

#4

protodimension magazine



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Issue #4
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FROM THE SHADOWS

Lead Editor
Norm Fenlon
(starman)
www.protodimension.org

Where does it all lead?

Just read part one of an interview with Marc Miller, one of the founders of Game Designers Workshop (GDW). Marc had the audacity in the heady days of paper-chicklet wargaming to actually publish a role-playing game. The good ol' little black books, LBBs, better known as Traveller, nee Classic Traveller. Little did he know, or me for that matter, it would fire imaginations for decades. I hungrily consumed first edition Dungeons and Dragons, the LWBs, but my hunger for Traveller was ravenous. In the days before instant gratification of internet communications and 24-hour mail ordering, I had to wait for the Tin Soldier to order more of the little books -- Traveller books always sold out within days. So I would occupy my time looking for others to play this marvelous outlet for creative fires that burned with volcanic fury, and draw multi-colored lines on hex- and square-ruled paper. Indeed the imaginative space that game promised has stayed with me all my life, I am still drawing such lines, but no longer with mechanical pencil and straight-edge. Indeed, because of Marc and Frank Chadwick, former head of GDW and historical gaming visionary, and the others at GDW, Wiseman, Novak, Lester, gaming has become what I do. It literally defines me, still, decades later.

I recommend the Black Gate blog where Marc's interview resides. It describes how the Old Guard and us grognards fought the first war quite well -- the war that paved the way for Wizards, White Wolf, and the others that have hung around. By the way, for you New Guard, you have not lived until you have played a years worth of Europa, the complete East Front on several gaming tables pushed together with stacks of counters numbering in the thousands on each side. Ah, the hatred and despair that would break out when someone opened a door to let the wind in, or the cat found the table-top, scattering counters and destroying carefully planned strategies. Aaahhhh! Those were the days when the pains were in your back from leaning over a table and not in your wrist from typing too much. I remember sore shoulders from having to support myself with one arm while leaning four feet into a table to straighten paper-chicklets with the other arm, one foot lifted from the floor.

So where does my passion leave me? Lodged in a Protodimension with no real hope of escape. This issue has some real gems. Tad pointed me to an enterprising writer's attempt to change the way literary works are developed? Published? Sold? You figure it out in an the interview with Jess Hartley. We also have lots of fiction -- seems we have been publishing as much fiction as gaming support material lately. Go figure. The Bisailons (Tim and Peyton) bless us with a father-daughter pair of short stories. Our own Tad Kelson drew two pair: fiction and articles. Tad has also been piling artwork onto the submission email for some time, it all caught up this issue, look for his background graphics here and there. Because my artwork doesn't really please me, I have been looking for new artists. So, I have been nosing around deviantArt and found some, one wordsmith and one artist. There I copped a couple of poems from a talented young lady goes by music-lover101 and a neat comic-style image from a young lad. You will probably be seeing more of CosmicGhost's artwork if I have my way.

For adventures, Dave Schuey has graced us with a gruesome bit for Dark Conspiracy (but it's really systemless and loses none of its evil flavor for it) set in the Appalachian Mountains of the US, an area renowned for the closed communities those remote "hollers" engender. Come on! Cannibalism, zombies and dark rites? How can you go wrong? We also have some more Spycraft 2.0 material, a wonderful international organization complete with a whole sack of sneaky motive for international intrigue. Being a Spycraft 1.0 kind of guy, I have just upgraded to 2.0 and it is worth it. The nice thing about the Spycraft contributions (Crafty Pat has been beating the bushes for us there) is that they come with ubercool graphics from Octagraphics. Newcomer, Michael Pevzner contributed a great cult built right into an established institution, the correctional system -- great stuff, all occultish and rife with symbology -- Michael did his homework. CitizenX sent us a monster...a whale, a regular

(From page 4)

Moby Dick of an adventure. It was so big it wouldn't fit into this issue. So we are running his tables for generating an outbreak of zombiosis -- you know, that good ol' zombie infection outbreak? We got a proto-dimension (note the hyphen, without one is the name of this magazine) from Linden Dunham. We just can't get enough of Linden's stuff, but he is busy having a life, so we will take what we can get in Motorway. (Can I just mention that I had a similar idea called Blacktop, complete with a machine Dark Lord and little critters. He just beat me to it.) Big guns, we also have, of course, (I'm thinking of buying a real world one of these with a third mortgage, they look that cool) from Kevin McNeill's private DC arsenal. He's got more so you'll be seeing more of Kevin in PDM, hopefully. We have some equipage from Zvezda, a big DC fan from that area of the world formerly known as the Iron Curtain. He has great ideas, believe me, he was in on the original forum conversation that spawned Linden's premier Rat King. We have a couple of comic panels on Cthulhuian humor from the Braincase Factory;

and not downplaying it, From Under the Floorboards we get thoughts on a pub from the ubiquitous Lee Williams.

