



"THEY KILL BY PROXY..."

AN ADVENTURE FOR

THRILLING TALES



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By Daniel R. Robichaud II

BACKGROUND

When the stock market crash sank his family's fortunes, Eddie Boyd tried to cultivate connections with the Mob. He orchestrated a few choice capers, used influence over city officials to aid criminal operations, and made some capital. However, those Mob connections ultimately reneged on promises to get him meetings with any family Dons.

Eddie got the idea for a modern day Hellfire Club. Just as that organization began in antiquity as a gathering place for men to indulge sins, so Boyd's group organized among the wealthy as an excuse gather and enjoy debauchery. The name had to be lurid, and what better than The Murder Club, as it was his intention to murder civilization's corset-tight morality? However, his brainchild soon blossomed into something far greater, thanks to input from Felix March.

March had grown up in the slums. He crawled up from the gutters and into the penthouses through hard work and an inability to surrender. He did some terrible things to get where he was, and from those experiences he developed a keen skill at reading people, a skill at manipulation, and a killer's eye for opportunity. In Boyd, he found an eager soul looking for an excuse to be malicious, and after sharing stories of gangsters and crime, he convinced Boyd to turn the Murder Club into a force to be reckoned with. March's best trick was to convince Boyd he was the one to develop the Club's extracurricular activities.

Soon, the Murder Club used political influence, connections with authorities, and their dwindling familial fortunes to assemble technologies and contacts across the nation. Under March's supervision (using Eddie Boyd's name), a small pulp magazine dubbed The

Hell Pages circulated through New York City and then New York State and soon found its way across the country. Though it appears little more than a spicy pulp filled with hackwork fiction and licentious artwork, it is a coded call to arms for sadists, maniacs, and tormenters. With a discrete application letter accompanied by two member recommendations, anyone could participate in The Hell Pages' secret force. That force would be supplied with a transceiver and an opportunity to find outlets for its peculiar and perverse pastimes.

After almost one year, The Murder Club's nationwide army is already seven hundred bodies strong and growing. They are cunning and capable, serving Eddie Boyd and Felix March's whims.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

They Kill by Proxy is an adventure for **Thrilling Tales** told in three acts.

An invitation to attend the reading of a will is this adventure's call to arms. The PCs find themselves trapped in an isolated mansion, plagued by poisonous traps, and hunted by a sadistic researcher. Surviving this encounter, PCs learn the existence of a secret cabal operating in New York City--The Murder Club.

The second act brings PCs to New York City to investigate The Murder Club and its leader, Eddie Boyd. An eager Detective asks them to collect evidence to construct a court case. However, Boyd's ties to the mob make this no easy matter. Before justice can be served, however, an outbreak of violence reveals Boyd to be a stooge for the Murder Club's actual leader.

In the final Act, the PCs face a small army of lunatics as they pursue the Murder Club's real master to a private yacht in international waters.

NOT QUITE HORROR, NOT QUITE MYSTERY: THE WEIRD MENACE GENRE

They Kill by Proxy's first Act is rooted in pulp fiction's weird menace school. It rides the line between being a horror story and a thriller. In fact, it leans more toward the thrilling side, as there is no supernatural element at work here. However, the players don't know this. Savvy Game Masters can maintain an illusion of supernatural menace, building to the big twist reveal--it's not a ghost or monster, a man is responsible for the terror!

To run this Act, Game Masters are encouraged to heighten the creepy atmosphere by dimming the lights or playing moody music. Franz Waxman's scores to either *Rebecca* or *Sunset Boulevard* are fun choices, as are William T. Stromberg's scores to *Cat People* or *The Seventh Victim* (available in the compilation **Cat People: Classic Music for Val Lewton Films**).

Magazines such as *Dime Mystery*, *Spicy Mystery Stories*, and *Spicy Adventure Stories* specialized in weird menace stories. Often, the cover images told all: a deformed or monstrous looking man exposing a gorgeous damsel to some hideous torment. Often, the stories feature bizarre twists, strange murders, thinly disguised sadism, and unlikely disguises. Pulp magazine reprints are available through small press publishers such as Wildside Press (<http://www.wildsidepress.com>). Also, short story collections by weird menace authors are available, including Hugh B. Cave's *Death Stalks the Night* (from Fedogan & Bremer) and Henry Kuttner's *Terror in the House: The Early Kuttner Vol. 1* (from Haffner Press). The prose is sometimes rough, the salacious-for-the-times material has grown less lurid, but the best stories remain action-packed reads.



ACT I: NIGHTMARE MANSION

The characters have been invited to dinner and the reading of the Last Will and Testament of Nobel Cutter. Though this individual is likely unknown to PCs, streetwise or high class contacts identify the Cutters as former Manhattanites, who relocated to an out-of-city estate in the early 1920s.

No amount of research will reveal why the PCs received invitations. Game Masters are encouraged to create suspicions about the Cutter family's distant connection to the PCs or their allies, or simply leave it a mystery "To be solved over dinner."

The truth is this: In exchange for a quantity of Mormo's exotic poisons, March has arranged for several of Eddie Boyd's enemies to show up at the Cutter mansion for Mormo's pleasure. As well, March included some wild cards--people who might survive the encounter and enact Boyd's removal--the characters!

ONE FOR THE ROAD

The adventure begins with the PCs en route to the Cutter Mansion in upstate New York. The countryside is serene and wild, a far cry from The City. Not a mile from the house, they encounter a car on the earthen shoulder and a woman waving for help.

This is Megan Bickle, en route for the Cutter Mansion herself. She has a facsimile of the PCs' letters, and she's glad if the PCs stop to help. She finds the prospect of walking across wild land in three inch heels after dusk fearsome. She tries to make jokes to hide her own fear, but the PCs' arrival offers her relief.

If asked what happened, she relates a brief accident. An animal bounded across the road, and she swerved to avoid it. When her car roared onto the shoulder, she heard a terrible, metallic snap, felt a powerful jolt, and then the car stopped working.

The car has been caught in a bear trap. The iron jaws have bitten through the underside and crushed axle and engine components. Curious PCs notice this trap has been hidden too close to the road to catch traditional game. This trap awaited far different prey.

THE CUTTER HOME

The two-story mansion was built in the early 1920s. Poor maintenance and harsh weather have taken their toll. The east wing has been destroyed by fallen trees, while the remainder is serviceable, if unsightly.

Three other cars are parked in the mansion's circular drive: Pulanski's Lincoln Zephyr, Woodrow's Studebaker Dictator, and Burton's battered Austin Seven Special. Any



inspection deeper than a cursory glance at these vehicles and a successful notice roll reveals they are inoperable. Plants have been stuffed in the engines to clog the works, important fuses or lines have been ripped free. A search turns up one of the missing pieces in the grasses halfway to the house's ruined east wing. A tracking roll can find some tromped down grasses, indicating rather large boots came from the house's east side and then returned. This trail disappears shortly after rounding the house. Exceptional rolls (three or more raises) will pick up the trail again in the rear grounds: it leads to the refuse pile (see A Walk Through the Woods below).

Alniuk answers the front door with suspicion, until someone produces their letter for him to scrutinize. Satisfied, he welcomes the visitors, telling them the estate's executor (Mr. Curtis) is delayed, but the other guests are waiting in the parlor. He shows the PCs the way, informing them dinner should be ready within the hour.

INTRODUCING THE OTHER VICTIMS

In the parlor, the PCs meet Burton, Woodrow, and Pulanski. Now, the intrigue begins. These NPCs have their own agendas. Game Masters should not skimp on the roleplaying opportunity here. Burton and Woodrow are already at odds-

-Burton playing the witty rake, and Woodrow getting increasingly steamed. Pulanski's paranoia is already alert, and when the PCs arrive, his suspicions grow more acute.

