

G U R P S

THE SECRET OF THE *GNEISENAU*

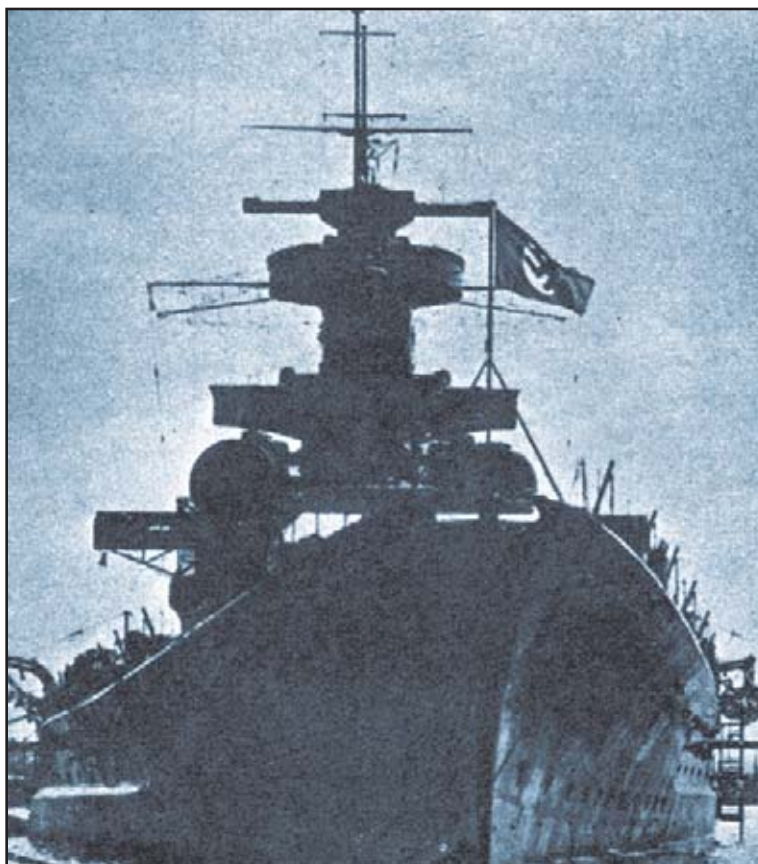
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Edited by Gene Seabolt

AN e23 ADVENTURE
FOR GURPS® WWII FROM
STEVE JACKSON GAMES
FOR 3-6 PLAYERS

INTRODUCTION

The Secret of the Gneisenau does not pit the players against a conventional enemy. Instead, it is a *Weird War II* adventure, meaning the opponent is a much more sinister one – the unknown world of magic and the paranormal.

The players take the role of engineering hands onboard the doomed German battlecruiser *Gneisenau*, just a day after it has successfully sped through the British-controlled waters of the English Channel in a nearly impossible feat. Along with the battleship *Prince Eugen* and its sister battlecruiser *Scharnhorst*, the *Gneisenau* left the Channel behind, pushing toward Holland, dodging pursuing Allied forces. This risky move represents the last desperate gamble to give the German navy, or Kriegsmarine, a bargaining chip in the North Sea.



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What most onboard the doomed convoy don't know is this: Their safety in the Channel was bought at a hefty price. Reality itself was *bent* to create a pocket of probability through which the German vessels could sail unmolested. Like all other aspects of nature, however, there is a natural inertia to probability. Now that the feat is done, nature struggles to complete events that *should* have come to pass the day before in the Channel.

The three ships – by nature destined to perish in a doomed run through British home waters – are now being pushed toward destruction by the laws of probability. Some will give in sooner, some later, but nothing on Earth can stop it from eventually coming to pass. Unless the players discover the secret and take steps to survive, they too will meet their fate within the *Gneisenau*.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Unlike many other adventures, *The Secret of the Gneisenau* is structured to be free-form. There is no set path, no fixed beginning or end. Instead, there are a number of independent story elements that the PCs can interact with, discover, puzzle out, or prevent from occurring.

The main goal of the PCs in this adventure is simply survival. Better yet, they could somehow prevent the destruction of the battlecruiser. To do this, they must first discover the secret of the ship. How, when, and where the PCs resolve this adventure is up to you, as the GM, to determine. If you feed them leads, clues, and hints, don't worry, they will follow. From there, it's just a matter of pacing.

Dealing With Know-It-Alls

Those well versed in WWII history will no doubt know the specifics of the Channel dash, and may even know the actual fate of the *Gneisenau*, itself. This knowledge could interfere with the adventure if you, as GM, allow it to. Cries by players of “but this never happened!” or other factual demands can very quickly lead to trouble, if they go unanswered.

The answer to such problems is simple – the players are supposed to be taking on the roles of sailors onboard the battlecruiser *Gneisenau*. To them, future events and the outcome of the Channel dash are far from certain. Feel free, as GM, to allow anything to come to pass – the *Gneisenau* could sink, be boarded by the Allies, bombed to the point of absolute disintegration, or even successfully steered to port at Kiel. (The last outcome is, indeed, what historically happened, but here it would represent an outstanding success on the part of the PCs. Your troublesome know-it-alls might be surprised to find out that their sailors' most heroic efforts were required just to make events follow their historical course . . .)

In short, it is your game, and neither history nor the players dictate what occurs. That remains entirely up to you.

A Note on Style

This adventure avoids several themes commonly found in WWII games – the black-and-white portrait of good vs. bad guys, an obsessive concentration on factual material, and an attempt to thrust the players into a crash course on language.

The black-and-white characterization is avoided because of the time and location of the adventure. While the German navy did not exactly care for the British, many sailors were far from Nazis. Many German mariners, both officers and ratings, held deep misgivings about Hitler and his party, and felt the course of the war practically guaranteed Germany's destruction. Under these circumstances, naval loyalty often was paid to an individual ship first, Germany second, and Hitler only when necessary. The enemy in this adventure (the Allies, which are pretty much represented by the British in this scenario) is referred to mostly in the background. More unearthly dangers will soon crowd these conventional foes from the players' concerns.

A concentration on factual material is avoided because there is a limited amount of time to learn such material. In a short adventure, two hours of game time cannot be consumed by exposition on the type of craft the players are in, where it is, its exact tactical situation, and other details. Such facts might be learned in game, and it remains up to the GM to keep things in perspective, but there is nothing but a general “what you know” section outlining the facts as the players understand them (found on p. 6). Everything else, the players must learn by themselves in the course of the adventure.

A crash course on language is avoided for similar reasons. There is little time in the game for the players to learn all the nuances of the German language (unless they are German, of course) and the difference between a *leutnant* and *gefreiter* is usually lost on everyone except the war buff or military collector. Instead, when possible, all ranks, names, and other German words or phrases are translated into English. Players should be encouraged to attempt to simply play the German sailors, not imitate them (hopefully avoiding the temptation to speak English with a bad German accent . . .)

What Is Needed to Play

This adventure can be played with as little as the *GURPS World War II Lite* free PDF – the essentials to play a game are in there. The GM might be able to flesh out and expand the experience, however, by having any of the following *GURPS* books on hand:

- *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*
- *GURPS World War II*
- *GURPS WWII: Iron Cross*
- *GURPS WWII: Weird War II*

Creating the Player Characters

The PCs are all engineers of some sort. They work below deck to repair and maintain the vast labyrinthine ducts, pipes, wires, and tubes that keep their huge warship going. Whether they are electrical engineers, engine men, hydraulics experts, or even plumbers matters very little. What does matter is this – each character has a different field of expertise, and they all know each other.

Sample characters can be found on p. 15. Alternately, original characters can be created based upon the Sailor template found on p. 15. As illustrated by the sample characters, original characters should have a significant amount of skill in their particular

expertise. Beyond that, it remains up to the players to develop the names, personalities, abilities, advantages, disadvantages, and skills of original concepts.

New character writeups should not exceed 75 points nor have Military Rank above 2. The PCs are leaders, but not of officer caliber. (In any case, rank is not as much of an issue below deck as it is above.) The players should feel free to purchase any advantages or disadvantages necessary, paying special attention to the national listings on pp. 68-69 of *GURPS World War II*, if that book is available. Note that these are presented as a guideline, not a hard-and-fast rule. Disadvantages rarely found in sailors, as well as physical impairments that would limit a man's military viability, should be restricted or avoided.

