery and concealment of new Lazarus Pits, debunking those who would push false histories or fraudulent "miracles", maintain their own low profile. The younger acolytes have secretly expressed to each other their wish to see the Lazarus water used to help cure common deadly diseases, such as cancer, but the elders have forbidden its use except by doctrine. It will probably be many years before the liberal factions of acolytes rise to power, and by then other cures may have already been found.❖



CALL TO DARKNESS

FICTION

Part One

Shadow of Madness

Doctor Nicholas Mercer plucked the fountain pen from the holder on the guard's desk and deftly signed the visitor log-book. As he wrote, his watch sang a small musical tone to indicate the top of the hour, and he smiled to himself as he entered the time of arrival as exactly 3:00 p.m. He hated being late for appointments; especially with new patients. The tall, lanky guard seated behind the desk handed him a small identicard, which Nick clipped to the lapel of his jacket. He straightened up and took a step back from the desk to allow the desk guard's partner, a short, dark-skinned woman with wiry black hair to pass a small detector device over and around his body. After a full minute of scanning, she nodded to her partner, who pressed the release button that unlocked the door to Ward D.

The female guard gestured for Nick to enter the chamber beyond, then fell into step behind him. Even before she had passed all the way through the doorway, the motorized outer door began cycling closed and clanged into place with a hollow metallic tone. Only after the door had been closed for ten full seconds, did the inner door cycle open, allowing them access to the high security wing.

Nick felt the hopelessness of the inmates on the ward wash over him like a tangible wave of nausea. Most of the patients in this wing were beyond help, but a select few still had a glimmer of hope of recovering. It was Doctor Mercer's job to figure out which ones were which. That was why he was here today: preliminary evaluation of a new patient who was recently admitted.

As Nick and the guard walked down the hall, they passed dozens of heavy, riveted metal doors with tiny barred window slits. Through these slits, came a variety of voices and the occasional grasping hand from those who had managed to avoid being held in restraints for the night. For the most part, only the sounds of wailing and whispers met his ears as he passed each darkened door. Intensely insistent voices drifted past him as he walked down the hall - fragments of disjointed thoughts and partial conversations with partners, unseen.

"...no mommy, I didn't touch the knife..."

"...I want to go out, I want to, need to, want..."

"...Waiter! Waiter! I cannot accept these conditions!..."

For the most part, Nick was very careful to walk down the exact center of the hallway. A pair of twin yellow stripes ran down the center, about two feet apart. They marked an absolute "safe zone" that was out of the reach of most of the inhabitants of the wing.

"Has she calmed down at all, Rachel?" Nick asked his escort.

Rachel shook her head. "Not as much as some, more than most," the older woman replied.

"What about food?"

"No. She keeps upending the trays, and swearing at us." Nick was intrigued. "Really, what is she saying?"

"Heh, sounds like gibberish to me. Here it is." Rachel pulled a small electronic keypad from a pouch on her belt, and placed against a small outlined area on the cell door. She punched in a lengthy number sequence, and then stepped back as the door began cycling through its disarming phase. By the time the door was opening, the guard had drawn her taser and stood at the ready.

The harsh fluorescent light streamed through the doorway into the cell, revealing an empty cot. Nick was taken aback by the empty cot, but regained his composure quickly when Rachel shined her flashlight to the left, back corner of the cell.

Huddled in the corner of the room, the woman wore a pale gray straightjacket, which pinned her arms unceremoniously behind her back. She rocked her body back and forth, muttering softly to herself. Her shoulder-length auburn hair was so badly tangled that it stood out from the sides of her head like an animal's nest. She didn't even look up as Nick entered the room, but merely continue her quiet conversation with the air in front of her.

"Doctor Westfield?" Nick asked tentatively.

At the sound of his voice, the woman ceased her rocking and very slowly lifted her gaze to look into her visitor's eyes. Nick was taken aback by the sight of her. Even now, it was obvious that she had been a very attractive woman. Her face was pale and gaunt with bloodshot eyes sunk deep into the sockets of her skull.

