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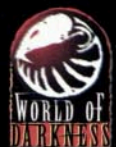
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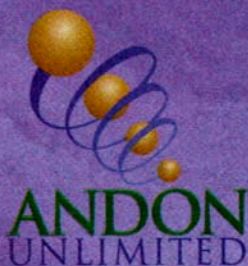
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Issue #26
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by DBA Productions
Page 38

*Cthulhu and oil drilling;
you figure out the
connection.*

Strange Vistas

Heartwrencher's Lament
by Edward Carmien
Page 15

*Fiction from the world of
Dark Champions.*



The Edge

Page 65 *et. seq.*

Breaking news, reviews, and similar good stuff.



About the Cover

This month's cover, by Greg Simanson, is the "Benthic Explorer from Wizards of the Coasts' new *Magic: the Gathering* expansion set, *Alliances*.

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This policy actually penalizes AEG
for being associated with SHADIS
rather than having an unfair advantage
over other companies. We hope this
policy demonstrates our determination
to keep SHADIS truly independent.

Editorial

Hit & Run

In that I have no one large topic to address this month, I'm going to steal a format lock, stock, and barrel from Suck (<http://www.suck.com> — trust me on this one) and treat several unrelated topics at a shorter length. Bear with me.



One of our readers, a dedicated fan of *Earthdawn*, called up the other day and very generously gave us a couple of corrections for "Causoban," the *Earthdawn* city-cum-scenarios we ran in SHADIS #24 and #25. Consequently, we'd like to correct the following errors:

- The Scourge lasted for four hundred years, not eight hundred.
- There are Troll player-characters, but no Ogre player-characters.

Thanks for the tips, and we promise not to make any more errors in the future!

ACTIVISION®

I was recently in an electronics store (the third most-dangerous shopping environment for me, behind bookstores and music stores), and on impulse picked up a discounted copy of Activision's Atari 2600 Action Pack. Remember back in the early 1980s, when Activision was pushing the envelope of the 2600's incredibly limited capabilities with their cartridge games like *Kaboom!* and *Pitfall!* and *Freeway!* Fifteen of those games are now available on a single CD, following

in the footsteps of Infocom's twin CDs which collected all of their text adventures in one place. The collection appeals to the same set of brain cells which thinks, "Hey, a lava lamp! Cool!"

It's been well over a decade since I played any of these games, and I was momentarily shocked to find how kind my memory had been to the graphics. Contrariwise, the help screens, which included occasional designer notes, were rather more enlightening this time around; there are quotes like "In those days, we had to build everything from the pixel up" and "Games were only 2K in the beginning.... I had to modify the chip to [design a 4K game]." (Bob Whitehead, author of *Boxing*, *Chopper Command*, *Stampede*, and other games.)

The graphics are jaggy enough to cut your finger on, and the gameplay is no longer as challenging — I've had twelve years to develop my hand-eye coordination — but these are still fun for a change of pace. To complete the authenticity of the gaming experience, there is a "Nagging Mom" feature built in which will occasionally exhort you to turn off the games and come to dinner. Unlike the first time around, this feature can now be turned off.



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A Roleplaying Game
by Wallace G. Sullivan

Ann Dupuis, of Grey Ghost Games, recently asked us to insert an announcement calling for game masters and players in the second annual FUDGE Tournament, at *Origins* in Columbus. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, we don't have room to make the announcement... sorry, Ann! (Further info is available on the World Wide Web at <http://members.aol.com/ghostgames> or via email at ghostgames@aol.com.)

Announcements,
a trip down
Memory Lane,
and an unsolicited
plug.

The Aliens Are Coming!

The sound of an approaching underling attracted the attention of the leader, who was gazing out the viewport at a mottled blue-green globe.

"Report!" he snapped, rattling his chitinous arm plates.

The lackey stuttered, "Uh, well, your Excellency, there seems to be a few unusual energy readings we haven't been able to pin down yet...."

"Irrelevant." He waved a claw. "Your conclusions."

"The primitive natives of this world have no capacity to resist our forces," came the nervous answer.

"Perfect," replied the leader, clicking his mandibles in satisfaction. "His Supreme Highness will be most pleased. Another easy conquest for our glorious empire." He looked back at the globe.

"Let the invasion begin."

Introduction

Aliens are usually found only in science fiction role-playing games, but it doesn't always have to be that way. Before SF was developed, stories about contacts with creatures from other worlds were in the province of fantasy writing. Poul Anderson's classic, *The High Crusade*, told the story of a 14th century English baron and his followers who are confronted with an alien invasion, with a background very similar to a medieval-based fantasy setting.

There is no reason that a gamemaster (GM) couldn't mix fantasy and outer space on special occasions. Nor should aliens be restricted from other milieus. Any game in the past or modern eras can have visitors from space as a special, one-time encounter. Old movie serials, superhero, supernatural, horror, and adventure fiction often

had aliens show up to terrorize the world. H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds" is the original alien invasion story, and is set in the Victorian Era. The monsters in H. P. Lovecraft's tales were mostly from other worlds. Thus many types of campaigns are compatible with an extraterrestrial encounter, including dark future and cyberpunk. Alien is really a horror story set in outer space. In some ways aliens work better in genres other than regular SF, because in those games they're well-known, being an all too common part of the background, usually without any strange and awesome powers that sets them apart from PCs (player-characters). In fact, PCs may get to be aliens in SF games, which is fun, but takes a lot of the mystery out of play.

Biology

From the GM's point of view, one good thing about aliens is that they're... alien. They're not just another monster. Orcs with blasters get old really fast. Creatures from space should be treated as outside of the normal rules, and have unique and unknown abilities. Psionic skills are not uncommon. Nothing stops a party cold like being told their fireballs or machine guns have no effect whatsoever on the nasties. There isn't a better way to create excitement among players than to have them run into something which isn't in the book.

Many aliens look like humans, making it easy for them to keep their true identities secret. Thus, the party, which may be on their guard for trolls, cyber-assassins, or ghosts, barely notices someone who seems just a little eccentric.

Non-humans come in a variety of shapes and sizes and can have such unusual abilities as invisibility, resistance to heat or cold, shape-shifting, and the like. Some are not autonomous individuals, but are part of a "hive" race or mentality. A

Why restrict aliens to the SF genre? Larry Granato shows us how to expand ET's potential.

by Larry Granato
Artwork by
Steve Bryant

few are very large or very small. Big cranium types are common, and some aliens are nothing more than oversized brains. Of course, many are repulsive in the extreme. For people who are not used to seeing beings of types other than themselves, fear and loathing are common responses. Space

party's warnings go unheeded because society dismisses them as cranks. Soon, mysterious happenings begin, which eventually provoke a response from the still-unbelieving public, perhaps directed at the characters. The party is left to deal with the situation on their own. If they are successful, the



creatures may deliberately use their hideous appearance to terrorize the population.

The party may make friends with an alien, who can provide help or annoying advice from time to time. Since the idea of gainful employment may be impractical, the creature will probably end up as a freeloader. Likewise, they can create an recurring adversary by angering some obnoxious ET.

Psychology

Aliens not only look different, but think in ways unlike those of humans. As a result their actions may be unpredictable and bizarre. Difficulty in communications is a common problem. Typically, aliens involved in military or diplomatic missions desire to contact the highest level authority available, while those who are covert or secret assignments want to limit knowledge of their presence to as few individuals as possible. Aliens rarely understand or care about the function of the media or normal channels of communication.

The typical scenario begins with the PCs or their friends glimpsing an alien landing. The

dilemma ends there. If not, the invader makes itself known, possibly by a rampage, and the people turn to the party for help. All resources are mustered to deal with the situation, and the PCs must come up with a plan to resolve the problem in a final confrontation.

Anyone who is identified as having come in contact with space creatures will generate feelings of awe or rejection among the public. Fear of the unknown is more scary to most people than the actual unknown entity itself. Once humans accept the idea of extraterrestrial life, it will be business as usual.

In all types of societies, government takes a leading role in dealing with foreigners, especially those of great power and importance. The same holds true of space visitors, and public leaders will often try to cover up evidence of otherworldly encounters, or control the situation as best they can by taking aliens and witnesses into protective custody. Anything that can be construed as a threat to national security will provoke a military response, whether it's calling out the town guard or launching a barrage of nuclear missiles.

Some ETs, by their own attitudes or appearances, may create such feelings of disgust and hate that conflict with humans is inevitable. If not, once formal communications are established, the aliens will be treated as distinguished visitors — albeit closely watched ones. If there is any political or commercial advantage to be gained by dealing with the space creatures, you can be sure an official or businessman will make a overwhelming effort in that area. In some cases the aliens will be naive enough to play into these people's hands; other times they will be such sharp dealers that the earthlings will be left on the short end of the stick.

Technology

Another important point is technology. The aliens' capabilities are far beyond the PCs'. This does not necessarily make them invincible. Although the aliens may be very advanced, they aren't immune to mistakes, or doing stupid things like leaving the door to their spaceship open or forgetting about basic hygiene (earth germs and stuff).

Energy weapons, from heat rays to disintegration beams, are standard equipment for space beings. Some employ robots as well. Aliens employ many types of gear other than weapons, much of which appears miraculous to earth people. Flying is their most common mode of long distance transportation, either by rocket belt, gravity platform, shuttlecraft, or their own ship.

Letting some alien technology fall into the party's hands is an appropriate reward for fighting off an invasion, but do not allow this to unbalance the game. Most complex equipment will be incomprehensible. The PCs may learn to operate a device, but they probably won't understand the principles behind it. Recharges and replacement parts are unavailable, of course, and local conditions or lack of maintenance may cause the equipment to deteriorate rapidly. Some gadgets have built-in safety mechanisms that prevent or punish tampering and abuse.

Most aliens will have a spaceship. A few may be dropped off by a mothership or arrive by matter transmission beam. There is virtually no chance of PCs being able to fly a ship, but they might accidentally activate the autopilot while inside, and take off for parts unknown. Certainly if the government gets hold of the vehicle it will never be seen again.

The following is a list of alien encounters that can be used by GMs to spice up their role-playing game.

1. BEM: Bug-eyed Monsters are a alien tradition. They are not very smart, but can be quite destructive. After landing, the creature will skulk about a bit, preying on isolated victims. It's almost mandatory that the monster surprise a couple enjoying a romantic interlude on lovers' lane (or

the equivalent) before going on the usual rampage.

2. LGM: The Little Green Men are coming, and usually arrive in a flying saucer. They like to use paralyzation rays on people and then perform medical experiments on them. They often use telepathic powers to erase people's memories, mess around with their skills and stats, and generally screw up their lives.

3. The Conquerors: In this classic scenario, an invasion armada of heel-clicking warlords appears in the skies, prepared to enslave the world. They follow a precise invasion plan worked out in advance, which may include deceiving the inhabitants about their intentions, mind control, letting loose trained monsters, duplicating people, poisoning food or liquids, employing a fifth column, and so on. Although their forces may be overwhelming, they always have some weakness to be exploited. Certainly guerrilla resistance is possible.

4: Lost from Space: This individual is stranded on the earth due to a spacecraft malfunction (or maybe he just got left behind). The human-looking ones can be both amusing and infuriating due to their odd habits and lack of knowledge about earth, but at least they can be taken out in public. The "ET" types cause fear and panic wherever they go. No matter how peaceful they are, people may react with violence. The PCs can assist the lost one to go home before the mob or government gets to them.

5. Them: They look human, but they are really something else. Intent on infiltrating government, business, and society, the aliens are adept at covering their tracks, and leave no evidence of their schemes behind. Except for a few intrepid investigators, their existence is unknown to the public, and anyone who talks about it is considered a kook. Could they be watching even now?

6. Herald of Doom: A well-meaning emissary who warns earthlings that they are meddling with some power (magic, atomic power, gene-modification, pollution, war/violence, space travel, cyborging) that is beyond their capacity to control. He may deliver something that sounds like an ultimatum. He is supercilious but sincere. However, suspicious and skeptical government leaders or trigger happy soldiers may cause an unintended confrontation — and the emissary is quite capable of self-defense.

7. Aliens Bearing Gifts: The aliens have a device which is the solution to all your problems. They give it to someone, perhaps a PC. There's a catch of course, as the device will be misused or has unknown abilities which cause unfortunate consequences. The inevitable disaster precipitates the return of the alien, who sadly demands the return of the device, saying that the earthlings are not ready for it yet. Alternatively, an enigmatic object left by aliens astounds and perplexes the

"The aliens' capabilities are far beyond the PCs'. This does not necessarily make them invincible. Although the aliens may be very advanced, they aren't immune to mistakes, or doing stupid things like leaving the door to their spaceship open or forgetting about basic hygiene."

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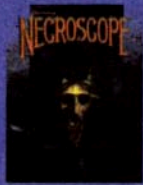
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people who discover it. The actual function of the item is up to the GM, but can be both subtle and powerful.

8. Salescreatures: The aliens want to make you a deal. They set up shop and offer unbelievable merchandise at incredible prices. You want weapons? We got weapons. How about a Mark XIV Death Beam, power cells extra? If one person buys one, everybody else has to, just to keep up. After saturating the market, they then offer the Number 9 Neutralizer, just what you need for nullifying those pesky death beams. And so it goes. Their real goal is to drain the world of all its treasure and valuables. Of course, some alien traders are legitimate.

9. Battle: Opposing aliens, either individuals or teams, chose the earth as a battleground to settle their differences. The crossfire can be pretty deadly. It's up to the PCs to broker a peace agreement or mitigate the damage. Another possibility is the Fugitive — on the run from interstellar police, this escapee is armed and dangerous. He has no compunction about blasting anyone who crosses his path. A police agent is in hot pursuit.

10. Odd Visitors: Aliens tourists or scientists in disguise are sojourning on your quaint planet. They unintentionally wreak havoc due to their ignorance and clumsiness. But when one of their masks slips off, the real fun begins.... Alternatively, a human-looking alien wants to study earthlings and follows the PCs around, recording their feelings when they get swords stuck through them and the like. Of course, they'd like to help when somebody gets in trouble, but there's that non-interference rule....

11. Judgment: Powerful beings from a distant star want to pass judgment on the fate of the world. The PCs are chosen to represent mankind. There may be trial, a contest/battle between the party and an opposing force, or some mental/ethical test. If the PCs foul up, at least they won't have to worry about taking the blame — there won't be anyone left to gripe at them. More merciful beings may let the earth off with a quarantine or the destruction of all technology, sending it back to the dark ages.

12. Tentacles and Protoplasm: Even more disgusting than BEMs, these sickening, slimy creatures squelch their way through drains and door-cracks. What's worse is their immunity to most (but not all) attack forms, and a fantastic rate of reproduction. Can the right weapon be found before the nauseating things overrun the world?

13. Misunderstanding: Communications difficulties make it impossible to be sure exactly what the aliens want and this may lead to war. Possibly the aliens might appear to be peaceful, friendly, and proffer something of value. My favorite case is the "Twilight Zone" episode where the aliens offer to "serve mankind" (broiled, naturally).

14. Exile on Earth Street: An alien, usually an outcast, dissident, or petty criminal, is marooned on the earth. Often misunderstood, they are generally less friendly than lost ones, and a lot more trouble. The party may not be able to return him home, but sending him to an early grave is a possibility if the alien becomes a menace.

15. The Dump: Your planet has been selected as a receptacle for galactic waste. The trash, which may be dropped anywhere, is alternately noxious, useless, incomprehensible, dangerous, messy, and a nuisance. However, occasionally a valuable item appears.

16. Contamination: A meteorite or returning space vehicle brings with it an alien plague. People die horribly, there's no known cure, and it spreads rapidly. Can the PCs save the day? Or get away?

17. Killers: Creatures bred or evolved for nothing but slaughter: they really enjoy it. Exceedingly cunning, they are very stealthy, quick, strong, have impressive natural weapons and special abilities on attack and defense. They don't use technology, but understand how it works. This category also includes alien hunters who want a stuffed human head or three on the wall of their trophy room and various murderous robots and death-dealing mechanisms.

18. Mental Entity: This non-corporeal being inhabits the bodies of humans, animals, maybe even corpses. It is on a quest to gain life energy by killing as many people as possible in terrible ways. Extraordinary means are needed to get rid of it.

19. Mars Needs Women: Kidnapping and enslavement of females is the goal of a gang of loathsome, lecherous creatures. What red-blooded earther can stand the sight of a scantily-clad, beautiful woman in the pincers of a grotesque extraterrestrial?

20. Pseudo-aliens: These are people who've acquired some advanced technology that allows them to pose as aliens. They are out to commit some crime, cause panic, or blackmail governments.

21. Snacktime: Hungry aliens are dropping by for dinner, and the PCs are on the menu. More than just people-munching monsters, these creatures are gourmands who appreciate a good chat with their meal before meticulously cooking and feasting on it. If resistance is feeble enough they may consider turning the earth into a "class six feeding station."

22. Scout: An alien on a reconnaissance mission is checking the earth out as a potential target for attack. He asks a lot of stupid questions, or worse, wants to capture a few humans and test their abilities, often in a rather ruthless fashion. The PCs must convince him to buzz off.

23. Call for Help: The aliens want you! A race

For an example of an inconvenient alien invasion in the middle of World War Two, check out Harry Turtledove's *Worldwar* series. Once you've finished, have a look at Rob Vaux's translation of the series into an RPG background in SHADIS 22.

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Designed by Susan Van Camp, Developed by Mark Harmon, Art Directed and Graphics by Mark Poole

The Aliens Are Coming!

in distress needs a few good characters in its battle against galactic evil. Transportation, room and board, training, and nifty uniforms are provided.

24. The Galactic Federation: A envoy from an interstellar authority lands and offers the world provisional membership provided they carry out certain reforms. The terms may be somewhat difficult to fulfill, and will impact the PCs somehow,

could cause endless trouble if it falls into the wrong hands. There may be other aliens or humans trying to get the object first.

27. The Collector: This being wants a few humans for his private zoo or as playthings for his kids. Will the PCs do? Also, a space tyrant may abduct the party just for the hell of it.



aside from generating great social changes. Eventually, the establishment of trade allows the party an opportunity to travel to other worlds for new types of adventures. Or, there are the Galactic Snobs, snotty aliens who visit your world to buy trinkets from the natives and remind you how backward and ignorant you are.

25. Destroy All Planets: The earth is in the way, and it's got to go. Uncaring interstellar bureaucrats, negligent space jockeys, robotic world-wreckers, rogue planets, or vicious vandals prepare to pulverize the place. It's up to the PCs to halt the disaster. This could be a tough one.

26. Retrieval Mission: Some important alien artifact (or alien itself in stasis or hibernation) has been left on the earth. An ET recovery expert is dispatched to return the valuable item, which

28. Powerplay: Aliens secretly back a government or faction in a bid for control. The alien's role is unknown, but if the party can get some proof, it will set their plans awry. The human leaders of the plot don't want the public to know for fear of "culture shock" or simply want the help for their own benefit. The **Interstellar Powerplay** is when competing alien races want to use the earth as a pawn in their own struggle.

29. A Not-So-Distant Mirror: The aliens have arrived, and aside from their space travel technology, it turns out that they are a lot like earth people; some are good, some bad, some greedy, temperamental, virtuous, treacherous, silly, etc. Alternatively, **We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us:** the PCs discover that one or more of their group, perhaps even everyone on their

world, are the aliens — descendants of space beings.

30. Cosmic Meddlers: These superior aliens enjoy fiddling with evolution, genes, and history. They've done it before, and they'll do it again unless the party can convince them that earth people are "grown up" enough to handle their own destiny. Trouble is, the aliens might just make the party prove their case. Don't say we didn't warn you.

31. Immigrants: Welcome to the new world. The aliens are coming, and they're here to stay. Refugees from another planet settle on the earth in large numbers, bringing all the troubles that newcomers normally have, plus a few extraterres-

grow to giant size, plants become carnivorous, climate changes radically, household appliances become deadly, etc. Certain individuals (including the PCs) avoid the effects, and have to discover the source of the transmissions and put a stop to them.

35. Parasite: A creature which attaches itself to a host, eventually taking the person over. The intelligent ones may gain control of whole towns, turning everyone into happy little drones (pods, anyone?). Mental parasites confuse their hosts, clouding their minds. The more disgusting varieties live inside people before they burst out, killing them. Who says two is more fun than one?

36. Space Vixens: They're babes, they're hot, and they're looking for a few good earth men. However, they've got something up their shiny sleeves. Perhaps the mating ritual on their world resembles that of the black widow.

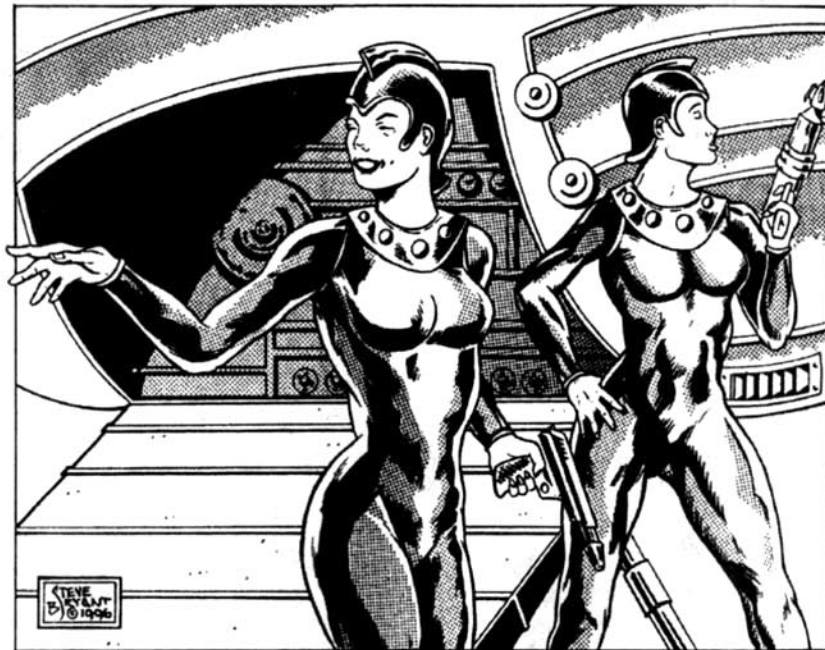
37. Raygun Raiders: Alien pirates have come to steal all of the earth's air, water, gold, art treasures, chocolate, etc., kidnap world leaders or scientists, or sabotage essential projects.

38. The Saucer People: These individuals claim to have

seen UFOs, encountered aliens, been abducted, or say they're in contact with space beings. They seem pretty crazy, but what if they're right? Another alternative is the UFOlogist, an investigator or scientist who has been studying this phenomenon. He may be a little flaky, but he's exactly who you need when the ETs show up.

39. Roboprobe: An automated exploration ship is checking out the solar system. It may stay quite a while, sending out robots on various missions, like scientific research, resource gathering or the construction of repair facilities. More often than not, it lacks programming to deal gently with human interference.

40. Message from the Stars: Aliens contact the world from afar, sending a cryptic message, technological information to build something (or someone), or just the warning, "we're on our way." 6



trial ones and the usual undesirables. Alternatively, they may be alien colonists who were not expecting to find any intelligent life on the earth, and who won't go back home either (i.e., big conflict ahead).

32. Benefactor: An super-powered alien appears, saving the PCs (or the world) from some disaster or other space marauder, or provides guidance through some difficult times. Gratitude (i.e., a quest) is expected.

33. Basic Needs: Aliens require the earth to hatch their eggs, grow their food, mine critical minerals, etc. They are not warlike. Can a bargain be made to temporarily share the planet or will intolerance rear its ugly head?

34. Strange Rays: A bombardment of beams from beyond begets bizarre behavior or byproducts. People may mutate, become homicidal or irrational, fall permanently asleep, insects might

"Creatures from space should be treated as outside of the normal rules, and have unique and unknown abilities.... Nothing stops a party cold like being told their fireballs or machine guns have no effect whatsoever on the nasties. There isn't a better way to create excitement among players than to have them run into something which isn't in the book."



Heartwrencher's Lament

by Edward J. Carmien

From the world of Dark Champions by Hero Games

November 6: Thursday 01:23

Thomas Hart wheeled toward the new threat. Beside him a man screamed with pain, the shriek muting suddenly as it breached the decibel safety cut-off in Hart's amplified earphones. A handgun went off, the pop of the cheap nine millimeter making its own bulb of silence in his ear.

Something tapped him in the chest, and Hart grinned then, just as he let the shotgun do its job. The punk with the pistol went backwards, made no sound except for a gurgle. Since Hart didn't have a fix on who else was in the alley, he blew away the one dim light with another shot and slapped the infra-red goggles down over his eyes.

Hart spun slowly in a deep crouch, taking in the alley and the street beyond. He was alone, except for the dead and the screaming. The other punks must have taken the path of least resistance, he mused. Just then the radio crackled. Whatever his fellow vigilante had to say was lost in the screaming.

Placed firmly on the punk's throat, Hart's boot brought quiet to the alley.

"Say again."

"I said what do you need?" Nighthawk's slightly amused tenor was clear over the scrambled radio link.

"Nothing. The bad boys I was watching had the bad taste to notice me." Hart looked down at the punk who was clutching feebly at his leg. "Don't scream," he said.

"Don't what?" said Nighthawk.

"Not you, nimrod, this punk I just shot," Hart said.

Hart lifted his boot. The kid — Hart could see now the one that might live was just a kid — stopped screaming. His breathing was labored and loud in Hart's earphones, but he didn't scream. Wearing a full-face combat helmet wasn't confining if you had amplified hearing and infra-red goggles. Below him on the street, the punk's face was a red blotch on cool dark grey concrete.

"Oh great," Nighthawk said. "Not again. Will he live? Remember what happened the last time —"

Sirens in the background roused Hart from contemplating the simple courage of the kid he'd shot. Hart wasn't sure he could stop from screaming if he had a leg full of buckshot. Or maybe it wasn't courage, he reflected just a bit more, but the maw of the shotgun pointing casually downwards. There was a lesson there about human nature, he decided.

"Cops," said Hart then as he scanned the end of the alley for a discreet path of retreat. "Some citizen did his civic duty."

"Hell yes. And the police are coming twice as fast, knowing it's you," said Nighthawk.

Hart felt a sharp pain in his side as he went over the fence at the back of the alley. From there he could make a roof easily. The pain reminded him he'd been shot. Probably a broken rib. Not enough to bother the family doctor.

After he ditched the cops, Hart thought to himself as he went hand over hand up to a rooftop, he'd rendezvous with Nighthawk, one of a handful of the vigilantes who fought crime with steel, lead, and unquenchable spirit.



November 6: Thursday 02:06

The darkness was comforting for a man with infra-red goggles. The night was alive with heat. It always was. He could see Nighthawk's cycle blocks away, despite the fact his fellow vigilante was driving with his headlight off.

"Dangerous habit," he said into the mic in his helmet. "I'm four blocks farther down. Nice place to park right behind the dumpsters."

"Thanks," was all Nighthawk had to say. He parked the bike.

They stood looking at each other for a few moments.

"Police radio says one dead, one in intensive," Nighthawk said finally. "They're calling it a Heartwrencher shoot. They've got a witness who made the I.D. on your souped-up army helmet."

Thomas Hart mulled that over. Around them the night was quiet and cool, but the nearby dumpster added a dirty taste to the air.

"So?" he said finally.

"So? For cryin' out loud, the cops are going to be all over us for weeks...."

"Aren't they always?"

Nighthawk shook his head. When he wasn't wearing his motorcycle helmet he used a scarf to cover his features. It slipped now with that motion, but it didn't matter much. Thomas Hart and Mike Stone knew each

other. The mask was for other watchers.

"They'll be all over the streets for the next few weeks at least. Some mother will come out of the woodwork, get some air time, do Oprah and Montel, go on and on about what bad vigilantes we all are." Stone — Nighthawk — challenged Hart with a direct stare.

"You ever wonder why they don't go after the Harbinger like that?" Hart said.

"Harbinger didn't start his career by —" shooting a cop, Nighthawk was going to say.

"I know, I know," Hart interrupted. Those words made something wake inside him. He preferred the dead feeling. He preferred it to be left undisturbed.

The silence stretched.

"Sorry," Hart said finally.

"You like it, don't you?" Nighthawk said. "Did you have to get into that firefight? Did you?"

"I didn't start that one," Hart said.

"Oh yeah? Did you have to be in that alley? Cops on the radio described the scene: those were close-in shots. We're talking about a few small-time dealers here. Poppuns."

"I took a bullet," Hart said, his pride stung. "It wasn't that easy."

"Oh, you took a bullet." Nighthawk turned away, kicked at a crack in the concrete. "We're supposed to be different. Make a difference without killing. Harbinger gets away with it because... because the cops know he won't hesitate to shoot... because he's so damn good. When it gets down to us, we're doable, man, we're a promotion waiting to be earned by some hotshot cop. And they're gonna be out looking for us, now. In spades."

"You wanna tell Dancer?" Hart said after a few seconds.

"No need. She'll never get picked up by the cops. Too subtle."

"What's she been up to?" Hart was glad to change the subject.

"Hear about those muggers in LeMastre Park? Those were hers."

Hart laughed, a few short barks of laughter. "I should have known. I mean, who else leaves two guys with symmetrical broken bones?"

"Yeah. Right wrist, shoulder, knee and foot on one guy and left wrist, shoulder, knee and foot on the other." Nighthawk laughed too, a gentler guffaw. "Where do you learn to do that to a guy?"

Hart thought he knew, but it wasn't for him to talk about Dancer's Company connections.

"It's getting late for me," Nighthawk said after awhile. "Some of us actually work for a living, you know."

"Sure," said Hart, thinking about the cot he slept on in his warehouse. He didn't look forward to sleep. Never did.



November 6: Thursday 14:55

It wasn't the Father dream, of that he was certain and grateful. It was the Government Center. Night. Half-lit corridors, one after another. The terrorists had the Mayor. Right.

That night it had said so on the TV: the Mayor, taken hostage by terrorists in the Government Center. Unspecified demands. Building surrounded, negotiations to begin soon. It was all a trap, meant to bring vigilantes to justice. A reelection campaign trick. Hart remembered this, in his dream, but he still had to dream the dream.

Nighthawk was there. Dancer was there. Scapegoat and Toecutter were there, and in the dream he knew them, wasn't meeting them for the first time.

The door in the stairwell was metal. Fire code, some part of Hart said, that's the fire code. A random thought, enshrined forever by the dream. His amplified earphones picked up idle chatter, the sound of terrorists comfortable and safe inside the building.

With a silent gesture, Heartwrencher and Nighthawk readied their weapons. A countdown of fingers. On three, the door.

The dream says dream with slow-mo. Kicked door swings. Heartwrencher's first target is in jeans. He's got an AK-47, casually slung. He's got coffee in a styrofoam cup. Heartwrencher blows him away.

Nighthawk's submachine gun chatters. His target wears a vest, is dressed in police blue. Something's wrong. Something's phony.

Heartwrencher watches the rest of the dream with detached angst. There's nothing he can do about the cop he just shot, the cop dressed as a terrorist. He dreams bitterness and bad luck: Nighthawk's target wore a vest and lived.

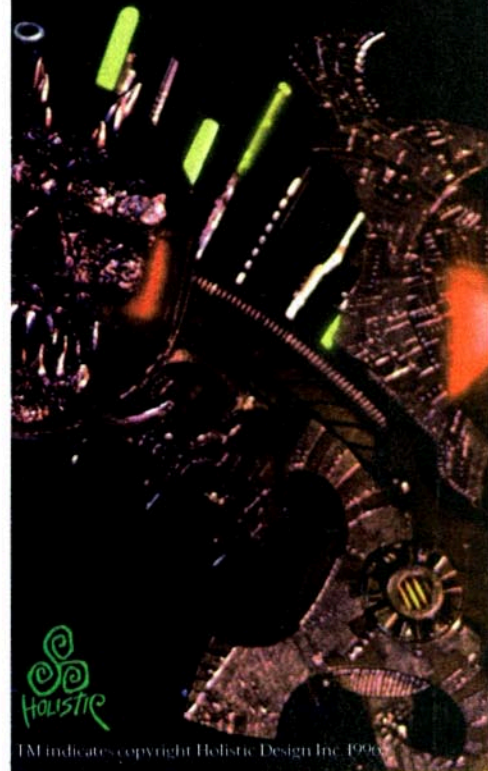
Escaping the trap meant running, smoke, pain, a red haze from leg and chest. Dancer muscling him to safety just past the fake corridor they'd busted open with smoke and frag

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Heartwrencher's Lament

grenades. The deja-vu of a dream of real life.