News of sabotaged cars result in disbelief, accusation, and outrage.

During this conversation, Mormo busies himself sabotaging the PCs' vehicles. The parlor blinds are closed, but anyone looking outside

will have a fair chance to notice a dark shape moving away from their vehicle.

If PCs pursue, Mormo will lead them on a fair chase through the woods, directing them into some of his traps. His area knowledge grants enough advantage he escapes all but the greatest tracking successes. Should PCs manage to find him, Mormo plays mute idiot, trusting in the servants to get him out of the worst trouble (see **For Whom The Help Serves**).



THE GUEST LIST

Each NPC guest's invitation included a second page, supplying additional reasons for to attend the auction. These are included in the character write-ups following this Act. The GM is encouraged to create similar tasks for the PCs. These are pure fictions, but are best related to PC backgrounds. These notes come from Felix March's exhaustive research, so Fortune Hunters might get wind of a missing museum relic hidden on the grounds, Reporters might hear about scandalous letters hidden in the Master Bedroom, etc.

Megan Bickle prefers to stick close to her "saviors" (providing PCs stopped for her on the road). However, her curiosity and her compassion are her downfall. Until such time as she discovers the real danger, she is easily distracted from the group by anything unusual--a shape moving where no shape should be, or the sounds of an animal suffering outside. Though Megan can play the wilting damsel for a time, especially after suffering an eerie interlude as being stuck on a creepy, remote road in the middle of nowhere, her independent streak will eventually take over, and she will rely more and more upon her own abilities. In fact, she might overcompensate, choosing to show any stuck up chauvinists she is not content to play plucky sidekick.

Algie Burton wants to get outside as soon as possible. While talking to the others, he is distracted and glances toward doors or windows. He ultimately excuses himself to visit the bathroom. He bypasses this, however, and heads straight to the gazebo. Searching the area, he triggers the paralytic dart trap. Five minutes later, Alniuk rings a bell off the kitchen, and five minutes after that, Mormo collects his victim.

Dominick Woodrow downs glass after glass of booze, growing steadily more headstrong. He picks fights, seldom backs down, and ultimately storms off muttering "Rewards flow to real men." He heads up the stairs, where he proceeds to tear Guest Rooms apart, and triggers another of Mormo's poison dart traps. He collapses to the floor, alive, but incapacitated. If left alone in the Guest Room for longer than fifteen minutes, Mormo will appear from the secret passage and remove Woodrow to the greenery.

Polanski becomes incensed at other guests. When the executor does not arrive in timely fashion, his paranoia will know no bounds. By dinnertime, his suspicions focus on Megan Bickle, viewing her as a temptress seeking to coax confessions. He will try to kill her if an opportunity presents itself. Once she's dead, he will attempt to kill everyone else in the house.

DINNER IS SERVED

Mrs. Carmody, the household's cook, arrives to announce dinner is ready. She is unaware any guests are missing. If questioned, she will play her role as a dotty elder lady, cook to the household for some years. She feigns knowledge of the evening's arrangements, but talking with her reveals she knows more than she lets on. Persuade and Intimidate are effective means of getting information from this servant, especially if police action or scandal is intimated. She knows no lawyer is coming. She suspects the house's master arranged this gathering to reinvigorate his social standing. If asked about the house's master, she reveals young Mr. Mormo Cutter is hoping to rejoin society, despite his family's wishes to remain apart from it. She cannot clarify this, as she does not know any specifics regarding Mormo's interests. She believes young Mr. Cutter will reveal himself at dinner.

Dinner is a simple meal dressed up with fine china. It is also poisoned--the herbs used in the preparation are all culled from Mormo's exotic greenery. Mrs. Carmody is unaware these plants induce ill effects. PCs with appropriate knowledge skills (botany, biology or poison) or interests may well detect these agents. If not, a display will be necessary--having Megan or Mrs. Carmody taste something and then convulse in gruesome fashion is a fantastic way to demonstrate the hidden poison.

Extras automatically suffer the poison's full effects. If PCs eat the food, they will have to succeed at Vigor rolls against the poison to escape the effects.

Paralytic herbs (-3): Paralysis for 1d4 hours. They remain aware of things going on around them, though their senses are dulled adding a dreamy/nightmarish effect to any circumstances. This last bit gives Game Masters creative license to add fantastic or horrific details to goings-on.

Mormo watches the dinner party from behind a secret panel. Should two or fewer PCs remain active, he will emerge from the panel and attempt to overpower the PCs before making away with his victims, one at a time. He will not attack superior numbers, however; he is crazy but not stupid.

Should the odds look unfavorable, he will bide his time. Alniuk is positioned at the bell off the mud room. As soon as the PCs start to fall, he will ring the bell frantically, trying to lure active PCs away. Anyone checking on the ringing bell will discover a terrified Alniuk standing alone. He tells wild stories about skulking shadows in the woods. Should the PCs mention the poisoned food or make threats, Alniuk will stammer out excuses and then flee into the woods, trying and make his way to the greenery and drugs. He will not get far before ending up in one of Mormo's traps.



Unaffected PCs can attempt healing(-2) tests to restore affected victims.

Mormo takes fifteen minutes to select a victim, carry them to the greenery, secure them in his experimental pits, and then return. He will begin with any of the four NPC guests remaining with the party, and then take party members, starting with Seasoned heroes, then Veterans, thus saving Legendary heroes for last. This gives affected PCs a chance to witness a hulking horror emerge from the walls at regular intervals to steal away their allies one by one, while granting them the chance to escape the paralytic effects.

At this point, remaining characters have a chance to search the house, the grounds, and the woods to find the source of their troubles.

FOR WHOM THE HELP SERVES

Addicted to the exotic drugs refined from Mormo's greenery, Alniuk remains loyal to Mormo above all. As such, he will help Mormo move bodies if necessary. However, PCs might discern Alniuk's addiction, and use this weakness to their advantage to gain some aid from Alniuk. He will never actively oppose Mormo, as he fears his master's revenge, but he can provide information about the greenery,

the mansion's secret passages, and Mormo's traps.

Mrs. Carmody's loyalties lie with the Cutter family itself. She will serve the family legacy over its individuals, and can be convinced to aid the PCs if threats against the family's honor or standing are made. If PCs convince her that the Cutter family name will benefit from her help, there are few things she will shy away from. However,

Mrs. Carmody is an elderly woman, unwilling to participate in violence and incapable of strenuous physical activities.

If Mormo is captured, Alniuk will do his best to save his master, inventing stories about a monstrous clan of maniacs in the woods who keep close watch on the house to distract the PCs, giving him an opportunity to release his master.



BOOBY TRAPS

A NEW HAZARD FOR THRILLING TALES

Booby traps are hazards designed to stop or kill those who stumble into them. They can take many forms, but in essence they are divided into two categories: lethal and non-lethal.

For the purposes of these rules, all booby traps are treated in the same way. Wary PCs have the opportunity to notice a trap, though each trap has a potential penalty. With a successful notice test, characters spot the booby trap before triggering it. Discovered traps can be avoided or deactivated with a Smarts test.

Should a PC fail the notice test, then he triggers the trap. PC still have a chance to escape, by succeeding at an attribute test as specified by the trap itself. Should a PC fail to escape the booby trap, he suffers the effects.

SAMPLE NON-LETHAL TRAPS:

Bear Trap: Notice(-2) Escape: Agility(-2)

Effect: If a PC triggers the trap, he must pass a Vigor test or break a leg. A broken leg's effects are identical to the Lame Hindrance, and last until a healing(-2) check is made or the limb heals naturally.

Ankle Rope: Notice(+0) Escape: Agility

Effect: drags the PC into the air and prevents all movement until the PC escapes. Another PC can free the first by cutting the rope. A PC can cut the rope himself with either fighting, climbing, or an Agility test, at a -4 penalty.