OPERATION CERBERUS – THE CHANNEL DASH

Operation Cerberus was a devious and risky plan to move several large German warships with a picket force of smaller destroyers, cruisers, and escorts from Brest, France, to the North Sea, and more specifically up the Elbe river to Kiel, home of the German shipyards in the north. It was undertaken at Hitler's insistence – though the ships already posed a significant threat to the British while based in Brest, he felt sure that the North Sea off of Norway would be the crucial naval battleground in the months to come. His naval advisers balked, to the point that the Führer had to order them to either move the ships or decommission them on the spot. Thus, some of the officers in charge of Cerberus find it not only outrageously risky, but strategically foolish as well.

On Feb. 11, 1942, the German sailors sped into the English Channel and the very jaws of their powerful enemy. Though British intelligence warned of the possibility of such an action, and the proper command channels were informed, the British were caught embarrassingly flat-footed when the Germans actually made their move. A series of miscommunications, miscues, and bad timing kept the British from ever mounting a proper offensive. Despite numerous small attacks launched on the German ships as they sped at top speed through the British waters, none of the ships was hit significantly – at least not until they were free and clear of the Channel.

Off the coast of Holland, however, first the *Scharnhorst* then the *Gneisenau* were struck by

mines. Despite this setback, both ships recovered and began steaming forward again.

THE SECRET

Unbeknownst to them, the British were battling more than a German task force during the Channel dash. The SS' most secret and deadly division – the *Ahnenerbe*, or Ancestral Research and Heritage division – spread a dozen agents among the *Gneisenau*, *Scharnhorst*, and *Prince Eugen* to conduct magical experiments in hopes of protecting the valuable Cerberus fleet from attack.

The only successful magical effort is based on *Gneisenau*, but it is not actually led by an SS agent. The individual with the amazing power to “mask” Cerberus is Amri Aboukrat, a Berber from southern Tunisia. The Africa Korps discovered Amri in 1941, when he came to the attention of a regional commander due to his astounding abilities. Aboukrat and his people lived in the midst of what was believed to be a German-controlled position, invisible to the numerous guards, scouts, and machine-gun posts. For several months, the Germans were baffled by robberies where food, weapons, and equipment were stolen apparently right out from under their noses – all the while with no one in the immediate area to be blamed for it. Or so it seemed.

Amri turned himself in to the German forces when several of his people (including his eldest

daughter) were captured after the Ahnenerbe intervened, interfering with the spell the Berber had laid on his village. Since then, his “power” has been the subject of intense scrutiny by the German occult division. The SS has gained Amri’s cooperation in the matter by holding hostage two of his favorite wives and six of his children on an island off the coast of Italy.

Amri has explained his “method” to the Ahnenerbe. It is, as he puts it, “The Mask of Atal,” a chant taught to him by his father, who in turn, he claims, learned it from a Djinn, or desert spirit, in the Saharan wastes in 1904.

Amri has kept many secrets, himself. This ability is fickle. It can obscure people by slightly changing events and alter the outcome of small things with impunity, but the larger the action shifted, the more severe the repercussions. Hiding

a small, out-of-the-way village from invading Germans is one thing, but obscuring a naval fleet from the vigilant Allies is quite another. Surely there is destined to be a backlash from the largest change Amri has ever attempted – nothing can survive that should not have survived without the Mask of Atal. Each seaman and ship predestined to meet its fate in the Channel will instead meet a similar fate later. It is a zero-sum game; only the time and place of their destruction has changed.

Amri is foolishly optimistic. He believes those who are not supposed to be there at all (in particular, Amri himself) will find safe haven no matter how dangerous the circumstances on the ship. He has set off a reality time bomb, and now waits in the bowels of the *Gneisenau* for his freedom to arrive with its detonation.

THE MASK OF ATAL (VH)

This spell (or more specifically, this chant) allows the magic-user to positively alter the outcome of any event in his presence by expending a single point of Fatigue. This event must be succinctly and explicitly defined by the caster. (For example, “This unit will win this battle,” is a good example while, “All my actions will be successful,” is not.)

During this time, the caster must chant a lengthy series of Arabic incantations, uninterrupted. In *GURPS Magic* terms, this means the spell must be cast as a ceremonial spell, without any option for casting without incantations at high skill levels. Those maintaining the ceremonial spell may not eat, drink, sleep, or relieve themselves. The casting “circle” may, of course, consist of only one spell-caster, if necessary.

The subjects of a Mask of Atal casting are able to unconsciously navigate probability, guaranteeing a successful action. Used on a single subject or a single action, the Mask is virtually absolute in power. Anyone subjected to it is able to re-roll any failed action covered by the chant, as if they never failed at all. (For example, if a caster used the Mask to ensure good marksmanship, the subject could re-roll his appropriate Guns skill whenever he missed a shot.) Each additional re-roll after the first costs the casting circle an additional energy point.

The casters can “opt out” at any time, choosing to cancel any additional re-rolls. If so, or if the caster(s) are knocked unconscious before a successful roll, the spell is canceled and the last roll stands. Once the Mask alters a small-scale action, nothing can restore the “real” results – the effects are permanent.

Used on a larger scale, the spell’s effects become tricky. Altering large-scale events (anything affecting more than 10 people at once) doubles the initial cost and guarantees success for that action – but only until the circle stops chanting and casting the spell. Events spin out of control to restore “reality” once the circle quits intoning the Mask of Atal, though this might take considerable time if reality was only mildly disturbed. In a really large or probability-defying event, such as the masking of Cerberus, this “probability inertia” can begin manifesting more quickly and by drastically altering probability itself. The longer or greater the change, the more extreme these aftereffects will become.

For example, a casting to help a 10-man infantry squad escape circumstances they might have escaped otherwise might not show any repercussions until some mildly strange event causes the death of one of the former squad mates years later – because he would have died without the spell’s help. During a casting to help an entire army win a hopeless battle, however, weird events would begin to manifest shortly after the casting ends. Within days (even hours or minutes in extreme cases), these will ramp up in severity until reality’s ordained outcome has been put back on track.

College: Meta-spells.

Duration: course of one action for small-scale change, or length of casting for large-scale change.

Cost: 1, plus 1 for each additional re-roll for small changes; or 2, plus 1 per hour of maintenance for large ones.

Time to Cast: 5 minutes as ceremonial spell.

Prerequisites: Bless, Arabic-12+.

THE *GNEISENAU* AT FULL STEAM

The adventure begins off Holland's shore in the dead of the Feb. 13th night. Despite striking a mine hours earlier at 1955, the *Gneisenau* has slipped free of the Channel and – with good fortune – is less than 10 hours from its final destination.

The calamitous evening already is a fading memory, thanks to the tireless efforts of the battlecruiser's engineering crew. The mine's immense explosion tore a huge gash on the starboard side, and some engine damage resulted, but the worst effects of that evening's mishap have been repaired. Just 20 minutes after the blast, the once-crippled ship was back up at full speed, forging for the Elbe.

The last sighting of the enemy came about the same time as the mine strike, just after dark, when a single British Beaufighter reported the fleet off the coast of Den Helder, Holland. The ships of Cerberus are spread thin in anticipation of a coming onslaught, with their picket ships scattered. The German sailors wait nervously for the other shoe to drop.

It is 2400 hours (midnight), and though the ship seems to be in order, there is always work for the engineering crew.

LIFE ABOARD

Life on board the *Gneisenau* is tough. There is little in the way of good food or water, quarters are cramped, and everyone is on edge, feeling as if somehow they narrowly avoided a terrible fate on the

Gneisenau Statistics

Length: 234.9 meters (771').

Beam: 30 meters (98').

Draft: 9.1 meters (30').

Machinery: 12 Wagner three-drum-type boilers with three Deshimag turbines delivering 119,312 kW.

Top Speed: 30 knots.

Rudders: 2.

Screws: 3.

Armor: sides 13" (DR 1,100), deck 3" average (DR 240), turret faces 14" (DR 1,150).

Armament: nine 283mm (11") guns, 12 150mm guns, 14 105mm AA guns, 16 37mm AA guns, 10 20mm AA guns.

Secondary Armament: six 533mm torpedo tubes.

Ship's Company: 60 officers, 1,661 hands.

Planes: two Arado 196s (see p. W:IC84).

Channel. The captain and first mate have not slept since the ship's departure from Brest.

The crew waits for the enemy, scanning the horizon and sky for ships and planes. No one has any clue that the danger facing the *Gneisenau* can be found within it, and that reality itself now conspires against her.

Life Above

Above deck, the crew is active in 12-hour shifts, watching the freezing skies and sea, ever vigilant. Few have any illusions about their situation. All in the German navy know the surface ships in their fleet are a mere shadow of the vast power of the Royal Navy. Most onboard are convinced the British are hurrying into full pursuit of the German armada violating their home waters.