"And awake, to cold sweat and darkness and the smell of gun oil, the shotgun cleaned and loaded one handbreadth away.

"Damn," Hart said to no one in particular. He reached for the light.



November 7: Friday 02:04

"So I'm worried about him," Nighthawk said. He'd arranged a private meeting with Dancer with the cell phones they all carried as backup for the scrambled radio link.

"You said that already," Dancer replied. LeMastre Park was quiet around them. Two in the morning. She wasn't a tall woman, but the way she held herself promised strength and speed in a fight.

"He's trying to get himself killed."

"Aren't we all?" Dancer's voice was tinged with sarcasm. "This isn't a desk job..."

Heartwrencher's voice came over the radio. "Got a dealer here, maybe. Can't tell. I'm

going in to look. Two blocks south of the Barton Street Mission."

Nighthawk flipped his mic to 'live.' "Give us a few minutes, we'll be there."

"No need," said Heartwrencher.



November 7: Friday 02:07

The dealer — he was certain it was a dealer, but he couldn't get close enough to the transaction to see the goods—was half in the mouth of an alley, just barely silhouetted by the one working streetlight half a block down. Hart had watched him for half an hour. People stepped up, stepped away. Infra-red was no good for detail. He had to see the goods to be sure. Hart radioed his fellow vigilantes, just in case. Then he got ready to take a stroll.

Hart's bulky combat helmet went into the bag he slung over his shoulder. He flipped the safety off the shotgun and held it under his coat. Pulling his overcoat around him,

Thomas Hart made his way down the street.

Some small part of him said 'stupid, stupid,' but he kept walking. The dealer had his arms crossed, waiting. Hart walked right up.

"What you got?" he said casually.

"What you want?" said the dealer, tense and tight.

Hart swung the shotgun up and into the dealer's belly. Equally fast, the dealer unfolded his arms. One hand held a pistol. It came to rest on Hart's forehead, just right of center. The dealer held it in the sideways grip so popular on TV these days, Hart noted.

"Now lissen' here, asshole!" said the dealer. "Just you back away!"

Something hot boiled up inside Hart. The night receded around him until all he could see was the dealer, the dealer's arm and hand and the gun just above his right eye. There was also a row of blue shirts, the color guard at a cop's funeral, a waving flag, a dead feeling inside his belly.

"Yeah, sure," Hart said. And he pulled the trigger.

Something boomed. Something went bang. A red flash of lightning lit the inside of his head. A tremendous CRACK! deafened him. The dealer went backwards, guts a red mess.

Then Hart was falling to his knees. He couldn't quite understand why. Something was wrong with his legs, he thought. Something was wrong with his arms. The shotgun clattered on the dirty sidewalk. Numb, he was numb, his ears were ringing.

Hart toppled forward with a smile on his face. His head came to rest next to the dealer's feet.



November 7: Friday 02:16

Nighthawk and Dancer scanned the scene. The dealer was clearly dead. Sirens in the distance suggested that company would soon arrive. They were two blocks south of the Barton Street Mission.

"Where's Heartwrencher?" said Nighthawk. Dancer stooped low, shined her light upon the ground. She picked up the dealer's nine with a gloved hand, sniffed the barrel.

"Somebody got shot here," she said, straightening.

"No kidding?" quipped Nighthawk, gesturing at the corpse.

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"Somebody got shot here," Dancer repeated, and pointed her light downward. "Look at the blood pattern. This guy didn't get shot in the foot, did he? Where'd this blood come from?"

"This is the corner. Let's assume this is the dealer Heartwrencher mentioned. So where's our man?"

"Gone," said Dancer, backing away to Nighthawk's motorcycle. "Which is what we should be."

"Don't have to tell me twice."

Nighthawk thumbed his cycle to life and Dancer swung on behind. Slowly they wheeled down the dark street, leaving the scene to the police.



November 9: Sunday 16:35

Heartwrencher was blind. His face was tightly bound. A strap dug into his arm. His other arm felt dead from the elbow down. His feet felt like they were under blankets.

Puzzling this out exhausted him, and he fell asleep.



November 9: Sunday 21:48

"You're awake. I can tell."

The voice was male, a gentle baritone. Heartwrencher cursed to himself. He must be in a hospital. Caught.

"First of all, you're not in a hospital, like you must be thinking. Second, you've been shot in the head. I took the liberty of taking you off the street."

Heartwrencher tried to clear his throat. It was dry, and he coughed. A trickle of water soothed him. "Who?" he managed.

"I'm a friend. So far as I can tell, one of few. Of course, one might blame your singular friend the Idiot King for your lack of a social life, Mr. Hart. Having your night identity linked with your day identity has a way of scaring one's friends away."

"King...no...friend of mine," Heartwrencher managed. He tried to move his arms, but they were tied down.

"Now, now, I was just being facetious. And you're strapped in for your own good: you've got I.V.'s in both arms."

"Fashy-what?"

"Come, come, Mr. Hart. You're no low-brow know-nothing. Five years of Army Intel. All those years of college."

"Where am I?" Heartwrencher felt his mind clearing moment by moment. Drugged. He must have been drugged. He also felt a thumping headache coming on.

"You're completely safe. I have to be going now. I'm glad you're coherent. A head wound like that...let me just say you have an amazing skull, Mr. Hart. Although it's not medically recommended for patients with head wounds, I hope you sleep well."

"Wait...don't..." Heartwrencher managed, just as drug-warmth spread through his body and dragged him into sleep.



November 10: Monday 01:15

"No luck?" Nighthawk asked. Again they'd arranged the meet via the cell phone. With Heartwrencher's radio in unknown hands they were taking no chances.

Dancer shook her head. They were meeting next to the enclosed pond in LeMastre Park.

"Nice pond. No tourists," Nighthawk said.

"Vigilante privilege. I'm out of ideas on this Heartwrencher thing. He wasn't picked up by the police?"

"No way. We got there ahead of them. Besides, after a few days they'd let the press know. Who else, then? Some druggie gang?"

"For what? Ransom? Besides, my street contacts say nothing doing on that story. They're not Republic serial villains, Nighthawk. They'd just shoot him if they got the chance."

"Yeah, you're right. Any news about our...other favorite friend?"

"Nothing weird on the evening news that I know of," said Dancer.

"Where does he go?" said Nighthawk.

"If we knew that, there'd be no more Idiot King," declared Dancer. "Come on. Have we tried the radio lately?"

Nighthawk flipped on his voice-activated headset. "Heartwrencher? Nighthawk. Come on in, Heartwrencher."

Scrambled radio signals went into the

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Heartwrencher's Lament

night. Arrived. Descrambled themselves.

"Nighthawk?" said a voice into his headset. Not Heartwrencher's.

"Jesus!" exclaimed Nighthawk. "Did you..."

Dancer's hand shot out and cupped his mic. "Shhhh."

Laughter over the radio link. "I'm more an Old Testament figure, Nighthawk. I have news about your friend. He's been shot in the head. He'll have a terrific scar. I'll be able to turn him over in a few days. For now he's stable. But he should be more careful. That's all for now."

"Who are you? Where is Heartwrencher?" Nighthawk demanded. Silence.

"Can't you guess who that was?" Dancer said after a quiet moment.

"Harbinger?"

"I'd say Hart's in good hands so long as he doesn't piss him off. They say he knows a little about everything. Must know some medicine, too."

"Oh, man, oh, man..."

"Shut your mic off. I'm right here."

"Oh, man, oh, man..."

"You said that already. Lets get going. They do patrol the park, you know." Around them the night was November-brisk, and utterly dark.



November 13: Thursday 11:27

Heartwrencher came awake like a swimmer coming to the surface of a dark pond. For minutes he lay there, remembering. The pain in his head was a throb that kept time with the beat of his heart.

His head was still wrapped. His arms felt strapped. He was thirsty again.

"Would you like a drink of something, Mr. Hart?"

Damned mind reader, Heartwrencher thought to himself. He tried to nod, thought better of it.

"Yes," he gasped. A trickle of water soothed his throat.

"It's been five days since you were shot. I'm

about to turn you over to your friends. They are very concerned. How are you feeling?"

"Head hurts. Who are you?" Heartwrencher took care to keep his head still.

"Haven't you guessed? I'm the grand old man of your current profession, Mr. Hart. Or should I say Heartwrencher?"

Heartwrencher struggled against the muzziness the drugs induced. Grand old man? His current profession? Then he felt cold.

"Harbinger?"

"Or as the press prefers, and I must admit, more romantic, the Blue Moon Killer. You're very lucky I came by when I did, Mr. Hart. You were bleeding to death quite nicely when I arrived."

Heartwrencher was too stunned to reply immediately. Instead he tried his arms. They were still strapped. He felt helpless. Faced with silence, he spoke again.

"Why do you do it?"

"Why do I do it? To make a difference. Same as you, one might suppose. Or not, if one looks to particulars. Psychologically speaking. Why do you do it, Mr. Hart?"

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"Father...killed...."

"Oh yes. I believe the press did a nice exposé after the Idiot King so thoughtfully exposed you. Mr. Collins of the *Mirror*, as I recall. You're sure that's all? Walking into a nine millimeter pistol is something even I avoid doing, Mr. Hart."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," Heartwrencher said.

"It would appear that even you know that's not true," said the voice. "Don't forget," the voice continued. "I have you wired to six different monitors. They serve quite nicely as a lie detector. Unfortunately, I don't have time to serve as your confessor. Or as your therapist."

Heartwrencher yanked against the restraints. His head ballooned with pain, but the straps held. He had a hard time believing he was speaking to the legendary Harbinger, said to have killed thousands, even a Governor at one time. All in the name of justice.

"Shall I ask how you think I've survived this long in this business? Allow me to answer my own question." The man cleared his throat. "I do not have even the slightest impulse to suicide, Mr. Hart. I suggest you consider us different in that regard. I suggest you ponder that fact. You can't make a difference if you're dead."

The voice stopped speaking. Heartwrencher dismissed his words, listened carefully to hear if the Harbinger was still in the room. He could hear nothing except the beating of his own heart.

Then he felt the drugs coming back into his system. Heartwrencher fought to stay awake, repeating the mantra 'it isn't true, it isn't true, it isn't true' over and over again.



November 13: Thursday 23:12

"It isn't true," mumbled Heartwrencher.

Word had finally come over their radio link. Where and when. They found him strapped to a stretcher five blocks from the warehouse Heartwrencher used as a base of operations.

"He said something," said Dancer. They were in a small room, once an office.

Nighthawk came out of his doze and sat up. "What?"

VOLUME V • NUMBER I

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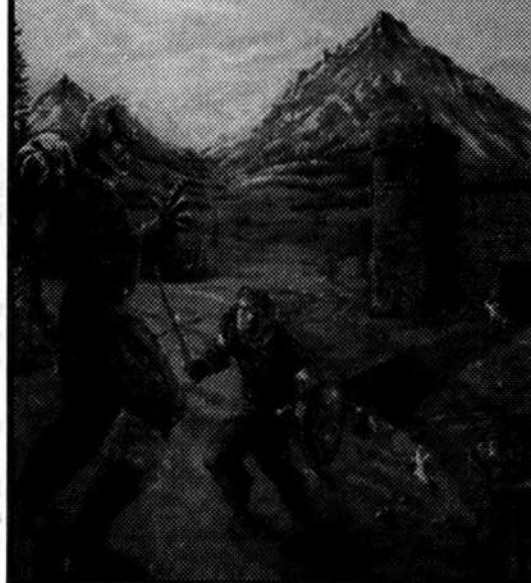
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Heartwrencher's Lament

"Something about truth," said Dancer. "Heartwrencher? Thomas Hart! Wake up!"

Heartwrencher struggled once again to consciousness. His head hurt, but he wasn't tied down. And he could see. Almost.

"Whoa there," Dancer interrupted his rise. "You're not going anywhere for awhile. You've been shot in the head. You won't believe who took care of you..."

"Harbinger," Heartwrencher gasped. "Water."

Nighthawk poured him a cup. Heartwrencher's head was swathed in bandages, but his color was returning.

"You talked to the Harbinger?" asked Nighthawk.

Heartwrencher drank. "Sure. Nice guy. Uses big words. Veddly eddicated." He slumped back onto his pillows.

"What's not true?" asked Dancer, but Heartwrencher was sound asleep.



November 14: Friday 18:44

Heartwrencher opened his eyes. Someone was driving a ten-penny nail directly into his forehead. He looked around. Whoever it was, they were invisible.

"You awake?" Nighthawk. Or merely Mike Stone, a man without his mask.

Heartwrencher closed his eyes. "God, my head hurts," he said.

"Take some of these. He said you'd be wanting them as soon as you woke up." Nighthawk offered pills and a glass of water, watched bleakly as his companion struggled to sit up and drink.

"How do you feel?"

"Veins full of library paste, head has a nail in it, and I have to use the toilet."

"What? Oh. Here, use this jar. Unless you..." Nighthawk handed over a jar.

"No, not yet. And I'm hungry."

"You should be thankful you're alive after what happened to you. Say, what did happen...?"

Heartwrencher settled back onto his pillows, closed his eyes. "I did something stupid. Dealer must have been suspicious, had his gun ready when I walked up. We faced off. I figured... I dunno what I figured. I cut loose, he cut loose, next thing I know somebody with a

fifty dollar vocabulary is..." he yawned, drifted. "Is, uh, talking to..."

Nighthawk waited, but it was clear his patient had fallen asleep. According to the Harbinger's polite letter and medical instructions, this would continue for at least a week as 'Mr. Hart' recovered from the extreme shock of his wound.



November 24: Monday 19:58

"This is it, this has got to be it!" Nighthawk exclaimed. Dancer patted him on the back. He was as excited as a boy before Christmas.

"We still have to look into it, but it is promising. It explains where he goes when he's not raising hell. It explains his kookiness." Dancer was always careful when prognosticating about the Idiot King.

"Too bad that poor guy had to die for all this to come to light."

"Too bad?" Dancer stood, glanced at Heartwrencher sleeping peacefully. It was now two weeks since he'd been shot. "This is the guy who was helping the Asylum Director, whatsername, cover up all those escapes. All those years of grief! He deserved to make the acquaintance of a Mack truck! And what other lunatics might have been waltzing in and out of that place? We'll be checking all the possibilities."

"Mack truck?" asked Heartwrencher, groggy but awake.

"Some state medical administrator bought it over the weekend. Turns out he was concealing escapes from the loony bin outside of town." Nighthawk pointed to a newspaper next to the bed. "It's all in there."

"It's been years. We figure maybe that's where the Idiot King comes from. He's crazy, we've always said that. And if he isn't out there, maybe some other wacko is. We're going to check it out," said Dancer. "Just an initial investigation. You're staying here, of course."

Heartwrencher's bandages had just come off, and the scar was as dramatic as promised. A deep welt covered in stitches ran from just over his right eye back along the top of his head. A round burn pattern made the start of the welt even more apparent.

Now that welt and developing scar flamed red. Heartwrencher struggled to sit up and stand. Weakness dragged at his limbs, and he coughed with the sudden effort.

"You're in no condition, hero. Besides, we're just taking a look. When the time comes, you'll be with us." Nighthawk patted his shoulder. Heartwrencher fell back into bed, breathing heavily.

Dancer and Nighthawk left. Heartwrencher leaned over, opened the drawer in the bureau next to his bed. He took out his radio headset, rested a minute, then pulled the .357 Magnum out of the drawer and onto his lap. He rested a few more seconds before swinging his legs down to the floor.

"Like hell I'm not going," he said to himself, and began the long journey to an automobile, any automobile.



November 24: Monday 21:23

The radio told the story to Heartwrencher as he drove through the night. He was minutes behind them. Critical minutes. He cursed again and struck the steering wheel feebly. Why did he rest so long at the bottom of the stairs? Why did he rest after he'd broken into the car? Now he would be too late!

The state's most dangerous lunatics were housed at the Asylum. And now one of them was loose. Or maybe he hadn't ever been contained. Not the Idiot King, but evil enough.

"Watch out for that wire!" Nighthawk.

"Uhn. Damn, it's wrapped all around him! Don't close—!" Dancer.

"Dancer!" Nighthawk.

"I'm OK! Cut my f—" Dancer.

"Duck!" Gunfire, Nighthawk's submachine gun. "Look at him move!" Nighthawk.

"I'm coming!" Heartwrencher yelled. "Just hold him off for a few minutes!"

It was Sin, it must be: one of the asylum's most famous psychotics. It sounded like his treatment program hadn't quite weaned him from his trademark: barbed wire. They didn't respond to Heartwrencher's call.

He slammed his hand against the steering wheel again and pushed the car faster through the night.

More gunfire, Nighthawk's submachine gun. Then a few feeble pops; Dancer's polite nine millimeter pistol.

"Dammit!" Nighthawk.

"Don't pull against it!" Dancer.

"It's got me!" Nighthawk, voice tinged with fear and pain. More gunfire. The submachine

gun.

"Just a second—uff!" Dancer, with effort.

Heartwrencher careened around a curve, the car weaving wildly. Luck: no oncoming traffic. More luck: three figures struggling in the distance, near the asylum's front entrance.

"It's me! It's me!" Heartwrencher yelled. "Push him in front of the car!"

Still no response.

"Car!" yelled Dancer, as she saw Heartwrencher's headlights.

"!" and a choke from Nighthawk.

"Pull him toward the road! Make the car hit him!" Dancer.

"Yes! Yes!" screamed Heartwrencher. He gunned the car for all it was worth. A stolen Ford, it wasn't worth too much more than it was doing already, but it lurched ahead.

In the distance, Heartwrencher could see Dancer wheeling about, trying for a shot. Nighthawk was wrapped in a coil of wire, and a third figure, bleeding and wrapped in wire himself, was dragging Nighthawk toward him.

"Break him free!" Heartwrencher shouted.

"Cut me loose!" Nighthawk yelled, the shout in the earphones deafeningly loud.

Dancer leapt, kicked, connected. Sin stumbled backward into a maple tree. Nighthawk gained a yard or two of slack. Heartwrencher cut the car, aimed it straight for the tree. His right hand fumbled for the seatbelt. At this speed he was a goner without his belt.

The car floated along. Time seemed to slow for Heartwrencher: it was amazing what adrenaline could do during a crisis. Nighthawk scrambled around and behind the tree while Sin, dazed, regained his balance and stared at the onrushing car. His eyes glowed red like a dog's, caught in the light. Dancer fell, clutching her leg where she'd struck Sin. The barbed wire wrapped around his body had cut through her boot and into her foot.

Why buckle? Heartwrencher thought to himself. It would be a good way to die, pinning Sin against the tree. Heartwrencher saw himself in the windshield, dimly lit by the dashboard light. The others could take care of the Idiot King, even if it turned out he wasn't at the asylum as they thought.

The Ford left the road, but the shoulder was reasonably flat. Seconds to go.

Why buckle? Wasn't the Harbinger right? Hadn't Mr. Thomas Hart, vigilante, been trying to find an easy death all these recent months? Well, here it was!

The cop he'd shot came back to him then. He'd been dressed as a terrorist. It had been a trap. Then why did he feel so damn bad about it?

The car rocked. Nighthawk curled up behind the tree. Dancer stood, stared at the windshield. "Heartwrencher," she whispered.

What had the Harbinger of Justice said? "You can't make a difference when you're dead."

Damn straight. The world became clearer, then. Thomas Hart, Heartwrencher, clicked the seatbelt home. There were some things you couldn't change. And there were some things you could.

The Ford smashed into Sin. Bone and wire and blood spread everywhere. The hood crumpled. Glass shattered. The tree splintered but held. A bit of bumper wrapped around the tree and struck Nighthawk in the leg, shattering it. He screamed, a sound lost in the din of the crash.

Heartwrencher lurched forward. Even with a belt, he felt the crash. Ribs gave. Part of the floor crumpled upwards, trapping his right foot and snapping three toes. Glass came in from front and side.

And a second later, silence, except for Nighthawk swearing into the night. Lights from the main asylum complex came on.

Dancer pulled at the door, then yanked at Heartwrencher. She looked at his face: dead white in contrast to the red blood pouring from his nose. His eyes looked bloodshot.

"We've got to get the hell out of here," she said.

"Good thing you're here to carry me," Heartwrencher said. "Idiot King?"

"No sign. But something is definitely fishy. If he's here, we just flushed him out." Dancer grunted with effort.

"I can stand," Heartwrencher said. The car defied Hollywood and did not explode. Dancer let him go.

"Oof," he said as he fell. "Why don't you bring the car around?"

"Men," Dancer said, but left at a limping run.

Nighthawk crawled over. "Nice to see you up and around, Heartwrencher."

"I'm feeling much better, thank you." Heartwrencher felt attached to the ground. He couldn't have stood to save his life.

"Say, why didn't you use your radio to tell us you were coming?"

"I did!" In the distance, Dancer eased her bitchin' Camaro out of the bushes.

Nighthawk reached over to Heartwrencher's headset, flicked a switch. "It helps if you turn the mic on."

Heartwrencher laughed, then, and Nighthawk joined in.

Dancer found them that way, laughing and crying and moaning all at once.

"If you can laugh, you can get in the damn car. Come on."

November 30: Sunday, 10:33



They sat in the coffee shop, bandaged and bruised. Mike Stone had his leg in a cast. Thomas Hart had his ribs and toes bandaged. Dancer, with cuts to the bottom of her kicking foot, was least hurt. She got the coffee.

"It's not enough I have to do this all day, I have to do it for you guys, too!"

"We're buying," said Hart.

"Nice to get out," asked Stone.

"Yeah," said Hart. He sipped his coffee. "You know, I should get out more. Maybe I'll buy me a coffee shop like this one. What do you say?"

Stone rolled his eyes. "It's your money, man. Me, I gotta work for a living."

"You seem a bit more cheerful these days, Thomas," Dancer noted. She toyed with her cookie, breaking it into small bits.

"It helps to put old bones to rest," Hart said. He drained his cup. "More coffee?"

THE AUTHOR SAYS: "Heartwrencher's Lament" is a story about a vigilante who fights crime in the *Dark Champions* "Hudson City" setting by Hero Games. The characters and general background are taken from an upcoming campaign book called *Idiot King Rules*, scheduled for release sometime in early 1996.

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Babbage's World: The Steampunk Campaign

While not everyone is aware of it, Cyberpunk started as a movement within science fiction. The members of this movement have since moved on, but the effects of Cyberpunk can be felt in science fiction literature and gaming to this very day. One major new thread in the cyberpunk tapestry is steampunk, a new style of sci-fi literature that blends Victorian history with cyberpunk morality.

The defining element of the Babbage campaign is the creation of the analytical engine, Charles Babbage's design for a digital computer using gears and punch cards. In our reality, the analytical

engine, which would be the size of a football stadium, was never built. We would wait until the 1930's, a full hundred years later, until digital computers really became practical.

However, in the Babbage campaign world, the Analytical Engine is built, leading to great and rapid advances in technology. In effect, the industrial revolution never ends.

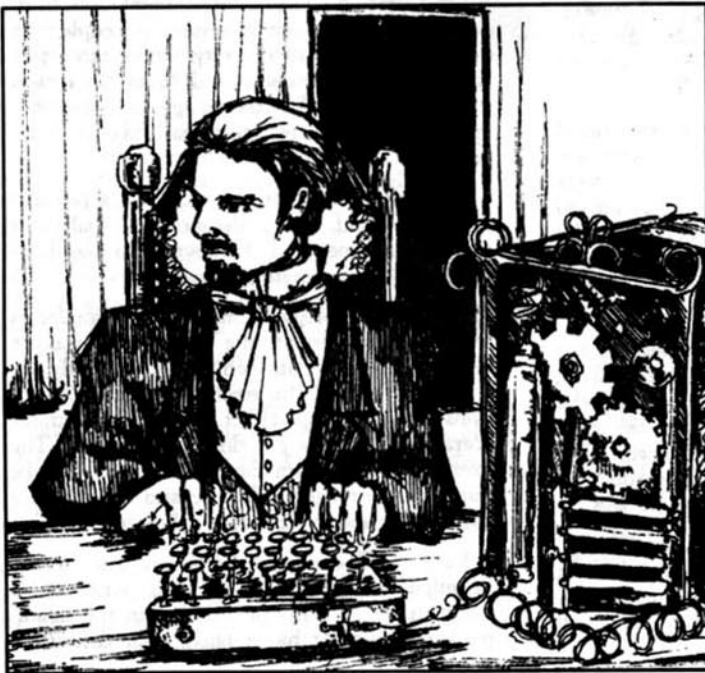
Huge corporations rise out of the sudden urbanization of Europe and America, and the underclass becomes a lot more dangerous. The steam engine and the steamboat bring Europe and America closer together, and the telegraph system is used in conjunction with the analytical engines throughout Europe and America to form an information web.

By 1855, Babbage's world is a totally different world from ours.

Timeline

The Industrial Revolution (circa 1730 - 1850)

The Industrial Revolution can be considered the single most important factor leading to the Victorian age of England. The Industrial Revolution led to the production of steam technology, an important part of the Victorian Age and the Steampunk cam-



By Joseph
Johaneman

Illustrations by
Intern Jen

Further Readings In Steampunk

The Difference Engine, William Gibson & Bruce Sterling. This novel is to steampunk as Gibson's *Neuromancer* is to cyberpunk. Not just useful source material, but also a ripping good yarn.

Space: 1889, by Frank Chadwick (GDW). Heavy on the steam, and almost totally lacking in punk, but nevertheless an excellent place to go for flavor. You could run a Babbage campaign here with a minimum of retrofitting.

Castle Falkenstein, by Mike Pondsmith (R. Talsorian). The reigning steampunk game, and with good reason. Babbage gets a mention in the rulebook. Be sure to check out the "Magic Works" option first.

paing. The Industrial Revolution also encouraged urbanization (the movement from small communities to cities). The increase in the population during the Industrial Revolution was phenomenal, and the prices of many goods dropped dramatically as machines took over the jobs that people once had.

The Victorian Age (circa 1850-1906)

This period of time defines an era where the working class gained some measure of power in our world. Unfortunately, in Babbage's world, the Corporations that rise from the increased use of technology force the underclass back down. The poor remain unrepresented and uncared for.

In Babbage's world, Charles Babbage started work on the Analytical Engine a full three years before he did in our world. Thus in 1830, with the full cooperation of the British Government, Babbage started construction of the Analytical Engine just outside of London.

The Analytical Engine was completed in 1833 and was the size of a football stadium. It used gears and levers rather than integrated circuits or vacuum tubes. Babbage started to sell time slots on his Analytical Engine to small companies that needed to do large calculations. Unfortunately for Babbage, he didn't realize that Britain's aid made the machine theirs. In 1835, the English government seized the Analytical Engine and made Babbage's patents their own. Babbage committed suicide in December of the same year.

England allowed copies of the difference engine design to fall into the hands of Ted Mulligan, a genius who existed in Babbage's world, but not in ours. Mulligan improved the design a thousand-fold, and in 1836, he was hired as a consultant to the state, and he sold his design for the new and improved "Analyzing Machine" to England.

The new machine included magnetic based memory storage, smaller, faster gear operations, and an improved user interface. No longer were punchcards necessary. The user could command the analyzing machine through a keyboard. The users typing was copied onto paper by the machine. The machine was as small as a modern day chicken coop.

England started leasing out the design of the Analyzing Machine in 1837. France, Italy, and the United States immediately jumped on the Analyzing Machine bandwagon, and by 1840, France had eight. Unfortunately, whenever one of the machines was built, its core programming had to be placed in by hand because there was no other way to enter the code.

The telegraph, which was modified by Morse in 1844, became an obvious relay of information. Suddenly it became possible to talk to people all

over the world, especially with the invention of the relay. The telegraph relay was used to hook the machines together, allowing them to communicate to each other and send information. The net was born.

Small companies started pooling their resources in order to get access to these analyzing machines. By 1850, these conglomerates grew into huge multinational corporations, and each corporation owned at least one analyzing engine. These corporations started to yield grant political influence throughout Europe and the United States.

The year is 1855, and the world is a very different place.

Characteristics of the Steampunk Campaign

There are several characteristics that are a major part of the Babbage Campaign. The Steampunk campaign is more than just a mix of Victorian roleplaying and Cyberpunk roleplaying. It is a carefully balanced entity in its own right.

Respectability - Respectability is a large part of Victorian England, were people were classified as respectable or not respectable. Those people that were considered respectable (middle class or higher) followed a strict societal code. Etiquette was followed to the point of absurdity, and ridiculous taboos were common. Those people who resisted Etiquette or Taboo were considered not respectable. (Thus was born the dividing line between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor.)

Urbanization - The industrial revolution, by its nature, encouraged the movement of people from their rural homes to the city, where more jobs could be found. European and American society started to move away from an agricultural economy and developed a technological and trade economy.

Peaceful - The Victorian Age was a peaceful era in our world, and for the most part, Babbage's world is also peaceful. However, war has been replaced with corporate espionage.

Steam Technology - One of the major forces that moved Europe into the Victorian age was the development of steam technology, especially the steam engine and the steamboat. These inventions brought Europe closer together, since transportation time was cut down enormously. The invention of the steam engine allowed goods to be distributed throughout Europe and the US at a much faster and cheaper rate.

Punk - The defining characteristic of the Steampunk campaign. The word punk means many things to many people, but in the steampunk campaign it has a fairly clear definition.

Punk is those elements having to do with the underclass. Punk is technology in the hands of the masses, and an ever expanding counterculture beneath regular society.

A major element of steampunk is the use of drugs. Drugs play an important part in the underclass's existence. Most of the underclass's addicts are alcoholics, since they can't afford the more expensive "snuff" (cocaine). Note that player characters are heroes in the Steampunk campaign and should transcend their fellows in the underclass. This does not mean that they can't have a drug problem however, since it makes a good weakness.

Adventuring in the Babbage Campaign

There are several roles that players can portray in the Steampunk campaign. The following are just examples:

The Enforcer - This character works for one of the corporations, or maybe she's a mercenary. Whatever the case, the enforcer's job is to destroy the corporations' enemies, get revenge on data pirates and corporate spies, and to protect the corporate elite from rival companies' enforcers.

The Data Pirate - The data pirate is a maverick who knows the ins and outs of analyzing machine design and programming. Data pirates break through the codes in rival companies analyzing machines and steal the data. Unlike the data pirates of the Cyberpunk world, Steampunk data pirates can't jack into their analyzing machines. Instead, they operate just as any user would, through its keypad.

Corporate Spy - The Corporate spy attempts to get hired by his company's competitors and steal their information. Sometimes corporate spies steal from the companies they work for and sell it to the highest bidder.

Law Enforcement Agent - The character is a police officer, or maybe a detective with Scotland Yard. Her job is to stop corruption, protect the upper and middle classes, and to stop enforcers and corporate spies from waging open war in the

streets. Usually a thankless job, especially if the character tries to defend the rights of the lower class.

Nobility - The nobles are supposedly the rulers in Steampunk Europe, but it is the Corporations that are the true rulers. Most nobles fall into the respectable category, though a few refuse to follow court culture and are thus considered not respectable. Nobles almost always have the advantage of money and Court politics play a large part in their lives.



Reporter - With the steampunk information net in place, reporters have access to large pieces of information, research, and telecommunications over telegraph lines. The reporter will want to be the first to get the story, and will often take chances to get her story.

Several common traits in the steampunk campaign are Money, Respectable or Not Respectable, Addiction, Analyzing Machine Knowledge, Analyzing Machine programming, codebreaking, stealth, alertness, and contacts.

Women in Babbage's World

In the Victorian Age, women were considered frail and men thought that they needed to be protected. In Babbage's World, the harsh existence of the underclass, coupled with the Corporations need for intelligent and driven people, has freed women from their social chains much earlier than in our world. While men still think that women need to be protected, they recognize that many positions of power are now filled by women.

Some Options for the Steampunk Campaign

The steampunk campaign is fun and interesting in its own right, but when any of the following optional campaign extensions are used, the campaign takes on new depth and excitement:

Magic Works

In this Steampunk campaign, magic actually works, and just about everyone knows it. The players could be magicians, working for the corporations. If magic worked in the steampunk campaign, then trains and steamboats would be obsolete, since magicians could probably teleport across the planet. Analyzing engines could be connected to each other through specially constructed magic portals, and spells would exist to protect analyzing

engines. Of course, spells would also exist to break into them!

Ether Space - The Victorian scientists were right: Ether really does fill the vacuum of space. Using an analyzing machine, a group of scientists develop a way to travel through the ether. Thus characters could take journeys through the ether to other planets. Victorian people believed that people actually lived on Mars and Venus, and it was during the Victorian Age that people believed in the canals on Mars. Maybe they were right!