The woman on the floor looked up at her visitor for a full minute before saying anything, the entire time, the glowing fires of fury growing behind those eyes.

"Doctor Wes..."

"Ma-teo shjay ahm sheloz," the woman began shouting at

FICTION
BY
MIKE
MARCHI

25

him. The sounds and phrases she used, seemed to indicate an organized speech pattern, but the meaning of the words was lost on Doctor Mercer.

"Doctor, my name is Nick. I'm here to help you -"

"Ma-teo pah. Shjay ahm sheloze beh," she spat back.

Rachel, who still lurked in the doorway behind Nick, chimed in. "Those are the sounds she keeps making. Like I said. Non-sense."

Nick didn't even bother responding to the guard. Instead he crouched down in front of the agitated woman in front of him and spoke very softly. "Enise. I don't understand what you are trying to say. Can you try to calm down, and let me help you?"

Never breaking his gaze, she lowered her voice to the same conspiratorial tone. "Ma-teo shjay mart-alay beh." Tears began to slide down her cheeks, adding to the general soggiess of the straightjacket. "Des-pok ahm shel. Help me? Mateo pah. Without understanding, you waste both our times."

Nick smiled softly to himself. *Contact*. "I try not to, Doctor Westfield. How much time I waste depends on you. I'm here to listen."

The fire behind her gaze faltered for a moment. "I don't need someone to listen. I need someone to let me act."

"All in good time Enise. First we have to understand one another. I can help if you'll let me."

Enise winced involuntarily, her left eye twitched and she paused for several seconds while a spasm of pain shot through her head. "What do you get out of this?"

Nick smiled. "Let's just say that I can sleep a lot better at night knowing that I'm offering a chance at salvation. I rescue lost souls from the brink of insanity."

Enise's lips twisted into a crooked smirk. "Don't be so certain, doctor. Insanity can be a refuge, as well as a curse."

"That was an interesting language you were speaking. What is that? Spanish?"

"No, it wasn't." Enise replied, looking somewhat uneasy.

"What was it, then?"

"If I told you, you'd turn right around and walk out of here."

"Try me."

"Let's just say it's not a European language, and leave it at that. You're a little off the mark."

Nick furrowed his brow. "All right. Let's try another one. Do you know why you're here?"

Enise's gaze darkened, and for a moment, she looked like she would retreat again into herself. "No, I don't."

"Do you remember where you were found?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the hospital. In the surgery."

"Do you remember what you were doing?"

Enise dropped her gaze to the floor. The corners of her mouth drooped down and began to quiver as fresh tears slid down her cheeks. She nodded her head imperceptibly.

"Doctor Westfield. Tell me what you were doing when

they found you."

"I ... I was ..." her voice broke, and her whole body began to shake from the effort of remembering. "I was operating," she whispered so softly that Nick had to lean forward to hear her more clearly.

"On whom?"

Once again, she looked up at him. "I was *saving* him."

Doctor Westfield, the man on that table was sliced to ribbons. There wasn't a part of his body that you didn't cut into. "You killed him."

"NO!" Enise shouted, suddenly angry. "You don't understand. You don't *KNOW*. He was already dead."

"I don't want to contradict you, Doctor Westfield, but that man's heart was still beating when they found you."

"I don't care what you heard. I don't care what you believe. You don't know what I know."

Nick put his hand on her shoulder and locked gazes with her. "Then make me understand. Tell me what happened."

Doctor Enise Westfield returned his stare for a full minute before she continued. "*Wil was dead long before that night*. He died a long time ago..."

Through the Door

"Behind you!" shouted Wil Ohmsford, leveling his Colt Krait over the left shoulder of his companion. Dr. Enise Westfield instinctively dropped to one knee and swept the air behind her with her staff as she turned to see the subject of Wil's warning. When the tip of the staff impacted against her assailant, Enise leaned into the obstruction, using her opponent's weight to speed her own turn. A moment later, the roar of the Colt filled the dark chamber, illuminating the large white-furred creature with the muzzle flash. She pushed away from the monster, trying to get behind Wil, and clear his field of fire. As she dropped behind him, he fired again, dumping three more bullets into the advancing bulk. This time, the strobe effect of the repeated muzzle flashes added a surreal quality to the movement of the three-meter tall behemoth. The handgun didn't appear to be having an effect on it – other than making it mad.