SAMPLE LETHAL TRAPS

The Old Rolling Boulder Gag: Notice(-4) Escape: Agility(-2)

Effect: depends on the size of the boulder: 2d6 damage for a small one, 4d6 damage for a man-sized boulder, 6d6 or more for larger boulders.

Spikes From the Walls: Notice(-2) Escape: Agility

Effect: 4d6 damage and PC must pass a Vigor roll or have 1d4 limbs impaled. Actions requiring use of an impaled limb suffers a -4 penalty until a healing(-2) check is made or the limb heals naturally.

Poison Darts: Notice(-2) Escape: Agility

Effect: 2d6 damage and exposure to poison (which may be non-lethal).

SEARCHING THE HOUSE

FIRST FLOOR

Foyer: This grand entry features white marble floors and a pair of winding stairways leading to the second floor. A crystal chandelier hangs above. The rope supporting this light source has been trimmed. It falls at a dramatically appropriate moment (present PCs succeeding at an Agility test do not suffer 1d10 damage). Dirt fills the umbrella stand, suggesting it might have doubled as a planter.

Ruined Wing: Several trees ripped through this half of the house, rendering both floors useless. The place shows signs of fire, water, and other damages from long ago. Mold and mildew reign here. Inquisitive PCs might notice the trees appear to have been purposefully chopped down.

Parlor: This tastefully appointed receiving area hasn't received anyone in years. The bar is well stocked. Anyone sampling the as yet untouched bottle of cognac must succeed at a vigor(-2) test or suffer paralytic poisons effects (as above).

Library: Couch and reading chairs are rather dusty, as are the shelved books. One rug has a large, dust free circle suggesting something heavy often sits there. In fact, it came from Mormo, who sits in the spot whenever using this room. The shelves are stocked with a large number of botanical texts as well as

books on genetics. These volumes also show signs of having been well browsed. A successful notice skill test reveals a loose panel in the wall, which hides the secret chamber.

Downstairs Bathroom: This room has seen regular use. Clean and well appointed.

Secret Chamber: On a flimsy table waits a set of hypodermics, vials of paralytic poison, dirty surgical tools, and a notebook filled with botanical doodles, unlabeled tables, and nonsense scribbles. The last entry, dated five days ago, mentions "*The Murder Club has arranged for new specimens*" as well as mentioning the greenery, and concluding with a cryptic "*EB is correct: Man is God's heartiest creation*".

Storage: This area holds things salvaged from the destroyed wing's rooms and general bits and bobs. As well, this area holds six five-gallon drums of fertilizer.

The Dining Room: Though the table has been washed and the china is clean, dust lingers in the room's corners. PCs may notice one chair is warped, as though a bear had been sitting in it for days at a time. Tucked behind the china cabinet are a set of tattered medical restraints. Whatever they held proved too strong.

The Kitchens: Poorly stocked and somewhat filthy. In the spice cabinets are unmarked bottles of curare, cyanide, and arsenic.

Alniuk's Quarters: Several expensive knick knacks have been relocated from elsewhere in the house. A double barreled shotgun hangs on a rack over the bed. Ammunition sits in the dresser's top drawer.

Mud Room: This combination mud room and washroom has seen a lot of traffic from large dirty boot. The servants' stairs here lead to the second floor. Outside this room is a large brass bell, which Alniuk uses to summon Mormo.

Mrs. Carmody's Quarters: A tasteful (though plain) bedroom.

Greenhouse: Broken windows, puddles of standing water, and dead plants fill this spacious greenhouse floor. Though this area suffered from lack of attention, a recent storm split a tree trunk outside, which fell and finished off the room. Amidst the rubble, PCs succeeding at a notice test find traces of bamboo and bits of

sundew, fallen when Mormo transferred his plant collection deeper into the forest.

SECOND FLOOR

Pet Room: Locked, and only Mormo has the key. The distinct stink of putrefaction hangs around this door. A lockpicking(-2) skill test opens the door. Investigating PCs discover several dozen dead animals in various stages of taxidermy--Dogs, raccoons, rabbits, cats, and more.. The animals look to have been killed and then brutalized in ways beyond the taxidermist's skill to cover over. Needle holes, bamboo splinters, and mutilations are evident in most.

Master Bedrooms: These two bedrooms are kept locked, and Mormo alone possesses keys, but PCs can use lockpicking to open the doors. The rooms are individually decorated.

Master 1 is a woman's space. Master 2 is a patriarch's room. Queen sized beds occupy both rooms, made but unused in over a decade. An enormous nest made from blankets and sheets has been erected in the far corner of



Master 1, sized for a moose. This is where Mormo sleeps, when not in his Greenery.

Guest Rooms: These three rooms have been made up in the last day. PCs succeeding at a notice test discover sliding panels leading to secret passages behind the walls. These connect with the Secret Chamber in the library. Each of these rooms is fitted with a paralytic dart trap, which searchers may trigger.

Upstairs Bathroom: This room's claw footed tub, toilet, and sink were new in 1919. They have not aged well. The Linen Closet is filled with fresh linens. Mrs. Carmody still takes her job quite seriously.

Nursery: The walls are sparrow's egg blue. A notice roll reveals many of the dusty dolls and toys have been mutilated.

Balcony: an open air balcony offers a view of the overgrown rear grounds. A successful notice skill test reveals the greenery's roof through the trees.

A WALK IN THE WOODS

The overgrown rear grounds are home to a collapsing gazebo. Anyone searching this gazebo will set off a poison dart trap. Beyond the grounds are dark woods.

Once PCs set out into the forest, they will have a pick of several trails to follow.

Traps: These woods are peppered with non-lethal booby traps. Mormo is interested in living subjects, and he checks his traps nightly. A PC stumbling off into the woods has a good chance of triggering Mormo's traps.

Some places the PCs might end up:

The Refuse Pile: While this appears to be a mulch pile standing some five feet wide and half as tall, it is also a hodgepodge of animal bones, bits and bobs stolen from various cars, and a single human corpse.

The Cemetery: This clearing is dominated by the Cutter family crypt (holding three generations' remains). Surrounding the crypt are dozens of handmade, crude markers for beloved pets. These graves belong to Mormo's first failed experiments, performed some ten years ago--exhuming the graves reveals cats, dogs, rabbits, and other animal carcasses showing signs of brutal deaths but loving burials.

All roads eventually lead to Mormo's lair...

INTO THE GREEN

The greenery stands fifteen feet tall and seventy yards in diameter. This humid, warm building is home to hundreds of poisonous and/or addictive exotic plants.

Mormo has erected a sleeping area near the center. Searching PCs discover several issues of The

Hell Pages (with marginal notes that decipher The Murder Club's secret messages) as well as a radio transceiver. Currently, the transceiver is inactive, the unfortunate victim of a recent tantrum's hammering fists. PCs can use repair skills to discover a triggered explosive device which destroyed the transceiver's contents. Several shipping crates here connect to The Rogue Shipping House. The Hell Pages and the transceiver point PCs toward New York City and Act 2.

Set amongst a circle of bamboo plants stand two rows of shallow graves, which Mormo uses for his experimental subjects. He buries victims to their necks, and then uses a gadget to continually inject them with various toxins. He seeks to produce a plant-mammal hybrid. Mormo believes it requires strong subjects and the correct toxin cocktail.

Any characters taken by Mormo are buried here. Mormo's device--an ingenious pumping engine cobbled from unlikely components--slowly forces green death through surgical tubing to the needles in each victim's throat. Captured PCs will recover from the poisons in time to discover the growling machine in action. They have little time to escape their own burial and free any others from a deadly fate!