Revolution - The underclass just isn't gonna take it anymore. They rise up and try to overthrow the monarchy. The Corporations side with the European nations, and people found supporting the revolution get public executions. Corporate enforcers are used to hunt down the revolution's leaders. PCs could either be revolutionaries, or they could be trying to stop the revolution.

America, Home of the Enslaved - In a tragic turn of events, the corporations in America wield enough political power to overthrow the US government. Within a matter of months, the new US takes over Canada and Mexico and starts a campaign to annex Central America. The PCs are trying to set things right, or maybe they're just trying to survive.

No matter if you use these options or not, the Steampunk campaign can provide many adventures for your PCs. With the gritty Cyberpunk morality, mixed with Victorian technology, the PCs are likely to be shocked many times by the complexity of the stories you can weave.



Team Phoenix

"tell yah," Hard Corpse said leaning back in his chair until it groaned under his weight, "I ain't never seen nothing like this." He took another swig of Estro-gin, then set the bottle down hard.

"There were two of them, boosters both... I guess Deathmonger and me were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We spotted them sneaking out of the second story of the Bureau of Vital Statistics. One had a thin, black courier tube slung across his back. Death thought it might contain something interesting, something we could sell — whipped out his MegaGat and began firing. Put a bullet in the first one's skull, but the second slipped back inside and began ripping.

"I don't know what kind of gun that was — a bulky, brickish thing by its looks, but it tossed enough ammo our way to keep us hopping from cover to cover. After a few seconds, I got bored with the scene, yanked out my grenade launcher and took out the whole wall. Me and Death went over to stake our claim. Death lifted the auto-pistol from the first corpse and showed it to me.

"Custom job, ain't got no marks," he said, then pointed it down an alley and squeezed the trigger. Next thing I know, I'm tossed across the street, half deaf and scorched from the explosion. When I looked back, Deathmonger lay sprawled in the opposite gutter — the right half of his body missing. I figure the gun had some sort of booby trap, but like I said, I ain't never seen nothing like it."

Thin Red Line was one of the first generation of boosted soldiers. At the age of nineteen, a latent genetic deficiency manifested, impairing her body's ability to replace lost cells. An otherwise degenerative, incurable disease made her the

ideal candidate for Allied Mayhem's genetic experiments. Red hesitantly volunteered, seeing the procedure as her only chance to live a somewhat-normal life.

While her thin frame limited her usefulness as front-line infantry, her naturally quick wit and nimbleness suggested other possibilities. Vastly increasing her intelligence and perceptive abilities, Allied Mayhem turned her into a highly effective intelligence agent.

In return, Thin Red Line spent two tours hopping from one hot spot to another. Once in country she would begin evaluating the society's stability — carefully noting any weak spots or keystone elements. AMI execs. then used this information to plan appropriate covert actions. Thanks to Red, many countries fell into chaos after a single, surgically precise attack.

As her tours passed, Red became an expert in entropy, chaos and social disorder. Her predictions became increasingly accurate — almost precognitive. She intuitively knew where a society was headed, what forces drove it and what held it together.

Then ten years ago, Thin Red Line mustered out. She planned to return to the States, hoping to build a civilian life, but her years in the military continued to haunt her. Her experience-hardened instincts found the signs of deterioration and collapse spreading throughout her own country.

For months, she examined every detail of American society, studying the growing trends toward violence and apathy. After checking and rechecking her results, she came to one

Preserving
the Finest,
Abandoning
All Else,

Building a
Stronger
Society

On the Ashes
of Today.

—Team
Phoenix
Motto

A Shadowy
Underground[™]
Organization

by Rich
Warren

Artwork by
Brad K.
McDevitt

Thin Red Line

Str: 1
 Dex: 7
 Spd: 3
 Res: 2
 Int: 12
 Will: 3
 Aura: 4
 Tolerance: 6
 Skills:
 Acrobatics (+3) 10
 Administration (+2) 6
 Business (+2) 14
 Computer Science (+2) 14
 Detective (+4) 16
 Gun Combat (+2) 9
 Leadership (+3) 6
 Military Science (+2) 14
 Psychology (+3) 15
 Social Science (+3) 15
 Streetwise (+2) 5
 Thief (+4) 11
 Enhancements:
 Boosted Dex 9 (2 c)
 Boosted Intellect 19 (2 c)
 Empathy 6 (0)
 Enhanced Hearing 10 (0)
 Code: Will never abandon her ideals
 Traits: Curious, needs to control everything around her

Thin Red Line is a small, thin woman with thick red hair. She appears entirely normal except that her head seems out of proportion to the rest of her body (roughly 50% larger than a normal). Red tends toward quiet, introspective behavior, though she can become quite animated when discussing her plans for Team Phoenix. She has an honest desire to save people, but has completely turned her back on modern society. In her mind, the travesty of modern society must be wiped away before she can make any advances.

inescapable conclusion — the United States had less than twenty-five years of life remaining. The Great Collapse, as Red named it, was unavoidable. We had crossed a threshold and cannot go back.

But AMI trained Thin Red Line to find opportunities in any situation. The great collapse was not the end, merely a change. A new society would arise from the ashes. If she prepared — hoarded resources, archived human knowledge — perhaps she could shape that society.

To this end, she created Team Phoenix: A secret intelligence organization dedicated to gathering and preserving the best aspects of her world. Team Phoenix focused on hoarding technology, information and resources to rebuild a better, stronger society. Since the Great Collapse is inevitable, Thin Red did not concern herself with improving or maintaining current condition. In fact, many Team Phoenix projects directly contribute to the worsening of the world.

Officially, Team Phoenix proposes the creation of a government in which boosted, non-boosted and pre-frontals have the same rights and responsibilities. Not that all are created equal — clearly some people's abilities (natural or otherwise) far exceed others. Still, everyone will have their place in the new society, and they will all be treated equally under the law.

Unfortunately the organization's emphasis on boosted vets has cast a shadow on those ideals. Most of the leadership is boosted, and many of Team Phoenix's operatives openly believe in the supremacy of the Homo Superior. Some even sympathize with movements like Eugenix. In addition, Thin Red Line plans to create an army of boosted operatives once the Great Collapse begins. Several prominent non-boosted members have accused Thin Red Line of organizing a Homo Superior coup. Of these people, most remain loyal — hoping for their own genetic enhancement.

Team Phoenix Organization:

Team Phoenix consists of four main branches: administrative, data/resource, research and operative. The administrative branch directs the actions of the organization as a whole. Data/resource maintains and stockpiles technology and information. Research develops new technologies, and the operatives act as security, field agents and black marketeers. Historically, admin and D&R have been the most powerful branches of Team Phoenix; however, a growing emphasis on research has allowed that branch to usurp D&R's position. The operative branch remains

the weakest of the four, despite its direct involvement with outside events; however, its proposed expansion during the early days of the great collapse will cause it to overshadow the other three.

Team Phoenix organizes all its branches into cells of one to twenty members, seven being the average. Cells act individually or communally, depending on the security needs of the area. For example, new operative cells often report to a single individual whose identity remains concealed, while most research cells work with multiple partners across the world. This flexibility allows each branch and region to adapt the basic structure to their exact needs.

Individual cells report to either a local admin. cell, or a regional base. Regional bases form the center of operations for the admin branch. Headed by a regional director, they are the worldwide hubs for gathering and disseminating information, technology, equipment and other resources.

Thin Red Line controls the South-West Coastal Region (consisting of most of California, some of Nevada and a bit of Arizona). Technically, all other regions are subordinate to South-West Coastal; however, each region maintains a large amount of autonomy. Thin Red's control over the whole organization has shrunk to monitoring the network of information between regional bases, thus keeping apprised of Team Phoenix's actions on a global scale. She reports the status of the organization, issues long-term goals and organizes occasional, multi-region operations.

Other than Thin Red's limited directorship, Team Phoenix has no true center — most decisions grow out of the communal effort of all regional directors. This guarantees that Team Phoenix will survive the destruction of any one regional base.

Similarly yet separate, the D&R branch maintains hidden data/resource caches, scattered across the United States. While D&R readily provides needed information and equipment, they keep the locations of their caches secret. Each D&R head, the leader of one cache, will know the location of a few other caches. No one knows them all.

Six years ago, D&R issued standing orders that all Team Phoenix operatives must record their missions for future reference (using a program like Pueblo Commando). This information has become the mainstay of the D&R branch. Hundreds of data technicians sift through these recordings, compile the most vital information and make it available to the regional bases. This



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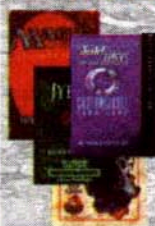
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gives most cells access to database programs that lists vital information on boosted and important, non-boosted people in their area (similar to Pablo's Snitch, but with a 30-50% chance to recognize people).

Finally, operatives and researchers work strictly at the cell level under the supervision of their local admin base or cell. Still, these two branches are not without representation, as ex-researchers and operatives make up the bulk of the admin. branch.

Thinking Globally

Despite its original, American focus, Team Phoenix has grown into an international organization. While the bulk of its cells still operates in North America, a number now exist in Central and South America, Europe and Asia. Over the last ten years, Red's original theory has expanded to include the world as a whole. Even if the other countries survive their own problems, the destruction of the United States will surely signal their downfall. When the US collapses, it will drag the North American Confederation with it. This will destabilize world trade and trigger the fall of the Far East Collective and the European Common Market.

Team Phoenix Technology

While originally specializing in information gathering and storage technology, Team Phoenix's research has spread into other areas. As the organization grew, Thin Red Line hired scientists and acquired entire businesses to ensure the technical knowledge neces-

sary for her vision. Today, Team Phoenix's research branch focuses on three main areas: genotech, computers and "wet wiring".

Each regional base maintains their own collec-

tion of genetic engineers, with labs rivaling those of the military corporations; however, a special emphasis in Slumberland and reconditioning makes Team Phoenix's creations less susceptible to Magnetic Feedback Trauma (in game terms, they spend \$7,000,000 on reconditioning, giving a counselor skill of 14). Currently, Team Phoenix produces very few boosters, due to the risk of discovery. Full-scale production will begin during the early stages of the Great Collapse.

Team Phoenix also experiments on boosting animals. Besides producing enhanced guardians, this research also stretches the bounds of genetic surgery. Several labs currently experiment on extending the genetic alterations to the subject's germ line (the genetic traits that pass to the subject's children). Others have begun enhancing fetal animals. The fetal research has shown promising results on dogs. It simplifies the genetic surgery, eliminates the need for Slumberland reconditioning and automatically alters the subject's germ line.

Unfortunately, fetal alterations do not allow the surgeon to tailor the enhancements to the subject's natural abilities.

In computers, Team Phoenix engineers and programmers continue to outpace commercial products—partially due to their habits of wholesale plagiarism. They take the best



Using Team Phoenix Elsewhere

Team

Phoenix is a group admirably suited to any dark near-future game in which the world is going to pot. Adjust the specifics as necessary; for instance, in *Shadowrun*, Team Phoenix would doubtless have a mage, or team of mages, in most D/R sections.

Hardcore+ Crowd Pleaser IA

12mm, Drum Fed

Acc: +1, Pen: 10, Dmg:

LW, MW, HW, IN, Rng:

7/13/14, Ammo: 25,

Rate: 1/4, Str: 2, Res: 13

40mm Grenade

Launcher, Revolver

Acc: -2, Pen: 16, Dmg:

LW, MW, HW, IN, Rng:

5/10/14, Ammo: 4, Rate:

1, Str: 2, Res: 14

Cost: 225,000

Availability: Special

Standard issue to Team

Phoenix operatives.

Difficult for anyone else

in Team Phoenix to

acquire. None sold to

outsiders.

Hardcore+ designed this

auto-pistol specifically for

Team Phoenix. It has

become the standard

sidearm for Phoenix oper-

atives.

Despite its deceptively

bulky appearance, the

Crowd Pleaser is an

unparalleled feat of preci-

sion engineering. Its deli-

cate balancing and recoil-

less construction makes

even full auto seem

smooth. Light enough for

the non-boosted, it packs

sufficient stopping power

to handle all but the

heaviest opponents. Its

rate of fire exceeds all

full-auto weapons, equal-

ing many mini-guns, yet

it rarely jams (only on a 3

or less).

Hardcore+ specially crafts

each gun to fit in its

user's hand. Additionally,

a palm reader in its grip

keeps the weapon from

firing unless held by its

owner. If someone else

tries to fire the gun, it

explodes (blast 3, pene-

tration 12).

The wielder can also pro-

gram this self-destruct

mechanism as a "dead

switch." The gun ties

into the wielder's com-

puter pack, monitoring

his vital signs through

Pueblo Commando (or a

similar program). If the

wielder becomes incapac-

itated, the gun explodes.

continued...

stuff on the market, tear it apart, clean it up and piece it back together. Team Phoenix also maintains many impressive machines — most boasting five or more bio-drives.

Each phoenix regional base has at least four computers, and many cells have at least one.



Computer engineers have built even larger database compilers for the D&R branch.

Finally, with their usual willingness to ignore the law, Team Phoenix continues to improve wet-wiring techniques. By wet-wiring rats, mice and other urban creatures (in combination with the more-traditional hawks and eagles), they have developed thousands of nonhuman spies. Fear of discovery limits their potential use, but many cells keep five to ten wet-wired rodents as information gatherers.

Team Phoenix Industry

Team Phoenix's research facilities have not remained limited to the strictly scientific. To fund the organization, Team Phoenix has converted many of their research cells into legal and illegal industries. One of their most profitable (and most controversial) is the sale of black market arms.

Besides providing stolen military hardware to the general public, Team Phoenix makes and markets its own weaponry. About five years ago, Thin Red Line bought Hardcore+ Munitions Experts, a gun company focusing on bleeding-edge technology and made-to-order weaponry. Hardcore+ continues to make money for Team Phoenix, but

more importantly — it gives Team Phoenix unparalleled (and unregistered) weapons.

Hardcore+'s top-of-the-line material is only available to Team Phoenix operatives. To ensure their technological edge, they equip these guns with a dead-switch, guaranteeing the weapon will

explode before falling into someone else's hands. This allows Team Phoenix operatives to enter any combat zone, comfortable in the knowledge that their heat is the hottest around.

Other Phoenix industries range from designer pharmaceuticals and entertainment to real estate and agriculture. Their diversification guarantees sufficient funds to keep the organization running, while providing a broad foundation for their new society.

Phoenix Setbacks

Over its ten-year history, Team Phoenix has had its share of setbacks and disasters. The two most infamous are the X-wheat dust bowl and the grand rampage.

X-grains are a Team Phoenix creation — grains genetically engineered to produce all nutrients necessary for a balanced diet. Furthermore, their hearty nature allows them to grow in all but the poorest soil. X-grain distribution throughout the third world could drastically cut or even eliminate hunger and malnutrition. While Team Phoenix has perfected several varieties of X-grains, they continue to withhold distribution until after the Great Collapse. These grains will become another

bargaining chip to insure loyalty and security in Thin Red's new society.

Four years ago, during the field testing of X-wheat 4.3A, the plant so aggressively drew nutrients from the soil that it left a 100-acre (and spreading) patch of sterile dirt. The resulting dust bowl eventually caught the attention of the USDA-GAP (United States Department of Agriculture — Genetically Altered Produce). Their analysis of the organic traces left in the soil quickly verified the presence of unstable, genetically altered plants. Further investigations threatened to uncover the existence of Team Phoenix. The Midwest Region scrambled to cover its tracks, an operation later known as the Scapegoat Maneuvers. Their operatives planted a false trail that led the USDA-GAP investigators to an innocent research group working on nitrogen-binding bacteria. The resulting arrests briefly caught the attention of the worldwide media, then slipped back into obscurity.

The second setback occurred when a phoenix-built Homo-Superior suffered severe Magnetic Feedback Trauma inside Chicago's thirty-story hyper-mall. After the local police subdued him (involving an estimated loss of 176 lives, five police officers and \$13,453,200 in damages), the coroner tried to identify the responsible military corporation by analyzing the Homo-Superior's genetic signature — discovering that the signature matched no known enhancement labs.

Fear of an unknown and unregulated enhancement

lab prompted an investigation by the FBI. Though the investigation has gone nowhere, it continues to this day.



Use In Your Game

Team Phoenix has many potential uses in your Underground game. For example, Team Phoenix could recruit the characters as a new operative cell—working near-blind, receiving orders and reporting to a single, mysterious source. Alternately, they could become staff members in a large, regional base. Here they would have greater access to information and equipment. Finally, Team Phoenix can make a very powerful, well-organized antagonist.

All three examples provide interesting opportunities for role-playing. Team Phoenix is a morally gray organization: its goals may be worthy of praise, but many of its current actions seem self-serving, antisocial or morally corrupt. Whether the characters join or oppose Team Phoenix, they should be confronted with both aspects of the organization: forced to decide the truth for themselves.

Operatives must activate the dead switch when working on sensitive assignments.

Finally, the Crowd Pleaser 1B comes with Firefight+ (memory 5), an upgraded version of Pueblo's famous Firefight program. It reduces Medium, long range and movement difficulty modifiers by one. Improved threat-evaluation routines now include environmental considerations and information on bystanders, but the most noticeable difference is in the select fire mode. The wielder can fire the gun full-auto into a crowd, while only hitting the bad guys. This drops the weapon's rate of fire to 3, and gives all targets a +3 modifier due to cover. Any shots that miss have a 1 in 10 chance of striking a bystander.

Three months ago, Hardcore+ released the beta Crowd Pleaser 1B—a booster-only version that replaces the 12mm barrel with twin, linked 20mms. Unfortunately, this version seems prone to jams (on a 5 or less). While Hardcore+ works to solve this problem, they have equipped the beta versions with a spring-mounted bayonet. When triggered, the foot and a half bayonet emerges from below the grenade launcher (Pen: 6, Dmg: LW, LW, MW, HW, -1 to the weapon's accuracy).

Hardcore+ Crowd Pleaser 1B

Twin, linked 20mm, Drum Fed
Acc: 0, Pen: 14, Dmg: LW, MW, HW, IN, Rtg: 8/13/14, Ammo: 20, Rate: 1/4, Str: 9, Res: 12
40mm Grenade Launcher, Revolver
Acc: -2, Pen: 16, Dmg: LW, MW, HW, IN, Rng: 5/10/14, Ammo: 4, Rate: 1, Str: 2, Res: 14
Cost: 250,000

Availability: Experimental

**A DBA
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**Screenplay
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Matt Staroscik &
John Wick**

**Editing
D.J. Trindle and
Intern Jen**

**Starring
Your Hapless
Players**

**Directed by
You**

DISCLAIMER

Crude Oil is an adventure to be used in the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. It contains material that may not be suitable for readers. (That means there's some gross and disillusioning stuff in here, people.) Those who think that good always overcomes evil and that heroes always succeed may be disappointed after playing *Crude Oil*. You have been warned.

CALL STAY

Crude

Introduction

"Crude Oil" is an introductory adventure for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. The actual scenario is fairly short, and should be able to be played within a single evening. This is also part one of a two-part adventure. The second part picks up in the 1990s, nearly seventy years after the first part wraps up. Your players will be taking the roles of Agency Detectives and FBI agents in both eras, investigating the strange goings on in the small town of New Jerusalem. Their success or failure in the first part of the scenario will have a significant effect on the second part.

Background

The year is 1928. It's February and everything is covered in a fresh coat of snow. Thick flakes are still falling from the black winter sky. The small town of New Jerusalem (located just forty miles south of Boston) is about to encounter the horror of the Cthulhu Mythos. The town popped up around oil baron Sean O'Bannon. The Irishman was a petty gangster until he stumbled across his small oil field five years ago. Now he's a millionaire with a dead wife and a wild-eyed red-haired daughter. His oil field has three pumps and forty employees. What he doesn't know about is that his drilling operation has tapped into a lost temple of Tsathoggua where hundreds of Formless Spawn are sleeping. The drilling has disturbed their rest. The foreman, Scott Ridley, happened across one particularly intelligent Spawn two weeks ago. The Spawn flowed its viscous form into Ridley's body and took over his mind. The Ridley-Spawn then began making preparations to release the rest of its brothers from captivity. When Ridley disappeared, O'Bannon became concerned, but quickly replaced Ridley with another worker, Arthur Whipple. That was a two weeks ago. Three days ago, Arthur Whipple stumbled across Ridley on the site. Ridley and Whipple were competing for the affections of Kathy O'Bannon (Sean's lovely and rather randy daughter). Whipple had a bit too much to drink and the Ridley-Spawn didn't want its activities discovered. The Ridley-Spawn killed Whipple and dumped his body into the river. Three days later, the body was discovered down stream in Vermont. Since the body floated across state lines, the FBI was called in on the case. This is where our intrepid investigators come in....

Crude Oil

Oil

Adventure Structure

Crude Oil is divided into Days. Each Day contains four parts: **Events** (which tells you the things that will happen each day, regardless of the Investigator's actions), **Goals** (the things your Investigators should have done by the end of each Day), **Consequences** (what happens if they do or don't get things done), and **Details** (which fills you in on little details you can include to make you look thorough to your players).

Adventure Overview

On the **First Day**, the Investigators will arrive, have breakfast with O'Bannon and look at Whipple's body. That night, the Ridley-Spawn will perform its first sacrifice at the well, the first step in freeing the other Spawn.

On the **Second Day**, the Investigators will find evidence of the sacrifice and will get contacted by a very flustered Kathy O'Bannon. She will let them in on a few secrets just before she wanders off to the beach to get killed by the Ridley-Spawn. The Investigators will want to wait for the Spawn to show up at Well #3, but they will get detoured by the angry Irishman when his daughter's body gets discovered.

The **Third Day** will give the Investigators Kathy O'Bannon's diary, along with the secret rendezvous point she used to share with her two lovers. The Investigators will check out the lair of the Ridley-Spawn, and discover more than they wanted to know. Finally, at midnight, they will be forced to confront the Spawn on its own terms. Their success or failure will set up the circumstances for the Second Part of the adventure next month.

Day One

Events

- 5:00 AM: FBI Investigators arrive by train. Investigators from Burns agency have already been there for a couple of hours.

FBI Agents' Briefing

The FBI agents in "Crude Oil" are dispatched from the Boston bureau. They are brought into the case because Arthur Whipple's body, which was dumped in the Durant River, floated all the way into Vermont before it was found. The fact that the corpse crossed state lines, and the gruesome nature of the murder aroused the FBI's interest.

Consequently, Special Agent Harcourt, the PC's supervisor in Boston, sends them via train to New Jerusalem. Before they depart, Harcourt will give them the following briefing:

"Yesterday the mangled corpse of Arthur Whipple, an oil field worker from New Jerusalem was found in the Durant river, over the border in Vermont. As the body crossed state lines, our charter permits us to involve ourselves in the investigation - and we have also been contacted with a request for assistance from the sheriff in New Jerusalem. He will have more details for you upon your arrival, but keep in mind that all may not be as it seems. The owner of the oil field the victim worked in, Sean O'Bannon, has connections to East Coast organized crime. We've never been able to pin anything directly on him but his ties to the Finnerty family is well-documented. He is not a suspect at this point, but I felt you needed to be aware of his history. Keep your eye on him, but don't turn this into a fishing expedition; the sheriff already has a suspect in mind, a co-worker of the late Mr. Whipple. I don't have all the details, but it sounds like a promising lead. Are there any questions?"

[Continued next page]

FBI Agents' Briefing (Continued)

If not, Ms. Graves has your tickets — I believe your train leaves at midnight."

If the PCs ask the right questions, Harcourt will volunteer the following information.

- The victim seemed to have been killed by severe physical trauma to the upper body, but the nature of the murder weapon is currently unknown.

- O'Bannon has been clean for the last few years, as far as the Bureau knows. It may be that his new-found wealth from the oil business and the work of running his small field has reformed him.

- New Jerusalem has one of a handful of profitable oil fields on this part of the East Coast.

- O'Bannon's wife died a couple of years ago; his daughter lives with him.

To inquiries that fall outside of these grounds, Harcourt will either claim ignorance ("That's why I'm sending you, Special Agent!") or tell the PCs to speak with New Jerusalem's sheriff, who has the whole story. If the investigators ask some questions that are way off base ("How long has the Finnerty family been active in Boston?"), Harcourt will tell them straight out he thinks they're barking up the wrong tree.

- 8:00 AM: Breakfast and debriefing with O'Bannon.

- 10:00 AM: Investigators will view the body of Whipple at the local doctor's home.

- 11:00 PM: The Ridley-Spawn kidnaps a child. It is lucky enough to find the child's window open and makes off with the child without incident.

- 12:00 AM: The Ridley-Spawn sacrifices the child at Well #3.

Goals

The Investigators are expected to be brought up to speed on the events of the last couple of weeks and formulate a plan of attack for the next couple of days. O'Bannon will help them in any way he can, but the information he has is limited.

Consequences

The only real event of any consequence is the kidnapping of the child. The locals will find the withered body in the morning. The Ridley-Spawn will sacrifice the child, and will have transferred Power into the runes carved into the wellhead, thus bringing it closer to freeing its brethren.

Details For Day One

The agents are equipped with Colt 1911 .45ACP pistols, cameras, flashlights, and the usual assortment of handcuffs, notepads, and the like. They do not have radios. If they ask they will be allowed to take up to two 12 ga. shotguns, so long

as they are discreet about it; Harcourt doesn't want the Bureau to look like a pack of cowboys. Agent Reid Parker also has a small forensics evidence kit.

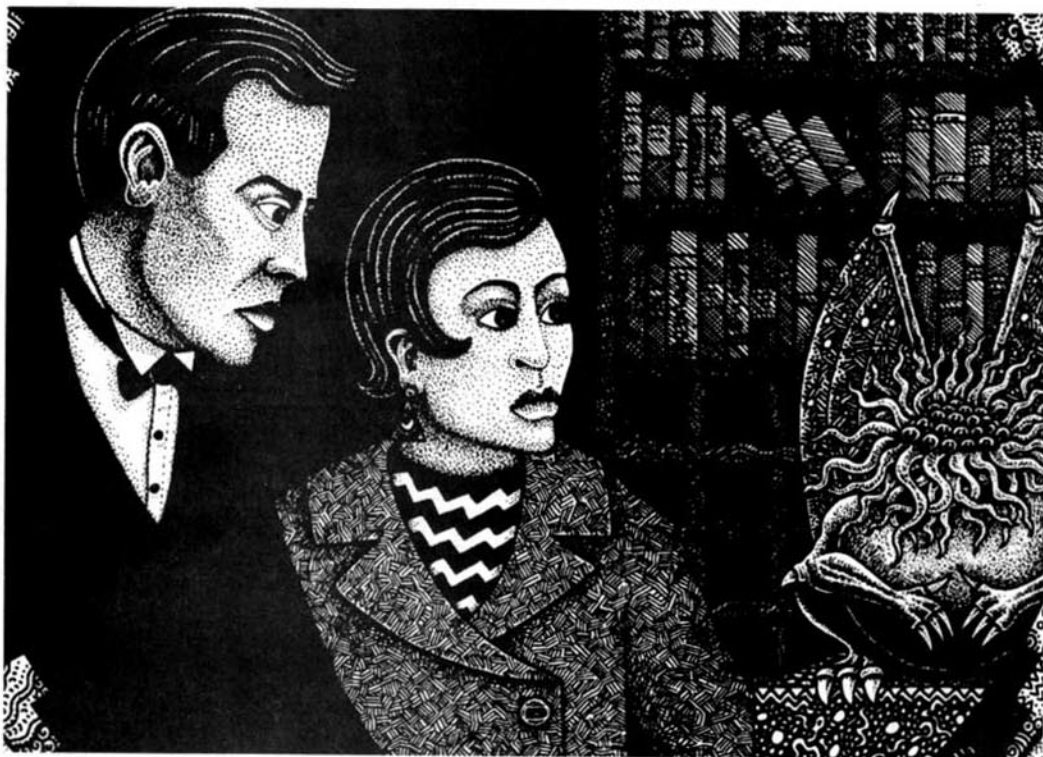
The agent's train leaves promptly at midnight, but mechanical trouble delays their arrival in New Jerusalem until approximately 5 A.M.

The Arrival

Give each of your players an "Investigator Run-Down" located at the end of this article. This will let them in on everything they need to know about their character. When they arrive in New Jerusalem, they all check into the local hotel (run by Joseph P. Cottonmaker, an old gray fellow who has a bad limp in his right leg that he got when he fell off the swings when he was seven) and are met by a big thug who tells them he's here to take them to O'Bannon. They drive up to the house in a black Packard Twin Six (the seven seater limo) and take a twenty minute drive through the snow-covered countryside to the house high on the hill overlooking the town.

When they arrive, they are offered brandy and escorted through the spacious and extravagant halls to the library. They will be quick to notice that the library is all but devoid of books. Empty shelves circle the room, but it is the only room in the mansion that sports a fireplace, and the Investigators can relish the warmth.

About twenty minutes after their arrival, the Investigators are greeted by the very Irish





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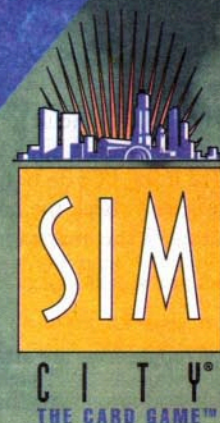
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O'Bannon. His red hair has not gone gray yet, and his steel blue eyes have no hint of fog. He is smaller than average, has a sloped jaw and a full set of teeth. His handshake is warm, and perceptive Investigators will notice a peculiar grip when he shakes their hand (a Federal agent shot off his little finger during a fire fight in Chicago two years ago). Sean O'Bannon is very tired and very cranky and more than a little drunk. Read or paraphrase the speech located in a sidebar nearby. This is all the pertinent information O'Bannon is willing to give them. When he's done, he'll send them on their way down to see what's left of poor little Whipple ...

The Autopsy

The local doctor, who has no pathological training, is ill-equipped to perform a detailed autopsy. Fortunately, Special Agent Parker is trained in the discipline, and the doctor will be more than happy to show him the body. Whipple's corpse is currently being stored in the doctor's shed, packed in snow to keep it fresh. It was returned to the town for burial (and police examination) only the day before. Agent Parker does not have all of the tools to conduct by-the-book autopsy, but he'll still be able to gather valuable information with nothing more than gloves, his kit, and lamp light.

Upon scraping away the snow, all the investigators except Agent Parker (and the doctor) need to make Sanity rolls. If they make the roll, they only lose 1 SAN. If they miss the roll, make them lose 1d3. Even the stoic Agent Parker is momentarily taken aback by the spectacle. Whipple has been torn almost in half; a huge ragged wound runs from his right upper torso down to approximately the location of his left kidney. From the wound jagged shards of his ribs protrude, and soft coils of intestine bulge and glisten in the lamp light. The body, which had been in the Durant River for several days, has taken on a repulsive gray-green tone, and facial features are gruesomely distorted by bloating.

Examination of Whipple's body will yield the following facts to Agent Parker upon successful Forensics rolls, or upon asking the right questions. The GM shouldn't hide information unless a roll is badly failed, or unless the player is going off on a tangent. Remember, Special Agent Reid Parker is a doctor, and a specialist in the field of forensic pathology. Reveal these facts in the order they are presented below.

- The murder weapon was not a blade. The wound is too jagged, and the bones show no

telltale nicks.

- Regular scrapes on the victim's back, and the back of the legs, would seem to indicate the body was dragged some distance after death.

- There is a large quantity of an oily black substance in the wound cavity. Traces are still visible in the hair, filming the eyes, and under the victim's nails.

- Bruising on the body indicates that the victim was tightly held, or perhaps crushed under an object, near the time of death. This bruising pattern is distinct from the small wounds caused by the body hitting debris in the river.

- The victim's throat was crushed. There is a curious bruise pattern extending all the way around the neck which is not attributable to hands, rope, or any other commonplace method of manual strangulation.

- The esophagus and stomach are curiously distended and ripped. The stomach has a tremendous tear in it. No stomach contents are recoverable.



- Judging by the manner in which the ribs are splintered and the internal organs are displaced, it seems that the body cavity was ruptured from the inside.

The PCs will not have time to have any lab work, like toxicology, done on the body. They may also be unable to identify the black liquid at first, but if any oil field worker (including O'Bannon) is shown a sample, they'll be able to identify it as crude oil.

Alert PCs will take photographs of the late Arthur Whipple. After the examination is complete the body can be prepared for burial.