I would now like to acknowledge that this completes our first year of publication. I am surprised at how fast it went. Thanks to all the people that took the time to download our file and a special thanks to all the folks that share with us. The way contributed material just shows up is surprising. Our queue is really small, so, please, keep it coming. I also wonder if anyone has noticed how realistic the images from the back cover look. They should, they are all post-processed (and sometimes augmented) images of our troops. I want to remember their sacrifices, some of them the ultimate sacrifice, some of them my friends, and to keep them in my memories. The original images I used in the photo-manipulations, all come from US servicemen and women who took the photos in the line of duty. For this reason the photos are in the public domain. So if you are interested there is a link off of www.denfenselink.mil that leads to a photo repository of

some of the best contemporary military photography you will find (uh, US that is). These men and women go to school to learn how to shoot and not just weapons.

Now. Finally. And not to steal the show from the real stars, that is, the people that contribute articles and stuff, I would like to announce that The Editors of this magazine have entered into negotiation with the license holders of Dark Conspiracy to publish material commercially for 1st/2nd edition DC. Our goal, at first, is to provide electronic products, but print is not off the ticket quite yet. Depends on sales, you know? <nudge, nudge, wink, wink, photographs, doh!> In the negotiations somewhere is a refresh of DC to align it with the GDW House System of Traveller: The New Era and Twilight 2000 v2.2. I know, the system is clunky, but remember what I said about the decades thing? Besides retro is cool and while I don't listen to classic rock, the old games are still some of the best and imagination never ages. Just consult a medium and speak with my man, H.P.