As per the suggestions for Death Traps appearing in the *Curse of the Jade Monkey* adventure for *Thrilling Tales*, the injection gadget

is a classic Set Death Trap. PCs are allowed an escape attempt on their initiative. If the trap's initiative card is a Joker, then it becomes somehow even more complicated. PCs each have three rounds to escape this trap, and they can employ what skills, attributes, and methods they wish. Physical actions suffer a (-2) modifier due to the burial factor, unless players offer creative reasoning!

PCs escaping this death trap will not be able to tug the hypodermics from every threatened person, but they will be able to stop the machine with a lever throw. A fight between PCs and an enraged Mormo can reactivate the device again, to act as a deadly ticking clock for those still buried.

AFTERMATH

Once Mormo is defeated, the PCs can piece together the situation. Clues can be found in Mormo's pockets or the greenery. Alternately, Alniuk might point the way to Eddie Boyd and the Murder Club, at which point any surviving guests can relate their recollections about Eddie Boyd, thus leading the PCs to the next Act.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: ACT I

MORMO CUTTER

(Wild Card)

Mormo was born big and bad -- age has only intensified these attributes. A birth defect rendered him hideous and slow witted, and his parents preferred to leave their New York social circles for lives spent in self-imposed exile rather than face public ridicule and scorn.

Mormo becomes obsessed by ideas, but he possesses neither the patience nor the sense to follow them through with an authentic scientist's precision. He is at best a science hobbyist, and prone to violent rages when his experiments invariably fail. When he deciphered the hidden code in issues of *The Hell Pages*, he made the empowering discovery he was not alone--like minded individuals were scattered across the country. Nay, the globe! He has maintained direct correspondence with "Eddie Boyd" (actually Felix March), who suggested Mormo turn from animal experiments to humans, saying "Man is God's heartiest creation!"

Mormo cuts a hulking, intimidating figure. He is brawny and ferocious, a walking mountain of scars and muscles, whose hands are wide enough to palm a man's head. His pinched facial features suggest Down Syndrome, but he does not actually suffer this handicap.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidated8, Knowledge (Botany): d6, Notice: d8, Shooting d6, Throwing d8

Charisma: -6, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 7, **Toughness:** 8

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Ugly

Edges: Brawny, First Strike, Improved First Strike, Really Dirty Fighter, Two-Fisted

Gear: Mormo has 10 darts (4/8/16 2d4 RoF: 1) dipped in the paralytic agent (see "Dinner Is Served", above). He can throw these, stab with them, or use a blowgun to fire them.



ALNIUK

(Henchman)

Alniuk has served the Cutters for years, despite the dwindling family. In Alniuk's imagination, he now owns the mansion and all its contents. He reads all correspondences aloud to Mormo, and therefore knows about The Murder Club.

He is highly addicted to exotic drugs grown in Mormo's greenery.

Alniuk is a weary looking man with dark circles around his eyes. He wears baggy suits. His frantic smile, perpetual sweat, and unhealthy pallor suggest he's eternally nervous.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d10, Shooting d8, Stealth d8

Charisma: 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Habit

Edges: Dodge

Gear: a gold pocket watch, worn suit. He carries a Derringer (5/10/20 2d6+1 RoF: 1, Shots 2) in his pocket, and has a double barreled shotgun (12/24/48 1-3d6 RoF: 1-2 Shots: 2)) in his room.

MRS. LUCILLE CARMODY

(Extra)

An 80-year old lady who is hard of hearing and blind in one eye, Mrs. Carmody is nevertheless shrewd about maintaining the Cutter family honor. She is no longer convinced young master Mormo can overcome his crippling ailments and become the savior of the family. She remains unaware of Mormo's murderous interests. She seeks to restore the family to its proper station once these hard times have passed.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Intimidation d4, Knowledge: Cookery d8, Persuade d6

Charisma: +0, **Pace:** 5, **Parry:** 2, **Toughness:** 4

MEGAN BICKLE

(Extra)

A party girl from The City, she has a history of fast romances and hot emotions, which cool quickly. Megan is a compassionate and curious woman; these two qualities overwhelm caution. She enjoys meeting new people, and her personality and attractiveness light up any room she enters. She is an entertainer, attractive but unfamiliar with society outside New York City's Broadway scene. She is an idealist and someone who stirs the hopes of those around her.

Connection to Boyd: She took to Eddie Boyd for a time, until she realized he wasn't a nice man. She did not witness his actual depravities; she wearied of his mean-spirited humor, decided her interests lay elsewhere and left him, promptly forgetting about him. Though never actually in love with her, Boyd refused to forget or forgive her abandoning him.

GOAL: Meg is certain this invitation has been sent in an effort to embarrass her, and yet she is not one to run from social danger; she hopes to discover just who has targeted her in such a fashion and call them out.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (NYC Nightlife) d6, Persuade d6, Taunt d6

Charisma: +1, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

ALGIE BURTON

(Extra)

Algie is an athletic man in his late-twenties, with ice blue eyes and a crooked grin. Algie achieved minor celebrity as a tennis player before a knee injury removed him from the professional sport. Though his limp is barely noticeable, it keeps him out of major competitions. Not content to dwell in his glory days, he tries to find something new and wonderful to cling to, and when it disappoints him (everything eventually disappoints Algie Burton), he is quite passive-aggressive in cutting that pasttime or person down.

Connection to Boyd: Algie teaches tennis, and Boyd was his student. He attracted Boyd's ire when he declared, "Eddie Boyd is unfit to carry a racket, much less swing one." Delivering this embarrassment in front of Boyd's acquaintances signed Algie's death warrant.

GOAL: He believes this estate to belong to one of his greatest fans, and his letter indicated he might find a trophy he has been missing for some years secreted in the gazebo in the rear grounds. At the first available opportunity, he will sneak away to search for it.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Boating d6, Driving d8, Repair d6, Taunt d6

Charisma: +1, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 2, **Toughness:** 5

DOMINICK WOODROW

(Extra)

Finding wealth at the turn of the 20th century, Dominick Woodrow's family hit rock bottom in '29. He has since pulled his family's legacy back together through determination, ire, and will. Dominick Woodrow is as much a force of nature as he is a person. His ambitions, take no guff attitude, and bravado are the tell tale marks of an alpha-personality template.

Connection to Boyd: In many ways, Woodrow is the man Boyd wishes he could be, determined, ruthless, and well-liked. He has a short fuse, however, and this has caused him trouble before--including one incident where he blackened Eddie Boyd's eye over a booze fueled dispute. With some prompting, he can recall this incident, which came to blows when Boyd called him "a silver-tongued lapdog". Boyd remembers it all too well.

GOAL: Dominick believes this estate to belong to a distant relation, who secreted several gold bars in an upstairs bedroom "to be found by an active minded man". He will not go straightaway, but bide his time, getting to know the other guests before he takes his leave from them. He will search the guest rooms first, and then attempt to enter the Master Bedroom.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6
Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6,

Intimidate d6, Knowledge (Finances) d6, Piloting d6

Charisma: +0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Dominick always carries brass knuckles (Str+d4)

MEYER POLANSKI

(Extra)

A thirty-year old man with sloping shoulders and a despairing air. Meyer turned his back on his Polish father's carpentry career for a brush with illegality. He started as a bootlegger and now acts as a bagman for the local mob.

Connection to Boyd: He offered to introduce Boyd to his bosses, but backed out in the last minute, citing "Bad feelings" and Boyd never forgave him.

GOAL: Polanski knows this will is hokum. In fact, one of the people in this crowd, he has been told, is an informant to the FBI, and this is Meyer's chance to rub that individual out. He asks leading questions and grows increasingly paranoid.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Skills: Driving d6, Shooting d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: +0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 2, **Toughness:** 4

Gear: Bulldog Revolver (12/24/48 2d6 RoF: 1, Shots: 6)

ACT II: THE MURDER CLUB

The clues from the Cutter estate lead to the Big Apple. With a little legwork or streetwise skills, PCs obtain the following information:

The Rogue Shipping House keeps many actions undocumented. Among its day-to-day records are numerous deliveries dubbed "Special Services" containing obviously false details or incorrect information. Cross-referencing the numbers on Mormo's crates with Rogue records suggests "costume jewelry and empty storage trunks" delivered to a Schenectady address. Rumors of mob connections, exotic arrivals from the Orient, and other leads can open up red herring avenues (should Game Masters so desire), but the Rogue Shipping House is too small time for any such large scale operations.