Other Events

The rest of the day can be spent asking questions about Whipple. The only people who really knew him were his co-workers, and they will all say the same thing. Whipple was a quiet guy who kept to himself. He liked to read pulp magazines (he was especially fond of Robert E. Howard) and used to talk about going to college one day. They will also tell the Investigators that he and the old yard boss, Ridley, were competing for the affections of O'Bannon's lovely daughter Katherine. If the Investigators want to talk to Katherine, they'll discover that she's out of town for the day and will be returning late tonight. Everyone knows she's off in Boston spending her

O'Bannon's Speech

"I didn't call you," he says to the Federal Agents. "But I know why yer here. That's fine. If you get the job done, I'll be happy. Here's what I'm gonna tell ya, and ya'd betta listen up the first time 'cos I ain't gonna tell ya again. Two weeks ago, my foreman, that's Scotty Ridley, he disappeared without a moment's notice. That's bad. I liked Scotty. Then, just three days ago, the man who took his place, Arty Whipple's his name, he goes missing, too. That's bad. Now I ain't got nobody who knows how to work them pumps out there and everything shuts down for three days. Now just last night, Whipple gets found and he's floating down the river. All I know is that Whipple and Scotty were rivals for the job when I hired them. They ne'er got along well, those two. Now one of them turns up missin', I don't think nothin' of it, 'cos Arty couldn't hurt a fly and Scotty could whip the temper out of a bull if you gave 'im the chance. But now both 'ave turned up missing 'r dead and I don't have one clue why. You can talk to anyone on the yard, talk to anyone in town, I don't care. Just find Scotty and find out if he's still alive. Then find the guy who did this to me and rub him out. Make sure he never does it again."

If anyone dares to ask O'Bannon why he doesn't have some of his Chicago connections investigate, he'll get real angry and go to his desk. Then, he'll think twice about pulling the gun in his desk drawer and say between gritted teeth, "Why don't you just go out and do your job?"

Katherine's Diary Entry

Daddy's all wrong about Scotty and Arthur. I can't believe that he'd think that Scotty was sent from Boston, I just can't believe it. He was so gentle, so kind. Maybe I'll go down to the cave today and watch the waves roll in and listen to the sound of them crashing on the shore and think of Scotty. Poor Arthur.

Flashlights in 1927

The Investigators' options here are: flares, kerosene lanterns, gas lanterns, electric torches and carbide lamps. Flares will set off a blaze in the cave, so they may be a very bad idea. Kerosene lanterns explode when dropped, so they may also be risky. Gas lanterns are a bit more safe, but carbide lamps (because of the open flame) are right out. The best option would be electric torches. Their light is very weak and thrown in a beam. Batteries will keep them alive for 2-4 hours, long enough for the Investigators to wander around the dark tunnel. If it's dropped, give it a 75% chance of breaking the filament. It will take about 5-10 minutes to replace the filament, plenty of time for the Ridley-Spawn to sneak up on someone in that dark cave.

allowance on whiskey and roulette, but only a significant bribe can get anyone to say so.

The Investigators are free to drive up to Boston (it's only forty miles away), but they will only be wasting their time. Kathy O'Bannon does not want to be bothered, and even G-Men are going to have a problem getting into the places that she's hanging out in. If you feel like a little change of pace, however, feel free to have your Investigators shlep themselves up to Boston to hang out in ritzy gin joints rubbing shoulders with gangsters to ask Ms. O'Bannon some questions. It'll keep them out of town for a day and allow the Ridley-Spawn to claim its first victim.

Little Billy Bowyer

Billy is four years old. He lives at #3 Peyton Place. Earlier in the day, his mother threw a stray cat who had made its way into the apartment out the window of Billy's room. She's deathly allergic to cats, and in her anxiety, she forgot to latch the lock on the window. At approximately 11 PM, the Ridley-Spawn will open the unlocked window, snatch up little four year old Billy Bowyer and carry him out to the well where the little boy will have his POW sucked out of him in a dark ritual designed to release the Spawn's sleeping brothers. The mother will not notice that he's missing until 8 AM the next morning. By then, it will have been far too late.

Day Two

Events

- **6:00 AM:** The Investigators are summoned to Well #3 by the foreman. The workers have found carvings on the wellhead along with a large quantity of blood. Along with the runes and the blood, workers will also find the withered body of the child.

- **10:00 AM:** The Investigators receive a phone call from Kathy O'Bannon at their hotel. If they aren't there, they get a message when they return. She wants to meet them to tell them of her trysts with Ridley and Whipple.

- **12:00 Noon:** They meet with Kathy O'Bannon in a private place (an abandoned water well on Oak Street). She tells them all about Ridley and Whipple and their violent competition for her affections.

- **3:00 PM:** Kathy O'Bannon departs for the seashore. She wanders by the old cave where her father first found oil seepage and is killed by the Ridley-Spawn. The Spawn throws her body out into the ocean.

- **11:00 PM:** Kathy O'Bannon's body is found by two kids making out on the beach.

- **11:55 PM:** O'Bannon's thugs drag the Investigators away from whatever they are doing into a meeting with O'Bannon. He's furious about the death of his daughter and demands results.

- **12:00 PM:** The Ridley-Spawn performs the second rite and sacrifices another victim to empower the runes at Well #3.

- **After Midnight:** The Investigators learn that



Crude Oil

O'Bannon is leaving town and they gain another clue.

Goals

The runes, blood and remains of the child should clue the Investigators that it would be a good idea to stake out the well.

Talking with Kathy O'Bannon will give them a suspect with a motive (Ridley).

Investigators will want to question the townsfolk about Ridley. People to question: Co-workers, Ridley's Mom, his landlady and O'Bannon.

Consequences

If Investigators go to the well that night, O'Bannon's thugs will "pick them up" for a heated discussion with the Irishman about the death of his daughter. If the Investigators decide to leave someone behind, he'll have a lethal encounter with the Ridley-Spawn.

Details for Day Two

The Little Old Man

When the Investigators get called down to the site where Billy's body has been found, they will encounter what can best be described as a "little old man." Billy's tiny four-year-old body has been shriveled. His skin is tight on his bones, almost translucent. Bones poke at the thin layer of skin and the thick black ichor that was once his blood pumps slowly through his veins with a sickening slowness. That's right: Billy is still alive. He's clinging on to life with his single point of POW. Finding Billy in this state will cause the Investigators to lose 1/d4 SAN. If the Investigators try and move him to the local doctor, they will find that his extremities are as brittle as sandstone. Trying to lift Billy will only complicate matters, as his fingers and toes will disintegrate in the party's hands. This sight will cost the Investigators an additional 0/1 SAN. Finally, ask the Investigators who are carrying Billy make DEX checks. If one of them fails even once, Billy's corrupted body breaks in half and his organs and thick black blood spill all over the ground and the Investigators. This will cause a 1/1d6 SAN loss. Even if the Investigators get Billy to a vehicle, he will die before they can get a chance to get him to medical attention.

The other very important clue at the site are the runes that are carved around Well #3. They are indecipherable and the well workers cannot explain how they got there. However, there is blood smeared into the carvings (found with a successful Spot Hidden check).

O'Bannon's Daughter

The Investigators get a message from Katherine O'Bannon. The way she gets the message to them varies on where they are at around 10 AM. She could send out one of her daddy's thugs to meet them, she could leave a message at their hotel, or just find them herself. Either way, she needs to talk to them about... things.

Katherine is small with dark red hair and a trim figure that she accentuates with her dresses. She has her hair cut short (quite scandalous in such a small town) and wears soft make-up to highlight her bright green eyes. She meets the Investigators for lunch (or dinner, if that's more convenient) and tells them quite frankly about her affairs with Whipple and Ridley. She smokes clove cigarettes



during lunch and makes shrouded flirtations at each of the Investigators as she tells her story.

When she started her affair with Ridley, she did so just to anger her father. They used to meet at the cave that made her father rich: a little cavern by the ocean that is thick with oil seepage. Her father used it as a hide-out when the Feds got a bit too close. When he realized what the oil in the cave meant, he got some investors and made a killing. He moved his wife and daughter to New Jerusalem to get away from the action that was going on in Boston. He kept all his contacts, left on good terms and retired a rich man.

Katherine, however, did not approve of the

Power & Sanity in Call of Cthulhu

In CoC, a character's magic ability is represented by the Power stat. Power (usually abbreviated POW) is also a measure of a person's intangible "life force" and can be sucked away by some creatures or magic spells.

The Sanity (SAN) stat represents a character's mental resilience. Unfortunately for investigators, the eldritch horrors they face will often be so weird, so monstrous, that they will inflict terrible damage on the human psyche — hence the need for SAN rolls from time to time. Horrible mundane events, such as viewing a mangled corpse, can still have an impact on one's Sanity too.

If a character loses 5 or more points of SAN from one roll, they will go temporarily insane if they succeed in rolling under 5x their Intelligence on 1d100. (This is called an idea roll.) The duration and effects of temporary insanity are varied. The character may flee in panic, become catatonic, or lash out against friend and foe alike. Indefinite insanity results when a character loses 20% or more of the Sanity in one game hour. It lasts 1d6 game months. Characters who lose all their Sanity are driven barking mad, permanently. Consult page 46 of the CoC rules for more details, but let's hope for your players' sake you won't need them...



The Formless Spawn

STR 25
CON 13
SIZ 25
INT 24
DEX 19
POW 12/18/22 (First night/
Second night/Third night)

Damage Bonus 2d6
Hit Points 19

Weapons: Whip: 90%,
damage 1d6; Tentacle:
60%, damage DB;
Bludgeon: 20% damage DB;
Bite: 30% damage see
below.

When in this form, the Spawn may perform a special Bite Attack. The victim is instantly swallowed. Each round thereafter, the victim takes an additional point of damage from constriction (second round he loses two, third round he loses three, etc.). While swallowed, the victim may make no action whatsoever. The Spawn can continue to swallow prey, making one Swallow attack per turn, until it has swallowed 25 points worth of SIZ in Investigators. While Swallowing, a Spawn may not move from its current location. It may continue to fight, however. If it does move, it dislodges any swallowed Investigators.

move. She loved the lifestyle of a gangster's daughter, and when her mother died of cancer a year ago, she snapped. She drives up to Boston every night and gambles away her allowance and drinks until she can't stand and spends the night with men who don't even remember her name in the morning. She started flirting with Ridley just to watch her father's fury, but even that was not enough, so she started up another affair with Ridley's assistant and best friend, Arthur Whipple. The two friends suddenly turned into bitter competitors. The morning before Ridley disappeared, there was a fist fight between Ridley and Whipple that ended

up with the other oil workers pulling the men apart.

Katherine tells the Investigators all of this (the workers on the yard won't; they want to protect Ridley because of their strong devotion for the man) and tell them that she's convinced that Ridley did away with Whipple. She doesn't know how he did it; "He was always such a gentle man."

Whatever time the Investigators meet Katherine, she will leave them feeling nostalgic and will wander down to the cave at the beach. Unfortunately, that's also where the Ridley-Spawn is hanging out. She will see Ridley hiding in the cave, approach her old lover and try to embrace him. The Ridley-Spawn will proceed to tear her into pieces and throw her into the ocean. Her body will be found washed up on the shore by two kids from Boston University making out on the beach at approximately 11 PM. Their screams alert a deputy who's watching them with binoculars. He'll come down to the beach, recognize the bloated face and notify the sheriff and O'Bannon immediately.

Staking Out Well #3

If the Investigators start putting one and one together, they'll figure out that they'd better stake out the well tonight. If they don't, no big deal. They'll just have another body on their hands in the morning and fresh blood on the runes. But if they do decide to stake out the well, they're going to be in for a rude surprise.

At about 11:45, that black limousine pulls up to the yard and O'Bannon's three thugs step out and walk right up to the Investigators. The boss wants to see them *right now*. If they resist, they get blackjacked. Notify them that killing the thugs would be a bad idea. Such an act would bring bad press to the Bureau and would also endanger the investigation. Going along with the thugs is the best idea. Of course, if the Investigators want to split up and leave someone behind, they are more than welcome to do so.

The Ritual

At midnight, the Ridley-Spawn arrives with its new victim and begins the ritual once again. Any

Investigator watching the ritual will lose 1/d4 SAN as the dark sorcery rips holes in time and space. Also, anyone watching the ritual must make a POW vs. POW test or get sucked into the energies of the ritual. The ritual has a beginning POW of 10. Every turn, this POW gains one point. Every turn they remain near the site of the ritual, the Investigators must make a new POW vs. POW test. If they fail the test, they begin losing 1d6 Magic Points per turn. When they run out of Magic Points, they start losing a point of POW every turn. Remember, an Investigator with zero POW suffers the same fate as poor little Billy. The only way to stop the POW drain is to stop the ritual. The only way to do that is to face the Spawn.

Facing the Spawn

This is a bad idea.

The Investigators are not prepared to face the Spawn and will get themselves slaughtered if they try. Bullets will harm Ridley's body, but not the Spawn. Black ooze will spill out and perform a Whipping Strike at the Investigators, striking with a 60% accuracy for 1d6 damage. It can attack d3 Investigators within reach with this attack (reach of the Spawn is approximately 15' in this form). The Ridley-Spawn can also use an Enveloping attack with a 30% accuracy. The Envelope attack involves a part of the Spawn exploding from Ridley's body and squeezing an Investigator to death. It can only attack a single Investigator a turn this way, and it may still use its Whipping Attack on other Investigators while it uses its Enveloping Attack. Once the strike is successful, the Enveloped Investigator will take 1 damage per turn. Witnessing the Spawn use each attack for the first time will cause an Investigator 1/d4 SAN.

You can handle an encounter with the Spawn one of two ways. You can make it gentle, or you can make it hurt. If the Investigators don't get the clue that they are outclassed, even after they've shot the thing up, make it hurt. You don't have to kill them, but you can sure hurt them so bad they wish they left the damn thing alone.

O'Bannon's Flight

The Investigators who don't stay behind are going to get to face a wrathful and drunk Sean O'Bannon. He's seen his daughter and he's convinced that his old connections back in Boston are trying to bring him back. Under all of his bravado, Sean O'Bannon is scared. Halfway through his drunken tirade, one of his aides informs him that his car is ready and the Investigators watch as he leaves the house with a whole lot of luggage. He tells them they can consider themselves off the case. He gives each of them a large envelope stuffed with cash (\$1,000 apiece) and he wishes them good luck. They will never see Sean O'Bannon again.

A Spot Hidden roll by any Investigator will see

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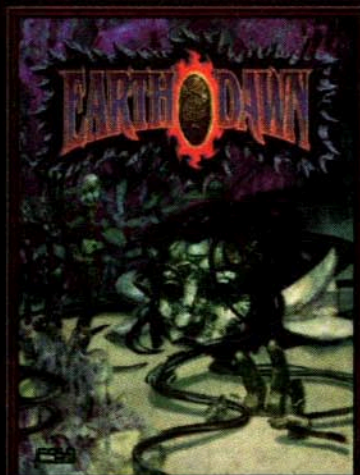
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FASA
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an open book by the chair that O'Bannon was sitting in. It's Katherine O'Bannon's diary. The book is open to her final entry that reveals where she went before her demise. You can find the entry in the sidebar.

The Investigators should be able to figure out that Katherine went down to the cave before she was killed. Her body was found on the seashore, and if they inquire about the cave, they'll discover that her body was found not a mile from the location. That should be enough to convince the Investigators to go and take a look at the cave.

Day Three

Events

- **Sometime during the day:** The Investigators explore the cave where the Ridley-Spawn is hiding out. The black goo will move in "unnatural" ways (because of their paranoia and the unsteady light from their flashlights). They see heavy footprints and a human form in the distance. They chase the form. It runs away. They follow the footprints to a large pool of "oil" and the footprints walk right up to the edge and disappear.

- **Midnight:** The Investigators hide out at Well #3. They encounter the Ridley-Spawn (for better or worse).

Goals

The Investigator's primary goal is stopping the Ridley-Spawn from performing another ritual.

Consequences

If the Investigators do not visit the cave, they may not get the clue about the flammability of the Ridley-Spawn.

If the Spawn is successful, it will release the magical barrier that traps its brethren, and the town will be annihilated by a swarm of the Formless Spawn of Tsothoggua, which will spring from the well in an unholy gusher.

If the Investigators manage to stop the Spawn, its fellows will remain trapped in their cyclopean tomb.

Details For Day Three

At the Cave

Unless they are complete dunderheads (and that's what the Idea Roll is for, folks!), the Investigators will go down and check out the cave. It's a creepy place with long, shifting shadows and black water. The echoes from the

dripping are amplified a thousand times and everything seems to be moving all at once. You have an ample opportunity to really scare the pants off your players here. Keep them second-guessing about every shadow, every pool of black water, especially if they happened to see the Ridley-Spawn last night.

The Spawn is indeed here. It's hiding far back in the shadows. With the use of electric torches, the Investigators will proceed through the tunnel. Spot Hidden checks reveal footprints and distant footsteps running deeper into the cavern. The Investigators are free to try and chase the Ridley-Spawn, but if they get close, it will quickly leap into a nearby pool of crude oil and water and disappear.

The Confrontation

At midnight, the Investigators will once again stake out Well #3. If the Investigators stuck around last night, the Spawn will be ready for them. If not, they might catch the thing unprepared.



The Ridley-Spawn will perform the ritual once again, and anyone watching it will feel the tug on their POW as before.

Your Investigators will no doubt come up with ingenious ways to stop the Spawn. Since

O'Bannon has abandoned everything, they may even feel the need to use explosives. Let them

come up with whatever clever and destructive methods they wish to use to destroy the Spawn. The thing to remember is that it is hindered by its mortal body. Ridley's body should be quite near the point of disintegration at this point. If the Investigators cause 15 or more points of damage to the body, the Spawn will cast the body aside and reveal its true form (a gruesome sight that will cost the Investigators 1/d10 SAN). Here's a summary of ways that your Investigators may try to use against the Spawn:

- Normal mortal weapons will not harm the Spawn at all. Firearms, knives, axes, swords and the like will simply slice through its liquid body, allowing the Spawn to get close enough for a nasty attack.

- Explosives will cause the Spawn half normal damage. A stick of dynamite does 5d6 damage

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What's a *Cthulhu* adventure without handouts? BORING! That's why we'd like you to have the **Official Crude Oil Keeper Kit**. It's all the stuff we couldn't fit in the article (we ran out of space!). Just send us a self-addressed stamped envelope (better make it a big one) and we'll send you an entire packet filled with goodies. The **Crude Oil Keeper Kit** includes:

- Pages from Katherine's Diary
- The FBI Run-Down
- Character Sheets and background for the five Investigators designed especially for this adventure
- NPC Stats and Role-Playing suggestions
- Illustrations and photographs, including a very very gruesome picture of Whipple's body at the autopsy. Those who have a weak stomach may want to pass on this one.
- And more!

It's a complete companion piece to *Crude Oil*. It's meant for **MATURE READERS**, so please, if you're under 18, get your parents' permission first.

And whatever you do,
don't ever call
1-900-CTHULHU.

There are some things man was just not meant to know.

Blowing Up Well #3

Enthusiastic Investigators may get the brilliant idea to drop dynamite down the well to keep more of "whatever the hell that thing was" from coming back up.

Let them.

First off, they'll need to get one of the roughnecks (oil workers) to pull up the drillbit. A few thousand feet of drillbit can't be pulled up easily by a few Feds and flatfoots. Once they've got the help and know-how, they can get all that steel up out of the ground and begin dropping sticks of dynamite down the shaft.

Remember, we've got crude oil down there. Explosions of this kind are likely to rip up the earth they're walking on, not to mention cracking the seals that are keeping the Spawn asleep. The waking Spawn will flow up the tube and (since they've been asleep for so long and are so very hungry) will start eating anything in sight.

That'll teach 'em to leave well enough alone.

normally, so roll for the damage and divide by half, rounding down.

- Fire will also do half damage to the Spawn. Small flames will do 1d3 per turn. Large bonfires will do 1d6 per turn.

And in case your Investigators get really inventive...

- Flareguns and cutting torches will do 1d3. Hand-held, home-made torches will do a single point. Molotov cocktails will do a d6 per round to the Spawn. Every turn, have one of the Investigators make a Luck Roll. If they miss it, the Spawn gets the flame out. The Spawn must roll for each flame every turn.

Do not allow your Investigators to use their Damage Bonus against the Spawn for any reason.

Oh, and just in case you were wondering, there are no flamethrowers in 1927.

If the Investigators Succeed...

Congratulations are in order. If the Investigators stop the Spawn from finishing the ritual, the other Spawn will remain locked away in their subterranean tomb. Stopping the Spawn will get the Investigators a d10 SAN reward.


If the Investigators Fail...

The Spawn will release its brethren and they will spill out from Well #3 with violent fury. Seeing this sight will cost the Investigators a d10 SAN loss, not to mention a sudden need to flee the area, lest they become overwhelmed by hundreds of Formless Spawn.

The entire town will be destroyed by the arcane explosion of Spawn. No man, woman or child will live through the chaos. Investigators that do (and that alone may make a very interesting adventure) will lose an additional 2d4 for the realization that their failure caused the death of hundreds of people.

Conclusion

The report the FBI agents bring back to the Bureau will be marked "CONFIDENTIAL" and will be locked away. The official report of what happened in New Jerusalem will be gang activity and sabotage. The Investigators know better, however, and their diaries and journals will keep the truth alive for another seventy years when a new batch of agents must return to New Jerusalem to solve a new mystery.

But that, of course, is another story. 

James Lawson Agency Detective

25 years old

STR	13
CON	9
SIZ	14
DEX	13
APP	12
SAN	85
INT	18
POW	17
EDU	19
Idea	90
Luck	85
Know	95

Hit Points	12
Magic Points	17
Damage Bonus	+d4

Bargain (05), Fast Talk (05), Fist/Punch (25), Grapple (25), Handgun (20), Hide (10), Law (05), Library Use (25), Persuade (15), Psychology (05), Sneak (10) Track (25) Credit Rating (75)

Notes: 380 Points on listed Skills; 180 on any Skills. You come from a wealthy family and may "acquire" things with a successful CREDIT RATING. You may not raise your Credit Rating Skill with Points.

Dalton Harris Agency Apprentice

20 years old

STR	18
CON	17
SIZ	18
DEX	13
APP	10
SAN	65
INT	11
POW	13
EDU	10
Idea	55
Luck	65
Know	50

Hit Points	18
Magic Points	13
Damage Bonus	+d6

Bargain (05), Club (20), Conceal (20), Fist/Punch (25), Grapple (25), Handgun (20), Head Butt (20), Kick (25), Knife (25), Persuade (15), Psychology (10), Shotgun (20)

Notes: 200 Points to spend on listed Skills; 55 Points on any Skills. You do not suffer SAN losses for seeing corpses or violence. You may also purchase any "criminal" skills with a base of 20%.

**Benjamin Halsey
Federal Agent**

22 years old

STR 17
CON 17
SIZ 16
DEX 15
APP 15
SAN 50
INT 13
POW 10
EDU 16
Idea 65
Luck 50
Know 80

Hit Points 17
Magic Points 10
Damage Bonus +d6

Bargain (05), Drive Auto (20), Fast Talk (10)
Firearms (20) Fist/Punch (25) Forensics (00)
Grapple (20) Hide(10) Law (05) Persuade (15)
Sneak (10) Spot Hidden (25) Track (25)
Occult (75)

Notes: 320 Pts to spend on listed skills; 130 on any Skills; you may use your Occult Roll Score (75) instead of SAN at any time. You may not raise your Occult Roll with Points.

**Reid Parker
Forensics Specialist**

32 years old

STR 10
CON 14
SIZ 13
DEX 15
APP 13
SAN 75
INT 17
POW 15
EDU 20
Idea 85
Luck 75
Know 99

Hit Points 12
Magic Points 15
Damage Bonus +0

Chemistry (00) Forensics (00) Law (10)
Medicine (05) Pharmacy (00) Photography
(10) Spot Hidden (25) Dodge (30)

Notes: 400 Points on listed Skills; 170 on any Skills; you do not lose SAN for seeing corpses or other gory scenes.

**Wade Derby
U.S. Marshal**

Age 52

STR 11
CON 12
SIZ 17
DEX 12
APP 10
SAN 90
INT 14
POW 18
EDU 18
Idea 70
Luck 90
Know 90

Hit Points 14
Magic Points 18

Damage Bonus None

Bargain (05)
Drive (20)
Fast Talk (05)
Handgun (25)
Law (05)
Listen (25)
Persuade (15)
Psychology (10)
Spot Hidden (10)
Track (25)
Dodge (24)

Notes: 360 Points to spend on listed Skills; 140 on any Skills. You always lose the minimum SAN unless told otherwise.

The Characters

The five characters on these two pages are the characters designed for *Crude Oil*. Adjust them to your taste. Two come from the FBI, two come from the Harris Detective Agency, and the third is the U.S. Marshal investigating the murder.



GAME MASTER'S WORKSHOP

The Good,

Artwork and Characters by Tonia Walden © 1996



Cecile Delacroix

Occupation: Mambo (Voodoo Priestess)
Skills: Clairvoyance, Healing, Divination
Motivation: To serve her congregation and the loa
Weaknesses: Trusting

Cecile is a young woman of about eighteen who is a priestess of Voodoo, known as a Mambo. Voodoo is a religion which worships ancestor spirits known as loa. The spirits must be shown respect by performing ceremonies in their honor and giving them offerings. In return they will look after their followers and give them gifts and knowledge. During the ceremonies the loa enter Cecile and by possessing her body, they appear and speak to the worshippers. Cecile knows how to call the spirits down and how to control their possession of her body. She always carries a rattle called an "asson" which symbolizes her power over the spirits.

Marie received the calling to become inducted into Voodoo when she was very young. She underwent the training and ordeals to become a mambo and she was chosen by her patron loa Erzulie, the goddess of love. Her teacher during this time was the mambo Marie Pascal; Cecile used to keep in touch with Marie, but lately she has not heard from her.

Cecile was born with a natural gift of second sight and has been able to see the loa since she was very small. Her kind and trusting nature and clairvoyant skill have made her a favorite among the loa, and although she is young she has had many successes with healing sickness and divining people's fates. She often works alongside Rene Trouillot, a respected houngan. ⑤



Rene Trouillot

Occupation: Houngan (Voodoo Priest)
Skills: Calling the Spirits, Healing, Training Initiates
Motivation: To serve the loa
Weaknesses: Overconfident

Rene is about thirty and has long been a priest of Voodoo known as a Houngan. He has his own temple called a "houngfor" which has altars to the loa and this is where he carries out Voodoo ceremonies and dances to honor the spirits. Rene leads his congregation in these ceremonies and he calls down the loa to possess the worshippers. Rene's patron loas are Damballah-wedo, the snake god, and Papa Legba, the guardian of the crossroads; he is most often possessed by Damballah during these ceremonies.

Rene has trained many other young potential candidates to take up the "asson" (sacred rattle) of the voodoo priesthood. He often works with the young mambo Cecile Delacroix, who he encouraged to join the priesthood after she told him of her visions of the loa.

Rene has had many successes and is much loved and respected by his congregation; unfortunately, this has made him overconfident. He might soon need reminding that the spirits do not serve him and that they only grant favors to those with the proper humility and respect. ⑤



Michael Labat

Occupation: Docteurs feuilles (Herb Doctor)
Skills: Plant Identification, Making Magical Powders
Motivation: To gain more knowledge about plants
Weaknesses: Obsessed with his profession

Michael is not a member of the voodoo priesthood but he has gained knowledge from the loa about many different plants and has become a "Docteurs feuilles" or herb doctor. He can immediately identify plants by sight and knows which ones are associated with which loa and their magical properties. He knows how to make mixtures of dried roots and leaves that can be made into magical powders.

Michael sells these powders as love charms and healing powders. He knows how to make other powders too — ones that can cause insanity or illness or make people invisible — but he would never sell these powders, and keeps them his secret. These powders can be taken willingly or can they can be used as invisible contaminants; for example, on bouquets sent to women or dusted on household surfaces where they are unwittingly breathed in. Dew is also thought to have magical properties, and the powders may be spread out at night to mix with the dew; the magic will be absorbed if someone walks on the wet ground.

Michael is obsessed with finding new magical plants and secrets and he always seems rather preoccupied and distant. He can be tempted with new knowledge and may not think of the consequences until it is too late, because knowledge and favors often have a price. ⑤



GAME
MASTER'S
WORKSHOP

The Bad,

Artwork and Characters by Tonia Walden © 1996



Joseph Maidou

Occupation: Bokor (evil sorcerer)

Skills: Making Magical Powders, Binding Bakas (evil spirits)

Motivation: Power

Weaknesses: Owes debts to several powerful bakas

Joseph is a much-feared sorcerer who is said to "serve the loa with both hands," which means that as well as serving the spirits like the priests of voodoo, he also practices black magic. However, there is a price for asking the spirits to do black magic, as they demand sacrifices and favors in return. The stronger and more powerful the magic the greater the sacrifice, and some evil spirits may demand Joseph capture "ti-hon-ange" — human souls — for them.

Joseph sells magic spells, charms known as "wargas," and powders; his prices are high and if he feels the person is influential, it may involve favors instead of money. A "wanga" is magical charm often used for selfish purposes: it is a talisman to which a spirit is bound, and the magic it can do depends on the type and strength of the spirit bound. A person can buy a strong evil spirit called a "baka" to do their bidding, but they are never completely in control of it, as the baka will only obey if it is given offerings. To make a person rich, it demands a relative's soul, and if the pact with it is broken there is nothing to stop the baka from the devouring the soul of its owner.

People only come to Joseph if they are desperate, as it is rumored that he is involved with death magic and has changed people into zombies. These rumors are true — he has a couple of zombie servants that work during the night on his farm. ☞



Gabriel Duval

Occupation: Zombie Laborer

Skills: Untiring worker

Motivation: To escape

Weaknesses: Bully (not when zombie)

Gabriel was the head of a large family and he often humiliated his younger brothers, demanding that they do more their fair share of the work on the family farm and borrowing — and not paying back — their money. One brother finally had enough and went to Joseph Maidou, a feared Bokor, to get revenge. A few weeks later Gabriel appeared to catch a sudden illness and died. Gabriel's brother was horrified, as he had only wanted his brother punished, but he was too afraid of the Bokor to do or say anything.

In reality, Gabriel was poisoned by Joseph to make it appear as though he was dead. The day after Gabriel had been buried he was dug up by the Bokor, and given a partial antidote to the poison. Gabriel's mind is still clouded by the poison and the terrifying experience of being buried alive has transformed him into a zombie, willing to mildly follow Joseph's orders. He works untiringly through the night at Joseph's farm. His movements are slow, he never sweats, and he displays no emotion. His "gros-bon-ange," or life force, has been captured by Joseph and placed in a bottle in his house — until it is retrieved, Joseph has power over Gabriel. Deep in the recesses of his mind Gabriel knows he must escape and if he does he will probably be found wandering aimlessly, unable to speak. If he is given the traditional treatment of salt water it will return his power of speech but his mind will still be damaged. If someone recognizes him as the recently-deceased Gabriel perhaps he can be returned to his family. He can be cured by a houngan or mambo if the bottle containing his life force is retrieved. ☞



Marie Pascal

Occupation: Mambo (voodoo priestess)

Skills: Calling the Spirits, Black Magic

Motivation: To gain the highest level of the priesthood

Weaknesses: Pride, Corrupted by bakas (evil spirits)

Marie is a voodoo priestess who started out being a good mambo. She has trained many in the ways of the loa and always took care of her congregation. However in the last few years she has tried to reach the highest level of voodoo induction, the "prix-des-yeux" or the "price of eyes" which is the gift of second sight. However, she has been refused by the loa, who said she wasn't ready for such a gift. This has made her bitter and jealous and instead of waiting for the power, she has started to dabble in black magic, using it to cause sickness and bad luck among her perceived enemies. Although she was arrogant enough to assume she could deal with the bakas, she has come to regret her actions of "serving the spirits with both hands," as the evil spirits have been hounding her, offering her more power, if she will only give them the proper sacrifice of a human soul. Marie has been trying to resist their advances but she doesn't know how much longer she can withstand them. She knows if she uses magic to kill, her own soul will be damned.

Unknown to her, the spirits have already started their corruption and she is becoming an evil spirit herself. At night she becomes a tiny "loup garou", which takes shape of a mosquito and sucks the blood of children. Any child she feeds from will become sick of a wasting disease and unless she is stopped from her nocturnal visits, they will eventually die. Charms from voodoo priests or herb doctors can keep "loup garous" away. The only way Marie can be cured is if she swallows her pride, realizes what a mistake she has made, and seeks help from a houngan or mambo. ☞



GAME
MASTER'S
WORKSHOP

And The Ugly

Artwork and Characters by Tonia Walden © 1996



Papa Legba

Occupation: Guardian Loa (powerful spirit)
Skills: Possession, Magic
Motivation: Guarding the gate to the spirit world
Weaknesses: Lame

The loas are ancestor spirits; Voodoo followers must appease them with offerings and ceremonies, and in return the loa will grant favors and give advice, protection and knowledge. It can be disastrous to ignore the loa, for if they feel they are being dishonored they will cause all sorts of trouble, such as illness and bad luck.