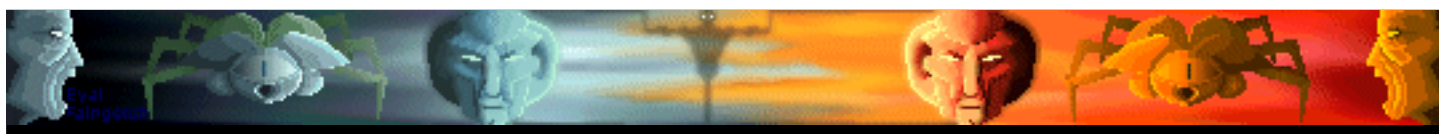
"Get back to the others! Tell them we've got company," said Wil.

Enise looked worried. "What about you?"

"I'll be right behind you. Go!"

Enise turned and sprinted back along the ice-lined tunnel, toward the dimly lit junction where the group had split up. Her right hand tightened around the staff as she ran. Another trio of reports behind made her regret her decision to eschew firearms. The two-meter stick in her hand wasn't going to help against that shambling carpet of fur and claws back there.

She reached the junction, and ran headlong into Kevin and Thann coming from the other direction. Kevin was a huge marine, and saw himself as protector of the party, while Thann, was the group's resident computer expert. The smaller man looked decidedly uncomfortable gripping the assault rifle against his chest. They had heard the gunshots. That would mean oth-



ers had too; so much for the element of surprise.

"Down there!" Enise pointed behind her as she gasped for breath. "Wil..."

A throat-shredding roar rose from the direction she pointed. It was as if the beast had at last grown tired of listening to the annoying opinions of the handgun, and chosen that moment to make its position on the issue known. The two men nodded and headed down the side passage, unslinging their rifles as they went. Enise glanced nervously around the empty, dimly lit intersection, feeling suddenly very alone.

From the tunnel behind her, the creature's furious cry made it clear that further insolence from the upstart Colt would not be tolerated. The single shot it offered in answer to the challenge seemed inappropriately small and weak. Suddenly, a pair of combat rifles added their harsh retorts, ending the argument with the shear force of their response.

With the end of the skirmish, the ambient sounds of the tunnels pressed in on her once more. Distant dripping and echoing sounds like the fluttering of wings whispered out of the darkness. From the passage to her left, she heard the sound of a small stone, clattering across a distant tunnel floor. She couldn't tell how far away the source of the sound was, but she instinctively backed up, intending to rejoin the others. Suddenly the silence was broken by Kevin's voice. "Doc, we need you."

Enise glanced warily down the passage from which the sound had come, listening intently to make sure no further sounds were forthcoming, before she trotted back down the passage to the others. When she arrived, Thann was hunched over the fallen creature. Kevin was standing over by Wil, who was lying against the wall where the creature's last swat had sent him sprawling. She quickly approached Wil, and ran a quick check for major injury. Finding none, she made him lie still long enough for his head to stop spinning, before allowing Kevin to help him to his feet.

Satisfied that Wil would live, Enise cautiously approached the fallen creature, and joined Thann in his scrutiny. Up until now, they had only observed the massive animals from a distance. They had not noticed the foul stench that emanated from the thick, matted hair. And now, upon close inspection of the thing's face, she grew even more convinced that "animal" was the wrong term to apply to this creature. It walked upright

like a man on massive callused feet, and would have easily towered over even the tallest person. The color of the coarse fur was a mottled grayish white, with streaks of lighter brown running from around the mouth and down onto the broad chest. Enise realized with a sudden chill that the discolored fur was stained with dried blood.