The Hell Pages is produced by Pier Productions a small publisher on Seventh Avenue. The owner, an impatient dwarf by the name of Raul Pier, has neither patience nor time to talk with his editors, authors, and artists, much less people outside the business. All he knows about The Hell Pages is one E. Boyd cuts him regular checks to keep the pulp going, but demands complete editorial control. So long as the checks clear, Pier is happy to let the man play pulpmeister. All contact has been through post, though Pier's records are sloppy. On a side note, the pulp has a small but devoted nationwide following, which grows with each issue.



The Murder Club is an unknown entity, but asking about it will attract some unexpected (and unwanted) attention from two different sorts of lieutenants.

NYPD

Detective Lieutenant David Ringo has several paid informants under orders to bring him anyone mentioning the Murder Club. When the PCs come under his attention, he will arrange a meeting with them. Alternatively, he might be suggested as a source.

Ringo is a suspicious man by nature, asking leading questions in an effort to understand the PCs' involvement. When convinced of their sincerity, he shares the following information: The Murder Club is an as yet unrecognized conspiracy group operating in New York City. Few believe they exist.

The DA doesn't want to hear about the Murder Club, the Chief wants him to stop looking into the group, and even the milkman suggests he look into other things. This suggests big money behind the organization. Ringo suspects playboy Eddie Boyd to be the head honcho behind the Club's activities.

Boyd and his chums hold private debauches every Wednesday in a Manhattan apartment dubbed The Hellfire Chambers.

Boyd's offices are closed to the public, and the business he gets into

there is (on the books) up-and-up if mysterious. He deals in international securities, has no criminal record, and is good friends with the Mayor, the Police Chief, and several judges.

Detective Ringo cannot dredge up enough probable cause to get a search warrant much less to force Boyd into the courthouse. If he can get any useful leads tying Boyd to criminal activity (no matter how small), he will try to take the man to court. His theory is: "Hey, Capone was put away for income tax evasion."

THE MOB

Johnny Malchick is a lieutenant in the Capelli family mob. He serves his bosses by keeping attentive to anyone asking after Eddie Boyd. PCs nosing around Boyd's business find themselves visited by this man's goons.

The first encounter will be in the streets. Several mooks (two more than there are PCs) will stop the PCs to deliver thinly veiled threats. "Might be best to leave town," and "You'd stop sticking your noses in Boyd's business if you knew what's good for you." They won't start a fight, but they will try to defend themselves. If defeated and questioned, they remain tight lipped. Intimidation reveals their "boss" Malchick sent them.

A second encounter will happen in the PCs' residence--hotel room, apartment, etc. Several mooks will



try and pay off the PCs. The starting offer is \$100 per person, but they can go up to \$1000 per person.

A third encounter involves a Tommygun drive-by or similar subtle effort.

THE HELLFIRE CHAMBERS

Wednesday nights, The Murder Club meets in this four bedroom apartment to celebrate vice and sin. Though suspicious PCs might expect prostitutes or illegal drugs, in fact, The Murder Club keeps things relatively tame in this apartment. Occasionally, girls arrive already loosened by illicit toxins, so the worst the Club members can expect to find are scandalous stories in newspapers. As they cultivate bad boy images, such licentious activities are hardly newsworthy.

A successful notice(-4) test spots the loose floorboards in the largest bedroom. In the space below are two coded accounting journals. Should these records be deciphered, they indicate several shipments of illegal substances sent across the country through the shipping house (corresponding to that company's Special Services).

PCs aware of the loose floorboard's existence can find it without a notice check.

BOYD'S PRIVATE OFFICE

Two security guards occupy the Smith Building lobby at all times, shooing away people unable to produce a valid reason to be there. Once beyond the front desk, PCs can freely use stairs or elevator to access the fifth floor where Boyd's

business operates. Boyd's private security detail is composed of five dishonorably discharged military men. The leader of this lot is called Sam the Knife.

PCs looking for dirt will not find it in Boyd's office safe. Instead, a successful notice(-4) test discovers a cunning cubbyhole under a plant stand. Here, PCs discover a coded ledger. Knowledge: Cryptography or similar skills can reveal its entries to be documented donations of large monetary sums to public officials and private citizens (gangsters), as well as documented receipts of favors.

PCs aware of the cubbyhole's existence can find it without a notice check.

FELIX MARCH

In time, Felix March approaches the PCs with sobering tales of Eddie Boyd's nefarious activities.

March's Story: March volunteers his own involvement in the Murder Club, specifying he never assumed it was connected with authentic illegalities. Certainly nothing that harmed anyone. However, after a visit from an underworld element called Malchick, Felix March has been running scared. Now, he hopes to spill his guts in exchange for leniency.

By this time, Johnny Malchick has undoubtedly made his presence known to PCs. Wary PCs may

remain suspicious of March's activity, so he has arranged for a demonstration to ensure his veracity.

Soon after March shares his story, a hit squad of mobster mooks (two more mooks than there are PCs) arrives and the bullets start flying. March is struck, and collapses. After the fight, he reveals his bulletproof vest. He begs for the PCs' aid, offering to do whatever it takes to put Boyd away.

If PCs have not found the incriminating evidence secreted in Boyd's office and in The Hellfire Chambers, March will innocuously reveal Boyd's "hidden" locations--since he planted these, he knows the whereabouts and contents; however, he discloses vague details about Boyd's hidden documents and paranoia about their locations. Detective Ringo's Mercurial Interests

Once PCs acquire the information, they likely bring it to Detective Ringo. Unfortunately, doing so reveals the Detective is no longer interested in pursuing the Murder Club conspiracy. He is evasive and hesitant, but persuade reveals his daughter is being held hostage until the Detective removes himself from the case altogether. Ringo refuses to do anything to put her in further danger. Should the Detective's daughter be freed from mob threats, Ringo will return to the case zealous as a crusader.

FINDING DARLA RINGO

Streetwise skills or underworld contacts soon reveal the facts behind the kidnapping. Walking home from Sister Mary's private school, ten-year old Darla Ringo was grabbed off the street. The kidnappers' description is pure mob--well dressed goons in a black car held a crossing guard and group of children at gunpoint, while their leader picked Darla out and had his men drag her into the car. The execution took less than thirty seconds.

Getting a raise on a streetwise roll further reveals this car was stashed in the Bronx, where a second car waited to take the criminals to a brownstone in Brooklyn. Two raises reveals this address. Should PCs storm the brownstone, they will have a difficult fight on their hands: two more mooks than there are PCs as well as Johnny Malchick guard the girl. Should things get too tough, Johnny is not above threatening the girl to worm his way out of trouble. He does not make threats he is not willing to follow through on.

If PCs are not lucky enough to get the address through streetwise, then they have several alternatives:

PCs might use newspapers or federal agents to pressure the mob and/or Eddie Boyd. This will send Malchick into a frenzy of damage control, and he might offer to make a trade.

They might choose to bargain with the mob. Johnny Malchick serves as

a feasible contact, as they have had dealings with him before. Johnny wants the heat off Boyd, and he might exchange the girl for the evidence. Should the PCs make this trade, they find Malchick honorable enough--he plans to use the materials to blackmail Boyd.

So long as Darla is returned alive, Detective Ringo will try to assemble a case with whatever evidence/ witnesses the PCs can produce. Even if he has to make Felix March the focus.