One of the most important loas is Papa Legba. He is the loa that gave the secret of the spirit world to mankind and he is the first of the loa to be invoked in a Voodoo ceremony, as he opens the gate that separates the supernatural world from the world of humans. It is only once Papa Legba has been asked to "opened the door" that the other loa may join the ceremony. For this reason Legba is said to guard all boundaries and gates and is often known as the "Master of the Crossroads." He is also known as the protector of the home and once darkness falls he is sometimes worshipped as a patron of magic by sorcerers.

Papa Legba appears as a feeble old man, puffing a pipe and supporting himself on a crutch. His appearance is deceptive, as he is an extremely strong loa and if he decides to possess a worshipper, they undergo violent body movements and may even fall to the ground as if hit. Legba's "veve" or symbol is a cross and he is represented in many Voodoo temples by a crutch. He should be offered rice, smoked foods and green bananas. ☿



Erzulie

Occupation: Loa of Love (powerful spirit)
Skills: Possession, Bestow Happiness
Motivation: Romantic Love
Weaknesses: Jealousy

The beautiful loa Erzulie, the goddess of love, has many different aspects to her personality. She represents the moon and in this form is virginal and pure and is the goddess of love. She brings happiness and prosperity and bestows gifts on her followers. However she has a darker side, and in this form she flirts, has affairs with many of the other loa, and is prone to violent mood swings in which she can be jealous, melancholy or angry. In this aspect she causes jealousy and discord and she forces those she possesses to twist themselves into distorted shapes.

She is the wife of Legba and the mistress of Damballah-wedo, the serpent loa. She appears as a beautiful woman with very dark skin who is always opulently attired in lavish dresses and jewelry.

Erzulie's "veve" or symbol is a heart and she is sometimes represented by a mirror. Those possessed by her act in an exaggeratedly feminine way flirting with the worshippers and speaking in a high-pitched voice and demanding sweet cakes, champagne and perfume. ☿



Damballah-wedo

Occupation: Snake Loa (powerful spirit)
Skills: Possession, Bestow Wealth
Motivation: Bringer of Good
Weaknesses: Cannot speak

Damballah-wedo, the serpent loa, is a creator god who formed the stars and planets, and when he shed his skin, it released water to the earth. He is pictured as great snake stretching across the sky: he is married to Ayida-wedo, the beautiful rainbow loa, and together they entwine across the sky, representing unity. He represents goodness and the ancestral knowledge of the Voodoo religion.

He is thought to live in trees near bodies of water such as springs and these trees will often be decorated or offerings left at them for him.

Damballah's symbol or "veve" is a picture of a serpent — his symbol and that of his wife Ayida-wedo often decorate the central pole around which Voodoo ceremonies are preformed.

When Damballah possesses a follower, that person falls to the ground where they will not use their limbs, but will writhe and crawl along the ground and they may even climb trees. They never speak but only hiss, darting their tongues in and out like snakes do. During the ceremony Damballah is offered white things to eat such as eggs, rice, flour and white hens. He is associated with treasure and prosperity and may reward the faithful of his followers with wealth. ☿

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CYBER GENERATION

"...AND JACK LEFT TOWN", PART II

Part One: Cut To The Chase

In our last episode, brave and spunky cyber-kids took off with a Maguffin called T112, without which tigers cannot be hunted in Scotland. Wait, I mean, without which Wizards cannot be hunted in cyberspace. What ensues is the classic chase scene as faceless, humorless grownups in mirrored visors try to catch those meddling kids.

This is a chance for GoGangers and BoardPunks to shine. For centuries, cutpurse or pick-pocket children have known that the way to get away with the goodies is to split up, so your pursuers don't know which child is carrying the wallet, purse or datacard of potentially earth-shaking info. GMs (and PCs) may be hesitant to split up the party, but keep in mind that with cellular communications, it's possible for them to coordinate even from distant locales. (The chance that CorpSec is listening in should give Tinkertots and Wizards something to do while their velocity-addicted friends go at it.)

Rather than present a mechanized racecourse for GMs to chart their characters through, I'm just going to give you a menu of options; chances are, your players will think of something terribly offbeat anyhow. A rigid scenario would only frustrate them; this way you can just roll with the punches, while constantly throwing challenges at both the characters and CorpSec — just to keep the race interesting.

Really dumb yogangers will head straight for the Rock and Taco. If they decide to do this, turn to the player whose character has the highest INT score and casually say "You know, if you go there and stop before losing your pursuers, they'll surround you and turn the place into a little, baby sized killing field." That should start the chase.

Smart yogangers, on the other hand, will immediately light out for areas where they'll have the edge; ArcoRunners will hie for a familiar tunnel, Megas will want to go to the urban wastelands where CorpSec knows it isn't popular, and just about anyone else might decide to split for the mall. Chase scene possibilities are provided for each area.

Arco Tunnels

One obvious advantage that kids have in Arco tunnels is size; a nine-year old can skinny through ventilation pipes that a 200 pound CorpSec thug, weighed down by enough guns and gear for a John Woo flick, can't even reach. Some more fun ideas are...

- The sewer pipe. Opening this can of worms over the heads of pursuers is always good for a few yucks. Furthermore, decomposing feces creates methane gas, which is highly flammable. Just be careful igniting these gasses, or they'll travel through the pipes and create a towering inferno.

- Squatters might be found in the middle of an Arco, scavenging and living in the shadows. Kids had better be damn good and careful how they handle this. The squatters' reward for ratting out a pack of CyberEvolved terrorists could be their ticket to the Beaverburb lifestyle.

- Satellite feed trunk. This is the central core of communications for the Arco. Though shielded, it produces a whole lot of electromagnetic interference. Being near it will give Scanners a little trouble, until the shielding gets damaged or opened. Then it will give Scanners a lot of trouble. The flood of information may not be good for Wizards, either. Even the targeting of Bolters might be impaired in these heavy magnetic fields.

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■ At the top of the Arcology is a botanical garden. From a cramped and dimly lit tunnel chase, the kids are suddenly thrust into a sunny dome with a waterfall, trees, a climbable rock wall (with a safety cushion beneath, of course), playground equipment to duck behind, swings to entangle pursuers with, and ethical challenges for gun happy EcoRaiders.

■ The air circulation tunnels branch off of twenty central circulation pipes. At the bottom of each pipe is what the Arcorunners have colorfully termed "death fans." A strong jump might take you across the center pipe, especially if you're light enough or have a parachute or something... or you might slowly, oh so slowly, fall to a red mist demise...

■ Of course, the URBAN LEGEND is that the masked, deformed, hideously dangerous Phantom of the Arco lurks somewhere in the bowels of the structure — but that's just a story for kids, right?

Mad Max Turf

There are few places that the cops won't go, but

there are any number they'd prefer not to. Haring off to one of these demilitarized zones probably won't help the kids much — but the people there are much likelier to kill and eat representatives of the ISA than in any other neighborhood. A little spice can be added with any of the following:

■ A pack of feral dogs. If they see meat on the hoof go by, they'll try for an easy kill. Watch out; these puppies have got enough germs and virii in their bloodstream to create their own ward, and the last guy they ate had been loaded up on heavy-duty antibiotics. That means that the virii that survived the antibiotics could be eaten by later virii, which would then gain their immunities. (Yes, this really happens; ask your doctor about it the next time she wants to put you on a course of tetracycline for a minor illness.)

■ A pack of feral Megs. If they spot fleeing kids, they'll set up an ambush. However, once CorpSec shows up they'll attack them, obeying your basic MegaViolent code of "follow the path of most resistance."

■ An illicit drug factory. This isn't just a little pharmofac spitting out ten doses of Blue Lace a day; this is a major production site. It's well guarded by goons who shoot to kill; this is good, in that they can easily scare off a CorpSec kidnap squad; however, CorpSec will be back, and the pushers know it. They'll be very, very angry at the little punks who led them there — unless said punks can somehow prevent the CorpSec squad from revealing the factory (calling all Wizards...). The chase can then reverse, with the pushers chasing the cops. Such a reversal might earn the kids a nod from the pushers; however, friends like these may be worse than enemies...

■ A Clarker temple. Like the drug factory, this group will be more than willing to tangle with CorpSec, and won't want them to leave the war zone alive. New CyberEvolved will be welcomed. Eagerly welcomed. So eagerly welcomed that the Clarkers won't want to let them go. There are some CyberEvolved kids already living at the temple, some of whom would love to escape: other are jealous of their "godly" status and will attempt to eliminate all rivals.

■ A group of nomads has snuck in, looking for a buried treasure: specifically, a hidden cache of heavy explosives. They were buried by some corporate greedhead for a rainy day, and the Nomads have gotten his map. The last thing they want to see is a firefight in their dig. (Hey kids! Can



Evolve or Die!

you spell "BOOM"? I knew you could!)

■ **Bloodhead.** Around the war zone, there are rumors about a totally borged out, cyberpsycho solo called "Bloodhead" who roams the area, robbing and killing and generally getting his ya-yas out. If the chase crosses his path, the kids and the CorpSec squad *together* might have a chance against this uber-creep...

Mall, Sweet Mall

This last, sweetest haven for children in 2027 may pull them with an instinctive attraction. It will certainly provide them with crowds to hide in (depending on time of day, natch) and the public nature of the area will prevent CorpSec from getting fed up and using lethal force. Other tricks and treats include:

■ **Racing BoardPunks** on a cut decide to flaunt their suicidal tendencies by detouring through the mall. The last thing they're expecting is cops or a rival chase scene.

■ **An immense display** for the hot new band-du-jour, "Skin Integrity." The display includes three story high inflatable statues of the band members, a veritable maze of merchandise, and music pumping out loud enough to deafen a thundercloud. While near the display, the kids should not be allowed to communicate verbally, except with Scanners who make a roll high enough to read their minds of what they're trying to say. Of course, if they have some kind of sound dampening tech that will help — somewhat. Incidentally, the balloon statues are heavy plastic; if punctured, they will slowly collapse and create a barrier to vision and movement to any unfortunates beneath.

■ **Huge holo projectors** showing previews for movies. A Wizard who can take over one of these puppies can put images in front of just about anyone, V-trodes or not. Making the picture convincing is another story...

■ **One large area** is GymDandy, a daycare facility where parents can dump their toddlers and take off for serious consumerism. The area is full of jungle gyms, big holograph cartoon characters, puffy pillows, harried adults and... toddlers! Show your characters why these are called "the terrible twos." Don't be afraid to make your players squirm by putting little kids in danger, either; characters who stay in GymDandy get some measure of protection from the presence of children, but they also make it more dangerous for those children...

■ **One large store** has invested in an expensive holo display with a jungle motif. Visibility is low, there actually are vines you can swing on (though of course you're not *supposed* to) and you never can tell if the person around the corner is a cop or just another panicky consumer...

■ **The media** are present, either to cover some big event or to get a "person on the street" opin-

ion puff piece. Instead they get *real news*. The behavior of the PCs determines whether they become recognized as evil, destructive terrorists, or whether their pursuers are revealed as evil, oppressive thugs.

■ **A famous Glitterkid**, Tancy Peregrine, has deigned to grace the mall with her presence (possibly explaining the media attention mentioned above). She's surrounded by her entourage and by her adoring fans. However, a group of Face Dancers who specialize in impersonating her have shown up as well. There are at least ten Tancys around — and six of the impostors are good enough to fool her security for a short time at least. The mayhem associated with your PCs will make a confusing scene far, far worse.

Part Two: Rescued?

When (that is, if) things get particularly cataclysmic, you can bring in Ma and her pals (see sidebars) to help out. Or they might show up as things seem to be settling down and the kids are calm and off guard. Or they might spy out the kids, send in a CorpSec goon squad, and then "providentially" show up to as saviors.

If she can win their trust (or at least their ears) Ma will start a subtle pitch for Arasaka.

She'll start by describing the cruelties and injustices the CyberEvolved face. (She probably won't have a hard audience in your characters.) Next she'll say she works with a "loose group" who believe that the CyberEvolved have a right to live. She'll present all this with her "Cerebral Clicker" (see sidebar) turned off; she'll be sincere about what she's saying. If they seem receptive, Denny will subtly turn her clicker on, and she'll present Arasaka's spiel. The spiel will have several different spins, depending on how she judges her audience.

TO MEGAVIOLENTS, STREETFIGHTERS, GOGANGERS AND BOARDPUNKS she'll stress the excitement, adventure, and opportunity Arasaka offers. Megas and Streetfighters will have a chance to face tough opponents on fair terms. Instead of being constantly hunted, they'll have a powerful backer who can negate the advantages of numbers and tech that CorpSec and the CDC have. For the speed addicted, Arasaka offers spectacular velocity toys; possibly even prototypes that won't be available to the public for months, and which the kids could never afford under normal circumstances.

TO BEAVERBRATS, FACEDANCERS, GLITTERKIDS AND GOLDENKIDS she'll emphasize the safety Arasaka offers; if it's revealed that they're plague carriers, they'll go from being a favored elite to being the coolest kids in the resettlement camp. Arasaka can keep them safe, and many children have a strong desire to keep things from changing.

TO TINKERTOTS, SQUATS, VIDIOTS

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Command?
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Central Data
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Command?
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"For centuries, cut-purse or pickpocket children have known that the way to get away with the goodies is to split up, so your pursuers don't know which child is carrying the wallet, purse or datacard of potentially earthshaking info."

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Command?
>Execute
Download

AND MALLBRATS, she'll stress that a major corp has everything they want — in spades. Tech, access, knowledge and wealth are available to those who simply get with the program.

GUARDIANS, TRIBALS, ECORAIDERS AND RADS are a tough sell; to them, she'll point

more than the lives of some cyber brats. He'll try to steal it and get away; if that means killing them all in their sleep, he'll do it. Ma won't support him in this (well, stealing yes; killing the kids, no). Jack might go either way.

Now the ball is in the kids' hands. They can belly up to the tempting teat of Arasaka, there to suckle the sweet milk of safety and servitude for the rest of their lives. Or they can take the high road, make a powerful enemy and try to get away with the goodies.

It may help to think of this choice as a referendum: if your characters choose to join up with Team Arasaka, they're telling you (whether they realize or not) that they want a game of intrigue, betrayal and wrecking the system from inside. (Think of Fox Mulder on "The X-Files.") If they defy Arasaka, they want a game of pursuit, constant danger and life on the edge. (More like Thomas Veil on "Nowhere Man.") You may favor one style over the other, but this is your players chance to tell you, in character, what they're after. You'll be doing yourself a big favor by respecting that.

NPCs

Jack

When Jack swings into action, most yogangers shouldn't just want to be like him; they should want to BE him. Tall, good looking, cool, fearless and tough, he usually shows up just in time to save the bacon.

Outside of combat, he's even better. Self-effacing, even a little shy, but with an engaging friendliness and enthusiasm. He's just your basic good guy — or so it seems.

Actually, there's nothing basic about Jack; he's a complicated, confused pack of conflicts. Arasaka's top mind meddlers made Jack a special project for over a year; he's the best Tinman they've been able to "acquire." A lot of other yogangers broke before they bent, but Jack had a chink in his mental armor; he'd been found by Ma (see sidebar) and her kindness towards him opened the door to doubt just a crack. Once they got him over to Japan, that crack was wedged wide open and a deluge of poisonous Arasaka propaganda was pumped in. When they were convinced that he was "safe" they sent him back to the ISA, where more brain-washers were waiting with a team of sociologists

out that the power to make real changes is much likelier to belong to an Arasaka operative than to a grungy street urchin who carries a dread disease. She'll tell them that Arasaka realizes that the CyberEvolved are the future, and that the old style of management isn't going to work in a new paradigm. "In the old days, people cut ice out of lakes and delivered it door to door; you don't see any of those old ice miners building refrigerators these days, do you?"

If Denny finds out what's on the card, all bets are off. He'll reason (rightly) that T112 is worth



Evolve or Die!

to make him into more of a perfect yogan recruiting tool. Of course, to do this, they had to make him less and less himself.

Now Jack is mostly a hollow shell — all carefully programmed reactions and responses, but there isn't really much *there* any more. Scanners will get surface thoughts that largely match what he's saying and/or doing — just as they would from any honest, straightforward guy. However, a skilled Scanner (or one with a good roll) will notice a strange lack of force to Jack's emotions. Underneath the reactions, he's hollow.

In keeping with this, Jack usually follows orders from Ma.

INT 5 REF 7 COOL 5 TECH 5 MOVE 7
LUCK 4 BODY 8 EMP 5 ATT 7

Skills: Tinman 4, H-T-H Combat 4, Melee 5, Driving 3, Education 2, Athletics 4, Genspeak 5, Streetsmarts 5

Denny

Denny looks like a chubby ten year old with no hair. Maybe a little smudged and grubby around the edges, but he's cute as the dickens. He seems a little jittery and hesitant (as would any little kid in his circumstances) but he's trying to be a good boy.

Not. Dennis Brown is actually thirty two; he has a rare genetic condition that halted his apparent age twenty two years ago (it also made his hair and eyebrows fall out). He's been an Edgerunner most of his life; the disadvantage of his small, weak frame was amply compensated for by his innocent appearance. Dennis has learned to play the waif very, very well. He'll come off as the fragile kid that everyone wants to protect — and everyone trusts a little boy (or, at least, doesn't worry that he's going to sell them out to Arasaka at the first opportunity).

Dennis also pretends to be a Scanner. He has uncanny skills at reading people, which can pass for Scanning. He backs this up with boosted reflexes, if necessary; after all, no one would believe that a ten year old body could handle Kerenzikovs, right?

He appears to take orders from Ma (of course) but he has the real authority in this operation. However, he respects Ma's skills and usually follows her lead.

The one thing that really spooks Dennis is real Scanners. A genuine Scanner will pick up fear from Denny, because every time he meets new Cyber-evolved he's terrified that a real Scanner will find him out. He is careful to stay near heavy electromag machines if at all possible until he can dope out the abilities of his targets.

INT 9 REF 5 COOL 10 TECH 7 MOVE 5
LUCK 4 BODY 4 EMP 10 ATT 6

Skills: Interaction 10, Awareness/Notice 8,

Stealth 7, Ranged Weapons 6, Education 3, Athletics 2, Expert: Language ("street lingo") 6.

Cyberware: Neural Processor, 2x Cyberaudio, 2x Cyberoptics with targeting scope, Kerenzikov Reflex Boosters

"Ma"

Like Jack and Denny, Ma is not quite what she seems. On the surface, she's a caring, determined, gutsy gal in her mid-forties. Even a Scanner who realizes the truth about Denny will probably be fooled by Ma; this is because she's the test subject for a device termed the "Cerebral Clicker." So far, the test is going very well indeed.

See, the caring persona, devoted to protecting kids from a cruel society, is the *truth*. Ma really believes that working for Arasaka is the best thing that could happen to the CyberEvolved. However, she knows that many kids are (unreasonably, in her opinion) frightened of the corp. Even if they knew her intentions were pure, the knowledge that she works for Arasaka would repel most Scanners.

Hence, the Cerebral Clicker. Arasaka technicians "copied" the knowledge that she was working for them out of her mind, and then "erased" it from her consciousness. However, that knowledge (along with the passwords, codes and other spy stuff she'd need to deliver the kiddies) was stored in a special, permanently installed databatch. Denny has a control phrase that will switch her between "caring, embattled and rebellious Ma" and "tough, remorseless Arasaka op Ma." That's right; to make her "surface" personality more convincing to the cyberkids, Arasaka actually allowed her some glimpses of just how horrible and ruthless they are. Furthermore, they edited the personality on the chip to be more obedient and ruthless.

Basically, neither of her personalities is exactly like her original. She started out naive and good natured, trusting in Arasaka. Now her public personality is still kind and gentle, but is more street-smart and cynical. Her chipped, "clicker" self is more cold and detached. Neither of her personalities would be able to kill a child under the age of 14, however; Ma just doesn't have it in her.

INT 8 REF 7 COOL 8 TECH 7 MOVE 7
LUCK 4 BODY 7 EMP 5 ATT 7

Skills: Leadership 6, Ranged Weapons 6, Resist Interrogation 5, Athletics 5, Education 3.

Cyberware: Neural Processor, Chipware Socket, Cyberaudio, Nanosurgeons, Advanced Muscle & Bone Lace, Sandevistan Reflex Boosters, "Cerebral Clicker" (see above). 6

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The YYY computer system

...is not very well defended because their sensitive material is all located on the system that is inaccessible from the net, and they are still a struggling, young company. The system is INT 11, DEF 5. Use the basic layout and security of the sample Datafort (pg 163) with the following exceptions: 1: The FCT of all programs listed are reduced by two. 2: Any reference to a human sysop is instead a FCT 4 Spy with a FCT 5 Fenris. 3: The "physical" description of the Datafort is as follows: The Datafort appears as a gothic cathedral (e.g. Notre Dame) with high, arched ceilings. Alcoves and twisty staircases lead users off to the various subdirectories of the System. There is a giant stained-glass window of the YYY company logo on the north end of the main hall. The various rooms are all as bare of adornments as the main hall, but offer more comfort than the wooden pews. Conference rooms have large oak tables surrounded with padded chairs. Icons use the medieval motif as well (Fenris is a large mastiff, Blaster is a crossbow wielded by a squire, etc.).

Editor's Note: Irritatingly enough, this sidebar was inadvertently omitted from Part One of "Jack." Sorry for any inconvenience this might have caused.

What is *Lights, Camera, Action?*

Long-time SHADIS readers will recognize this feature immediately. Need an off-the-cuff storyline for your RPG campaign? Match the party's current situation to the one described in "Lights," then switch on the "Camera" and drag them into the "Action"!

We would love to see your scenarios! Send them in; there's a good chance they'll be used.

An Offer You Can't Refuse

Lights: On a remote space station on the fringes of colonized space, an alien recruits an intrepid band to deliver a package to his cousin on a distant world. The package is large: approximately a meter cubed and very heavy. It is made of a kind of ornate wood, but is unlike any kind of terran material they have ever seen. They are offered a monstrous sum of money to deliver this thing; it's an offer they can't refuse.

Camera: On the first day of the trip, everything goes wrong. Everyone wants what is in the box. As the journey progresses, the party discovers the alien who hired them is the equivalent of a mob boss who has been accused of smuggling and charged with murder in three systems. The party soon learns that men are willing to lie, cheat, steal, murder, maim, torture and kill to get the box, making their journey across the solar system a perilous one. Eventually, they will grow curious about what's in the box (if they don't get curious, you can always prod them), leading them to open it up and see what's inside. There's a small, sealed envelope inside, much easier to carry than a huge wooden box...

Action: When they finally arrive at the port where the cousin is waiting for them, the party learns what is in the small envelope. It's a short note wishing him a happy birthday. At which point he will ask the party, "Where's the box?" The box is an ancient holy relic that once contained the Heart of Thaltali, a religious symbol of great power. So, if the party delivers the package without the box, they will be in a great deal of hot water.

John Wick

Not Drowning, Waving

Lights: This interlude could take place when the party is near a coastal town. One of the party notices a person out in the ocean who appears to be drowning. If they gallantly go to the rescue, they will have to dive underwater to retrieve the body of a teenage boy and bring him back to shore. If the party decide not to swim out but try to take one of the small fishing boats that lie along the beach, the owner of the boat will be surprisingly reluctant to help and the party will have to simply commandeer the boat — if they waste any time arguing the boy will drown.

Camera: When they get the boy back to shore, they notice he is dressed in white robes and looks about fifteen. The party can resuscitate the boy, but when he regains consciousness he will look surprised and then angry. Instead of the thanks the characters may be expecting, the boy will shout a torrent of abuse. All the commotion will attract a crowd of villagers who are dressed in religious robes, and they are not at all pleased with the party. The boy had been chosen to go and join the sea god to ensure good weather and a good catch for the coming year. Every year a special boy or girl was chosen to be sacrificed in this way; however, the villagers do not see it as a sacrifice. They and the chosen victim consider it a great honor, and they believe that the drowned girl or boy will live a life of comfort in the sea god's court at the bottom of the ocean. The head priest will tell the characters that the sea god will be angry to be cheated of the boy and that the god will take the character who rescued the boy instead.

Action: The party may take this as a threat but the villagers will not attack or attempt to sacrifice any of the party — they will simply walk away. (Remember, they consider it an honor; to murder someone as an unwilling sacrifice is not the same). However, they have placed the sea god's curse on the character who rescued the boy — every time

Lights, Camera, Action!

he or she goes near salt water, an unlucky event will occur, such as an attack from a water creature or an accident on the boat they are travelling on. The character should learn to become wary of the sea, until they get the curse removed or somehow appease the sea god's wrath.

Tonia Walden

The Hunter And The Hunted

Lights: A young college man is panicked beyond reason. He approaches the investigators with a desperate hope that they can save him. Every night he has terrible nightmares of a witch putting a curse on his family, and every morning he awakens covered in mud and blood. This morning he found a young cheerleader in his closet. Her throat was torn out and he had her hair and blood under his nails. He's convinced he's turning into a werewolf.

Camera: If the party watches him, they will find that he handcuffs himself to the bed just as the sun sets. He suffers tortuous dreams, screams and howls all night long until he rips the handcuffs from the bed and from his wrists, tears off his clothes and flees out into the night, howling at the moon. If they manage to follow him, they'll find that he does not transform into a wolf, but suffers from extreme classical lycanthropy. He believes he is a wolf, running on all fours, chasing down bums and ripping out their throats, eating their flesh and drinking their blood.

Action: The unfortunate truth of the matter is that our college friend is not a werewolf. He's a vampire. Well, almost. He was bitten by a vampire a month ago, but in the midst of the action, the vampire was attacked by a vampire-hunter. The college kid escaped, but the vampire did not. Now, the poor sod is half-way between human and undead, trapped without a means of escape. Not only that, but the hunter is looking out for him. He's only a few steps behind, ready to put a hunk of sharpened wood in our little friend's heart.

John Wick

Bug Powder Dust

Lights: This is a less-than-serious scenario for a modern-day game. The party gets involved in a spate of robberies at exclusive restaurants or gourmet bakeries and delicatessens. The odd thing about these robberies is that only food has been stolen, but it appears as if the felons gained

access from the inside rather than breaking in. The owners of the stores are furious and will pay handsomely if the felons can be brought to justice.

Camera: Investigations reveal no fingerprints, but it looks as if the stolen goods were dragged across the floor — the robbers are obviously unhygienic. The owners might blame disgruntled staff, street people or psychos for the robberies (and feel free to make up some spurious characters for the players to investigate), but these leads come up with nothing. The thing all the establishments have in common is they have recently been sprayed for cockroaches by WSB Exterminations Co. There is a fine powder that can be detected on surfaces within the establishments and if the party fail to pick this up, all of the restaurants have a notice in their kitchens mentioning when the company was spraying. Although none of the owners will admit it, the players can find out from the staff that there seem to be more than usual numbers of cockroaches around the area lately.

Action: Yes, it's the cockroaches. The extermination dust the WSB company uses is illegal — they got a shipload of it cheap, after it had been banned. If the players investigate the company they can find this out, and that it was banned for causing mutations. Although the powder kills most of the roaches, a couple that survived became hyper-intelligent (for a cockroach). These super-cockroaches are telepathic and lead their cockroach armies in the war against the oppressors, the humans. At the moment they are executing this grand master plan by stealing the human's food — and eating it. They come up through the basement and by sheer weight of numbers, drag food back down to the basement and the sewers. The sight of this many cockies can be quite unsettling to anyone who is staking out a place to try and catch the thieves. If the cockies feel threatened they can quite easily suffocate (or severely traumatise) a person by covering them. The leaders can also communicate telepathically and could try and do a deal with the players or gloat to them about their megalomaniac plans. The players better get some reputable exterminators in really quickly or the cockies could start to work out that there is a much larger world out there than just their respective basements.

Tonia Walden 65



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AN ANCIENT EVIL AWAKENS.



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THE EDGE

NEWS, REVIEWS, RATS, AND MORE...

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NAVIGATING THE EDGE



Check it out!



Pay attention, there
may be a quiz.



Matt Staroscik was here.



John Wick was here.

THIS AND THAT



ROLEPLAYING IS DEAD!!!

I think not. Much of my editorial inspiration for this issue comes from attending conventions or reading other magazines. Unfortunately, in many magazines, the folks doing the writing have a doom and gloom view of what is happening in the industry. The biggest question or debate is still "Role-playing: is it dead?" Many people who are able to publish their opinions say, "Yes." I say "No." Before I say why here are a few facts from the last few months.

TSR's *D&D* sales (from reports we have heard) are now back at a profitable level. *D&D* has never made the money that *Magic* boasts, so to say that *Magic* makes more than *D&D* is just not a viable argument for the "death" of role-playing. *D&D* is, was and just may always be the best selling role-playing game of all time.

- Palladium Books has more than once since the beginning of the *Magic* craze announced records sales on new products and record months in overall sales.

- Last Unicorn Games has unbelievable preorders for the re-release of the award winning *Aria* RPG.

- White Wolf's *Kindred: The Embraced* TV show has catapulted sales of *Vampire*.

- Daedalus Games' *Feng Shui* sales are huge for a company their size. (By the way, have you seen this product? Full color with awesome art all the way through. When do I get my review copy?)

- At the recent Chessex Midwest open house, more than one industry pro commented on the large baskets of role-playing games which were being purchased.

These are just the obvious examples. I spent a good portion of time in the card game room at Gamex, a big Los Angeles con, this weekend. I listened to multiplayer games of *Jyhad* and *Legend of the Five Rings* being played, and I was surprised at the level of role-playing going on in both games. This wasn't just people throwing cards on the table at each other, it was vampires and Daimyos jockeying for power. Cards just happened to be the medium with which the players were role-playing.

Here is a fact: Role-playing games will never account for the amount of dollars that card games

do. Card games draw not only from role-players but non-gamers (as we know them) as well. But this summer the number of card games being released is fewer and role-playing games will again be a major focus of releases this summer and at GenCon. Pinnacle Entertainment will release *Deadlands*, a horror wild west game. Biohazard Games will release *Blue Planet*, while Holistic Designs has an almost guaranteed hit with *Fading Suns*. *Babylon 5* role-playing is on its way, and *Werewolf: Wild West* from White Wolf Games is expected to stir things up.

Also don't forget that many of the companies that jumped on the card game band wagon are role-playing game companies at heart. I am pleased to announce a *Legend of the Five Rings* role-playing game set to release early next year. Our friends at FPG are planning a big-production-dollar role-playing game based on the world of their new *Dark Age* card game, and Last Unicorn Games is hard at work on *Forsaken Earth*, the working title of the role-playing game based in the world of their *Heresy* card game.

Doesn't sound like role-playing is dead to me. Sounds almost like the renaissance is returning this summer. Card games have injected cash and adrenaline into the gaming industry, and that means giving those same companies more capital, and that means more of what everybody wants: good, high quality role-playing games.

If you have a take on this subject I would like to hear it. Send your letters directly to John Z. at this magazine's address.

CONTEST WINNERS!

SO FAR, NO ONE HAS ANSWERED THE DUNGEON CRAWL CONTEST FROM SHADIS #25 CORRECTLY. SO, WE'RE GOING TO KEEP TAKING ENTRIES UNTIL SOMEONE GETS IT RIGHT... KEEP THOSE CARDS AND LETTERS COMING!

WE DID, HOWEVER, HAVE A RAT RACE WINNER. WALTER MCMANNIS SPOTTED THE RAT ON PAGE 69, MASQUERADING AS A GREAT OLD ONE.

WE'D LIKE TO CONGRATULATE SHANNON RESCHKE OF WINNIPEG CANADA FOR WINNING OUR EARTHDAWN CONTEST. SHE WON OVER \$200 WORTH OF EARTHDAWN STUFF. OF COURSE, OUR SHIPPING MANAGER HAD A COW WHEN HE FOUND OUT. ('CANADA? WE GOTTA PAY TO SHIP ALL THAT STUFF TO CANADA?')

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BY LESTER SMITH

WEASEL GAMES

#4

WEASEL GAMES #4:
COMPETITIVELY STREAKING

I've often wondered at the competitive streak in human beings. Sure, it is an important survival trait for a species vying against others in Nature's food chain. But in our synthetic world of competing fast-food chains, that contentiousness is inflated to near-ridiculous proportions.