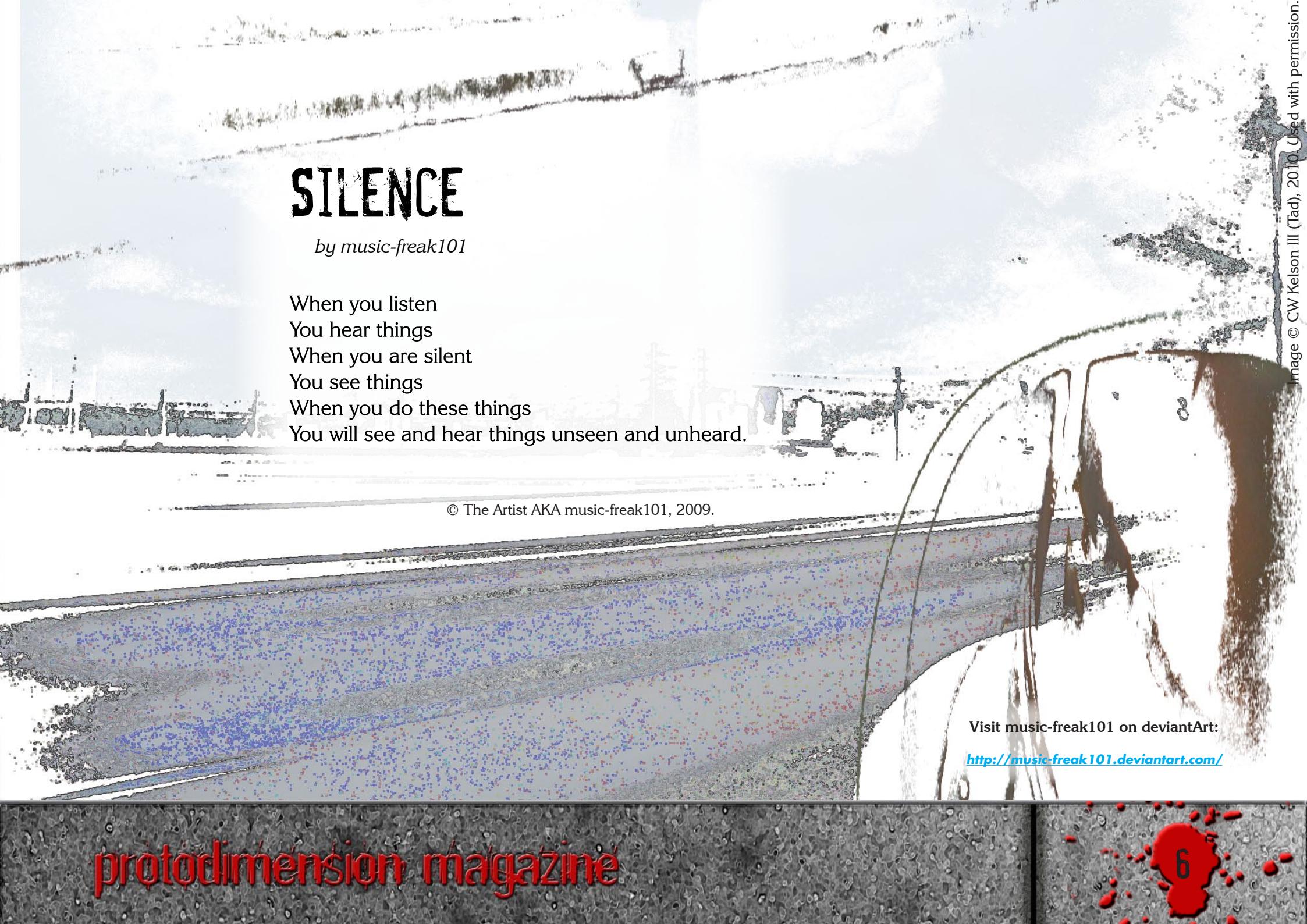
Cheers!
Norm

"We make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones."

--Stephen King

DARK
CONSPIRACY
LIVES!





SILENCE

by music-freak101

When you listen
You hear things
When you are silent
You see things
When you do these things
You will see and hear things unseen and unheard.

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Visit music-freak101 on deviantArt:
<http://music-freak101.deviantart.com/>

A RITE OF SPRING

An Adventure

by Dave Schuey

For *Dark Conspiracy® 1/2 ed.*

“Only the foolish visit the land of the cannibals”

Maori Proverb

This adventure takes place deep in the Appalachian mountain range. How your PCs get there will take some creativity. Possibilities include an aircraft mishap, cross-country travel gone awry, or even a malfunctioning folder-pod. In any event, the PCs will find themselves in the tiny, old, and exceedingly creepy town of Smokey Branch. The group can be made up of any Career paths available, but Scientists specializing in Sociology, Psychologists, Paraphysicists, and Mystics may have an advantage. Empaths of any type will find themselves on edge for the duration of the adventure, but will likely be of great use.

BACKGROUND

THE APPALACHEE

The Appalachee tribe resided primarily in Florida and is believed to have been of Muskhogean stock. The name is believed to be of Choctaw origin, a similar word of which means “the people”. They were an agricultural, prosperous and advanced civilization, and were known by the Spanish to be

excellent fighters. They were eventually Christianized, their settlements becoming important missionary centers.

Around 1700 they began to suffer greatly from raids by the wild Creek tribes to the north. These eventually lead to the devastation of the settlements and missions and the scattering of the tribe. Many fled to the French for protection and some effort was made to reform the tribe in Pensacola, but

Authors Note: With very little effort this town could be used for *Call of Cthulhu*. It is very much in the H. P. Lovecraft tradition. I did not provide additional information for the conversion, but I suggest the corrupting entity be Shub-Niggurath. Any GM with a reasonable library of CoC materials will likely have plenty of NPCs with which to flesh out the inhabitants of Smokey Branch.



(Rite from page 7)

ultimately this proved unsuccessful. The fugitive Appalachee important to this narrative went north, and secured an isolated area deep in the mountains that bear their name.

THE EUROPEANS

Smokey Branch was founded in 1764 by separatists who wanted no part of either the Spanish, the English, the French or the coming revolution. They journeyed as deeply into the mountain range as they could, seeking the ideal spot to wait out what they saw as Armageddon. There they found the Appalachee, and managed to befriend them. Over time, the groups grew closer and closer, sharing customs, DNA and religious beliefs. A hybrid belief system evolved, wherein the Christian God was recognized as the bringer of rain and his son Christ was the earth, bringing forth new growth in an eternal cycle. Satan also entered into this worldview in the form of the grub, devouring the roots of the new growth and causing strife.