From the tunnel ahead, came a chorus of low growls. As the four companions turned toward the sound, a half-dozen white wolves stole out of the darkness toward them. Enise watched as Kevin raised his rifle. He was drawing a bead on the lead wolf, when he caught sight of more motion behind them pack. Two more of the larger creatures were shambling toward them as well. "Hey guys? I think we need to go back the other way." The report from Kevin's rifle filled the chamber, dropping the first wolf in its tracks. The advancing pack paused for a moment, and sniffed their fallen comrade. For a moment it looked like the distraction might work, but a guttural shout from the big creature on the left set the wolves once more into a steady advance.

"I don't like the looks of that," Enise said quietly. "The wolves obey the big ones."

With Wil and Enise in the lead, facing forward, and Kevin and Thann covering behind, the four companions worked their way back down the tunnel, followed by the relentlessly advancing of the wolf pack.

"Why are they just hanging back like that?" wondered Kevin aloud.

Thann tapped Kevin lightly on the shoulder. "They're herding us," he whispered softly.

"I think you're right, buddy. Hey Doc!" Kevin called back over his shoulder. "Look sharp. Thann thinks they're trying to push us into a trap. We need to pick up the pace and make sure that doesn't happen."

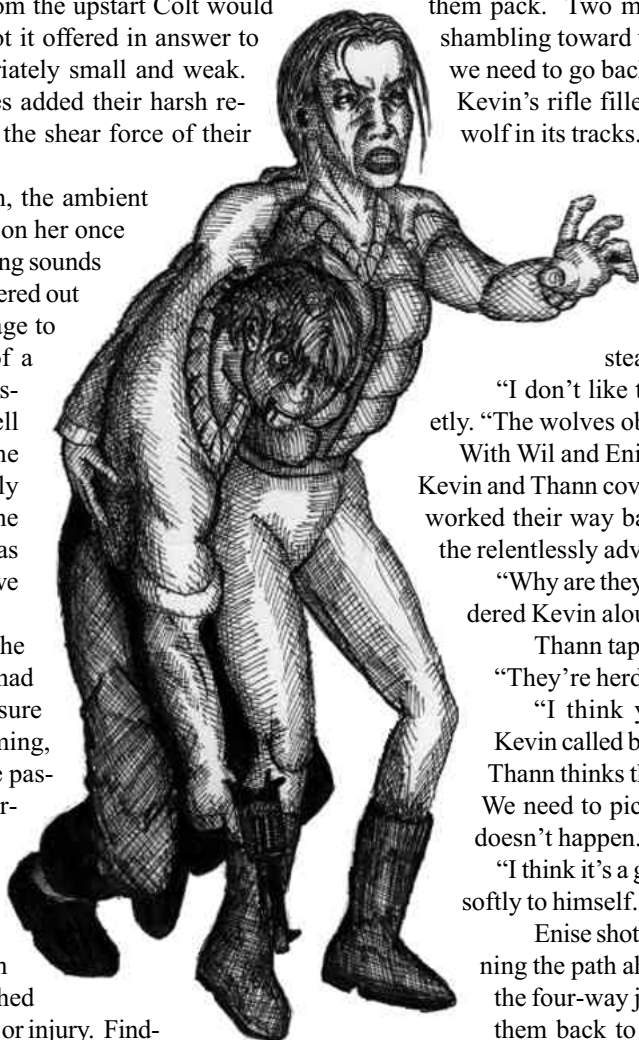
"I think it's a good time to leave," Wil murmured softly to himself.

Enise shot him a dirty look and resumed scanning the path ahead of them. At last they came to the four-way junction. Turning right would lead them back to the entrance. Turning left would take them back down the path Thann and Kevin had been exploring, and God only knew where they'd wind up if they went straight.

"Head for the exit," Wil hissed sharply. "Maybe they won't think we'd go through all of this just to go back the way we came."

Enise met his gaze. Her eyes narrowed and her voice dropped to a menacing tone. "We still have to find Sara."

"I realize that," he retorted. "But I don't think we have enough firepower at our disposal to take out more than one of



those big things at a time. And we still don't know which way to look for her."

"Make a decision, people." Kevin said menacingly from the back. "They're getting closer."

Enise glanced nervously down each of the three passages that lay before them. She gasped in shock as three yellow-eyed white wolves advanced out of the darkness directly ahead. Time was up. In or out?