Some of our race's more gentle members claim that competition isn't an innate element of human nature, but rather something imparted to individuals by a violent society.

But I'm not convinced. As far as the question of "nature versus nurture" is concerned regarding competitiveness, I lean pretty firmly toward "nature" as the source. In part, that attitude is due (as I've mentioned in a previous article) to the fact that some of our teeth are designed for tearing meat, and that a few essential proteins are extremely difficult to acquire from a diet of plants. Biologically, then, we bear evidence of our ancestry; our forebears chased, killed, and ate animals, an image of competition in its most primal form. Also, I think that it is telling that the Western world's free market economy — which depends upon competition as its driving force — continues to thrive while noncompetitive models collapse under the weight of their own lethargy. My opinion is further firm by the accounts of pacifists who have tried to keep their sons away from "war toys," only to find them pointing sticks at friends and hollering "Pow! Pow!"

However, modern society also depends on cooperation to a great extent. (After all, some of our teeth are designed for grinding plants, too, typical of herd animals.) We rely upon one another to fill specific needs, and develop specialists to supply food, water, electricity, medical care... and even entertainment. But paradoxically, the nature of that entertainment is quite often competitive. Consider popular sports, for example. Basketball, football, hockey, car

racing, all involve human-to-human competition. Even in sports such as

mountain climbing, in which climbers are apparently battling the rock face itself and the elements of nature, the goal is to beat an earlier record for speed or height; in other words, to do better than the individual who holds that record — to

"best" that person, if you will. Sports involving head-to-head competition simply make our rivalry more obvious.

Given our heritage as both plant- and meat-eaters — as both "bonders" and "competers" — it shouldn't be surprising that there is some difference of opinion over just how competitive a game ought to be. My spouse, for example, enjoys games in which cooperation plays a large part and despises games that pit individuals against one another, while I generally prefer the thrill of "dog-eat-dog" individual competition and find cooperative games enjoyable only as an occasional



THIS MONTH: THE COMPETITIVE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS,
LIFE AS OMNIVORES, AND CHILL-BLACK MORN MANOR.

break from savagery. The fact that both sorts of games continue to be produced says that there are lots of people out there from each perspective, and I certainly have a number of friends in each camp. Largely, though, I think it is more a question of degree than of pure dichotomy. The team games my spouse prefers give her the satisfying feeling of working together, but she is still involved in a competition. And while I enjoy contests of individual prowess, I prefer to play things that move quickly, allowing several games to be played in one session, so that everyone has a good chance of going home having won at least once.

What's more, I enjoy watching people grow and learn from the games they play. I have a friend who used to become so irritated when the dice seemed to be against him that he would often throw them across the room. As weeks grew into months, and months into years, he steadily gained control over that irritation, and I am positive that it mirrored the growth of patience in his daily life. I have learned a few lessons along that line myself, lessons about not taking things too seriously, and about putting competition into perspective.

Perhaps the best example of my learning that lesson involves a session of the *Chill: Black Morn Manor* board game. In this game, players investigate a haunted house, seeking to destroy the evil master lurking there. The game is designed in such a way that the master changes from session to session, so each game session involves solving the mystery of what sort of creature the master is, what powers are at its disposal, and what item is required to defeat it. To set up the mystery, the game begins one player in the role of a minion of the master, and that player constructs the event deck to reflect the particular creature to be defeated. The other players take the roles of envoys of S.A.V.E., a secret society which combats the supernatural. Over the course of play, envoys who lose all their willpower become minions, while minions can be "saved" from their evil enslavement, thereby joining the ranks of the envoys. Envoys win the game cooperatively, by together defeating the master; minions can only win individually, by being the one who carries off the board the one item capable of defeating the master.

In this particular session, I began the game as the minion — so I knew who the master was — and my spouse and a close friend were envoys. As play progressed, they managed to rescue me from the master's dominance. And yet — I am ashamed to admit — I would not tell them who the master

was. My reasoning was that the object necessary for defeating the master had not yet showed, and if, in the course of continuing the game, I became a minion again, I wanted the edge of being the only one to know what item was necessary to win the game. It was a wargamer's way of thinking, keeping the upper hand, covering all options. But my spouse and friend were incredulous at my attitude... and then disgusted. As things turned out, I did end up a minion once again, and with the edge of having kept the master's identity secret, I won the game.

It was a hollow victory. The other two players were really "cheesed," and as I thought things over during the next several days (having plenty of time to do so, considering that conversation at home was strangely scarce), I came to see that from, my spouse's and friend's perspective I had violated the spirit of the game. Undoubtedly, a "real" person, having been rescued from a monstrous master's control, would have blabbed everything he knew about the master. Considering that, only a weasel player would refuse to do so in the game.

Mea culpa.

I've definitely benefited from the experience, gaining new insights into what strings different games pluck in the human psyche. That's knowledge that serves a game designer well.

Oh, and by the way, I apologized about that particular session of the *Black Morn Manor* game, and things

are fine at home now.



WARBENING

GAMING
INDUSTRY
NEWS BY
STEVE
JOHNSON

NEWS

R. TALSORIAN & HERO GIVE CHAMPIONS A FACELIFT

On April 25, R. Talsorian and Hero Games jointly announced that RTG will publish and distribute Hero Games products worldwide. The agreement calls for Hero Games to work jointly with RTG in producing Hero products. Hero fans will be pleased to know that Bruce Harlick will continue to be the Hero Line Editor, and that RTG's leading-edge graphics and stylistic skills will be found in future Hero products. All the quality of Hero writers with all the style of an RTG product? Sounds like it's too good to be true.

THOSE MYRMIDON BOYS HAVE BEEN BUSY!

Myrmidon Press (the guys who published *Manhunter* and *Cosmic Enforcers*) have just announced the release of *Witchcraft*, a role-playing game of dark modern fantasy written by acclaimed author C. J. Carella. Players will take the rolls of 'the Gifted,' workers of the Wise Craft (that's witchcraft), facing off against supernatural murderers and human exploiters and despoilers. Definitely a book for mature readers!

Myrmidon also wishes to announce *Villains & Foes*, a new sourcebook for *Cosmic Enforcers*. The book will be written and illustrated by Kevin Long (long-time illustrator for the *Robotech* RPG). Kevin Long plans to make the *Cosmic Enforcers* line his own, and will be writing/illustrating several supplements for that game. The book deals with the underside of the galaxy, from evil aliens to gangsters and vigilantes who oppose the cosmic enforcers. The book will detail over 50 villains, teams and organizations as well as several archetypes, powers, magic and technology.

RONIN PUBLISHING HAS OPENED THE WHISPERING VAULT

A Boston based company named Ronin Publishing has acquired *The Whispering Vault*. Chris Pramas is currently the Vice President of Vault, and was one of the original freelance authors who worked on the original game. He's also done work for such games and *Underground*, *Over The Edge*, *Warhammer FRP*, and the upcoming *Feng Shui*. Upcoming support will include the release of *Mortal Magic* and *The Book of Hunts*. Ronin is also working on its first original game, currently codenamed *Dreadnought*. Good luck guys!

THE SLA INDUSTRIES SELL-OUT!

Wizards of the Coast has announced that it has found a new home for its RPG *SLA Industries*. Jageeda Publishing will be handling the production of SLA, including supplementary material and a new fiction line. Company principals include Matt Murray, Katherine Sifers, Brian Dugan and Dave Allsop (one of the original creators of the original game). You can reach Jageeda Publishing at (206) 298-9917.

FENG SHUI STOPPED AT THE BORDER

Feng Shui (the long-awaited RPG based on the highly popular *Shadowfist* CCG) got stopped at the border. Fortunately, Daedalus Games sent a whole gang of Dragons down to the border and kicked serious butt. We should be seeing the RPG any day now. Also, *Flashpoint* has suffered an additional set-back. Fortunately, the design team took advantage of the delay and streamlined the expansion to perfection. Way to go guys. The Players' Guide should be out in the fall and *Combat In Kowloon* has moved ahead of schedule as well.

WHITE WOLF ANNOUNCES SCI-FI RPG LINE

It's finally happened — White Wolf Game Studio has announced the impending release of a science-fiction roleplaying game line. The project is being headed up by Mark Rein•Hagen, the creator of *Vampire: The Masquerade*.

It should be interesting to watch things shape up between the as-yet unnamed White Wolf product and *Fading Suns*, the sci-fi RPG project being developed by Andrew Greenberg and Bill Bridges — former White Wolfers themselves.

HOW EXACTLY DO YOU PRONOUNCE "REIN•HAGEN" ANYWAY?

According to our sources, the buller in Rein•Hagen is pronounced by clicking your tongue. Alternative pronunciations such as whistles and less couth noises are discouraged.

PYTHON & THE GRAIL BACK ON THE SCREEN

Your computer screen, that is. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is a movie, soon to be a card game, and now is also a strategy game for your home computer. Produced by 7th Level (the folks who made the very popular *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time* CD-ROM package), *Holy Grail* offers new animation, voice overs by Pythons Gilliam, Idle, Jones and Palin, and the long-forgotten "King Brian the Wild" scene that never made it to the final cut of the film. If you're a Python Squid, this is a must have!

CANTICLE PUBLISHING RELEASES SINGLE CARD STRATEGIES MAGAZINE

Canticle Publishing, of Canada, will be launching a new magazine for collectible card game players in August. "Single Card Strategies" will feature not only the obligatory deck design tips, but history and background on the games. Subscribers can look forward to fiction, interviews, and lot more. Canticle can be reached at 923 Somerset Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3T1E8. (<http://www.aratar.mb.ca/~canticle>)

LOOKS LIKE ATLAS GAMES HAS BEEN BUSY, TOO

Atlas Games has obviously been taking advantage of getting snowed in out there in cold, cold Minnesota. Coming soon are Second Edition *Over The Edge*, 4th Edition *Ars Magica*, *Wetworks* (the new expansion for *On The Edge*), *Foxbat Unhinged* (a licensed Champions adventure supplement), and a new card game called *Lunch Money*. Both *Foxbat* and *Lunch Money* have already been released. The others will be released by the end of the year.



EVEN
MORE
NEWS

FASA'S WEB DEBUT
FASA'S WEB SITE IS
UP AT
WWW.FASA.COM.
VISIT IT TO GET THE
LATEST ON
BATTLETECH,
SHADOWRUN, AND
EARTHDAWN, AS
WELL AS FAQs,
ERRATA, SUBMISSION
GUIDELINES, AND
MORE.

WTS

BY BRYAN WINTER

IN THE TRENCHES

IN THE TRENCHES IS A MONTHLY ARTICLE DEDICATED TO THE GAME RETAILER. EACH MONTH WE WILL PROVIDE READERS WITH METHODS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, STORE APPEARANCE, SALES TECHNIQUES, AND PROFITS!

BRYAN WINTER IS THE DESIGNER OF THE DOOMTROOPER CARD GAME, AMONG OTHER PRODUCTS, AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN GAMING FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS. ED IN GAMING FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS. HIS OPINIONS ABOUT RETAILING AND THE CURRENT GAME MARKET ARE HIS ALONE, AND NOT THOSE OF SHADIS MAGAZINE OR ITS PROPRIETORS. SO THERE.

LESSON 4 TO EVERYTHING: TURN, TURN, TURN

No, it's not the Retro Sixties Flashback Fantasy version of *In The Trenches*, so put away those beads and get yourself a haircut. And while I'm at it, stop wearing those throwback Seventies flare-bottomed polyester-shining get-away-from-that-open-flame digs. I for one was alive and conscious during the disco years and I still wake up screaming. OK, that said, let's get on to the task at hand. This month I'm taking my turn and talking about "turning."

You know what "overhead" is (if you don't, get yourself to a Small Business Workshop at your local community college). Overhead is what costs you valuable cash. Your store, your personnel, your lights, your vacuum cleaner, and even your shelves are overhead. But the biggest overhead you have is what is sitting on those shelves — your inventory. This is the stuff that keeps you eating, but only if you "turn" it out the door.

The concept of turning your inventory is simple. You want to sell the items in your store, of course. But that's not enough. What you *really* want to do is make sure you sell the items in your store over and over again. It's a cycle. You bring in an item, sell it, order another one, sell it, order another, and so on. This revolving cycle is the primary goal of every retailer. Make sure it is yours as well.

The "experts" say that a good turning rate is 5 to 6. That means that your goal should be to turn every item in your store five or six times during a fiscal year. What that really means is that you have to sell your *entire* store's inventory five to six times *every year* in order to make a profit. Quite a feat! Now take a look at that dusty old copy of *Goober Wars* in the corner. Man, you haven't sold that thing in three years.

This is where it gets tricky. You want to have a good selection to offer your customers. That is vital. But that also means you are going to have to bring in a few obscure items in order to maintain that selection. You know they won't turn, but they will give your customers the feeling that your store has "everything," thereby increasing turns in

other areas. The important thing to realize is that unless you sell five or six copies of *Goober Wars* during a single year, that game is not turning a profit.

Keep the concept of turning your inventory in head at all times, especially when you are ordering. You don't need to order an entire year's worth of a product in one sitting. Instead, you can design your ordering system around turning. Wait for a product to sell, and then order another. The game distributors usually do a pretty good job about getting your order to you within a day or two. Only order an item when it sells out (or in the case of a hot mover, order when inventory is at a low point). Let the distributors sit on the overhead for you. That way you can afford to bring in more obscure titles that will make your customers happy. Don't consider these items money-makers. Instead, consider them "investments." Endeavor for inventory that is "an inch deep and a mile wide."

So where is the balance for your store? Good question, and one only you can answer. There are games that take up the slack and turn *dozens* of times in a year. That is natural. But remember, those games are not only paying your heating bill, they are paying for your overhead that is not turning. It is indeed a balancing act!

Measure the profitability of each shelf in your store, and then make changes to reflect the turning potential of each shelf. If your TSR section makes you the most money, why are you shoving it all into one small area? Products should be displayed at a proportion of their profitability. If TSR is making six times the profit of another company, give TSR products six times more space. That way, you balance turning power among your shelves.

I'll bet lately your biggest money-makers are taking up the least amount of space in your store: collectable card games. I'm going to devote all of next month's feature to these little buggers... But for now, take a look at that pile of *Fallen Arches* in the corner and remember that a pile of product that does not turn, turn, turn will just make you pay, pay, pay.

SUPER TUESDAY!

MEET THE CANDIDATES IN THE
SHADOWRUN ELECTIONS OF 2057



GENERAL
FRANKLIN
YEATS
(REPUBLICAN)



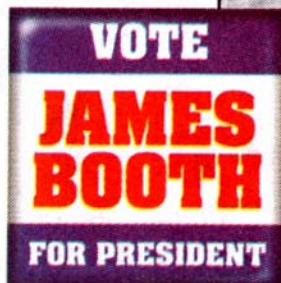
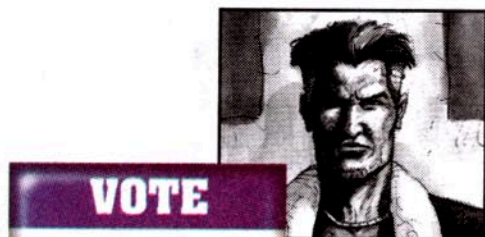
DUNKELZAHN
(INDEPENDENT)



ARTHUR VOGEL (ONE WORLD PARTY)



DR. ROZILYN HERNANDEZ (NEW CENTURY PARTY)



JAMES BOOTH
(TECHNOCRATIC
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SUPER TUESDAY IS A
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INTENDED FOR PLAYERS
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TUESDAY BRINGS YOU
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Welcome to Campaign 2057.

Absentee ballots available in *Super Tuesday* (on sale now), *Threats* (May), and *Shadows of the Underworld* (June). Your vote could be the difference! Ballots are entered in a drawing for great prizes!
Help determine the next president of the UCAS.

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DON'T HURT THE SNAKE!

BLOOD DAWN

• PUBLISHED BY OPTIMUS DESIGN SYSTEMS

• \$24.95/240 PAGES

• REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCK



I don't know about you, but I have been waiting for a new post-holocaust RPG for years. I've always been a fan of the world-in-ruins, scrounging-for-ammo-and-gas genre. What's not to like about tough guys with mohawks and sawed-off scatterguns, rusted-out nitrous-boosted cars, improvised weapons, and irradiated wastelands? It was probably *Gamma World* that first hooked me, lo these many years ago. *Gamma World* was in fact the first RPG I ever played, and I suppose it's GW's fault that today I find myself working for AEG instead of holding a respectable job.

Well, today I can finally retire my beaten-up copy of the 2nd Edition *Gamma World* rules to the Old Games Home. *Blood Dawn* is here, and it was worth the wait.

The setup is of course familiar. Mounting political tensions eventually result in a nuclear exchange taking place in 2042. In a flash of light, a lot of new parking lots are created. The nuclear winter kicks in shortly thereafter. Society crumbles, and by the time of the game's setting, 68 years after the war, things look like a *Mad Max* movie.

Except, of course, that Max never had to deal with mutants, the 4th New York Provincial Militia, or witches. Yep, that's right — there's magic in *Blood Dawn* too. There are covens of witches, healers, and cybernetically-enhanced human wizards, not to mention the magic-like powers possessed by some mutants. It's an interesting take on the classic post-holocaust genre, and I like how they did it.

Blood Dawn is built around the d20, uses eight stats, has point-based character creation, and uses skills instead of classes. There are 14 character archetypes given to get you started, but they're just the beginning. The game's mechanics are a lot like *Battlelords of the 23rd Century*. Like B23C, there are a ton of spells, long equipment lists, deadly weapons, and techno-toys to tantalize players with. The ODS touch is apparent, and welcome.

I only wish they had included more information on what happened to the rest of the world; only America is dealt with in this first book. If they crank out material like they did for B23C, though, we'll get all the supplements we could ever want.

Blood Dawn doesn't break any new ground, but it is a very skillful renovation of a genre that, in my opinion, has been left alone for too long. I'm glad to see it back.



WARBENING

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Redefining The Mythos

A Review of Call of Cthulhu

by Kevin Jones

How in the world do you review *Call of Cthulhu*? After all, everybody in the gaming industry knows exactly what *Cthulhu* is all about.

Or do they?

When I asked a friend of mine what he thought of CoC, he put it in very precise terms. "I don't like it because there's no way to win. You have to go against gods, man. There's no chance. No hope. All you can do is hope to drive them away for a while before they come back, and what the hell kind of fun is that?"

That's when I asked him if he'd ever played the game before. "Uh — no. I mean, if I don't like the premise, then why even try playing the game?"

My friend had a very good point that I won't even try to argue. If you're not into science fiction, you don't play *Traveller*. If you don't like high heroic fantasy, you don't play *D&D*. The problem is that most people don't know the premise of *Call of Cthulhu*. They hear what other people tell them what the game is about, and before they even try it out, they've already got a bad first impression that will mark them for life.

So right here, I'm going to try and break that whole misconception of what *Cthulhu* is all about so you'll have the right impression. Yeah, it's a mean, cold horrific world, but there's so much more that you're missing out on. Come on, let's take a look at where this big monster called *Cthulhu* comes from, and once you know his history, he won't be so scary anymore.

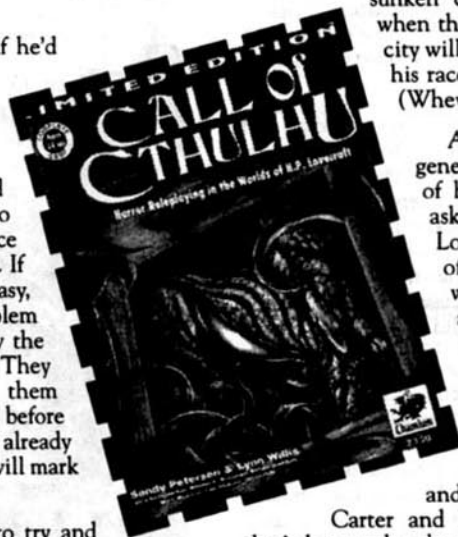
Call of Cthulhu is a role-playing game of fantastic horror based on the works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. "The Old Man of Providence" was a prolific writer who published most of his work in a small press magazine called *Weird Tales* back in the '20s and '30s. His stories usually

focused on the small town of Arkham, MA and involved the students and professors of Miskatonic University who did battle with an alien race of incredible power called "The Great Old Ones." So unfathomable was their might, that their science was like magic to a human's puny mind. Corrupt and insane humans worshiped the Great Old Ones, and the most prolific cult of worship was the Cult of *Cthulhu*, a giant, squid-like beast who lies in a death-dream state under the Pacific Ocean in his sunken city, waiting for the time when the stars will be right and his city will rise up from the depths and his race will rule the world again. (Whew, that was a mouthful.)

Anyway, Lovecraft generated a small cult following of his own, and when others asked permission to add to Lovecraft's growing pantheon of Great Old Ones, he welcomed them. Soon, authors such as Robert E. Howard (the guy who created Conan the Barbarian), Robert Bloch (author of *Psycho*), Fritz Leiber (the fellow responsible for *Fafhrd*

and the Gray Mouser), Lin

Carter and Ramsey Campbell (if you don't know who they are, you'd better go renew your library card) were all creating their own unspeakable monstrosities and blasphemous books. Soon, "the Lovecraft Circle" was passing private jokes in the pages of *Weird Tales*. The young Robert Bloch was kind enough to kill off Lovecraft in one story, and H.P. gladly returned the favor in another. Robert E. Howard mocked the self-important August Derleth by creating and killing off the effete "Compte d'Erelette" while Lovecraft wrote up a bogus "History of the Necronomicon," filled with in-jokes and jabs at his Circle. It was, perhaps, the most prolific "shared universe" the fantasy/science



THIS MONTH'S
SUBSCRIPTION FEATURE
(IF YOU HAVEN'T FIGURED
IT OUT YET) IS
CALL OF CTHULHU.
WE ASKED ONE OF OUR
BUSIEST WRITERS TO DO
UP A REVIEW OF THE
CLASSIC RPG AND HE
GAVE US A GLASSY
STARE.
HOW DO YOU REVIEW
CTHULHU? HERE'S HOW
KEVIN DID IT.

fiction/horror genres have ever seen, and it didn't stop with Lovecraft's untimely death. The Circle kept his memory alive by continuing to write "Cthulhu Mythos" tales while August Derleth and Donald Wandrei created *Arkham House*, a small press publishing house that published Lovecraft's fiction in a single collection for the first time.

Fifty years passed, and something inexplicable happened. "Real" authors started publishing Cthulhu Mythos stories. Guys like Phillip José Farmer, Alan Dean Foster, Harlan Ellison and Stephen King wrote their share of Mythos fiction, some of which was even worthy of publication. (Most Mythos fiction isn't, because authors usually dabble in the Cthulhu Mythos in their youth, and it's published as juvenalia.) And that's how the largest shared universe in the literary world was born. Lovecraft started it more than sixty years ago, and its still going strong.

Now, let's talk about *Call of Cthulhu*.

In CoC, you play the role of an Investigator. Game Masters (called "Keepers" which is short for "Keeper of Arcane Lore") usually run scenarios from one of the three "Eras": *Cthulhu by Gaslight* (1890's), *Classic Cthulhu* (1920's), or *Cthulhu Now* (1990's).

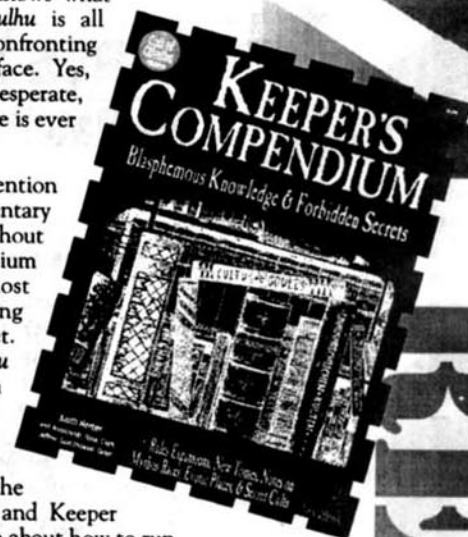
A typical *Cthulhu* game usually feels more like a Sherlock Holmes mystery rather than a Tolkien Quest. The Investigation usually begins with a mystery — a dead body, a missing relative, a mysterious death, or the discovery of a mysterious artifact. As the mystery unravels, the Investigators begin stumbling across things that... well, just don't make sense. Things become more surreal as they strip away the initial veil that keeps Mankind safe from the true nature of a stark, uncaring universe. Whether it's uncovering a cult of Cthulhu worshippers whose arcane powers defy logical explanation, or the discovery of a small town who is trading unspeakable acts for gold bars from shambling horrors from the sea, a typical *Cthulhu* adventure can be as sedate or as spectacular as the Keeper wishes to make it.

I've played in *Cthulhu Investigations* that began with a simple disappearance and ended with the Investigators trapped in a subterranean temple, half of them trying to hold off inhuman cultists while the other half try to set up enough explosives to detonate the place. Contrary to popular belief, Tommy-gun shoot-outs and fist fights are not alien to *Cthulhu*, but those who try and use violence against the malevolent power of the Great Old Ones are going to be in for a bout of disappointment. The emphasis in *Cthulhu* is investigation. Putting the puzzle together isn't half the fun, sometimes, it's all the fun. And it creates an interesting dichotomy. After all, if you spend all of your Character Points on things like Perception, Investigation, Clue Analysis, and that great *Cthulhu* Skill Library Use, you've got a character who isn't a combat monster, and when

combat with the cultists *does* come, players really start sweating. Combat isn't scary when you've got a character who knows what he's doing, and playing *Cthulhu* is all about getting scared, about confronting the unknown with a brave face. Yes, sometimes the battles can be desperate, but when there's hope, no battle is ever futile.

The last thing I'd like to mention about *Cthulhu* is the supplementary material. I think I can say, without fear of retribution, that Chaosium publishes some of the most thoroughly researched gaming materials on the market. Purchasing a *Cthulhu* supplement is like purchasing a little encyclopedia. A good example are the 20s *Investigator Companions*, Vol I & II. Volume I contains all the information a *Cthulhu* player and Keeper need if they want to know more about how to run a campaign in the Roaring 20s. It's got information about mundane things that you'd never think about. Headings include: Men's Fashions, Women's Fashions, Sports, National Records, State and Local Records, American Magazines, Buses and Trolleys, Taxi Cabs, Driving In America, Everyday Items (just how does a flashlight work in the '20s?), Winter Gear, Communication, Climbing Gear, Firearms and the Law, Special Ammunition and (yummy) Submachine Guns. Volume II includes 140 Occupations for use in the '20s, including special rules for each. It also includes 1920s Skills, Legal Tips, and a whole section on science and forensics. These two books (both listed at \$10.95) are *invaluable* to anyone who plans on running any role-playing game during that Era, which is true with just about *anything* Chaosium publishes. They put a lot of pride and research in their work, and it shows.

Call of Cthulhu is not a game about futility. It is a game about Mankind fighting desperate battles against horrors that are beyond human comprehension. It's not a game for the meek or timid, those who believe that good always overcomes evil because that's the way it works in all those fancy Tolkien Quest clones. If you've seen *Alien*, *John Carpenter's The Thing*, or *The Prophecy* (very Lovecraftian angels and devils), then you know exactly what you're stepping into when you play *Call of Cthulhu*. It's a desperate, deadly battle, but those are really the only ones worth fighting, aren't they?



Excellent
Satisfactory
Unsatisfactory

Plays Well with Others

by Matt Patterson

GO TO THE FAIRE!

The present world must suck. In this post-modern era it's normal to lose oneself in the fictional reality presented by popular culture. When it's over, most people go back to their humdrum lives a little refreshed. There is however, a growing subculture that refuses to come back to the crappy reality the rest of us peons live in.

One weekend in April, two of the biggest "alternative realities" opened their gates to the public: The Annual Grand Slam Star Trek Show, which draws 30,000 rabid Trekkies in one weekend, and the Renaissance Faire, which draws at least as many people during its two month run. Like any good media freak show, scores of reporters, flashing their press credentials and their big expensive equipment around, would be trying to home in on the big "story". What makes these people tick? I had a notepad, a disposable camera, a fake press pass that was stolen from a movie set, and an idea that would give me the scoop. I would gain their trust, hence more probing interviews, by becoming "one of them".

Although hastily slapped together, my costume was pretty good. It was a black wool cape draped over a black sackcloth I found in my closet, topped with a black plastic, feather-studded helmet I had around the house. I looked like Mordred in a gay production of the musical *Camelot*. No one would suspect I wasn't one of them.

Although the Pasadena Convention center is an unlikely spot for medieval pageantry, the illusion was well maintained. Costumed characters of all shapes and sizes paraded around the outside grounds. A costumed bunch milling around outside the entrance caught my eye. Their actions were aggressive, their costumes were meticulous, and their cleavage was ample. Would these Amazonian goddesses talk to a regular reporter? Please.

"Who the hell are you supposed to be?" asked a lusty wench as she looked me over. Their suspicions eased as I told them I was a warrior — and a reporter — who would like to ask them some questions. As they nodded in agreement I

was composing my Pulitzer acceptance speech. It worked! I asked if they made their own costumes by hand.

"Fool! We do not make our own clothing!" They all nodded in agreement. I taken aback by their coarse manner but I guess they were still in "character". I tried loosening them up by asking if they were participating in the live-action chess game but was met with blank stares. I was about to ask if they really enjoyed drinking mead even though it was honey-sweetened vinegar, but noticed something weird about them. Furrowing their brows in disapproval, I noticed each of them sported an artificial bulbous lumpy forehead. Were they trying to simulate victims of the bubonic plague?

"Are you some Federation spy?" a lady growled. Another unsheathed a nasty-looking curved blade. "Why do you pester us? Do you know where you are?" I guess my black outfit might be mistaken for some kind of Federation of German States spy costume (or was that the Holy Roman Empire?), but I really think my presumptuousness offended them. I quickly complimented them on their excellent blacksmith costumes, and their fine application of burn make-up. My dodge didn't work. They looked really annoyed. Their weapons looked like they could really hurt me, even if they were just foam and plywood. Looking down at my trusty pad I fired off a desperate question. Did they believe in magic?

They stopped, looked around, and all answered yes. I finally got through to them! It was then that Security approached me and asked for identification.

They announced that my press pass was bogus, and I was in trouble. No kidding. Now my prize-winning interview was ruined. I did what any good undercover reporter should do when confronted by authority figures. I ran away.

I guess it didn't really matter where I was. A costume is a costume. What mattered more to me was that if I actually paid full price for both events I would've been out sixty 1996 American dollars. How's that for reality?

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MYTHOS

- PUBLISHED BY CHAOSIUM
- \$8.95 STARTERS/\$2.95 BOOSTERS
- REVIEWED BY JANE ST. CLAIR

The back of the box reads "Mythos is Chaosium's collectable card game of authentic Lovecraftian horror. It features simple rules with complex strategies that allow the players to attempt to narrate a series of adventures before going insane from the growing horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos." That sums up very well how the game plays. It is quick, simple and filled with Lovecraftiania that makes any Cthulhu fan drool. Now, I'm not a big Cthulhu fan, so I sat down with a friend of mine (a short black-haired Welsh guy named Jones) and while we learned the rules, Kevin explained what all the cards meant. He got real excited about getting cards like *Asanath Waite*, *Edward Derby Pickman*, *Herbert West*, and (of course) *The Necronomicon*. Kevin showed me that it was the Greek translation. The game is filled with references to the Cthulhu Mythos, and Kevin seemed very happy about that.

What I was happy about was how easy it was to learn how to play. You get an "Investigator Card" in each Starter Deck that has a different Investigator on each side. Each Investigator has a beginning Sanity score. The object of the game is pretty much the same as a *Call of Cthulhu* game: Encounter as much Mythos as possible without going insane. As you encounter the creepy crawly things from other dimensions, you begin to lose Sanity. The objective is to get cards into your Story Deck (a special kind of discard pile) that match up with the **Adventure Cards** you have in your hand. I'll explain how those work later.

Mythos is much more like a conventional card game than most of the CCGs on the market. You only get to play one card per turn, unless a card says it can **Join** with another card. For instance, if you have three *Deep Ones* in your hand, you can play them all as a single card because they **Join**. Otherwise, it's just one card a turn.