Movement above deck is rushed, but controlled. No one seems to be moving without a purpose. The guns are oiled and ready to fire. The watch deck and towers are constantly manned. Strangely, despite this nearly constant activity, the crew is quiet. Except for the wind, the thrumming of the engines, and the crashing waves of the North Sea, the *Gneisenau* is silent, waiting for the coming attack.

Life Below

Life below deck is cramped, wet, and often stifling. The engineering areas surrounding the *Gneisenau's* huge steam engines are often above 25° Celsius (80° F) even when the engines are only idling. They have now been running non-stop for a long time, and the temperature there has soared to 30° C. The engineering crew is beginning to show signs of fatigue. Several cases of heat stroke have already occurred, and rotating shifts to the freezing deck above are now changed every two hours.

Regular crew is rarely found below deck in this area. They consider those below as literally beneath their station, referring to them as "kobolds," a nickname derived from a German legend about dwarf-like creatures formed from the corpses of miners trapped underground. Invariably, those from below deck are easily singled out by their manner of dress – they often wear no shirt under their stained, belted overall, but do keep a handkerchief tied to their sweaty brow. They have oil in their hair and saturated into their pores, and grease beneath their fingernails. The overwhelming stench of coal and fuel oil clings to them.

In general, kobolds can be found anywhere onboard, and are often completely ignored by the regular crew – they are, after all, those who keep the ship running. They can be found in any compartment, from the bridge to the captain’s stateroom, fixing intercoms, or steam and water pipes, or testing one of the vast arrays of systems strung throughout the ship. This unfettered access should be used by the PCs to best effect, as it allows them to go places and gain access to things out of bounds to even high-ranking deck crew.

ALL HANDS

Since the mine strike, the heads and leading experts of various engineering divisions (the PCs) have taken to meeting in the central forward watertight compartment to coordinate work. Amidst bins of gunpowder, torpedoes, food, and coal, the filthy engineers have formed an ad hoc meeting room, consisting of little more than a vegetable crate as a table and half a dozen buckets for seats.

At 2400, the PCs filter into the room. All are tired from hours of rushed work, but also mildly surprised by how easy the repairs actually were.

What the Players Know

Not surprisingly, the engineering hands know very little about Operation Cerberus. Obviously, they know the basics – the rush through the English Channel, the attempt to make port at Kiel – but besides this, they are very much in the dark. They know their sister ship, the *Scharnhorst*, and the battleship *Prince Eugen* are involved, along with dozens of other smaller ships, and that when possible air cover is provided from the German air force in France.

These facts are almost secondary to the actual concerns of the PCs. Will the welding seal on the hull hold? Will #2 turbine fail again? Will the bridge lose power? They are engineers. As such, tactical thinking should be of very little concern to them unless they’re fixing the results of an enemy attack. If the players fail to grasp this, the GM should remind them with a few emergencies (see *The Hazards of Ship Life – Amplified* on p. 10.)

Though the GM will know everything described in this scenario, the few portions known by the *sailors* at the heart of this adventure are:

- They are on board the battlecruiser *Gneisenau*, part of a battle group consisting of the *Scharnhorst*, *Prince Eugen*, and dozens of smaller picket craft. These craft have rushed through the English Channel, and are now steaming for northern Germany through the North Sea. This movement is called Operation Cerberus.

- At 1955 (7:55 p.m.), a mine detonated on the outer hull of the *Gneisenau*, puncturing its starboard bottom watertight compartment and damaging a turbine. Surprisingly, however, the damage was not serious. Though the gash appeared terrible, and the damage in the compartment was serious, its effect on ship’s systems was minimal.

- All engineering divisions were affected by the hit, but all are surprised by how easily it was repaired. The hit seemed much more serious than it actually was. All repairs were completed in 20 minutes. The breach was sealed, power to the turbine restored, and all ship’s systems are now nominal.

SHIP BASICS

To the engineers, the ship is broken into vast sections covered by particular engineering specialties – or even several specialties at once. To the players, the ship is a series of watertight rooms, which is all of the below decks, and the “bridge,” which is anything above deck. A general breakdown of the ship is given below. All of the PCs understand the following engineering information:

- The lowest levels of the ship are reserved for the steam engines, coal storage, weapons magazines, and engineering crew compartments. This is the main haunt of the engineering crew. It is also the area damaged by the mine hit. Deck and bridge crew are never found here unless something is dreadfully wrong.

- Mid decks are reserved for the mess, food storage, officers’ quarters, staterooms, and such. Many secondary systems are located here, including several turbines, wiring, pneumatics, and communications equipment. A turbine lost power here from the mine hit. Amri and his SS watchdogs/assistants are located in an out-of-the-way forward compartment here, as well.

- Upper decks are for gun compartments, main crew quarters, ammunition elevators, gun pits, and torpedo tubes. Ammunition elevators, gun motors and aiming systems, and communications are located here, as well.

- The main deck is where the guns are mounted (surface and anti-aircraft). There are few mechanical systems located on deck, except for winches and gun motors.

- The lower bridge is where the radar, radio and communication equipment, and staff are located. Obviously, this is packed with electronics and some mechanical systems.

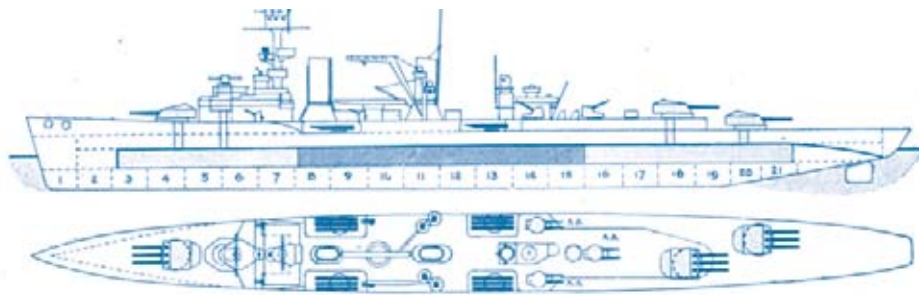
- The upper bridge is the command deck for the ship. This area is also ripe with electronic equipment. In addition, charting and navigation equipment are located here, as well.

SCUTTLEBUTT

Scuttlebutt – rumors onboard a ship – spreads incredibly fast. At any time, one of the following rumors can be overheard, learned through a confidant, or repeated over the intercom by one of the deck crew. (Of course, socially adept characters are much more likely to hear the following rumors than reclusive ones.)

They should be spread throughout the adventure, not lumped all at once on the players. Characters who pursue such information should obviously gain more than those who do nothing.

- Deck watch insists that the mine, which was clearly spotted before the strike at 1955, seemed to



veer at high speed toward the ship before it struck. Unlike a magnetic mine, however, it homed in on the ship from nearly 300 meters out at an estimated 50 knots (about 60 mph). (*True:* Reality was altering events to try to force the designated outcome of Operation Cerberus, which includes the destruction of the *Gneisenau*.)

- SS men are aboard the ship in a forward compartment with a captured Allied spy from North Africa. He is the reason for Cerberus. (*Partially True:* SS men are in a forward compartment with a prisoner, but he is not an Allied spy).

- The *Scharnhorst* – the sister ship to the *Gneisenau* – also struck a mine last night with similar effect. The two hits were almost identical. The ship is now under way. (*True.*)

- There have been two fatal accidents onboard since the beginning of the operation. One man choked to death in the mess, apparently when startled by the nearby mine explosion, and a second was killed minutes after surviving the mine strike when he tumbled down a flight of stairs and broke his neck. No one, however, was killed in the mine strike, despite its apparent severity. (*True:* The men were destined to die first during the Channel run, had the spell not been cast.)

- The two dead men were engineering crew located in the starboard compartment where the explosion occurred. (*Partially True:* One man – the one who choked to death – was indeed in the compartment

where the mine exploded. The second was not. If the players do a little more digging, they find that the second man was stationed at #2 turbine when it ceased working because of the mine hit. This means both men were located at points on the ship that were damaged by the mine – but did not die of mine-related causes.)

- Strange shapes have been sighted in the night, circling the ship. Command believes they are Allied warplanes searching for the convoy. (*False.*)

- Crew in watertight compartment XII (mid deck) report a strange repetitive droning chant coming from a nearby room. Whatever language it is, it is not in German. (*Partially True:* While, indeed, chanting can be heard in Arabic, it is not coming from anywhere near watertight compartment XII, but from nearly a quarter of the ship away. The Mask of Atal is audible through a small air duct that snakes between the two rooms.)