ON THE STAND

Little of note happens before the trial begins: Eddie Boyd is arrested, and he sits in jail without incident. As well, Felix March is taken into custody as well. On the day of the trial, he appears in the honorable Judge Horace Carstairs' courtroom. Game Masters are invited to use the Courtroom Clashes rules extension introduced nearby to make the trial all the more interesting for the players. In this case, treat the trial as a three round clash, where each round lasts one day of court time.

COURTROOM CLASHES

EXTENDED RULES FOR THRILLING TALES

The courtroom battle as drama extends further back than either John Grisham or *Law and Order*. As *Thrilling Tales*' first chapter points out, pulp fiction writers covered a lot of ground to create their fast paced tales. In fact, author Erle Stanley Gardner's work in the pulps paved the way for him to develop the iconic lawyer Perry Mason.

These extended rules bring the thrills and suspense found in courtroom battles (with high action, pulp fiction sensibility, of course) to any Thrilling Tales scenario. With little adjustment, this rules set could serve to replicate any large scale social drama. In addition, see Appendix One at the end of the adventure for a new character archetype: The Crusading Attorney.

DETERMINE THE STAKES

In a Courtroom Clash, as in any traditional combat, two sides vie for victory. However, in the courtroom battleground, goals are not always centered on beating an opponent. Is the case a life or death matter or a question of minimizing/maximizing scandal? Is an innocent man on trial for a murder he didn't commit? Is a guilty man sitting pretty, believing himself possessing the best justice money can buy? Is the court case just a formality, while the drama is between rival lawyers? Knowing the stakes can change the mood of a trial and a story using trials.

RUNNING AND RESOLVING THE CLASH.

Most legal cases can be broken down into combat rounds. In general, three or five rounds are enough to simulate any trial. Each round can last an hour, a day, a month or a year of game time, depending on the trial's scope.

Each round, initiative is drawn. Should the Game Master draw a joker, then some unforeseen twist arises, taking the trial in different directions. Perhaps the PCs' attorney is revealed to be ineffective, or someone in the jury is being bribed/pressured by the opposition, or some other detail. Aside from story cosmetics, a joker causes PCs to suffer a (-2) penalty on their actions for the round.

What actions can be taken during a Courtroom Clash combat round? Anything ... within limits. Courtroom Clashes allow any skill apart from physical combat. Does a PC want to intimidate the jury or persuade the witness to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Use a knowledge skill to help their case? PCs can attempt whatever skills they

cont'd

would like providing they can make a sensible story use to accompany them. Each PC gets one attempt to do something during the current round. PCs unskilled in social/educational arts can also play a role in the courtroom clash: a fresh piece of evidence (that is, one not already entered) can be entered into the court records for the equivalent of a success roll. Evidence must have been collected during the adventure prior to the trial, however. In *They Kill by Proxy*, there are two possible pieces of evidence: the accounting journals and the coded ledger. Game Masters should keep a tally of successful or failed rolls for each round. Once all these values are determined, then the players draw cards from the deck:

Total # of cards = 5 + #of Successes - # of Failures

They then try to assemble the best five-card poker hand possible. The Game Master then draws five cards from the deck, assembles the best poker hand possible. Then, the two sides compare their hands. The person who has the best hand takes that round, earning a victory point. Yes, even if PCs roll the maximum number of successes, they still have a chance to lose the round! Should hands tie, then a victory point is awarded to neither side. This process is repeated until the final round, after which the side with the most victory points wins the case. Ties in the final round can either go to the PCs or result in a hung jury--the case will need to be replayed at a different time.

Remember Savage Worlds' FFF maxim. These rules should offer a new dynamic, not bog down game play.

ORDER IN THE COURT!

Before the verdict is announced, the courtroom proceedings get a violent interruption. Gangsters storm the courtroom in an attempt to disrupt the proceedings long enough to get Felix March out of the picture.

The action starts with explosives in the ceiling raining marble and rubble down upon the judge and jury box. As soon as this happens,

gangster mooks (as many as there are PCs) erupt from the seats with weapons, filling the air with lead. The bailiff plugs one before getting gunned down. Eddie Boyd catches lead, finding his violent end. While the PCs take care of the gangsters and/or the wounded civilians, Felix March vanishes from his holding cell, whisked away by allies into a waiting car, which spirits him to his private yacht, the *Butterfly Jar*, and opens the way for the final Act!

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: ACT II

EDDIE BOYD

(Henchman)

Eddie Boyd is a 36 year old man who remembers every slight he's suffered since childhood. He considers himself a hard worker. Born to wealth, however, his definition of hard work is much different than a working man's. Prone to manic-depressive whims, he often starts projects without seeing them through to completion. The Murder Club has been the one project, which appealed despite his mood swings. He remains unaware of just how strong a role Felix March has taken in determining the Club's direction.

Since the Stock Market crash, Eddie has grown into a bulldog faced man--a strong jawls, haunted eyes, and a permanent frown. However, his body is athletically trim--he swims regularly and enjoys camping excursions.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Gambling d6, Persuade d8, Shooting d6, Survival d8, Swimming d6

Charisma: +2, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 2, **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Vengeful

Edges: Halls of Justice

Gear: Eddie sometimes carries a Walter PPK (12/24/48 2d6 RoF: 1 Shots: 8) in his jacket pocket.

JOHNNY MALCHICK

(Wild Card)

Johnny Malchick first met a gangster when he was seven years old. He was immediately fascinated by the classy crook's fine clothes, attitude, and menace. He knew then he would do whatever he had to in order to become like this man.

The years have not been kind ones, and though his heart has hardened against such felonious activities as racketeering, bribery, and murder, Johnny is still possessed by the childhood attraction to the lifestyle. He serves his Family with unswerving loyalty, hoping to make a good enough impression to escape being a number five man and find his way elevated to number one.

In his late 20s, Johnny always dresses smartly. He's five feet, two inches tall but he makes up for his small size through sheer charisma. A scar on his left cheek makes any grin sinister and any frown threatening. His eyes are dull blue, his dark hair shellacked by too much pomade.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Guns d10, Persuasion d8

Charisma: +0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 7

Hindrances: None

Edges: Dirty Fighter

Gear: fine suits, a briefcase, a Browning HP 1935 (12/24/48 2d6+1 RoF: 1 Shots: 8)

SAM THE KNIFE

(Henchman)

A former military man who saw too many horrors in the trenches of WWI. He is a haunted man who knows he must endure (and occasionally perform) terrible deeds in order to survive. Sam stands six feet tall, still carries himself as a soldier, but fights with zeal. A widower, he has two sons he wishes better lives for, and the money he brings home will help them achieve them.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidate d6, Notice d6, Persuade d6

Charisma: 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Carries a combat knife (Str+1d4) and a Colt Detective .38 (12/24/48 2d6 RoF: 1 Shots: 6)

BOYD'S PRIVATE GUARD MOOKS

Former military men, dishonorable discharged for various petty crimes and actions. They are hardened men, who call Sam the Knife "Sarge" and follow his orders as though their lives depended upon them. At heart, these men are cowards however. Should have their number be dropped, they will surrender or flee.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidate d6, Shooting d6

Charisma: 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Each guard has a uniform, a club (Str+1d4), and a Colt Detective .38 (12/24/48 2d6 RoF: 1 Shots: 6)

MOBSTER MOOKS

These gangsters serve Johnny Malchick with ruthless zeal.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidate d6, Shooting d6

Charisma: 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Tommygun (12/24/48 2d6+1 RoF: 3 Shots: 50) or pump action shotgun (12/24/48 1-3d6 RoF 1, Shots: 6) or Colt 1911 (12/24/48 2d6+1 RoF: 1, Shots: 1), dapper suits, fedoras

ACT III: HE KILLS BY PROXY

Following the daring courtroom violence and yacht getaway, Felix March reveals his master plan via radio broadcast:

"I've an army of murderers, cannibals and savages across the country, and they might live as close as next door. Unless the United States government pays me \$100,000 dollars per month for the rest of my life, I will unleash my army upon the populace."