You start the game by going to a **Location**, such as the *Arkham Asylum for the Deranged* or the *Miskatonic University Orne Library* or the *Marsh Farmhouse*. Once you've arrived at the **Location**, you can find other things there (bring more cards into play). Certain **Locations** allow you to bring **Artifacts** into play (like *Mist Projectors* and *Elephant Guns*) or if the **Location** has a Gate, you can use the Gate to bring **Monsters** into play. All **Monsters** enter play *face down* (which presents a small problem I'll talk about later). You can also get **Allies**, **Tomes** (like that *Necro-what's-it-called*)

and **Spells** (**Spells** Join with **Tomes** when you bring the big books into play). Once both players "Pass" their actions — or when a single player passes twice — the turn is over and the **Monsters** wake up. My **Monsters** attack you, your **Monsters** attack me, our **Allies** get in the way (we thought it was very appropriate that you could push your friends in the way of the beasts) and you and I lose **Sanity** from the **Monsters** that get through. Run out of **Sanity**, the game's over. That's the basic mechanics of the game. As I said, it's quick and simple. Now, here's the intricate part.

As I said before, the objective is to get **Adventure Cards** into play. There's a whole bunch of different **Adventure Cards** and each one of them has a different set of requirements. For instance, if you have **The Curious Parcel** in your hand and you have a **Tome** with a **Spell**, have travelled to one **Library**, one **Cemetery**, and a **Gate** location along with meeting two **Allies** on the way, you can put **The Curious Parcel** into play. You get 2 **Sanity** back (whew!) and score 6 **Points**. The game ends on one of two conditions. If I get 25 **Points**, the game's over. If *anyone* goes insane, the game's over and we count up **Points+Sanity**. Whoever has the highest total wins. Yes, that means that you can win by going insane (which is how Kevin won, the sneaky bugger).

It's got a neat storytelling feel (something I liked) and a lot of slimy fish guys (something Kevin liked way too much). There may be a problem with the **Monsters** (Dave W. at the office said he could build a **Deep Ones** deck that would be brutal), but the game really doesn't have a competitive feel. *Mythos* is *definitely* not for the competitive at heart. It's too easy to make degenerate decks. But it is a great game for friends to play, and for fans of the whole *Mythos*-thing. I've never read a Lovecraft story or played *Cthulhu* and I still had a lot of fun trying to drive little Kevin insane. It's quick to learn, filled with horror and humor (like *Giant Albino Penguins*— where did this come from?) Try it out!



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You

Only one entry per person, please. If you haven't figured it out, here's how it works. Send us a postcard with your name, address and phone number. You'll get entered in a random drawing to win the stuff in the sidebar. You must answer this question: "Have you heard the call of Cthulhu?" Simple "Yes" and "No" answers are acceptable. However, we will be also handing out all that other stuff to the answer that gave us the most maddening giggles. So, get creative and you might win more than you counted on. Entries are due by July 1, 1996, so get busy. We'll be announcing the winner in SHADIS #29. And if you've won lately, take a break, OK?

REVIEWS

ROBOTANKS

- PUBLISHED BY THE GAMESMITHS

- \$29.95

- REVIEWED BY MARCELO A. FIGUEROA

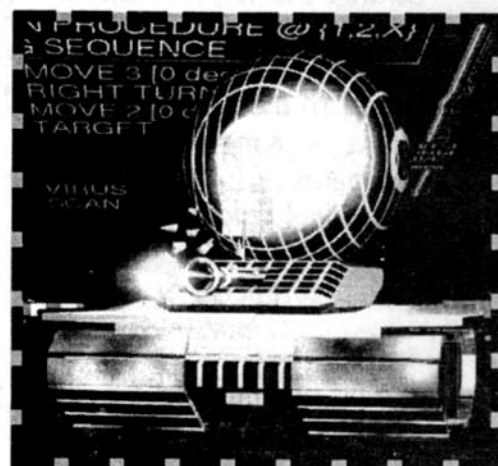
How many of you remember going to the theater as a kid to see one of the movies with the most ground breaking special effects in cinematic history? Of course it had to be a Disney movie. I don't know about you, but *Tron* is still one of my all-time favorite movies. Okay, so what does that have to do with the game? *Robotanks*, the fourth game by The Gamesmiths and designer Jeff Siadek, reminds me of those awesome tank battles in *Tron*.

The concept behind *Robotanks* is that each of up to four players controls a stable of four computer programmed tanks, and a command post. After set up, which entails merely setting the tanks in their assigned positions on the board, the computer program deck is shuffled and 18 cards are dealt to each player. Then, the players are allowed to set up a program loop for each tank, which will represent the order that the commands are executed in. If the player holds back a reserve of cards in his hand, he will have them to draw from later. The remainder of the cards are set aside to be used later also. The real strategy in this game is careful choice and ordering of the program cards.

The object of the game is to be the only player to have tanks on the board. The program cards are designed to control the movements, and the combat actions of the tanks. Each turn, each player is allowed to either play the next card in the tank's program loop, or declare a re-programming and reorder/replace the cards in the loop from the reserve hand. The greatest aspect of this game is when the player thinks he has the perfect program loop, and things go strangely awry. **Bait:** In combat, the tank shoots at the closest target, regardless of to whom it belongs. The definition of "target" includes command posts (one of which may be the player's own, because the tanks start right in front of it). **Hook:** Whenever a tank takes damage, the program cards for that tank are shuffled, one is drawn randomly, and discarded. When a tank no longer has any program cards to command it, it is destroyed. **Reel:** The same goes for when the command post takes damage. The cards held in reserve by the player are also subject to the same damage procedure as the tanks, except that when all of the cards are lost from the reserve, all of the players remaining tanks are destroyed and the player is out of the game. The player can also be put out of the game just by losing all of his tanks in combat. A four-player game only takes about an hour, maybe 90 minutes for the first game.

Besides how the game plays, this is by far the

best looking game The Gamesmiths have yet produced. The computerized images of tanks on the cards is stunning. The rules aren't a whole lot to sneeze at, either. All seven pages of them are easy enough for a child to comprehend, and shouldn't take an adult more than a few minutes to read. I have to admit that I became a fan of Jeff Siadek after I had purchased a used copy of *Total War*. *Robotanks* is a fresh alternative to the limited nature of traditional board games. *Monopoly* can only go so far. I prefer *North American Rails*, *Supremacy*, and *Robotanks*.



ROBOTANKS INCLUDES 16
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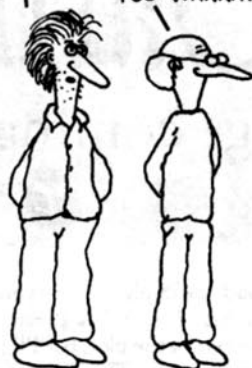
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They say that every Game Master is different, but there is one thing that will always be true about each and every one of them: Game Masters love resource materials. They just can't seem to get enough of them. Well, about twelve years ago, I got the GM bug, and it was with my very first RPG: *Call of Cthulhu*. Ever since then, I've been on the look-out for resource material. I've walked through the cramped and dusty corridors of used book stores and through the dark and dismal hallways of the public library, looking for sources to draw new stories from.

Then a friend turned me on to *The Unspeakable Oath* (TUO), a magazine published by a small publishing house called Pagan Publishing. The tiny magazine was loaded with information to use for CoC, as well as a big old parody section that made me fall on my face laughing. A lot of people think

The two "campaign" books Pagan has published are *Walker In The Wastes* and *Coming Full Circle* (both written by John W. Crowe III and priced at \$19.95 and \$17.95 respectively, and reviewed separately below). As for the backbone of Pagan Publishing, *The Unspeakable Oath* is perhaps one of the finest small press magazines in existence, certainly the finest for Lovecraft addicts. Very recently, TUO has changed its format a bit and it's meant nothing but improvement. Regular features include *Mysterious Manuscripts* (Mythos and non-Mythos tomes); *Tales of Terror* (quick snippet stories with multiple endings to fit your style); and *The Eye of Light and Darkness* (reviews of all things Lovecraftian and horrible). TUO also regularly offers complete stories to spring on your players. Most of these are single session stories and most are also better off left to the grown-ups. One of my

Take the Unspeakable Oath

A look at all those creepy things coming
out of Pagan Publishing.

that horror gamers have no sense of humor. If you believe that, you should see the *Cthulhu For President* poster I have hanging up on my wall. Not only were these guys informative, educated damn fine writers, but they were also funny! I was hooked, and I've been a devoted follower ever since.

There are three story sourcebooks available now from Pagan, all of which deserve high praise. *Devil's Children* tells the tale of four witches from witch-haunted Salem. In a stunning two-part tale, the players play both witches and then play the part of the ancestors of the men who caused their downfall. To reveal more would be to spoil Hitchcock-style surprise ending. *Of Gates & Keys* presents three early stories published in TUO, all of which deal with extradimensional threats, and lastly, *Grace Under Pressure* details the story of a doomed submarine and its encounter with the Cthulhu Mythos forty fathoms down. Each of these books provide extensive playtest notes, game master props (a must for any CoC game), bibliographies and sources and priced under \$8 apiece.

favorites (and a good example of a typical scenario) is *In Media Res*. I wouldn't dream of letting you in on the secrets of the plot, but I'll tell you how the thing starts out. There are four people standing in the middle of a room. Each of them are wearing prison garb. None of them know who each other are, or why they are there. One of them is holding a bloody knife and there's a body in the middle of their little circle. The face of the body has been cut away and one of the players is wearing the skin over his own face! Did I forget to mention he also has the tongue of the corpse in his mouth? Put your players in that situation, then sit back and say "Go" and see what happens.

Pagan Publishing has produced some fine products since its birth in 1990. I've met the towering John Tynes (the guy must be over well over 6') and despite the fact he writes the most disturbing adventures I've ever read, he was a courteous, soft-spoken, eloquent gentleman... who signs his correspondence with "Blood and kisses." Yup. You just can't beat well-read guys with a sense of humor, not without a really big stick, anyway.



WALKER IN THE WASTES

- BY JOHN H. CROWE, III
- PUBLISHED BY PAGAN PUBLISHING
- \$19.95 - 224 PAGES, B&W ILLUS., BIBLIOGRAPHY, XEROX-ABLE HANDOUTS
- REVIEWED BY EARL P. THATONY

There's nothing you can really compare this product to, except maybe for *Coming Full Circle*, the other *Call of Cthulhu* campaign from Pagan Publishing. This is a huge campaign book, 224 pages stuffed full of heart-pounding encounters, global conspiracies, and of course the horror of the Cthulhu Mythos. The bottom line is this: the PCs must stop the cult of Ithaqua from performing a ceremony at the Temple of the Winds (near the North Pole) and releasing him from his icy prison, or else we're all in big trouble. That may be a simple goal, but the path you take to get there spans five years and several continents.

In the first part of the campaign, the investigators (who are part of a 1927 expedition to the North Pole) get wise to the cultists' nefarious plans. Latter parts of the campaign revolve around sabotaging the cultists' work-in-progress; this involves traveling to locales both exotic and mundane and destroying cult assets before they can be moved into position at the Pole. The PCs will also need to organize their own expedition to the Temple of the Winds as a fallback plan — without it, they can't be sure they've thrown a big enough monkey wrench into the cult's work. Finally, the investigators need to find a way to seal the doors of the Temple of the Winds for good, trapping Ithaqua where he can do no harm.

Call of Cthulhu has always been a thinking gamer's pastime, and *Walker in the Wastes* is no exception. Players need to keep sharp, think about what's going on, and ask the right questions or they'll get nowhere. There are some vexing (and possibly deadly) red herrings waiting for them, and even the best groups might get tripped up. The GM needs to be on top of things as well. There are several warnings in the introductory pages about the complexity of the scenario and the need for the GM to not just read, but study the campaign. These warnings are to be taken to heart, but rest assured the effort will pay off.

Walker in the Wastes is an amazing product. It's organized, tremendously well-researched, engrossing, and fun to read. Anyone interested in running a mega-campaign is advised to take a closer look at it, as it's a fantastic example of how to do such a project right. For the GM and players who are willing to spend the time it will provide months of entertainment.

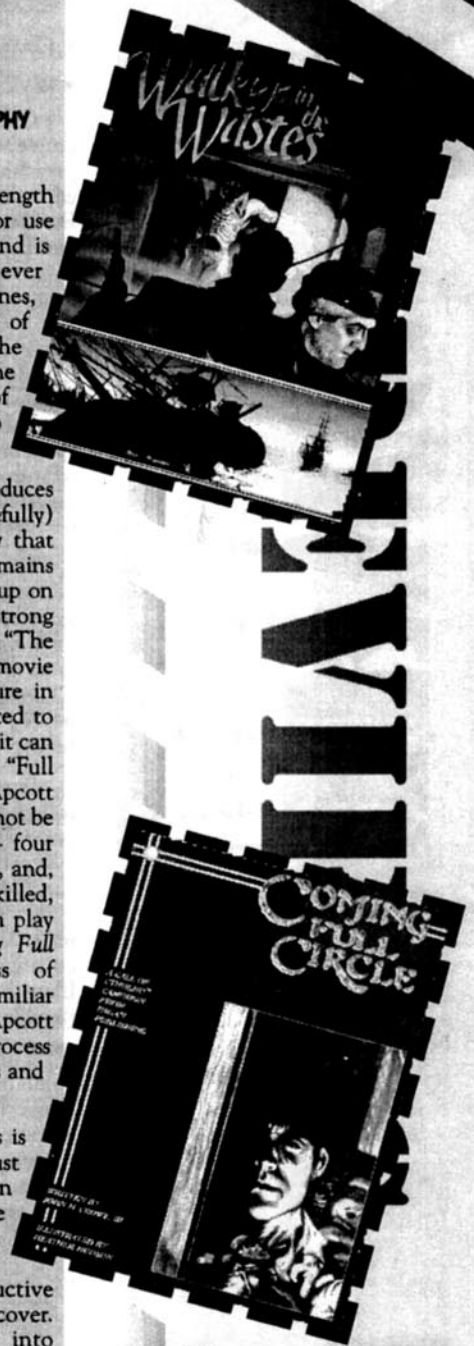
COMING FULL CIRCLE

- BY JOHN H. CROWE, III
- PUBLISHED BY PAGAN PUBLISHING
- \$17.95 - 160 PAGES, B&W ILLUS., BIBLIOGRAPHY
- REVIEWED BY ALLAN T. GROHE, JR.

Coming Full Circle is the second full-length campaign offered by Pagan Publishing for use with Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* RPG, and is the first non-Mythos oriented campaign ever published. In lieu of the presence of Old Ones, *Coming Full Circle* draws on the folklore of New England to challenge investigators. The campaign contains four scenarios set in the Franklin and Worcester counties of Massachusetts during the years 1929 to 1939.

"Cold Spot," the first scenario, introduces the PCs to the Apcott family, and (hopefully) establishes a connection with the family that will grow throughout the campaign. "Remains to be Seen," while not directly following up on events from "Cold Spot," maintains strong connections to it. The third adventure, "The Whitewood Horror," is based on a 1960 movie and remains the least integrated adventure in the campaign; while tangentially connected to the other three, among the four scenarios, it can most easily stand apart from the whole. "Full Circle" returns the investigators to the Apcott family and, as a sequel to "Cold Spot," cannot be easily separated from the latter. The four adventures share an emphasis on research, and, while situations in which PCs may be killed, driven insane, or otherwise removed from play exist, the emphasis throughout *Coming Full Circle* lies on process: the process of investigation; the process of growing familiar with, and establishing ties to both the Apcott family and the surrounding region; the process and passage of time and its impact on PCs and NPCs alike.

My only concern with the adventures is that some of the clues that the players must find may require difficult leaps of intuition or guesswork, so be advised that the research aspects to the campaign are not only crucial, but that the players must be able to draw both inductive and deductive conclusions from the information they discover. While some proofreading errors crept into *Coming Full Circle*, and some of the details offered unnecessarily repeat themselves, on the whole the campaign offers an enjoyable and thoughtful alternative to the standard alien-monster orientation of CoC. The bibliography and inclusion of new rules for psychics and mediums are additional highlights in this excellent product.



GATEWAR

- ESCAPE VENTURES, INC.
- \$29.95/275 PAGES
- REVIEWED BY DENYS BAKRIGES

GateWar possesses an intelligently conceptualized world background and very playable game mechanics. The setting is Vinya, an earth-like world similar to 13th century western Europe, though high magic abounds. Sounds familiar? Only to a point. As the magic users of this realm grew increasingly powerful, they arrogantly believed they could create a paradise via teleportation gates across the planet. Eventually, a powerful portal leading to other worlds was created. This exercise in hubris became apocalyptic. The gate couldn't be shut down and began to teleport to Vinya various alien species. Many of the creatures that appeared were of animal mentality, though some were intelligent races. What resulted was a war between Vinya's natives and the invaders.

While this allows various technological levels — even science fiction elements — to be interjected into the world setting, the game is 95% fantasy role-playing. The traditional fantasy races are given new names, but similar demeanors. Character races consist of dwarven, elven, and halfling types; an alien half-breed and several human races round out the list.

Fundamental characteristics are randomly rolled. Mental and physical skills are bought on a point basis to suit the character concept. Most everyone has at least a minor spell they've learned, regardless of background. Dedicated mages can learn from either of the game's two magical schools of thought. Common magic consists of battle and adventuring magery, while Element Mastery enables the wizard to cast flexible and potent spells.

The game mechanics are an excellent combination of realism and playability. All skill usage is percentile based. Combat is deadly, accomplished quickly, and makes perfect sense. Players looking for a well-fleshed-out combat system won't be disappointed, as there are plenty of options available.

More than half the book details the world background, including a large creatures section. Various articles on plant life, weather, and the magical arts are also included. Yet, considering the enormous spell use across the world, a larger spell tome would have made more sense. Another balk I have with the game is its resistance to losing any of the traditional fantasy races. Neither of these two problems, however, make the game less enjoyable.

All in all, for those wanting a complete FRPG with an extensive and unique background, you need look no farther than *GateWar*.

THEATRIX

- BACKSTAGE PRESS
- \$19.95/144 PAGES
- REVIEWED BY DENYS BAKRIGES

Theatrix presents a basic rules set for use across genres. The gist of the game can be summed up by one particular statement from the book: "Whether an action succeeds or fails, and to what extent it does so, is a judgment left up to the Director [GM]."

Obviously outside the paradigm of most RPGs, *Theatrix* forces all character actions to serve the Game Master's vision. The GM determines if the task succeeds based entirely on whether it fulfills the storytelling aims. This removal of randomness alters an RPG game from a set of rules mirroring "reality" to a set of rules that allow minor improvisations in a predetermined story.

The good news is that the game brilliantly succeeds.

A character is described by a number of traits, including physical and mental attributes, skills, and abilities. Each of these traits are rated on a scale from 0–10.0. The decimal scale is subjective across genres. While the average score for Strength in a pulp genre might be 3.0, and 10.0 the maximum, in a sci-fi genre, 3.0 might be average human strength, with 4.5 the human maximum.

Descriptors are a set of unranked traits describing a character's background and various other qualities. Secret Identity, Ambidextrous, and Magic Sword would all be examples. Plot points, gained through experience, can activate Descriptors or buy successes. In both instances the GM can override such an expenditure or make the point cost prohibitive.

Action resolution, ranging from picking a lock to shooting your opponent, is resolved by flow charts. Charts exist for combat, intellectual, athletic, and interpersonal task resolution. Each chart ingeniously takes into account variables of the situation. Depending on the GM's estimation of the character's capability to perform the task, a resolution is provided. While the GM makes the initial determination of success or failure, the flow charts wonderfully figure in the logic of the situation and narratively justify the outcome.

Theatrix is definitely not for everyone. Many gamers would retch at the thought of the gamemaster utterly controlling their character's destiny. However, for those that can have a good time participating in a story rather than guiding it, *Theatrix* proves to be loads of fun.

THE BOOK OF SIGILS & THE LOST NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI

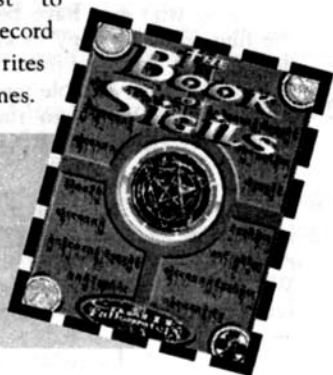
- TWO SOURCEBOOKS FOR CASTLE FALKENSTEIN
- PUBLISHED BY R. TALSORIAN GAMES
- \$17.00 EACH
- REVIEWED BY KEVIN JONES

The two most challenging aspects of making a good gaming supplement are: 1) Making it fun to read, and 2) Making it fun to look at. *Castle Falkenstein* books perform both of these tasks admirably. Every book is written in a narrative format (that means 'story,' folks). The story shows the effects and sidebars show you how to do it in the game. It's a great format that's both entertaining and easy to follow. And of course, RTG always makes the layout exciting and innovative. Two new books for the *Castle Falkenstein* line reflect this dedication to quality: *The Book of Sigils* and *The Lost Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*.

On the back of *The Book of Sigils* is the proud declamation: "The Banned Book." Once again, RTG has presented the sourcebook as an actual book from the world of CF. The *Book of Sigils* details the sorcerous orders of New Europa, telling their secrets, listing the books of Sorcerous Lore that lie in their libraries, talks about sympathetic magick, voodoo (called 'voudon' in New Europa), blood magick, curses, magickal foci and a whole lot more. "A wealth of information for the curious and the students of sorcery" is right. This one's got it all.

The narrative tells the tale of "Anthony Saville," a sorcerer who traveled the countryside gathering information about the different sorcerous orders of New Europa. He travels to America, Egypt, Greece and China (just to mention a few) to record their practices and rites and magickal tomes.

WHILE THE BOOK OF SIGILS IS FOR THE MORE TRADITIONAL MAGE ...



Of course, many of these Orders don't want their secrets getting out into the public eye, hence the sudden disappearance of the author. However, was able to hide the book before his mysterious death (even the famous Sherlock Holmes has had difficulty solving the case), and now you can make full use of its forbidden information. All of the rules you need to convert the information in the narrative are included in the sidebars, making gamemaster-friendly and a great read.

The Lost Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci uses much the same format. Presented as the actual notebooks, the editor then tells you how to use the books in "The Great Game" (see the sidebar for details on said Game). I'm a stickler for "Historical Correctness" (being a history major makes it difficult to read RPG source material sometimes), and RTG never disappoints me. All of the politics that were affecting da Vinci's writing during the Renaissance are present in *The Lost Notebooks*, reflected by da Vinci's careful comments to make certain the reader would not construe his experiments with black magic.

The book contains new rules for using Magickal Engines (something that was missing from the first book and is a welcome addition), sorcerous devices and boy are they comprehensive. There's Draining Engines, Auditorial Illusion Engines, Inferno Engines, Glacial Engines, Invisibility Engines, Dimensional Engines and that's just mentioning a few of them. There's also a complete section on "Star Iron", which translates into "Cold Iron" for those of you who have Seelie Lore. When you read this one, you have to keep reminding yourself that it's a sourcebook for a role-playing game. But then again, just about all of the *Falkenstein* books are written that way. It makes CF one of the most intriguing RPG a player could hope for.

THE LOST NOTEBOOKS IS FOR THE MAGICAL ENGINEER.



"THE GREAT GAME"

CASTLE FALKENSTEIN USES THE MOST ORIGINAL FORMAT I'VE EVER SEEN FOR THE PRESENTATION OF GAME MATERIAL. WHEN YOU READ THE CF BOOK, YOU ARE READING A NOVEL. THE STORY TELLS THE TALE OF RPG DESIGNER TOM OLAM GETTING SUMMONED TO THE WORLD OF NEW EUROPA AND HIS ADVENTURES THERE. WHEN HE COMPLETED HIS ADVENTURES, HE PUBLISHED "THE GREAT GAME" FOR THE NEW EUROPEANS TO PLAY. IT WAS A HIT IN THE WORLD OF FALKENSTEIN AND WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE SORCERERS OF NEW EUROPA, HE WAS ABLE TO SEND HIS NOTES TO MIKE PONDSMITH OVER HERE ON EARTH. MR. PONDSMITH KNEW A GOOD GAME WHEN HE SAW ONE, SO HE PUBLISHED "THE GREAT GAME" UNDER THE TITLE CASTLE FALKENSTEIN. THERE MUST BE SOME TRUTH IN SYNCHRONICITY BECAUSE IT WAS A HIT OVER HERE, TOO. NOW WHEN TOM SENDS MIKE NEW MANUSCRIPTS THROUGH THE VEIL, THEY CONTAIN SOURCE MATERIAL FOR NEW EUROPA ALONG WITH HIS RULES FOR PLAYING "THE GREAT GAME."

SAV

MASTERBOOK RPG LINE

• WEST END GAMES

• \$30 BOXED SETS OR \$19.95 WORLD BOOKS

Alfred Hitchcock hated commercials. Just watch any episode of Alfred Hitchcock Presents (the old ones, not the new ones) and you'll see him jab at his sponsors every chance he gets. That's because The Master knew just what commercials did: they shatter the carefully constructed atmosphere and mood that the storyteller is trying to invoke.

That's how I feel about game systems. Having been a storyteller for so long, I've developed a very narrative GM'ing style, and systems that are bulky and require a lot of attention tend to get in the way of my style. A style that's quick and easy and nearly invisible is great, but one that complements the story is even better. I'll even put up with a bit of complication if the system helps my players get in the right frame of mind for the game. That's why I loved Torg and that's why I love its metaphorical child, Masterbook.

The folks over at West End Games have designed Masterbook to be a uni-system with style. A Masterbook box comes with a Rules Book and a World Book. When you buy The World of Bloodshadows, for instance, you get a black Masterbook and a World of Bloodshadows book, two ten sided dice and the Master Deck. The rules are presented in the Masterbook. The basic rules are pretty simple and operate from a single chart. Character creation involves classic attributes and different rankings of advantages and disadvantages. The system also involves the Master Deck, a unique little gimmick that I remember from my days of running Torg. Some cards just give bonuses to rolls, but others (the Sub-Plot cards) give players direct access to the plotline itself. By working together with the cards, the players can really outdo the game master's villains. It creates a dynamic tension between players and game masters that I've never experienced in any RPG before.

In the World Book, GMs learn how the basic system fits in the setting. As I said above, the folks over at WEG know that systems can be like commercials, and they do a remarkable job of making the system fit right in. You hardly know that it's there, and when you do, it fits. In Indiana Jones, for instance, the system takes a very adventurous tone. Characters are constantly using cards and Hero Points to stay just a half-step

ahead of disaster. In Necroscope (a game based on the horrific worlds of Brian Lumley), the players have less access to card activity and their Hero Points. The threat to life and limb becomes much more real and the power of the villains becomes almost unimaginable. The system compliments the setting in all of the Masterbooks beautifully.

Now, let's look at each of the boxes to see what is you're getting into.

Bloodshadows

The World of Bloodshadows is a world that is filled with pulp fiction horror and adventure. Black magic, voodoo, private investigators, werewolves, vampires and others can all be found in the pages of Bloodshadows. Fans of the horror and PI genre will both feel right at home.

Indiana Jones

The World of Indiana Jones is familiar to us all. Adventurous archeologists, rambunctious side-kicks and megalomaniacal Nazis chase legends and clash over arcane artifacts in mystical lands long forgotten.

Necroscope

Based on the horror novels of Brian Lumley, Necroscope offers a different view of vampires from the recent "morbid romantic" trend. The Wampyri are deadly and dangerous, secret masters of mankind who are thwarted by those who have the ability to see them for their true nature. A darkly heroic game that combines the desperate feel of *Call of Cthulhu* with the conspiratorial madness of the John Carpenter film *They Live*.

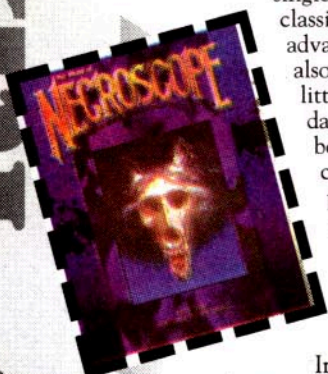
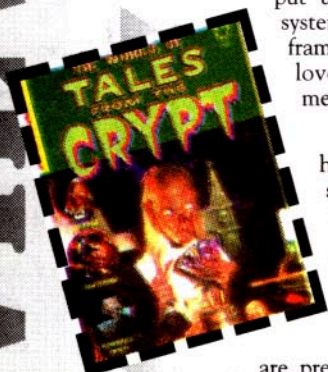
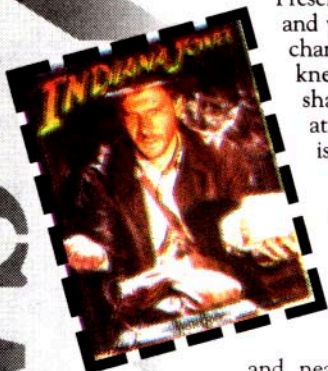
Tales From the Crypt

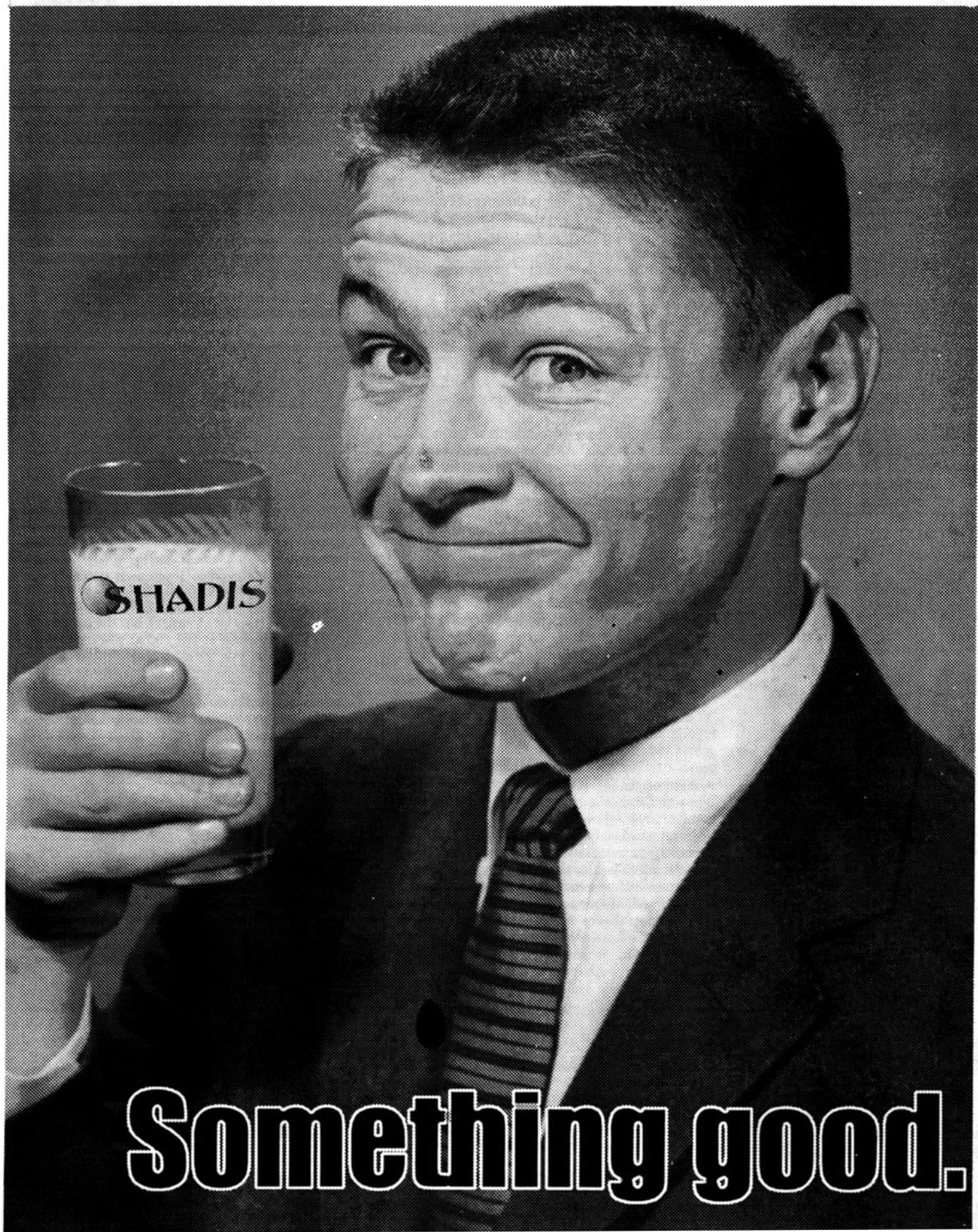
A sick, twisted and hilarious game based on the HBO show of the same name. The players take the roles of normal folks who get sucked into the Crypt Keeper's maddening world of mayhem and murder. They must brave through each tale, trying to survive until the end when the little guy with the laugh throws them into another. Wild, furious and fun for those who want a break from the same old, same old.