- The first day of the run, two unknown men in normal crew coveralls with no identification rode on the bridge and advised the captain. (*True:* These two men were the SS officers advising the

captain on his course.)

- The captain has lost the convoy and a British task force of warships is pursuing the ship. (*False.*)

- There is a picket of British warships waiting to intercept the task force off the coast of Germany. (*False.*)

THE CLOSED BULKHEAD

Located mid-deck in watertight compartment VI in an out-of-the-way storage area, Amri continues his vigil, guarded by his SS captors. Since the voyage from Brest to Kiel is supposed to take a good deal of time, they intend to keep Amri awake and chanting through verbal threats backed by a judicious application of pain and frequent dosages of the amphetamine Pervitin.

What the two Nazis do not know is that Amri ceased feeding energy into the chant – confident of his own survival – before the battlecruisers struck the British mines. The explosion – which was unlike anything Amri had ever experienced before – momentarily dented even his confidence, however. He recast the Mask right after the mine strike to ensure that all repair efforts would enjoy complete success, but not before reality caught up with a couple of crew members (see *Scuttlebutt*, p. 7). The

alarmed SS men at first suspected Amri's negligence – being busy chanting, he can't converse with them – but have since convinced themselves that the mine was nothing more than a "latent" effect of reality, since it ultimately proved harmless.

Still, Amri has begun to regain his nerve and is tiring rapidly under the strain of maintaining the spell for so long. He will soon let it lapse again. (The GM can decide *how* soon, based upon how quickly the players pick up on the strange circumstances and begin tracking down their source.)

Amri is shackled to the bed, and the keys are held by one of his SS captors. (The shackles can be cut open with basic tools and a successful Mechanic skill roll at -2.) It is obvious to anyone observing him that he is desperately unhappy and under duress. Watched at length, the Arabic cajoling and demands of the SS men make it obvious that Amri is being forced to perform the spell that he continuously chants. If the SS men are confronted by hostile PCs, Amri will immediately cease chanting and shout in broken French, "Free me!"

The SS, of course, will do their best to prevent this from happening.

A Glimpse Back to Port

Engineers involved in electrical or plumbing tasks can, on a successful IQ roll, recall being called into the port facilities early before the convoy's exit from Brest, where they received orders to specially outfit watertight compartment VI in mid-deck with plumbing and electricity. Of course, to recall such a minor task in the midst of the Channel dash requires the PCs to be on the hunt for such strangeness – without the idea that something odd is going on at mid-deck, the PCs have no hope of recalling such a thing.

Food and Secrets – Ernst Denning, the Orderly

Food is brought to watertight compartment VI every six hours by a single mess orderly named Ernst Denning. Denning is the captain's private mess orderly, and is under strict orders not to reveal his out-of-the-way deliveries to compartment VI.

Even if forced to talk, Denning knows very little. Nothing short of the threat of bodily harm will bring Denning to reveal the following. Then, if released, Denning will immediately report the PCs to the captain. Under the right circumstances, though, Denning will reveal that:

- There are three men in compartment VI. Two are SS. He has never seen the third. Three meals are

always prepared, but only two are ever eaten. (Even Denning does not know that when the captain ordered the three meals be delivered, the SS men simply let it stand, wanting to give the captain no reason for suspicion because his special passenger would not be eating.)

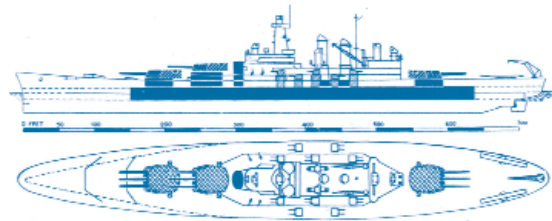
- A continuous chanting can be heard from inside VI at all times. Denning, who was once stationed in Tunis, is sure it is Arabic, though he cannot understand or speak it.

- The SS men wear pistol sidearms and small SS knives on their belts.

- The SS men were on the bridge with the captain the previous day when Denning served the captain's lunch – though they wore no sidearms or uniforms at that time. Occasionally, one would whisper something in the captain's ear.

If the players wish to be a bit craftier, another option is to follow Denning. This is easily accomplished, particularly if Denning has no idea he is under scrutiny. The PCs should be required to make several Stealth or Shadowing skill rolls, as the GM deems fit, depending on how they choose to pursue the orderly. The engineers' superior knowledge of the ship could allow them to follow Denning in crawl-spaces, listen to his movement through open intercoms, and the like. Ingenuity, of course, should be rewarded.

Careful players will approach the mess crew first, to feel things out. Information from the ships'



cook or other orderly staff (who can't stand Denning) is easy to come by. They know few important facts, but have several good leads, and unlike Denning, don't mind sharing them. Simply talking to the cook or other orderlies will reveal the following:

- Denning requires three meals made every six hours. Two are conventional German fare; one is North African – dates, lamb, and such. The cook is sick of making the special meal; the plate always returns having obviously been scraped off rather than eaten from.

- After Denning's deliveries, he reports to the bridge.

- Denning brags of his "special duty for the captain," though won't say what it is. Several of the mess staff have seen Denning on his errand, heading toward the front of the ship at mid-deck, though no one knows exactly where he goes.

Coming to the Right Conclusions

The turning point in this adventure occurs when the engineering party arrives at the correct conclusion – that is, that a magical spell has affected the *Gneisenau*. Once this conclusion is arrived at, all else should follow easily.

If the players seem to founder and fail to pursue presented leads, however, be more proactive and bring the problems to them – an accident in watertight compartment VI requires the PCs to perform a repair, as well as witness Amri and his captors at work. Or *another* crew member discovers the spell, Amri, and the SS, and begins trying to free the Berber, enlisting the PCs' aid. It remains up to you, as GM, to make the adventure click in the minds of the players.

The Ahnenerbe SS Men 100 points

Though they appear rather bland, the two Ahnenerbe SS men onboard the *Gneisenau* are heartless monsters. Years of political and paranor-

mal indoctrination have long ago stripped them of the last remnants of humanity. They will do anything – steal, cheat, lie, or murder – to succeed at their mission.

Few onboard even know they are here. The captain is under the impression that they are intelligence officers transporting a North African spy to Germany. Their identity and location on ship is a tightly guarded secret, known only to the captain, the first mate, and the orderly who delivers food to the compartment they are staying in.

When Amri again ends his spell, the SS men eventually will realize that the Mask of Atal is failing when reality begins unbending again. They will interrogate Amri, hoping to uncover what is wrong. The truth is that Amri can always set things right again – assuming he's not too beat up, exhausted, or dead to recast the spell – but he will be reluctant to give up this insight to them quickly, hoping that reality's return will kill his captors before they kill him.

Should the SS men come to believe that the destruction of the *Gneisenau* is assured – and truly disastrous events might thrust them to this conclusion even with a breathing but close-mouthed Amri before them – they will head toward the aft deck and attempt to steal a small motor launch or one of the seaplanes. Escaping with Amri becomes their primary goal, escaping without him a close second. God help anyone who attempts to stop them.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 6 (Knife).

Advantages: Legal Enforcement Powers [15]; Military Rank 3 [15]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Bully [-10]; Callous [-6]; Duty [-15], Fanaticism (Nazism) [-15], Reputation (-4, all non-Nazis) [-10].

Skills: Acting-11 [1]; Brawling-14 [4]-13; Broadsword-13 [4]; Criminology-11 [1]; Demolition-11 [1]; Driving-11 [1]; Guns (Light Auto)-13* [1/2]; Guns (Pistol)-15* [2]; Guns (Rifle)-14* [1]; History: (Esoteric)-11 [2]; Holdout-11 [1]; Intelligence Analysis-10 [1]; Interrogation-13 [4]; Intimidation-14 [6]; Knife-13 [2]; Navigation-10 [1]; Occultism-12 [2]; Piloting (Single-Engine Prop)-11 [1]; Powerboat-11 [1]; Research-12 [2]; Shadowing-11 [1]; Soldier-10 [1/2]; Stealth-12 [2]; Streetwise-12 [2].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Talking to Amri

If the PCs free Amri and can speak Arabic or French, he will tell them the truth – all of it – while bluntly informing them of the limits of the Mask. (Note that, if Amri has not already allowed his second casting to lapse, he certainly will do so when he begins speaking to the engineering hands.) Some PCs might find this hard to swallow, at least until they personally witness a supernatural event. (Keep in mind that Amri, who possesses multiple spells, can *demonstrate* his power, if needed.)