Wil actually made the decision for them. Grabbing Enise's right shoulder, he pushed her roughly down the right-hand passage. With the decision finally made, she broke into a run toward the exit. Wil pounded down the passage half a step behind her. As the two of them began to gain headway, Thann and Kevin gave up their stealthy retreat and began alternating short bursts of automatic fire down the passageway to discourage pursuit.

They came at last to a large anteroom, approximately 50 meters across, with a half-dozen passages radiating out from it. As they crossed the chamber, a loud klaxon alarm began its staccato wail, followed by angry shouts and the sound of boots pounding on the rocky cave floor. Enise barely had time to see the armed guards of the facility lining up along the side wall, before the gunfire started. Thann and Kevin returned fire, and suddenly the cavern was alive with ricochets and the cacophonous roar of automatic fire. Suddenly, Wil cried out in pain, and Enise turned to see him clutching the side of his skull as his knees buckled beneath him.

Enise stopped short and dropped to Wil's side, doing her best to drag him behind a small rock outcropping. Despite the relative shelter of the rock, she still had to shield her eyes from a near constant spray of tiny rock fragments. Blood was pouring from the wound beneath Wil's clutching fingers. She pried his hand away and observed the damage. "Oh my god...."

Awakening

When Enise finished speaking, she was trembling. Beads of sweat clung to her forehead, as though the sheer act of reliving those events was causing her pain. She resumed rocking on the floor.

Nick remained silent for a few moments. "And that's when he 'died'?"

Enise paused in mid-motion and looked up at him again. "Dying is a process, Doctor. Like anything else. It has to start somewhere."

"I don't understand. Did Wil die that night or not?"

"No." Enise muttered her reply through clenched teeth. "That's just when it started for him. That day, with the wolves."

"You were going to tell me how he died."

"I *am* telling you." She took a deep breath and continued. "It took some doing, but we managed to get out of there. We retreated back to our base camp, and I did what I could to patch him up. He seemed to come around just fine."

"What about your friend? I think you said her name was Sara?"

"When Wil and the others were patched up, we went back for her." She paused for a heartbeat. "Tell me something, Nick. Do you believe in the powers of the mind?"

"How do you mean?"

"You know. Do you believe that people can read minds, or make things happen just by thinking about them?"

"I have a doctorate in abnormal psychology. I believe the human brain is capable of many things that don't necessarily make sense."

Enise cocked her head to one side and furrowed her brow. "I was like you, once. A scientist. This all seemed like craziness to me when it started. It seemed that way to all of us — except maybe for Sara. She was our resident expert on weirdness. When we rescued her, the whole plan seemed to spontaneously fall apart, it was as if the people on the inside were tipped off to our presence by something."

She stopped again. Wondering if she was wasting her time telling this man anything. Considering her options, she elected to continue. "Wil was a Neuropath. He had latent mental abilities that were awakened by the gunshot trauma. Sara explained that he had tremendous potential, but lacked the training to be able to control his abilities. In those early days, he was pretty much the psychic equivalent of a siren. He advertised his presence wherever he went." Her eyes lost focus again as the memories returned. "Eventually he attracted the wrong kind of attention..."

TO BE CONTINUED...

SORRY WE'RE LATE

No, we're not dead. Yes, we are several months late in bringing out this issue of DEMONGROUND. For that, we can only offer our sincerest apologies.

Back in 1998 when we started DEMONGROUND, none of the editorial staff had any other commitments to the RPG industry. Since then, opportunities have come our way that we only dreamt about back then.

With Marcus off the air getting married, and Mike and Geoff tied up working on version 2.5 of Dark Conspiracy, it didn't leave any time to actually get around to putting this

issue of DEMONGROUND together.

The single biggest problem we have with every issue of DEMONGROUND is the layout and graphic design. At present, only Geoff has the necessary expertise with PageMaker to put each issue together. This means that if he is tied up with other work, the production of the fanzine is halted until he can find the time to work on it.

We're looking at ways of lessening this problem for the future. We're confident that beginning with issue 9, we will be back on schedule, and to get each issue out on time.



The Loose Ends

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