This signal is broadcast from his private ship, somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. PCs can determine its location using contacts, gadgetry, appropriate knowledge skills, or even boating (-2). However, before the PCs can embark on a rendezvous with March, a new development arises.

A SHOW OF FORCE

March decides to show the gravity underlying his threat by making an example of the PCs. When they arrive at whatever transportation means they have for getting to March's yacht, they walk into an ambush.

A crew of common workers (mechanics, dock hands, baggage handlers, etc.) have been replaced by Simple Cutthroats (as many as there are PCs). The cutthroats are relentless and bloodthirsty. Most use various melee weapons--knives, hooks, cudgels, etc--though one packs an old .45 Peacemaker (12/24/48 2d6+1 RoF: 1 Shots: 6).

Once the PCs deal with this group, they discover the truth. The PCs



were March's first show of force.

*"As there are fingers on a hand,
you are one of five!"* Then follows a
riddle, identifying the other potential
victims:

- *Without their aid, I would not have
succeeded; but soon they all shall
be bled*

- *He called me a maniac, but
between just us his infirmity looks
mortal.*

- *An Apple a day won't shield my
enemy from my wrath; flat feet won't
deliver him home.*

- *Suffer the child, apple of her
father's eye and product of his gut:
suffer and die child, but not alone.*

- *My finale brings the house
down: her big break will usher her
departure, sawdust to sawdust.*

This information can come from
either the last cutthroat or a radio
transmission from March himself.

Using smarts this riddle can be
pieced out to identify the five targets:

1) PCs, 2) Judge Carstairs, 3)
Detective David Ringo, 4) Darla
Ringo, and 5) Megan Bickle. The
PCs now face a quandary: should
they pursue March directly or save
these other victims. Players enjoy
flummoxing the Game Master by
splitting up to tend multiple matters
at once. This may work against
them.

FOUR REMAINING FINGERS OF DEATH

Judge Carstairs is in the hospital,
recovering from being struck
by a falling piece of courtroom
ceiling. Taken into an ambulance,
he remarked *"May the maniac
responsible for this find the harshest
imaginable judgment,"* which
was quoted in several papers. The
evening after the PCs' cutthroat
encounter, an Advanced Cutthroat
(masquerading as a nurse) injects
him with a toxin designed to cause
an agonizing death.

Detective David Ringo's honor and
integrity were useful in dealing with
Eddie Boyd. Now, the Detective's
usefulness is at an end. March has
arranged for the officer to be stabbed
to death on his front walk by an
Advanced Cutthroat disguised as a
street sweeper.

While he is not interested in
murdering children, per se, Felix
March is aware of the terror
potential in such actions. While
one child's death can galvanize
a community, multiple innocents
murdered in gruesome fashion lead
to increased terror and a tendency
to subservience. Therefore, Darla
Ringo and her classmates are to
be killed with poisoned lunch
food--specifically poisoned double-
chocolate cakes, as desserts are
guaranteed to attract the largest
number of victims. Though the
cafeteria staff is innocent, the
delivery man is quite guilty.

Megan Bickle has received an invitation to audition for a leading role in the Broadway show, *The Tempestuous Loves of Burmese Belles*. While at this audition, half a dozen simple cutthroats masquerading as stage hands cut lines securing sandbags, attempting to crush her to death.

Should PCs attempt to intervene, it is up to the Game Master if they can save everyone, or if they will instead need to make a choice (having multiple murders happening simultaneously can create incredible suspense as to which party to save, and which to let die). Creative players might well conceive elaborate plans to save all the victims.

Whether or not the attempts succeed, panic inducing headlines run in the papers about a murder army secreted across the country. This ignites fears from any and all irrational sources--class based, communism, racial, religious hatreds, etc.--leading to violent outbreaks in the city. This is all a part of March's plan. He has several similar acts planned in major cities across the country. Game Masters are encouraged to devise more dastardly plots to distract PCs from tackling March.



BUTTERFLY JAR GUARDIANS

In time, the PCs will choose to pursue March. Once they have identified the location of his custom yacht, travel plans can be made and the trip is straightforward.

Unless the PCs disguise their approach, once their craft sights the *Butterfly Jar*, they will also be spotted. March's private army has a pair of Curtiss F9C-2 Sparrowhawks (piloted by Advanced Cutthroats), which can launch from the Butterfly Jar's main deck. These planes will attack without hesitation.

Sparrowhawks (Acc/TS: 12/48, Climb 20, Toughness: 10 (1), Crew: 1, Weapons: Twin Machineguns (Fixed Forward 24/48/96 2d8 RoF 3, Ammo: 150, Notes: AP 2)

Should the planes destroy the PCs' transportation, the Butterfly Jar's dinghy will be dispatched to collect

prisoners. If the PCs are taken, they will be brought aboard the Jar (see Meeting Mr. March below).

Felix March has a sizeable crew of maniacs aboard his vessel. There are a total of five times as many Simple Cutthroats as there are PCs and as many Advanced Cutthroats as there are PCs. Game Masters will need to keep these numbers in mind, as Felix March does not have the ability to replenish these numbers.

While many cutthroats are sane enough to handle the tasks of running the ship, a majority of these men and women are too bloodthirsty and crazed for long term duty. Instead, three teams of Simple Cutthroats patrol the boat, wary for stowaways and trouble. Roving cutthroat gangs have as many members as the total number of PCs (even if the party has split up between the yacht and handling the Remaining Four Fingers of Death,



there will be as many cutthroats in roving gangs as there are total number of PCs). If they encounter PCs, they will first try non-lethal methods (captured PCs will be taken to March, see "Meeting Mr. March" below). However, if the PCs prove too dangerous, then the Cutthroats will use killing force.

EXPLORING THE JAR

The *Butterfly Jar* is a large ocean travelling vessel, which PCs can explore. The likeliest places PCs will go are touched upon below. As the *Butterfly Jar* is a sizeable vessel, Game Masters are encouraged to add rooms or respond to player character requests.

The Main Deck: In addition to docking bays and take off/landing strips for the two airplanes, the main deck is home to a high-tech amplified transmission tower which broadcasts March's radio signal across the world.

The Bridge: Here, PCs find all the necessary equipment to take command of the ship. It is not terribly defensible, however. Currently it is manned by two Advanced Cutthroat and half as many Simple Cutthroats as there are PCs. Should the PCs control this area and turn the ship toward land (not a bad use for the Pilot skill!), March will use every resource at his command to turn the ship back around. First, he will have his men pump gas into the bridge, to disorient or knock out the occupants. Then, he will send in his Cutthroats to deal with the party.

Cabins: The first sub-deck is dominated by cabins. Most of these are hot bunks used by the cutthroat crew. Some are set up for receiving guests. At any time, two roving crews worth of cutthroats can be found asleep in this area. They can rouse to action in three rounds. This area is also the place to find the mess and other necessary niceties.

The Third Sub-Deck: Accessible only by special keys, this area is dedicated to Felix March's plotting and relaxation. His private rooms are here, as well the high-tech radio equipment through which he communicates with both his army and the world. March can be found here. The area is designed as a submersible unit, so if the ship sinks, this deck can jettison away from the rest and survive on its own with minimal difficulties.

Storage: The fourth sub-deck's fore is dedicated to storage. It contains crates of provisions, ammunition, spare fuel, and plenty of items for day-to-day maintenance.

The Engine Room: The fourth sub-deck's rear is dedicated to engineering. It is manned by an Advanced Cutthroat and a team of Simple Cutthroats (half as many as there are PCs). Should the PCs take this area, they can sabotage the engines or even rig them into full power (with a Repair roll).