Though Amri believes reality will keep him alive no matter what, he's rather eager to make his own luck by leaving the ship before it meets its own fate. He doesn't have the slightest idea how boats or modern equipment work, however, so his "rescuers" become very important to him. (He's wise enough to realize that the SS represent only a tiny fraction of the German people, and is hopeful that others onboard do not agree with their methods and in turn will assist him.) He will do his best to make it clear that, if rescued, he will in turn save the PCs from the uncertain fate awaiting those on ship. In fact, he will go so far as to risk his own life to save those who assisted him in his time of need – even if they subsequently insist on risking their own life to try to save the *Gneisenau*, itself.

Languages: Arabic-12 [2]; German-12 (native) [0].

The SS men carry Walther PPKs (doing 2d-1-damage at Acc 2 with 7+1 shots; see p. W92 for more) and their SS daggers (treat as standard knives). They each have two extra magazines for their pistols and two capsules of cyanide for committing suicide or forcing others to do so.

Running the SS Men: The SS agents are the primary conventional enemies of the adventure, and should be played as smart, resourceful foes, capable of going to any emotional lengths to escape the doomed ship with Amri. They will kill anyone onboard, including the captain, to complete their mission. They will even sacrifice their own lives to prevent Amri from falling into the hands of others – but would rather not.

They will do their best to play up their rather mundane appearance, and will immediately change to crew coveralls when they choose to make their break above deck for the motor launch or aircraft.

If escape is hopeless, they will first dispatch Amri with a pistol shot to the forehead, and then kill themselves with the cyanide.

Amri Aboukrat 100 points

Age 46; 5'1", 109 lbs.; balding with black hair going gray at the temples; green eyes; dark brown

skin; a thin, friendly-looking Berber with a *huge* smile.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Magery 2 [25]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Word Bond) [-10]; Primitive (TL4) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-5].

Skills: Acting-11 [1]; Animal Handling-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (Southern Tunisia)-12 [1]; Camouflage-12 [1]; Climbing-11 [1]; Cooking-12 [1]; Knife-12 [1]; Hiking-11 [4]; Leadership-11 [1]; Naturalist-11 [2]; Riding (Camel)-11 [1]; Riding (Horse)-11 [1]; Survival (Desert)-12 [2]; Teamster-11 [1].

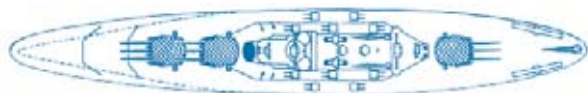
Spells: Beast-Soother-12 [1]; Bless-12 [1]; Create Air-12 [1]; Create Fire-12 [1]; Create Water-12 [1]; Haste-12 [1]; Ignite Fire-12 [1]; Itch-12 [1]; Mask of Atal-15 [12]; Master-12 [1]; Purify Air-12 [1]; Purify Water-12 [1]; Quick March-12 [1]; Seek Earth-12 [1]; Seek Food-12 [1]; Seek Water-12 [1]; Sense Danger-12 [1]; Sense Foes-12 [1]; Sense Life-12 [1]; Shape Earth-12 [1]; Spasm-12 [1]; Test Food-12 [1]; Watchdog-12 [1].

Languages: Arabic-12 (native) [0]; French-11 [1].

THE TROUBLES BEGIN

Once the engineering hands discover Amri – or if the players prove slow in realizing they have a mystery to hand and chasing it down – the Berber will drop his second casting of the Mask. Probability will shift on a pivot and things begin to go wrong – fast. Reality begins to actually work *against* the success of Cerberus.

In short, everything gained by the Mask is lost over a period of time. Meanwhile, it should take the players some time to digest Amri's story, decide what they should do, and go about doing it (assuming they don't still need to find Amri to *hear* his story). If the PCs are not paying attention or moving fast enough, they too may become victims of the curse.



NOTICEABLE STRANGENESS

The first effects of dropping the spell are minor physical and electrical problems. They appear in growing flurries, eventually becoming far too much for even the whole engineering crew to deal with. While the ship continues forward, cries from the bridge report minor problem after minor problem – the lights are out in the mess, water is in watertight compartment XXIII, intercoms are not working on the gun deck, etc.

A good way to clue the players in to the supernatural aspect of this problem is to have them *absolutely* fix something, only to have it break again in exactly the same manner a moment later. If they fix it again, it breaks again in front of their eyes, as if some invisible force damaged it.

PLAY STRUCTURE

Being a free-form adventure, *The Secret of the Gneisenau* represents a challenge for both the players and GM. Players must be proactive and actively pursue the problems presented in the adventure, or there's no hope of success. How can you, as GM, encourage such behavior in players? Easy – feed them leads! Every action taken by the players should at least hint at something unusual going on. There's no need to beat them over the head with it; a hint is more than enough.

When the adventure was playtested, the players took the following course of action: All hands met. They heard the rumor of SS men being aboard. They followed Denning to watertight compartment VI, but did not force their way in. Then, the ship began falling apart. Realizing that the SS were using magic, they entered compartment VI and freed Amri after a brutal fight with his captors. Dodging multiple disasters and security crews, they escaped on a motor launch. Amri casts the Mask to protect the party during this process, ensuring their getaway.

Obviously, the adventure could have moved in many different directions at many different points. If, for example, the players chose not to follow Ernst Denning, the trail to watertight compartment VI dries up, and they are in danger of failing to solve the adventure altogether. As GM, how would you restore that lead? Gently nudge them back in that direction, with a rumor, task, or lead – for example, you could have them overhear Arabic chanting through an air shaft while making a repair . . .

THE HAZARDS OF SHIP LIFE – AMPLIFIED

The following terrible events can occur at any time after the Mask of Atal no longer protects the ship:

Explosion!

Volatile chemicals in a watertight compartment ignite and explode, causing a disruption in local power and water and air supply, and filling the area with thick black smoke and noxious fumes.

Casualties: 3d.

Possible Damage: Smoke inhalation (1d-4 per turn).

Skills: Engineering and Mechanic.

Difficulty Modifier: -1 to vent fumes.

Fire!

Some kind of ignition occurs, causing a raging fire in a hallway or watertight compartment. If an airtight seal can be closed around it, the fire will burn itself out.

Casualties: 3d+4.

Possible Damage: Smoke inhalation (1d-4 per turn) and fire (1d-1 per turn, or 1d-3 if just moving through it for a turn).

Skills: Sailor (to handle fire-extinguishing gear), Mechanic, and perhaps Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

Difficulty Modifier: -2 to extinguish flames, -1 to vent fumes.

Gas!

Noxious chemicals from the steam engines leak into a hallway, gun turret, or watertight compartment. Many portions of the ship have emergency air shunts, allowing pressurized air to be flushed into an area – opening one of these should disperse the gas.

Casualties: 2d.

Possible Damage: Fumes (1d-5 per round; must make a successful HT roll every 10 seconds or fall unconscious).

Skills: Engineering and Mechanic.

Difficulty Modifier: -1 to vent fumes.

Leak!

Water begins pouring in, either from a rupture in the hull or a failed weld. Bilge, drainage, and air-pumping systems can be used to empty the water from the area. In addition, an area can be sealed by closing watertight compartments, preventing the water from spreading.

Casualties: 1d-4.

Possible Damage: Drowning (see the swimming rules on p. W96 or in *GURPS WWII Lite*).

Skills: Engineering and Mechanic.

Difficulty Modifier: -2 to seal leak, -1 to drain water.

Mine!

An explosion rocks the ship from a mine impact. Repairs could vary from hours of welding to simply sealing off that area of the ship.

Casualties: 3d+4.

Possible Damage: Combine the effects of *Leak!* and *Explosion!*

Skills: Engineering and Mechanic.

Difficulty Modifier: -3 to weld breach shut, -1 to drain water.

Malfunction!

A malfunction of some sort brings the ship to the brink – the steam engines are near explosion and won't dampen, the turbines spin up and fail to correct or reset, #1 prop is spinning but #2 will not, sending the ship in circles . . .

Casualties: ? (possibly everyone onboard).

Possible Damage: GM fiat.

Skills: GM fiat.

Difficulty Modifier: GM fiat.

Powder Ignition!

A stash of gunpowder or explosives ignites, tearing through the armored bulkhead of its magazine and damaging other areas of the ship.

Casualties: 3d×2.

Possible Damage: As for *Fire!*, *Gas!*, and *Explosion!*

Skills: Mechanic, Gunner, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Sailor (for handling fire-fighting equipment).

Difficulty Modifier: See *Fire!*, *Gas!*, and *Explosion!*

Rigging Accident!