Tank Girl

Those who may have been disappointed in the film will be happy to know that this book derives most of its feel from the comic book that inspired it. With a whole ton of source material, any GM who wants to run an "Out in the Wastelands" dark future RPG should take a look at *Tank Girl*.


West End Games has promised more from Masterbook and I'm looking forward to seeing it. Along with the success of the Star Wars RPG, WEG has shown that it has the ability to create systems that reflect the mood and atmosphere of any genre.





Something good.

WARCRAFT 2

- BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT 
- REQUIRES: PC W/8MB RAM, CD-ROM, DOS
- \$25.00 ON THE STREET - CHECK COMPLISA
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

Ever since *Dune 2*, the popularity of real-time tactics games has been on the rise. *Warcraft 2*, by Blizzard Entertainment, is the latest such game to hit the market. For those of you who aren't familiar with how these kind of games are played, here's a rundown.

You start out with a small number of forces in the middle of unknown territory — parts of the map where you haven't been are black. Directing your forces with mouse clicks, you have to explore the world; and then find and destroy the enemy forces. Your units move in real-time; there are no grids or hexes, and there's no "end turn" button. Typically you'll have to establish a stronghold, and gather resources which allow you to construct buildings and train troops. The types of forces you can build depends on what sort of buildings you have constructed; for example, to build a Troop Transport ship you'd need a Shipyard and a Foundry. Naturally, the computer is trying to wipe you out too, so you have to hold off waves of incoming enemies while you build your own army. When you tire of fighting the computer, round up another human opponent and have at it, because *Warcraft 2* supports modem, direct-connect, and IPX network multiplayer action. Best of all, one copy of the CD can be used for a 2-person game.

Gameplay is quite simple, consisting of click "you, go here," click "you, attack him," and click "you, build there" but from this humble foundation has sprung the hottest genre in video games today. There's just something about these games that has hooked people bad, and *Warcraft 2* is another fix for junkies everywhere. When a *Warcraft 2* scenario gets rolling, there's something going on everywhere on the map. In your village, little guys are mining gold or chopping wood. The barracks is turning out soldiers, which you deploy in a defensive perimeter. On the seas, your ships engage an enemy vessel to determine ownership of an oilfield. Enemy scouts buzz overhead, spying on your town. Every unit or building you click on makes a sound, too. When you order an Orc ship to move out, it responds with, "You're the captain!" or perhaps, "Ahoy!" If you click repeatedly on the same unit you can elicit some unusual responses from some units, too. The troll ax-thrower will get annoyed if you poke him too much and say, "I got ax for you."

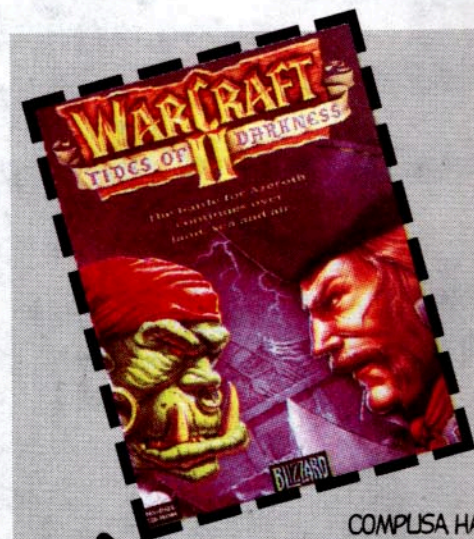
It's enough to make your head spin — but in a good way.

The premise behind the *Warcraft* series is that Orc sorcerers found a way to open a magic portal to a world occupied by Humans, Elves, Dwarves,

and other familiar races. Naturally, the Orcs charged on through and brought with them a host of other uncouth races to help them smash the Alliance forces. What this means to you, the player, is that at the beginning of the game you can choose which side to play, and when you've finished the game you can go back and play as the other side. A *Warcraft 2* campaign game is set as a series of scenarios, which are all separate from each other. There's no *Civilization*-esque technology researching going on, or accumulation of wealth. You either win or lose a scenario, and you have to win all of them to finish the game. This is my single biggest complaint about *Warcraft 2*, and for that matter about *Command & Conquer*, Westwood's modern-day take on the same style of game. The small-scale gameplay is incredibly fun, but there's no strategic level to think about.

The best way I can think of to describe the atmosphere of the *Warcraft* series is to liken it to *Warhammer Fantasy Battle*. The Orc forces make their buildings out of bones and skins, and crude glyphs decorate their ships. Disturbingly cheerful goblins ("I can see my house from up here!") pilot airships through the skies, and mohawk-sporting trolls throw axes at any Alliance forces in sight. The Alliance forces have elven archers, gnome dirigibles, paladins, and dwarven demolition teams.

All in all, the Orc and Alliance forces have 16 different units each — as well as 16 different types of buildings. It's a lot of variety, but the games still end up as a slugfest at the end as you try to wipe out the enemy. But it's a *fun* slugfest that doesn't get old too fast.



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WITH GRENADES,
PLATOONS OF LITTLE
TANKS, AND ALL SORTS OF
OTHER MECHANIZED
MAYHEM. IT HAS AN
INTERESTING STORY TOO,
TOLD WITH FMV
CUTSCENES BETWEEN
BATTLES. *C&C* IS
CURRENTLY OUT FOR THE
PC, AND WILL SOON BE
OUT FOR THE MAC,
PLAYSTATION, AND
SATURN.

CYBERWORLD

• DARK AGE GAMES

• \$25.00/224 PAGES

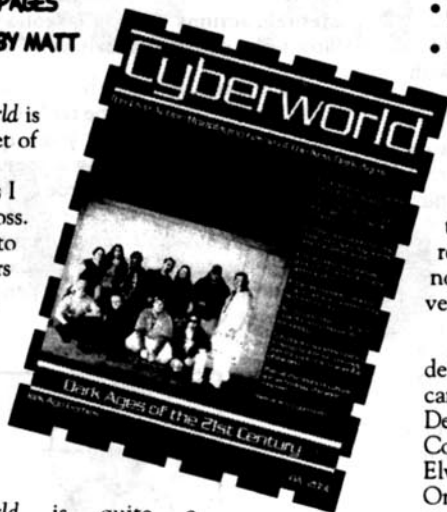
• REVIEWED BY MATT
STAROSCIK

Cyberworld is the newest set of live-action roleplay rules I have run across. I won't go into the particulars of the world, but it'll be familiar territory to any fan of the cyberpunk genre.

Cyberworld is quite a departure from the other LARP rules I'm familiar with. For one thing, it's sci-fi, and the most popular LARP games are mostly fantasy or modern-day. Cyberworld is also a no-contact game. There are no foam swords or Nerf guns to be had here, so those of you looking for some exercise need to check elsewhere. It's all verbal, like the Vampire "Theater of the Mind's Eye" LARP rules. And, at 224 pages, this book is no lightweight. It reads more like a tabletop RPG than a set of LARP rules, which tend to be lean 'n' mean.

That's not to say it's much more complicated than otherLARPs, because most of the bulk of the book is taken up with background information on the game world, equipment & cyberwear lists, and weapons tables. There are more options, so there is simply more to remember. The actual rules that make the game work are really simple, being based on — of all things — rock-scissors-paper. The "standard challenge," or rock-scissors-paper match, is used to resolve all Cyberworld tasks, from hacking a security system to firing a rifle. It's of course a little more complicated than that, since after all people with higher stats and skills tend to succeed more often, but the added complexity usually amounts to nothing more than the fact that the person with more bonuses on their side wins ties. And there are a lot of bonuses and penalties that can apply to a challenge; having GMs that are on the ball will be very important in a Cyberworld game.

In summary, if you are looking for no-contact cyberpunk live-action roleplaying (and you know who you are) this is what you've been waiting for. Vampire LARP players might also like giving Cyberworld a try, but I doubt it'll make any converts in the fantasy LARP crowd.



THE KANAR

• BY CHRISTOPHER JOZWIK & JIM PIGTAIN

• FALCHION PUBLICATIONS

• PRICE UNKNOWN/140 PAGES

• REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

The Kanar is yet another set of live fantasy roleplay rules. Using safe foam-and-PVC weapons for combat, it resembles the International Fantasy Gaming Society more than it does the no-contact style of play represented by the Theater of the Mind's Eye. It's not an IFGS knockoff, though — there are some very important differences.

For one thing, Kanar LARP provides a more detailed set of rules for making a character. You can choose to play one of 12 different races — Deep Dwarves, Stone Dwarves, Half-Dwarves, Common Elves, Forest Elves, Dark Elves, Half-Elves, Halflings, Half-Halflings, Half-Ogres, Half-Orcs, or Humans. Each race has different strengths and weaknesses, as in a tabletop RPG. There's also a skill system present to supplement the traditional class system, which includes Warriors, Rogues, Clerics, and Mages. Each of these broad classes is divided into subclasses; for example, under Cleric one finds Diviners, Druids, Enchanters, Healers, Necromancers, and Shamen. Speaking of spellcasting, magic spells are divided into the four elemental spheres of Fire, Water, Air, and Earth. Casting a spell is done rather conventionally; an incantation is required, as is a beanbag, which is thrown at the target.

The nifty skill system lets you choose from over 80 skills (including weapon skills) like Astrology, Herbalism, or Tracking, so your abilities aren't 100% defined by your character class and race. Naturally some races and classes are better at some skills; this is represented by letting them buy them at different prices.

Another key difference is that Kanar gaming groups will try to run a campaign as opposed to stand-alone adventures. The chapter's Game Master will design the overall feel of the game world and establish the major themes, and then sub-GMs (called "Theme Marshals") are responsible for designing interlocking scenarios. An Adventure Marshal then accompanies a party of PCs through the adventure.

It's an intriguing way to run a game; extending the tabletop RPG campaign metaphor into live-action play could be very rewarding if executed well.



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WOLF'S VAMPIRE LARP.
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REVIEWS

KILLER CROSSHAIRS

- BIOHAZARD GAMES
- \$10.00/24 PAGES + 2 TRANSPARENCIES
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCK



If you're like me, you are never satisfied with any roleplaying game right out of the box. I all too often find myself "tsk"ing under my breath as I inspect weapons tables and combat rules. Always in search of the ever-elusive super-accurate method of conducting RPG combat, I found myself turning to more and more complex sets of rules. Of, sure, it was innocent enough at first — *Traveler: 2300*. Who could forget those great rules for tamping explosive charges? But that was just the beginning. I knew I had a problem when I wrote five pages of rules for modeling radiation poisoning. All too soon I found myself spiraling downward into a Stygian abyss populated with the densest tables and charts Man has yet to devise: *Phoenix Command*. Don't get me wrong; it's still a great product, but it does not lend itself well to roleplaying.

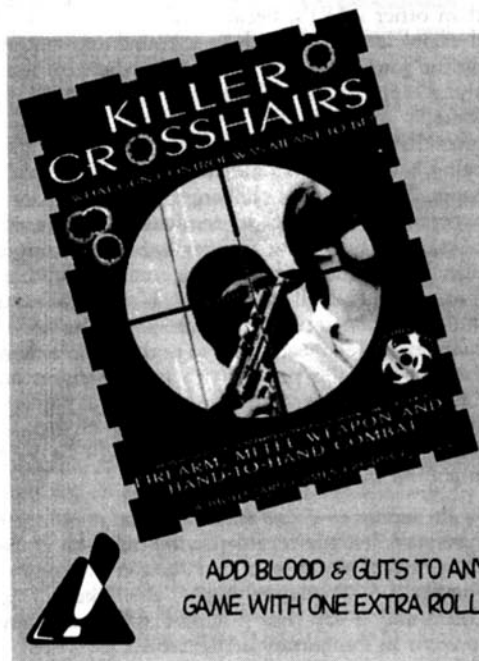
I've managed to kick the extreme realism habit, mostly, over the last couple of years by playing a lot of White Wolf games and *AD&D*. But I just found something that might push me right back over the edge. It's *Killer Crosshairs* from Biohazard Games. KC is a generic system for adding realism to ranged and hand-to-hand combat in any system. It works like this: you place a transparent template over a drawing of your target, centered on your point of aim. (The book is full of drawings of people and creatures in various poses.) Make your roll, and depending on how much you missed by, or how much you exceeded your target score by, you move the point of impact. This way, you know immediately where your shot went, and the GM can determine the consequences. (If you've played *Millennium's End*, you'll be familiar with this idea already.) There's one radial template for ranged attack deviation, and one curious-looking linear one for hand-to-hand weapons.

Hand-in-hand with the deviation system go the detailed damage charts. Once someone has been shot, stabbed, bludgeoned, or otherwise mangled, you can get the lowdown on just how bad a day they are actually having. It's far more entertaining than merely subtracting hit points, and a lot quicker than using the *Phoenix Command Advanced Damage Tables*, as much as I love them. (It's a personal crusade to find a way to elegantly incorporate projectile impact bite angle calculations into roleplay rules... but I digress!)

For example, say someone gets shot in the throat for, oh, 25% of their total hit points. This is what the entry reads: "Heavy bleeding and

serious tissue damage. Trachea crushed 20%, speech impossible if crushed. Suffocation 75% is trachea crushed; incapacitated. Bleed for 10% of hits/minute. Mental actions -10%." Yeah! Now we're gettin' somewhere!

The best part is that it only takes one additional die roll and one table lookup to get this extra level of detail. Sure, you might not want to do this if you are running a scenario where the players are engaging a horde of 50 orcs, but if it's a smaller, cozier battle everyone will enjoy the extra detail. Since everything is given as percentages, it's easy to adapt the system to whatever RPG you happen to be playing. Give it a shot!



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War In the Amazon Expansion Set

Actions

— Ambush	U
— Clever Diversion	U
— Legal Chicanery	R
— Stand Like Fool	R
— Throat Bait	C

Allies

— Amazon Warriors	U
— Avahuasca	C
— Brazilian Bureaucrat	U
— The Cleaner	U
— El Dorado	UR
— Ewaipunoma	C
— Joseph Herlech	UR
— Misfit Fomori	C
— Orville	R
— Spirit Tiger	U
— Tremere Warlock	R
— Tribal Warriors	C
— Unbound Bane	C
— Unseelie Troll	U

Battles

— Battle of Screaming Mud	R
— Battle of Vista Catarac	U
— Border Territory Skirmish	C
— Den of Rorth	U
— Feathermound Skirmish	U
— Forestry Outpost Raid	C
— Grassh Tak' Hyrrr	U
— Hellhole Assault	U
— Pentex Headquarters	R
— Ring of Fire	C
— Riverband Enfilade	U
— Routine Deforestation	C
— Supply Station Raid	U
— Surveillance Foray	U
— Temple Ruins Ambush	C
— Urban Clash	U
— Village Annexation	C
— War of Attrition	U
— Warehouse Brawl	U

Board Meetings

— Board of Directors	U
— Ritual of the Dark Spiral	R

Caerns

— Hell's Hand Hive	R
— Hollow Heart Caern	U
— Operation Blight	U
— Sept of Gold	UR
— Sky River Caern	R

Characters

— Alestro	Black Fury	U
— Atahualpa	Corrupt Bastet	U
— Athena	Pentex	U
— Barnaby Shadrack	Pentex	R
— Black Claw	Bastet	R
— Breath of Fire	Mokole	R
— Dr. Pearvos Smythe	Bane	U
— Fangs-Through-Eye	Black Spiral Dancer	C
— Frenar	Bastet	C
— Juicy Johnes	Pentex	C
— Juki, "Sun Halo"	Mokole	C
— Markhat	Bastet	U
— Prentice Turner	Pentex	U
— Rends-the-Innocent	Black Spiral Dancer	U
— Roars Like Thunder	Mokole	U
— Rytii, "Horned Thunder"	Mokole	U
— Svajda	Bastet	U
— Tamara Lovegrove	7th Generation	C

Combat

— Battle Fervor	R
— Maim	U
— Reinforcements	U
— Ribs Crushed	U
— Superior Tactics	C

Enemies

— Anaconda Gafflings	C
— El Guapo	R
— Excitable Good Ol' Boy	U
— Pentex Patrol	C
— Pentex Strip Miners	C
— Pentex Supply Lines	U
— Suicide Fomori Team	R
— Tourist Litterbug Lout	C

Equipment

— Bivouac	C
— Conquistador's Sword	U
— Experimental Cybernetics	U
— Fools' Gold	U
— Heavy Machine Gun	U
— Lost Map	U
— Machete	C
— Mantle of El Dorado	R
— Nerve Agent	U
— Rocket Launcher	R
— Spiral Boomerang	U
— Tracer Rounds	C

Events

— Cataclysm	R
— Distracting Spirits	C
— Dragon	U
— Gaia's Breath	U

— Ghost Raptor Attack	C
— Ghost Raptor Membership	U
— Hidden Supplies	C
— Iron Will	U
— Jaguar	U
— Lost in the Jungle	R
— Monsoon	C
— Nuclear Sauna	U
— Panthesilea	C
— Retaking the Field	C
— Spirit Backlash	R
— Visit from White Father	U

Gifts

— Bane Infestation	C
— Bellow	C
— Dragon's Breath	U
— Ectoplasmic Extrusion	U
— Eyes of Hate	U
— Feline Grace	C
— Fetish Sundering	U
— Fortuna	R
— Gaia's Will Corrupted	R
— Guidance from Below	U
— Kiss of Life	U
— Leap of the Kangaroo	C
— Lord of the Battlefield	C
— Lord of the Jungle	U
— Mists of Vengeance	U
— Night Terror	U
— Shriek	C
— Shroud of the Jungle	R
— Spirit of the Tiger	C
— Swift Reconnaissance	R
— Tribal Wisdom	U
— Walking Between Worlds	U

Moot

— War Council	U
---------------------	---

Quests

— Forestry Development	C
— Rescue Mission	U

Realm

— Dorado Realm	UR
----------------------	----

Victims

— Candomble Witch Doctor	R
— Cityboy Kinfolk	C
— Environmental Action Group	U
— Granola Pete	C
— Hapless Villagers	C
— Liberal Pop Singer	R
— Outcast Bastet	R
— Wild Animals	U

Corporation Cards

Agendas

AI Chief Financial Officer	Asset	R
Artificial Security Directors	Research	R
Bioweapons Engineering	Research	R
Black Ice Quality Assurance	Res/Black Ops	R
Corporate Boon	Asset	V
Corporate Coup	Black Ops	V
Corporate Downsizing	Gray Ops	V
Corporate Retreat	Gray Ops	V
Corporate War	Black Ops	V
Data Fort Reclamation	Gray Ops	V
Detroit Police Contract	Black Ops	V
Employee Empowerment	Gray Ops	V
Encryption Breakthrough	Research	R
Executive Extraction	Black Ops	R
Genetics-Visionary Acquisition	Gray Ops	R
Hostile Takeover	Gray Ops	V
Ice Transmutation	Research	V
Main-Office Relocation	Gray Ops	V
Marine Arcology	Asset	V
Network Operations Office	Asset	V
On-Call Solo Team	Asset	V
Political Coup	Black Ops	V
Political Overthrow	Black Ops	R
Polymer Breakthrough	Research	V
Priority Requisition	Gray Ops	V
Private Cybernet Police	Asset	V
Project Babylon	Black Ops	V
Security Net Optimization	Gray Ops	V
Security Purge	Gray Ops	R
Strike Force Kali	Asset	R
Subsidiary Branch	Gray Ops	V
Superior Net Barriers	Research	R
Tycho Extension	Asset	V

Ice

Asp	Sentry	C
Ball and Chain	Code Gate	U
Banpei	Sentry	C
Bolter Cluster	Sentry	C
Canis Major	Sentry	U
Canis Minor	Sentry	U
Cerberus	Sentry	C
Cinderella	Sentry	U
Code Corpse	Sentry	U
Cortical Scanner	Code Gate	R
Cortical Scrub	Sentry	C
Crystal Wall	Wall	C
D'Arc Knight	Sentry	C
Data Darts	Sentry	U
Data Naga	Sentry	U
Data Raven	Sentry	U
Data Wall	Wall	C
Data Wall 2.0	Wall	C
Endless Corridor	Code Gate	R
Fang	Sentry	C
Fang 2.0	Sentry	C
Fatal Attractor	Sentry	R
Fetch 4.0.1	Sentry	C
Filter	Code Gate	C
Fire Wall	Wall	C
Fragmentation Storm	Sentry	U
Haunting Inquisition	Code Gate	R
Homewrecker™	Sentry	C
Hunter	Sentry	U

Ice Pick Willie	Sentry	C
Jack Attack	Sentry	U
Keeper	Code Gate	C
Laser Wire	Wall	R
Liche	Sentry	U
Mastiff	Sentry	U
Mazer	Code Gate	U
Nerve Labyrinth	Code Gate	R
Neural Blade	Sentry	C
PI in the Face	Sentry	C
Pocket Virtual Reality	Sentry	U
Quandary	Code Gate	C
Razor Wire	Wall	R
Reinforced Wall	Wall	R
Rex	Sentry	C
Rock is Strong	Wall	U
Scramble	Code Gate	C
Sentinels Prime	Sentry	U
Shock	Sentry	U
Shotgun Wire	Wall	U
Sleeper	Code Gate	C
TKO 2.0	Sentry	C
Too Many Doors	Sentry	R
Triggerman	Sentry	C
Tutor	Code Gate	R
Vacuum Link	Sentry	R
Viral 15	Sentry	U
Virizz	Sentry	U
Wall of Ice	Wall	R
Wall of Static	Wall	C
Zombie	Sentry	C

Nodes

ACME Savings and Loan	U
BBS Whispering Campaign	C
Blood Cat	R
Braindance Campaign	C
Chicago Branch	U
City Surveillance	R
Corporate Negotiating Center	R
Corprunner's Shattered Remains	U
Cowboy Sysop	U
Data Masons	U
Department of Truth Enhancement	U
Disinfectant, Inc.	R
ESA Contract	U
Encoder, Inc.	R
Euromarket Consortium	U
Experimental AI	U
Fortress Architects	R
Hacker Tracker Central	U
Holovid Campaign	C
I Got a Rock	R
Information Laundering	U
Investment Firm	U
Krumz	R
Nevinyrral	R
Newsgroup Taunting	U
Omniscience Foundation	U
Pacific Regional AI	R
Remote Facility	U
Rescheduler	U
Rockerboy Promotion	C
Rustbelt HQ Branch	U
Schlaghund	R
Setup!	C

Skalderviken SA Beta Test Site	R
Solo Squad	U
South African Mining Corp	U
Spinn® Public Relations	C
TRAP!	U
Vacant Soukkiller	U
Vapor Ops	U
Virus Test Site	U

Operation

Accounts Receivable	C
Annual Reviews	U
Audit of Call Records	C
Chance Observation	C
Closed Accounts	U
Corporate Detective Agency	U
Datapool® by Zetatech	U
Day Shift	U
Edgerunner, Inc., Temps	U
Efficiency Experts	C
Falsified Transactions Expert	R
Management Shake-Up	C
Network Credit Voucher	C
New Blood	R
Night Shift	C
Off-Site Backups	U
Overtime Incentives	U
Planning Consultants	C
Power Grid Overload	U
Project Consultants	U
Punitive Countersrike	U
Scorched Earth	U
Silver Lining Recovery Protocol	R
Systematic Layoffs	C
Team Restructuring	U
Trojan Horse	C
Urban Renewal	C

Upgrades

Aardvark	R
Antiquated Interface Routines	U
Bizarre Encryption Scheme	U
Chester Mix	R
Chimera	R
Crybaby	R
Crystal Palace Station Grid	U
Dedicated Response Team	U
Dieter Easlin	R
Dr. Dreff	U
Jenny Jett	U
Jerusalem City Grid	R
Namatoki Plaza	U
New Galveston City Grid	R
Olivia Salazar	U
Omni Kismet, Ph.D.	R
Paris City Grid	U
Red Herring	U
Rio de Janeiro City Grid	U
Roving Submarine	R
Singapore City Grid	R
Tesseract Fort Construction	R
Tokyo-Chiba Infighting	R
Turbeau Delacroix	U
Twenty-Four-Hour Surveillance	R
Washington, D.C., City Grid	R

Runner Cards

Hardware

— "Armadillo" Armored Road Home.....	U
— "Drifter" Mobile Environment.....	U
— "Green Knight" Surge Buffers.....	C
— Arasaka Portable Prototype.....	R
— Armored Frigate.....	U
— Artemis 2020.....	U
— Bodyweight Data Creche.....	R
— Corolla Speed Chip.....	C
— Dermatech Bodyplating.....	U
— Full Body Conversion.....	R
— HQ Interface.....	C
— Lifesaver Nanosurgeons.....	R
— MRAM Chip.....	U
— Microtech Trade Set.....	R
— Microtech Backup Drive.....	C
— Militech MRAM Chip.....	U
— Nasuko Cycle.....	V
— PK-6089a.....	C
— Pandora's Deck.....	U
— Parraline 5750.....	C
— R&D Interface.....	C
— Raven Microcyb Eagle.....	C
— Raven Microcyb Owl.....	U
— Record Reconstructor.....	R
— Technonica Utility Suit.....	U
— Tycho Mem Chip.....	C
— WuTech Mem Chip.....	C
— ZZ22 Speed Chip.....	C
— Zetatech Mem Chip.....	C

Prep

— All-Nighter.....	C
— Anonymous Tip.....	R
— Arasaka Owns You.....	R
— Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood.....	U
— Core Command: Jettison Ice.....	U
— Custodial Position.....	C
— Deal with Militech.....	R
— Desperate Competitor.....	R
— Edited Shipping Manifests.....	C
— Executive Wiretaps.....	C
— Forged Activation Orders.....	R
— Forgotten Backup Chip.....	C
— Fortress Respecification.....	R
— Gideon's Pawnshop.....	C
— Hot Tip for WNS.....	R
— Hunt Club BBS.....	C
— Ice and Data's Guide to the Net.....	U
— If You Want It Done Right.....	C
— Inside Job.....	U
— Jack 'n' Joe.....	C
— Kilroy Was Here.....	U
— Livewire's Contacts.....	C
— Lucidrine Booster Drug.....	U
— MIT West Tier.....	R
— Mantis, Fixer-at-Large.....	C
— misc-for-sale.....	R
— Open-Ended® Mileage Program.....	C
— Organ Donor.....	R
— Playful AI.....	R
— Priority Wreck.....	R
— Private LIL Access.....	U
— Romp through HQ.....	U
— Score!.....	C

— Security Code WORM Chip.....	U
— Sneak Preview.....	R
— Social Engineering.....	U
— Stumble through Wilderspace.....	R
— Synchronized Attack on HQ.....	R
— Temple Microcode Outlet.....	C
— Terrorist Reprisal.....	R
— Total Genetic Retrofit.....	R
— Valu-Pak Software Bundle.....	U
— Weather-to-Finance Pipe.....	U

Programs

— AI Boon.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Afreet.....	Daemon.....	U
— Baedeker's Net Map.....	Base Link.....	C
— Bakdoor™.....	Base Link.....	U
— Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Black Dahlia.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Blink.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Boardwalk.....	Virus.....	U
— Butcher Boy.....	Virus.....	U
— Cascade.....	Virus.....	U
— Cloak.....	Stealth.....	C
— Clown.....	.....	C
— Cockroach.....	Virus.....	U
— Codecraacker.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Codeslinger.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Cyfermaster™.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Deep Thought.....	Virus.....	R
— Dogcatcher.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Dropp™.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Dupre.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Dwarf.....	Icebreaker.....	C
— Emergency Self-Construct.....	.....	R
— Evil Twin.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Expert Schedule Analyzer.....	.....	U
— Fait Accompli.....	Virus.....	U
— False Echo.....	.....	R
— Flak.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Force Shield.....	.....	C
— Gremlins.....	Virus.....	U
— Grubb.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Hammer.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— I Spy.....	.....	U
— Imp.....	Daemon.....	U
— Incubator.....	Virus.....	R
— Invisibility.....	Stealth.....	C
— Jackhammer.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Japanese Water Torture.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Joan of Arc.....	.....	R
— Krash.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Looney Goon.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Microtech AI Interface.....	.....	R
— Mouse.....	Detection.....	U
— Mystery Box.....	.....	R
— Netspace Inverter.....	.....	R
— Newsgroup Filter.....	.....	U
— Pattel's Virus.....	Virus.....	U
— Pile Driver.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Poltergeist.....	.....	R
— Pox.....	Virus.....	U
— R&D Protocol File.....	.....	U
— Rabbit.....	.....	U
— Raffles.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Ramming Piston.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Raptor.....	Icebreaker.....	V

— Reflector.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Replicator.....	Icebreaker.....	U
— Scatter Shot.....	.....	R
— SeeYa.....	Detection.....	C
— Self-Modifying Code.....	.....	R
— Shaka.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Shield.....	.....	C
— Shredder Uplink Protocol.....	.....	U
— Signpost.....	.....	U
— Skivviss.....	Virus.....	U
— Smarteye.....	Detection.....	C
— Snowball.....	Icebreaker.....	R
— Speed Trap.....	Detection.....	U
— Startup Immolator.....	.....	U
— Succubus.....	Daemon.....	R
— Tinweasel.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Vewy Vewy Quiet.....	Stealth.....	C
— Wild Card.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Wizard's Book.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Worm.....	Icebreaker.....	V
— Zetatech Software Installer.....	U

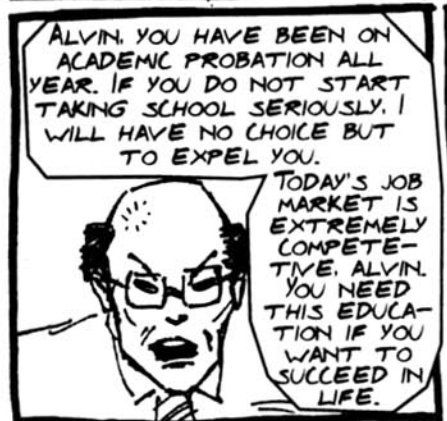
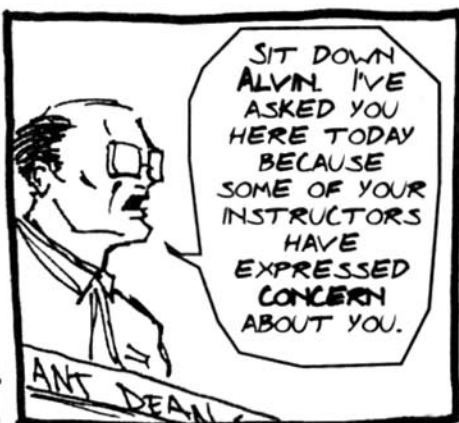
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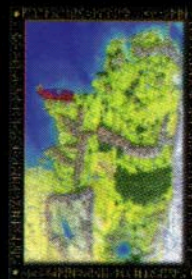
— Access Through Alpha.....	R
— Access to Arasaka.....	V
— Access to Kiribati.....	V
— Aujound'Oui.....	R
— Back Door to Hilliard.....	.....	C
— Back Door to Orbital Air.....	.....	V
— Broker.....	.....	C
— Code Viral Cache.....	.....	R
— Corporate Ally.....	.....	R
— Crash Everett, Inventive Fixer.....	.....	C
— Danshi's Second ID.....	.....	U
— Databroker.....	.....	U
— Diplomatic Immunity.....	.....	R
— Fall Guy.....	.....	V
— Field Reporter for Ice and Data.....	.....	R
— Floating Runner BBS.....	.....	U
— Hell's Run.....	.....	U
— Junkyard BBS.....	.....	U
— Karl de Veres, Corporate Stooze.....	.....	U
— Leland, Corporate Bodyguard.....	.....	C
— Loan from Chiba.....	.....	U
— N.E.T.O.....	.....	R
— Nomad Allies.....	.....	V
— Preying Mantis.....	.....	R
— Quest for Cattekin.....	.....	R
— Restrictive Net Zoning.....	.....	U
— Rigged Investments.....	.....	C
— Ronin Around.....	.....	R
— Short-Term Contract.....	.....	C
— Silicon Saloon Franchise.....	.....	R
— Smith's Pawnshop.....	.....	U
— Submarine Uplink.....	.....	U
— Technician Lover.....	.....	U
— The Shell Traders.....	.....	R
— The Short Circuit.....	.....	C
— The Springboard.....	.....	C
— Top Runners Conference.....	.....	R
— Trauma Team.....	.....	U
— Umbrella Policy.....	U
— Wilson, Weeflerunner Apprentice.....	U



BY ALLEN SMITHEE
AND THE FREAK FORCE

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he's good

watch this



What could you do with this card?



wish



really great card



what's he got?

nothing, ha!

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