MEETING MR. MARCH

Eventually, the PCs will find themselves in Felix March's presence. Whether they are prisoners, taunt him into a meeting, simply track him to the third sub-deck, or manage to cajole him out of hiding, they will stand face-to-face against the Mastermind himself. He will be attended by all remaining Advanced Cutthroats.

That these PCs have continually stymied his efforts is distracting to March. He is torn between wounded pride, which wants to destroy the party, and his eagerness to attract the best of the best. Unless the PCs attack him outright, he will play tempting devil, offering them the world itself. He will hint at grander designs than simple extortion (*"The money is just a start! I've big, big plans ..."*) though he will not elucidate on his larger scheme.

In fact, he is looking to extort monies from the US Government in order to buy an island in the South Pacific. From this island, he will use his Murder Army to vie for world domination against such high-end NPCs as The Master of the World (see *Thrilling Tales*). Game Masters can devise whatever

nefarious schemes they wish.

March has amassed large information files on the PCs, and he uses this intelligence to make big promises. Should the PCs agree to his offer, they take the first step to their own destruction. Such a victory asserts March's mastery over the PCs. He will continue to work with them for 1d4 weeks before his respect for the PCs dwindles, and he arranges their destruction.

If the PCs refuse to be a part of March's plans, they will rise in his estimations. Though he seeks to destroy them by any means available, he will view them as



equals instead of inferiors. Should he escape, he becomes a recurring thorn in the PCs' sides in future adventures.

WRAPPING UP

The only way to defeat March's plan is to ruin his transmission equipment (the tower on the Main Deck is one part of this, though the indispensable component is a set of high-tech radio gadgetry in his sub-deck). Once this is rendered useless, March cannot communicate to his Army on the mainland.

Records in March's cabin reveal names and identities of Murder Club associates across the nation (though Game Masters might opt to have a few undocumented maniacs crop up in future adventures). Once this information is given to the

authorities it can be put to good use, the police and government agents dealing with this menace through unprecedented coordination and cooperation.

Should the PCs deliver March to the mainland, he will be taken into custody and put on trial. The verdict is clear cut, and he will be sentenced to the harshest punishment. Success will result in possibly more renown than the PCs expect. Several NPCs owe the PCs their lives, New York City's Mayor's office will want to bestow medals of recognition, and the U.S. Government might extend their appreciation.

Such demonstrations might draw the eye of new, grander villains. But those are seeds for future **Thrilling Tales!**

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: ACT III

FELIX MARCH

(Wild Card)

Not yet 40, Felix March's hair has gone prematurely silver. This gives him a professorial attractiveness. These features often make people underestimate his abilities. He is not at all doddering, but lithe and quick.

March plays a debonair devil. He is a self-assured man, who has tested his skills against an apathetic world and always emerged victorious. His cockiness gives him a rakish charm. A born manipulator, Felix has found talk as useful a weapon as a gun or sword cane.

He longs to make the world his own. His ambitions are grand, his planning is Machiavellian, and his morals are nonexistent. He is not above leaving a corpse trail, so long as he gets what he wants. He has yet to meet anyone he considers an intellectual equal.



Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidate d8, Persuade d10, Shooting d8,

Charisma: +4, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 6 (includes swordcane), **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Cocky

Edges: Attractive, Charismatic, Charmer

Gear: a luger P-08 (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 8), swordcane (str+d4, Parry +1), the finest suit, a good hat.

SIMPLE CUTTHROATS

(Mooks)

These people are crazed killers who have given into their feral sides. They are not capable of organizing unless someone in authority makes them organize. Unless commanded by a strong personality, they might attack opponents at random, either as a mob or working alone.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidate d6, Swimming d6, Taunt d6
Charisma: +0 **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 5
Gear: stabbing weapons (Str+d6) and/or bludgeoning weapons (Str+d4)



ADVANCED CUTTHROATS

These killers are not as mindlessly bloodthirsty as the simple cutthroats. They retain some sense and leadership ability, able to perform day-to-day tasks or learn new tasks. An Advanced Cutthroat will organize a mob of simple cutthroats, and use tactics to command them.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d8, Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidate d6, Swimming d6, Piloting d8, Taunt d8
Charisma: +0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 6, **Toughness:** 6
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty
Edges: Hold The Line!
Gear: sword (Str+d6) or club (Str+d4), numerous knives

APPENDIX

CRUSADING ATTORNEY

A New Player Character Archetype

With a flourish, John Perkins revealed the murder weapon to the sweating occupant of the witness stand and turned to show the jurors.

"How'd you get that?" defendant Dopey Collins asked, tugging on his collar. He looked suddenly concerned about his decision to endure cross-examination.

Perkins' lips turned up in a tight grimace. "I see you recognize it. Well, why don't you explain to your peers about this particular pistol... Tell the jury how this weapon came to be in a murderer's hands."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Dopey Collins said. "That gun went missing from my collection almost three--"

"This gun," Perk said, "is responsible for seven murders. In addition to your wife, shot during a department store robbery, there's a drug addict in the Bowery, and the matter of a certain family in Battery Park."

"Family?" Dopey asked, fat lips trembling. "You mean ... You mean that little girl?"

"That little girl'," Perk repeated. "So many innocent lives have been stolen by this weapon. But yes, I



mean the Garret girl, only seven years old but now occupying a plot in White Heart cemetery along with the rest of her family."

"Objection," the defense attorney snarled. "Mr. Perkins is spinning stories not giving the court facts--"

"Sustained," Judge Marsters growled. "Please restrict your inquiries, Mr. Perkins."

"I'm sorry, your honor." Perkins pursed his lips and redirected his efforts. Little Miss Garret's memory deserved justice, but justice had to come fairly. "Mr. Collins, can you tell us how your 'missing' gun made its way into the hands of the man who confessed to murdering your wife for pay?"

"I--" Collins' eyes filled with tears. His shoulders drooped. He crumbled as Perkins and the jury watched. "I didn't mean for anyone else to get

hurt! That .. that animal! I thought I was hiring him, but instead I turned him loose. Dear God help me, I turned him loose!"

"Objection!"

Perkins knew he had this case sealed up.

While lesser known than the Ace Reporter or Man of Mystery, the Crusading Attorney is no less of a staple character in pulp fiction. He can be the stalwart public defender or the lawyer with a shady past discovering a good cause that returns him to justice's fold... Examples include Ken Corning and Perry Mason.

The Crusading Attorney is a man on a mission. He is the ultimate social combatant, able to maneuver any social situation with a boxer's grace and a cutting wit to match any femme fatale barb-for-barb.

The Crusading Attorney is usually defined by dedication to a cause or ideal, be it the nebulous (justice) or the specific (clean up a certain neighborhood or put a certain crime lord behind bars). This dedication leads the attorney away from the mundane realms of his fellow legal eagles, into the ranks of pulp fiction legendry.

A Crusading Attorney can be drawn into pulp adventures in various ways, either through the day to day job, or through contacts and friends-everyone wants to know an attorney

from whom they can request favors.

As well, this character can act as a nexus by which other characters can know one another. Like the Fortune Hunter, the Crusading Attorney needs a strong network of teammates in order to operate in his chosen arena, the courtroom. As such, he allies himself with Ace Reporters and Gumshoes, with G-Men and Femme Fatales, and even with Gangsters and Gun Molls. Outside the professional ring, the Crusading Attorney is a wheeler and dealer, and can be tied to any other character type through mutual interests or associates.

Suggested Skills: Driving, Intimidate, Guns, Knowledge, Notice, Persuasion, Taunt

Suggested Edges: Alertness, Charismatic, Moxie*, Photographic Memory*, Strong Willed

Suggested Hindrances: Arrogant, Code of Honor, Glass Jaw*, Obligations*, Overconfident, Vow

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