One of the steel support lines stabilizing the upper conning tower breaks free and is thrashing about in the high wind. The rigging must be either cut free from the mast, or pinned and welded to the deck.

Casualties: None until someone goes up to secure the line . . .

Possible Damage: 3d+1 crushing.

Skills: Engineering, Sailor, Climbing.

Difficulty Modifier: -4 to secure.

DEATH CONSPIRES

While the ship falls apart around the sailors, they should come to the understanding that *something* supernatural is going on, even if they have not yet found Amri or refuse to believe his story.

When things get *really* hairy, it might seem that they could die at any moment. In truth, they will perish only when they are predestined to – in the order in which they would have perished in the

Channel – though the GM doesn't have to tell them this. (Some GMs don't care to "fudge" rolls in favor of PCs, or intervene to save them, and won't be comfortable with this sort of mechanics. In that case, when a PC dies, his time has come, and nothing can save him.)

The GM can keep the party on their toes, hitting them with several disasters, inquiries by the bridge, and random accidents while they struggle to figure out the mystery and forge their own course of action.

The simplest – and usually most obvious – solution is to have Amri cast the Mask of Atal on himself and his rescuers to ensure a clean getaway. As long as the PC party numbers eight or fewer people (with Amri making nine), the effects of this casting can be made permanent, without reality reaching out for the sailors once the spell ends. Or the sailors – particularly those with strong ties of loyalty to the ship or their military duty – might seize upon a larger goal . . .

SAVE THE DAY!

Particularly clever players might piece together enough of the story to realize that Amri probably could keep the *Gneisenau* intact long enough to reach port – if he *wanted* to. Convincing him to do so is another thing, entirely. The effort would leave him at the point of collapse, unable to use another casting of Mask to save himself should reality's return prove particularly quick and fatal. (And no matter how long he puts it off with his chanting, it *will* return.) He's much more keen on leaving the ship – and particularly his two SS watchdogs – to its fate while he facilitates his own escape.

Even if the PCs convince him to try, actually *succeeding* should be far more difficult. For starters, if the sailors reached Amri by defeating the SS men in combat, then they will have to conceal the situation from Denning the orderly, who would report immediately to the captain. Regardless, the engineering party's own supervisors might notice their unexplained absences, and search parties would be sent after them. If the SS men remain alive and wake up, they'll plot to turn the tables as quickly as they can. They were running this operation and believe they had it in hand; they certainly won't cede control to some ignorant kobolds.

Keeping Amri awake will prove an even greater challenge. He's already gone for hours without proper sleep, water, or food, and the amphetamines will only help for so long. Keep in

mind that every second he forgoes casting the Mask again is one more second that reality might reach out and finally seize the *Gneisenau*. (Better yet, keep that fact in the players' minds.) They'll have to gauge how long to give Amri to eat and take in fluids before getting back to business; any legitimate amount of sleep would spell out doom. As the journey continues, the spell-caster will grow more and more tired, threatening to nod off. The PCs will need to find inventive ways to keep him awake, all the while fending off search parties, security details, and vengeful SS men . . .

CONVINCING OTHERS

A player who really does it by the book may have his sailor earnestly try to lay everything out to the captain or his supervising officer. Convincing the captain or command crew that the ship is cursed is a near impossibility. Now would the captain abandon ship unless the situation was terribly dire.

Convincing others in the engineering crew is a bit easier – especially after the dramatic series of disasters onboard. A simple Leadership or positive reaction roll will convince a single individual to join the conspiracy to abandon ship. (Keep in mind that the spell can only completely safeguard a group of fewer than 10.)

The deck crew is much harder to convince. All attempts to persuade regular sailors of the facts, no matter how calamitous the situation, are at a -4. On a failed reaction roll, the crew member reports the incident to the watch captain, and from there, a security detail dispatched to arrest the PCs is not far behind.

The Captain's Call

The captain of the *Gneisenau*, Otto Fein, is a decisive man who has fought hard over the past years to keep his ship alive, piloting it through dangerous situations and successfully bringing it back to port against the odds. The Channel dash, however, represents what Fein hopes will be his finest – and most difficult – moment. Now, just hours from Kiel, he is beginning to believe the plan just might work.

He is a levelheaded, down-to-earth man. Talk of curses, magic, or the SS casting spells on ship will be met with a steely gaze. Suggestions on course of action or interference with the chain of command or the SS will be met with a guard detail and a trip to the brig. Attempts to take the bridge, disable the ship, or steal escape craft will result in

confinement to the brig eventually leading to execution for treason.

“It's a Cursed Ship!”

Sometimes, in the midst of explosions, gunshots, and madness, a PC will just lose it, shouting for general mutiny. (This happened in the playtest.) Few in the crew will listen to such an outcry, despite any odd events going on – sailors are extensively trained to remain calm in the most extreme circumstances. Most will hold firm at their posts, and the only likely outcome of such an event is an order being issued for the PC's arrest.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN . . .

If a security detail is dispatched to find the PCs, things can become much, much worse. There are two levels of pursuit: If the PCs have simply gone missing, poked around, discovered the SS men and Amri, or questioned orders from the bridge, a search party will hunt for them and maybe rough them up as shirkers. If they are believed to be engaging in mutiny or similar fare, they will be hunted as fugitives. The security detail is given orders to bring them in at any cost. In that case, the security team will fire on the PCs if they refuse to comply. In any case, it should be made clear that if they are captured in such a pursuit, it's likely they'll eventually be shot, anyway . . .

Security Detail 50 points each

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 5.25; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 5 (Club).

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Overconfidence [-10]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Sense of Duty (to Captain) [-10].

Skills: Armory (Vehicular)-11 [1]; Boating-10 [2]; Brawling-12 [4]; Broadsword-11 [4]; Carpentry-12 [1]; Climbing-10 [2]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Freight Handling-11 [1]; Gunner (Cannon)-12* [2]; Guns (Light Auto)-11* [1/2]; Guns (Pistol)-11* [1/2]; Knife-11 [2]; Intimidation-12 [2]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-11 [1]; Powerboat-10 [2]; Sailor-12 [2]; Savoire-Faire (Military)-11 [1/2]; Seamanship-13 [2].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Equipment: Billy club (Damage 1d+1 swing or 1d-1 thrust, both crushing); *Fighting Knife (Damage 1d-1 cutting or 1d-1 impaling; Reach C, 1 for cutting or C impaling); *Luger P08 (Malf 16; Damage 2d+2; SS 9; Acc 4; 1/2 Damage 150; Max 1,900; RoF 3~; Shots 8+1; Rcl -1); **MP38 (Malf Crit.; Damage 3d-1; SS 10; Acc 6; 1/2 Damage 160; Max 1,900; RoF 8~; Shots 32; Rcl -1).

* Used only when under attack from the PCs or dispatched to take them dead or alive.

** Carried only if the PCs are wanted for mutiny.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE *GNEISENAU*

Despite the dangers faced in Operation Cerberus, the damage sustained, and the perilous odds, in the real world the *Gneisenau* reached port at Kiel on the afternoon of Feb. 13, 1942. Its apparent hard-earned luck did not last long, however. On Feb. 26, just 13 days after the Channel dash, the battlecruiser was mortally struck during an RAF bomber assault.

Crews rushed to repair the ship at the Deutsche Werke AG yards. Given their haste to make *Gneisenau* seaworthy again, standard procedure was not followed – the huge forward ammunition bays of the ship were not emptied. As a result, an RAF bomb ignited the tons of high explosive in the foredeck, destroying much of the ship’s structural integrity and killing 113 crew members. The German navy, already in shambles, had neither the time nor resources to repair the ship. In March 1945, the ruined ship was sunk as a blockade of the city *Gotenhafen* . . .

Few who survived could recall a stranger chain of luck and failure than that which was endured by the crew of the *Gneisenau*. Even in the real world, the *Gneisenau* and her sister ship, the *Scharnhorst*, are often referred to as “cursed.”

Of course, in the reality of this adventure, the *Gneisenau*’s “real” fate is reserved for those instances where the PC sailors somehow convince and help Amri to continue protecting the warship all the way to port, or they figure out some other way to allow the *Gneisenau* to cheat fate . . . at least for 13 days.

Running the Security Detail

The members of a security detail are not a bunch of cardboard cutouts – they will act and react as the situation dictates. For example, in pursuit of someone who has simply committed a minor offense, they will directly confront the individual in question, and, if necessary, use their billy clubs to subdue him.

In pursuit of mutineers or people who have fired upon or attacked them, they will be that much more careful and dangerous, employing pistols or, if the situation is dire enough, submachine guns.