THE SACRIFICIAL RITE

A tradition of sacrifice each spring developed, the purpose being to ensure a healthy crop. At first this sacrifice was symbolic only. It consisted of an elaborate dance centered on a young virgin. Then one year this was not enough. The crops failed and many insisted that God was unsatisfied. A plan was devised and the next spring the young virgin was wed to one of the village elders, and her virginity "sacrificed" in front of the whole village. The crops were even more bountiful than ever, so this became the new tradition.

Years later, the crops failed again. The elders of the village, now a complete mix of native and European, deemed that God needed a blood sacrifice. The virgin was not killed outright, merely cut during the ceremony, but died later of infection anyway. In any event, the crops once again rebounded. So this became the new tradition.

MORAL DECLINE

The deaths of the virgins began to take a toll on the remaining Christian beliefs of the village. The population was declining and the Elders instituted any policy they could to keep their numbers up. Polygamy and young marriage were common. Had they been in any sort of contact with the outside world they would have no doubt been moved and broken up.

They were, however, so deep in the mountains, away from ground and eventually air traffic (although the occasional appearance of an airliner during the 20th century was deemed a sign from God, which typically ended in someone being killed) that no authorities ever learned of their existence. Their society slid further and further from the "civilized" ways of either the Europeans or the Appalachee.

Enter the Dark Lord Xolk'nu. Recently freed from imprisonment in his own Proto-dimension by the actions of the aliens (see Dark Conspiracy Rulebook), he was drawn to these people by their fear, ignorance and the scent of blood. His perverse sense of humor excited, he began communicating with the village elders, convincing them of the "error" of their ways.

Townspeople images provided by Dave Schuey

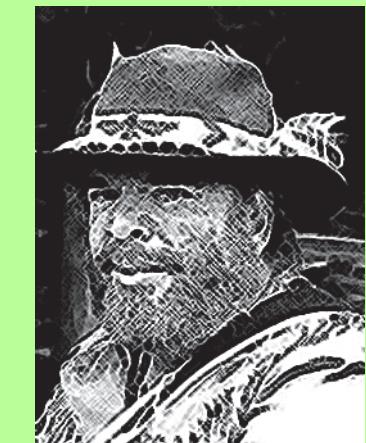
Hanna



Novice

Damage: Unarmed Melee
Notes: Orphan

Jedda



Elite

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket
Notes: Jedda was the first to be possessed by Xolk'nu and remains his favorite pet. He is Lijah's older brother.

(Rite from page 8)

They were told that the escalating appeasement of god had been the wrong plan all along. Instead he offered a type of worship wherein they need only make one sacrifice per decade for all their needs.

ACT ONE

A CRY OF DISTRESS

On a lonely dirt road in the Appalachian Mountain range, the PC's are startled by a near collision with a dirty and bedraggled creature. Seemingly entranced, or perhaps in shock, it soon becomes obvious that this is a young woman, perhaps 17. As the rain begins to fall she starts speaking a strange tongue. A Linguistics (Difficult) roll will reveal it to be a pidgin dialect comprised of Choctaw, Creek, Spanish, French and English. Although its components can be identified, it is so degraded that her babbling remains incoherent.

As the PCs continue to attempt to find their way out of the mountains and to something that approximates civilization, the young woman will become more and more agitated. Finally, as she becomes violent, the group will emerge from the tree line into a cluster of sad, decrepit buildings. If she has not been sedated or restrained by this time, the girl will attempt to break free from the group and flee into the woods.

A History or Architecture (Average) roll will reveal these buildings to date from the mid 19th century in most cases, while some structures may be a bit newer or older.

Da-na-na na-na na-na na naa

There are several men and two boys sitting on the porches of two buildings. They are dressed simply, shabbily, in homespun fabrics, which have obviously been fashioned into garments by hand. While the surrounding forest casts a green tinge to everything, the people seem almost as grey as the buildings. One of the boys holds a string instrument, and the PCs can almost hear the strains of "Dueling Banjos" echoing in the air. The falling rain on the surrounding leaves creates a white noise sound that threatens to lull anyone who lets their guard down to sleep.