They will work in teams, splitting up to cut off escape routes, sealing and locking doors, and even calling for backup as the situation dictates.

RESOLUTION

The most possible successful resolution to the adventure is to escape the *Gneisenau*, have Amri cast the Mask of Atal, and hope for rescue or make for land. This neatly separates the fate of the escapees from the altered fate of the *Gneisenau*.

With luck, more heroic PCs might manage to save the ship (along with all of the others in the task force). This outcome, however, only *delays* what is inevitable for *Gneisenau* (a point that Amri will be sure to make if the sailors try to persuade him to keep up his SS-appointed duties). Worse, the adventuring party usually will not be able to separate themselves from the battlecruiser’s awful destiny, as Amri will be too spent to cast another protective chant. Along with their crewmates, the PCs usually will be doomed to whatever fate might have awaited them in the English Channel – but at least they will have done their duty as some would perceive it.

Just what the ship’s fate might have been remains up to the GM to decide. Not all members of the *Gneisenau* crew are doomed to a watery grave, even after the Mask fails. Perhaps they would have abandoned ship during the relentless British attack, or been blown clear of a torpedo explosion that would have sunk the craft. As discussed earlier (see p. 12), even the brave and selfless PCs might be saved in

this fashion, by placing them among those destined to have survived the battlecruiser's unmanipulated fate.

Death and Other Mild Setbacks

The players might do everything right and still have the scenario come unglued around them. For instance, Amri could be killed accidentally during a liberation attempt. What does the GM do? A heartless GM might play out the remaining hours of increasing destruction onboard the *Gneisenau*, ending with a brutal description of the ship's demise, along with the PCs.

More forgiving GMs prefer a Hollywood ending. The ship might still be destroyed, but the PCs find themselves floating in the water amidst its wreckage; they weren't destined to die in the Channel dash, after all. If they were the crew ordered at port to properly outfit compartment VI (see p. 8), then the GM might even make them the only survivors. Upon rescue by a daring U-boat, they are returned to Brest, where a senior official comments that this is the *strangest* coincidence – all of them were supposed to be transferred off *Gneisenau* for duty in port, except that the refitting order postponed those papers past the ship's departure . . .

Conversely, the PCs might be moving along too easily, and the GM could use a twist to slow

them down. One variant scenario would have Amri somehow convince his SS captors that he can't save *Gneisenau*. They decided to abandon ship with him; he's worth far more to the Reich than any battlecruiser. The investigating sailors must race the SS party to their preferred method of escape, whether boat or plane, and fight them for possession of the spellcaster.

THE END?

Just where and when the GM wants to end the adventure is a matter of taste. A Hollywood ending would place the sailors onboard a motor launch watching the smoking ruin of the *Gneisenau* sink to the bottom, and that would be appropriate and satisfying. More subtle endings are possible, however. The GM could hint that a grim fate is waiting for the PCs at every turn, and this would be just as satisfying. For instance, once the battlecruiser sinks and Amri announces that it's safe for him to drop his casting of the Mask that kept the escaping party alive, the sailors could smell fuel just before they throttle up the launch's engine. On investigation, they find a split fuel line that is easily repaired, but would have caused a large (and probably fatal) fire if it had gone unnoticed. Upon having this explained to him, Amri might turn pale and mutter a few cryptic phrases in Arabic . . .

CHARACTERS

As discussed on p. 3, characters for this adventure can be based on the following template:

Sailor 50 points

The following template illustrates engineering hands in all the navies of WWII.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Fit [5] and 25 points in *National Advantages* (see p. W68).

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and -30 points in *National Disadvantages* (see p. W69).

Basic Skills: Boating (P/A) DX [2]-10; First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Powerboat (P/A) DX [2]-10; Sailor (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Savoir-Faire

(Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Seamanship (M/E) IQ [1]-12; and *one* of:

Chief Engineer: Engineer (Vehicles) (M/H) IQ [4]-12 with Armoury (Vehicular) (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel) (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Shipbuilding (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11.††

Petty Officer: Armoury (Vehicular) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [2]-11; Gunner (Cannon, Depth Charge, or Torpedo) (P/A) DX+2 [2]-12*; Explosive Ordnance Disposal (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Freight Handling (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (M/E) IQ [1]-12.†

Ordinary Seaman: Armoury (Vehicular) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [2]-11; Carpentry (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-10; Freight Handling (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-

11; Gunner (Cannon, Depth Charge, or Torpedo) (P/A) DX+2 [2]-12*; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

Secondary Skills: Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX+1 [1/2]-11*; Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+1 [1/2]-11*; Knife (P/E) DX [1]-10.

Optional Skills: Spend 10 points on improving any basic or secondary skill, or purchasing any of Guns (Light Auto) or Swimming (both P/E); Driving (Automobile or Construction Equipment) or Gunner (Machine Gun or Rocket Launcher) (both P/A); Carousing (P/A – HT); Area Knowledge (Ocean or Ports of Call), Cooking, Scrounging, or Telegraphy (all M/E); Cartography, Demolition, Electronics Operation (Communications or Sensors), Gambling, Hard-Hat Diving, Intimidation, NBC Warfare, Streetwise, or Survival (Island/Beach) (all M/A); or Engineer (any), Intelligence Analysis, Law, or Traffic Analysis (all M/H).

* Includes +2 for IQ.

† through ††††: Must have one level of Military Rank per dagger, with all skills required for that Rank (see p. W70).

SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Alternately, the GM could have the players use the following example characters. Though each has been given the beginnings of a personality, players should of course feel free to tinker with their characterization as they see fit.

Armin Wexler 75 points

Age 22; 5'10", 148 lbs.; blond hair and blue eyes; looks the part of a perfect Hitler Youth.

A cadet in the naval engineering program, Wexler holds rank something like that of a chief petty officer – he doesn't really have the same authority, but the hands have to respect that he'll be a proper officer one day soon. For now, though, he spends all of his time in the bowels of the ship learning the intricacies of its functions. This puts him in far more hands-on contact with the crew than most officers have – and makes it hard for him to ignore that the ratings have a far more intimate understanding of what's going on with the ship than many of their superiors would believe.

At an officer's club in Brest, before the Cerberus ships left port, Wexler saw a group of SS officers enter and cause the entire naval contingent in the room to stiffen and let their conversations

die. He might recognize any of those SS men should he see them again . . .

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].
Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 6 (knife).

Advantages: Appearance [5]; Fit [5]; Military Rank 2 [10]; Status 1 [5].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Officer's) [-10]; Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Honesty [-10]; Indecisive [-10]; Sense of Duty (Navy) [-10].

Quirks: Blushes then gets irritable because he did so; Feels compelled to display his bravery at every opportunity; *Hates* to admit that he still gets turned around in the bowels of the ship; Tries to maintain a neat appearance despite the overwhelming odds against it. [-4]

Skills: Administration-12 [2]; Armoury (Vehicular)-12 [2]; Boating-12 [2]-10; Carousing-10 [1/2]; Cartography-10 [1/2]; Driving (Auto)-10 [1/2]; Electronics Operation (Communications)-11 [1]; Engineer (Vehicles)-13 [6]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Guns (Pistol)-14* [1]; Guns (Rifle)-14* [1]; Knife-12 [1]; Law (Naval)-9/15 [1]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-13 [4]; Navigation-12 [4]; Powerboat-12 [2]; Riding (Horse)-11 [1]; Sailor-12 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 [1/2]; Seamanship-12 [1]; Shipbuilding-11 [2]; Swimming-11 [1/2]; Tactics (Naval)-12 [4]; Telegraphy-12 [1].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Languages: French-11 [1]; German-12 (native) [0].

Jürgen Loewe 75 points

Age 38; 5'8", 169 lbs.; brown hair cut to a stubble and unblinking brown eyes; looks hard and wizened and tolerant of absolutely no nonsense.

A chief petty officer of many years' experience, Loewe keeps a tight watch on things. He makes it his business to know his ship and his men better than anyone. Though he doesn't suffer fools gladly, he won't automatically dismiss any talk of magic or curses. He's too much the sailor at heart for that.

Loewe has seen a lot of combat in and around the Channel, and he knows that the Royal Navy is as capable of screwing up as his own service. Their luck so far has surprised him, but it's nowhere near out of the realm of the possible as far as he's concerned . . .

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 6; Move 6.

Dodge 6; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Advantages: Fit [5]; Military Rank 2 [10]; Toughness 1 [10].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Code of Honor (Petty Officer's) [-10]; Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Sense of Duty (His Men) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Navy) [-10]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Discreetly interferes with Nazi political programs among the crew; Rarely returns from leave with a reichsmark to his name; Refuses to admit when the weather is rough; Sharpens his knife when he's nervous; Spits on the deck when he's disgusted, then makes his victim clean it up. [-5]

Skills: Administration-11 [1]; Armoury (Vehicular)-11 [1]; Boating-13 [2]-10; Brawling-15 [4]; Carousing-10 [1]; Engineer (Vehicles)-12 [4]; Explosive Ordnance Disposal-10 [1]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Freight Handling-12 [2]; Gunner (Cannon)-14* [1]; Guns (Pistol)-14* [1/2]; Guns (Rifle)-14* [1/2]; Intimidation-11 [1]; Knife-14 [2]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-12 [2]; Navigation-12 [4]; Powerboat-13 [2]; Sailor-14 [6]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 [1/2]; Scrounging-12 [1]; Seamanship-12 [1]; Tactics (Naval)-12 [4].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Languages: Dutch-10 [1/2]; English-10 [1/2]; German-12 (native) [0].

Udalbert Mauer 75 points

Age 29; 5'10", 170 lbs.; black hair and blue eyes; constantly smells of fuel oil.

The leader of a boiler crew, Mauer spends his watches carefully nursing the plants that power the battlecruiser – nor do his crewmates ever see him topside on his own time. His profession leads him to think of most situations in terms of balance – one can't react in too cold of a fashion, nor too hot of one, if seeking the optimal solution. So far, treating life like a balky boiler has kept him from being left dead in the water or having circumstances blow up in his face . . .

Mauer served on a Mediterranean transport during the early portion of Rommel's campaign in Africa. In his contacts with army troops, he heard plenty of amazing stories about the native nomads appearing just after a battle to scavenge among the dead and wounded, then disappearing before any of the warring parties returned to the scene. The soldiers telling the stories did not attribute this to

magic, but rather to the natives' high Area Knowledge, Stealth, and Survival (Desert) skills. If he hears of how the SS came to believe that Amri possesses magical skills, he may not be as impressed as others would be . . .

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 5 (knife).

Advantages: Composed [5]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill 1 [5]; Military Rank 2 [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Phobia (Agoraphobia) [-10]; Secret (Jewish Blood) [-20].

Quirks: Carefully touches doorknobs and such to test their temperature before handling them; Disappears whenever medical personnel check crew for crabs; Gets to know the layout of any ship he's on intimately as soon as he boards. [-3]

Skills: Administration-11 [1]; Area Knowledge (*Gneisenau*)-13 [2]; Armoury (Vehicular)-12 [2]; Boating-11 [2]; Cooking-12 [1]; Engineer (Vehicles)-14 [8]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Guns (Pistol)-12* [1/2]; Guns (Rifle)-12* [1/2]; Knife-11 [1]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-13 [4]; Navigation-12 [4]; Powerboat-11 [2]; Sailor-12 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 [1/2]; Scrounging-12 [1]; Seamanship-12 [1]; Shipbuilding-11 [2]; Stealth-11 [2]; Tactics (Naval)-12 [4].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Languages: German-12 (native) [0].

Gotthold Drescher 75 points

Age 41; 5'8", 145 lbs.; graying brown hair and beard, and brown eyes; often carries his head cocked to one side.

As chief of an engine watch, Drescher suffers from the common conceit that this is *his* boat. He keeps it moving, after all. What's not a conceit is his uncanny ability to sense trouble brewing amidst the ship's infinitely complex systems. Often, he's already gathered up his tools and men and gotten on his way before others even become aware of the problem.

Drescher knows that this is a really well-built ship, so he is relieved – but not overly surprised – when the *Gneisenau* endures the mine's strike so well. He'll credit German engineering over magic as the cause . . .

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Advantages: Danger Sense [15]; Fit [5]; Military Rank 2 [10].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Engineer's: "Keep the ship afloat.") [-10]; Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Overconfidence [-10]; Sense of Duty (Navy) [-10].

Quirks: Always gives himself plenty of fudge factor when estimating repair times, Snaps at subordinates who move too slowly, Treats deck crew with suspicion. [-3]

Skills: Administration-12 [1]; Armoury (Vehicular)-13 [2]; Boating-11 [2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Carpentry-13 [1]; Climbing-11 [2]; Engineer (Vehicles)-14 [6]; First Aid-12 [1/2]; Freight Handling-12 [1]; Gunner (Cannon)-13* [2]; Guns (Pistol)-12* [1/2]; Guns (Rifle)-12* [1/2]; Knife-11 [1]; Leadership-12 [1]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-15 [6]; Navigation-12 [2]; Powerboat-11 [2]; Sailor-13 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-12 [1/2]; Seamanship-13 [1]; Tactics (Naval)-12 [2].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Languages: German-13 (native) [0].

Ludolf Zimmermann 75 points

Age 27; 5'9", 133 lbs.; blond hair and green eyes; an emaciated-looking fellow with thick glasses hiding incredibly tired-looking eyes.

An electrician's mate, Zimmermann volunteered for the navy to keep himself out of the army – and harm's way. His goal was to keep his head down for the course of the war, and come out the other side in one piece. Up until now, he has done his work well and kept a very low profile, even though he simply *cannot* get used to shipboard life and always seems to be jumpy and restless.

Zimmermann has been trying to chase down a bedeviling (but perfectly mundane) tendency for some ship's systems to short-circuit ever since he came aboard the *Gneisenau*. He sometimes sees electrical systems short out as soon as repaired, two or three times on end. Seeing the same from magical effects may not impress him at first . . .

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Advantages: Fit [5]; Less Sleep 5 [15]; Military Rank 1 [5]; No Hangover [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight [-10]; Edgy [-5]; Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Leaves a social gathering whenever the humor gets too coarse; Reads everything he can get his hands on; Wanders about the bowels of the ship when he should be sleeping. [-3]

Skills: Administration-11 [1/2]; Armoury (Vehicular)-12 [1]; Bicycling-11 [1]; Boating-11 [2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Carpentry-13 [1]; Climbing-11 [2]; Engineer (Electrical Work)-



16 [10]; First Aid-12 [1/2]; Freight Handling-12 [1]; Gunner (Torpedo)-13* [2]; Guns (Pistol)-12* [1/2]; Guns (Rifle)-12* [1/2]; Knife-11 [1]; Leadership-11 [1/2]; Literature-12 [2]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-12 [1]; Navigation-10 [1/2]; Philosophy-12 [2]; Powerboat-11 [2]; Sailor-13 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-12 [1/2]; Seamanship-13 [1]; Tactics (Naval)-10 [1/2].

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Languages: French-11 [1/2]; German-13 (native) [0]; Latin-11 [1/2].

Paul Färber 75 points

Age 19; 6'2", 215 lbs.; blond hair and blue eyes; tall and muscular, with an easy grin and none-too-bright expression.

Recently promoted from plumber's apprentice, Färber is glad to be learning a good trade while serving his country. His placid nature is perfectly suited for tracking water leaks throughout the ship's convoluted plumbing system, and his body is built to endure the rugged work of fixing them. Still, no one has yet seen how the cheerful plumber will react to stress that doesn't involve too many leaks and too few hands.

Shortly before the ship set off, a man dressed in coveralls without insignia, on his way to the bridge with a partner, stopped Färber and asked him if a fellow of his stout size and Aryan heritage was enrolled in any party programs. The stranger followed up by saying that he and his companion were Luftwaffe fighter-cover liaisons, before urging Färber to improve his party background and taking his leave. Färber won't easily let go of the idea that these men are with the Luftwaffe . . .

ST 14 [45]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20].

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Advantages: Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Toughness 1 [10].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20]; Gullibility [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10];

Sense of Duty (Comrades in arms) [-5]; Truthfulness [-5].

Quirks: Knocks on pipes when he enters a compartment; Often asks people to repeat their story to make sure he's got it straight; Pestering those who abuse his heads (toilets); Whistles in annoying fashion when lost in his work. [-4]

Skills: Armoury (Vehicular)-10 [2]; Boating-11 [2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Carpentry-10 [1]; Climbing-11 [2]; First Aid-10 [1]; Freight Handling-10 [2]; Gunner (Cannon)-12* [2]; Guns (Pistol)-11* [1/2]; Guns (Rifle)-11* [1/2]; Knife-11 [1]; Mechanic (Ocean-Going Vessel)-14 [10]; Powerboat-11 [2]; Sailor-11 [4]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-9 [1/2]; Seamanship-11 [2]; Swimming-10 [1/2]; Wrestling-12 [4].

* Includes +1 for IQ.

Languages: German-10 (native) [0].



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