If approached, the boys will remain seated, while one man stands. He will say something unintelligible that might be a greeting, judging by his mannerisms. If the girl is still with the group and visible, he will point to her and say something else that sounds vaguely demanding. If she has already gone then the conversation, such as it is, will remain cordial.

Anyone who can make three (3) successive Linguistics (Difficult) rolls can arrive at enough of an understanding of their language that communication can continue as if in English, but without Articles ("the", "that", "this", "those") and Pronouns ("he", "she", "it", "you", "me", "them", "my", "our", etc.).

The spokesman is named Jedda. He will identify the town as Smokey Branch. He knows nothing of counties, states or countries. If it does not exist within 10 miles of the town he will know nothing of it. He can give no useful directions for getting back to "civilization", though he suggests the PCs do so as soon as possible. If there are any women in the

group he will eye them somewhat critically, and suggest that they stay.

Hello, My Name Is _____

If asked, he will identify the other men as Lijah, Jonah, Mose, and Josh. The boys are Jeb and Micah. He will not volunteer this information. All in all, his demeanor is very private and secretive. If he sees the girl, he will call her Hanah, and command her to go home. If the PCs attempt to protect her or restrain her, primitive firearms will appear, as if from nowhere.

The hill people will not fire without reason, but it will be clear from their expressions that they hold the PCs in little more regard than they would a squirrel. If anyone beats them to the draw, they will see no trace of apprehension at the sight of advanced weapons. Drawing against them after they already have weapons trained will only provoke them to fire.

If a firefight erupts, the other men of the town will appear at the tree line after a few turns and fire from the rear of the group. Given their primitive weapons and the possibility that the PCs are wearing ballistic armor, it is possible the men of the town will be wiped out to a man. If this occurs, the PCs will find the womenfolk in the buildings, doing chores. They will be neither grateful nor upset that the men are dead, and will reluctantly leave the town if told by male PCs.

ACT TWO (A)

AND THE DEAD SHALL RISE

If the men have been wiped out, there are two courses of action. The PCs may leave immediately or they may stay and wait for the rain to cease. In

(Rite from page 9)

either case, when night falls, they will be attacked by the walking dead reanimations of the men of Smokey Branch. This time mere bullets, even to the head, will not stop them as one might expect. The only way to stop them is to completely drain them of hit points in all hit locations. They will move as swiftly as when they were alive, until their legs are blown to bits. They will still use weapons as long as they have both arms.

It might be slightly better to attempt to weather this attack in the buildings of the town, but the PCs would have to be expecting it. If they get caught out in the woods they can attempt to return to Smokey Branch, or continue wandering, but they will be harassed by the dead hill people the entire way. If they are in a vehicle that has not yet been immobilized, the hill people will try to disable their vehicle. The hill people won't know about tires, but it doesn't take much intelligence to shoot at the wheels. This basic situation will repeat each night, whether they lose the vehicle or not. If they can make a Navigation (Impossible) roll and survive 3 nights, they can make it to a more modern town. End of adventure.

UNHALLOWED GROUND

If the PCs stay in Smokey Branch they can move about freely during the day, but empaths will feel the oppressive nature of the place. A Foreboding (Average) roll will give the empath a vision of the black corrupted woods, filled with monstrous wildlife, slowly expanding and overtaking towns and cities. Clearly, every square foot possessed magnifies the power of the corrupting entity.

With a bit of interrogation the women will direct them to the church. Here they will find a place of

worship that would be bizarre even had it not been defiled by an extradimensional entity. The cross has been replaced by a symbol that looks like a merger of goat horns and an inverted half sun made up of undulating rays. The altar, stained with the blood of countless sacrifices, looks more like a dinner table, with twelve chairs arranged around it. There are no pews, only an open floor. There are human bones hanging from almost every foot of wall space, as well as from the ceiling. If examined, it is clear that the bones have been gnawed upon. A Forensics (Average) roll will confirm that these tooth marks are human.

"EVERYBODY MUST GET STONE-O"

The bad vibes become overwhelming when empaths enter the church. Clearly this is the center of evil for the town. Mystics might suggest any number of solutions, as might a Paraphysicist, but in this case the simplest solution is actually the correct one. Xolk'nu may have been attracted by the fear and ignorance of these people, but it was the bloody altar that allowed him to cement his relationship. Destroying the stone altar will close the conduit to Xolk'nu's proto-dimension.

Unfortunately, this will prove somewhat more difficult than it would at first seem. The energy flow between the two dimensions has greatly strengthened the basalt stone structure. The Armor Value Constant of the stone is effectively that of reinforced concrete, or .04, making bullets of little use (see Breaching Barriers, pg. 124-125, Dark Conspiracy 2nd ed.). The altar is a 6-foot by 3 foot by 2-foot (36 square feet) slab of extrusive igneous rock. Explosives will be needed.

Fortunately for the PCs, the hill people have been making their own black powder for their weapons for over two centuries. An Intelligence (Average) roll will be enough to figure this out, and if they don't ask the women an Observation (Average) will find the cache. A Chemistry (Formidable) roll can double the performance of the black powder, effectively bringing it to the level of C-4 (a Difficult result will bring the black powder only to the level of TNT, but a catastrophic failure on this roll will be REALLY catastrophic).

A Demolitions (Average) roll is the bare minimum to damage the altar, but an outstanding success means it was obliterated with one charge. Otherwise, it will likely take several charges to completely demolish the stone.

WATERSHIP OWNER

It would be nice if Xolk'nu did nothing to stop them from blowing up the altar, but this is a dark world. As soon as they begin any work to this end, any remaining walking dead, joined by possessed forest creatures, will start attacking. Any sort of normal forest creature might appear, and their profiles will be unchanged except for two things; they will all be sporting an unnatural increase to their AV of +1, and any bite from one of these creatures incurs a dark energy infection that must be fought off with Empathy. Anyone lacking Empathy will not realize they have anything more than a wound until the voice of Xolk'nu begins to twist their thoughts.

POSSESSION IS NINE TENTHS OF THE LAW

Every wound level increases the difficulty to resist the dark energy with Empathy. The first wound level

(Rite of Spring continued)

SMOKEY BRANCH

Map Key

- 1 Lijah's Home
- 2 Josh's Home
- 3 Vacant
- 4 Vacant
- 5 Jonah's Home
- 6 Mose's Home
- 7 Black Powder storage
- 8 Vacant
- 9 Jeddah's Home
- 10 Vacant
- 11 Jeb's Home
- 12 Vacant
- 13 Micah's Home
- 14 "Tannery" (Meat prep)
- 15 Vacant
- 16 Ruth's Home

Scale: 1 square = 10 feet

Map drawn by Dave Schuey made using:
Dundjinni Mapping Software



(Rite from page 10)

begins at Easy. Every failure raises the infected's Possession value by 1. Possession is used like a skill. Anytime the character has the opportunity to do something destructive or evil, he makes a Possession (Average) roll. If the roll is failed, the character may act normally. If the Possession roll is successful, the evil act is performed to the best of the character's ability. Empathy can be used to "De-possess" someone infected. Every Empathic success level cancels one level of Possession. If the Possession level reaches zero, the possessing entity is cast out.

ACT TWO (B)

YOU AIN'T FROM AROUND HERE

If, on the other hand, Hanah is no longer with the group and the men are not provoked to violence, the PCs may secure an invitation to dinner. They may be dubious, but any sort of Sociology (Average) roll will confirm that in most societies the decline of such an invitation is considered an insult. Dinner will not appear immediately, so the PCs may have a little bit to explore.

The town consists of six (6) shacks, a few outbuildings, and a small church (at least it looks like a church, with a small bell tower). They will find no resistance to exploring the shacks and outbuildings, although entering without knocking will of course be discouraged, but if they approach the church men will appear and shoo them away. The explanation will be that they are "outsiders," and god would be angry if they entered his holy place.

This may spark a discussion of religion. They will speak in very general terms about God, Christ, rain

and the harvest, but will defer any deeper discussion of their faith to Jeeda. No amount of persuasion will sway them, and if pressed they may forcefully escort the PCs to Jeeda for more answers.

Jeeda will speak of many of the same things as his congregation, but will also talk about communion (which is given every ten years for four Sundays), confession (a matter for god and the confessor alone), forgiveness (a benefit only extended to those of child bearing age), and the *Voice of God*. Seemingly he is the only one who hears the *Voice*.

A Religion/Occult (Average) roll will reveal a lot of this belief system to be kind of fishy. Jeeda doesn't go into detail with outsiders and seems offended that the faith of he and his people would be questioned. If the questioning continues he will ask the PCs to stay in one place until dinner. If they did not arrive in a vehicle he will allow them to spend the night but insist they leave the next day.

"THAT'S A TENDER SUBJECT"

Dinner is a family affair with everyone in town gathered around a large table. The meal consists of greens, vegetables, cornbread and a meaty stew. Whether she escaped or not, Hanah is not present. The townspeople eat heartily and seem more than willing to share. They are, however, a dour bunch. There is nary a fraction of a sense of humor between them. There is little talking at the table, any closeness with the PCs being squelched by a glance from Jeeda. If anyone questions the meat in the stew the townsfolk will share a momentary glance and Jeeda will say it is possum.

Table conversation will be sparse, and dominated by Jeeda. Evasive answers to all questions will be

given, and if they persist, the PCs will be told that talking during communion is discouraged.

NIGHT STALKERS

Nighttime would be the best time to attempt an examination of the Church. A Stealth (Difficult) roll will get the PC past the guards and into the building (see *Unhallowed Ground*). If they get into the Church they will discover, among the old bones, a fresh, complete, human skeleton, save for the head. The missing cranium sits on the altar, and it is Hanah. A Forensics (Average) roll reveals that tool marks on the bones suggest that the flesh was stripped meticulously.

At some point, while they are in the Church, Jeeda will call to them from outside in a voice much larger than his body should be able to emit. A glance outside reveals the men of the town with rifles and torches, surrounding the building as best they can. Jeeda will tell them they are defilers and sinners, and that communion was wasted on them. An Intelligence (Average) roll will clue in anyone who has not already made the connection between Hanah and the stew.

Most likely, the PCs will be better armed and armored than the men of Smokey Branch. If the men are killed, they will return in a few minutes (see *And the Dead Shall Rise*). Meanwhile, possessed forest animals will begin their part of the assault (see *Watership Downer*).

If the PCs manage to make it through the night (be sure they keep track of their ammunition), they will have the day to destroy the altar, if tracking down black powder is necessary. If they have their own explosives they can try to blow it up during the

Xolk'nu

This Dark One, an entity from a proto-dimension that is physically very much like our own, began life as a slug. A cosmic conjunction left him changed. Sentience was but the first gift he was endowed with. His lifespan exceeded even that of the humanoids of his proto-dimension. He soon found that he also had a sort of "vampiric" ability to drain Empathy. Later, he began to take on the physical characteristics of his prey, although in a twisted form. About a century into his existence he developed both a need and taste for fear. Using abilities he had gained over the years he began a campaign of terror designed to feed his hunger. His power grew, as did his legend. It could be said that he became the "Satan" of his proto-dimension. After millennia of preying on the inhabitants of that realm, he was trapped in the void between realities, where he gradually grew weaker. Then came the opening he needed, and he found his way to Earth.

Like a slug, he travels and lives deep in the ground, but his consciousness can range several kilometers from his actual body. His physical presence is 200 feet below the church. This body is large and whale-like, but not extremely tough. However, his Empathy is nearly off the chart, and he has many empathic skills. He will not attack directly, for fear of exposing his vulnerable body, and chooses instead to attack through those he Possesses.



(Rite from page 12)

attack. However, the first explosion will likely bring down the church and do quite a bit of damage to them, as the concussion value of the charge will damage anyone in the surrounding area.

EPILOGUE

THE VILLAGE PEOPLE

When the altar is destroyed an unearthly cry will issue forth from the mouths of every living thing touched by Xolk'nu's possessive power. The mixture of human and animal sounds, at the volume they produce, will be painful for normal ears, but not damaging. Interestingly, the cry seems less one of pain than of frustration. Those who hear it are left with a sense that Xolk'nu is more annoyed than hurt.

All those suffering from Possession are freed when the altar is destroyed. This new free will, however, will do little to help the women and remaining men (if there are any) of Smokey Branch. If the PCs insist on trying to assimilate these people into modern society, they will find the task daunting at best. It is extremely likely that after a few days in a large town these people will flee back to Smokey Branch.

If actually asked what they want to do, the inhabitants of the town will ask to be left alone to bury their dead and live out their lives. They seem neither grateful nor angry for the actions of the PCs.



Smoothbore Musket

---Recoil---

	ROF	DAM	Pen	Blk	Mag	SS	Brst	Range
.69 caliber BP	SS	2	Nil	6	2rl	1	---	10
Ammo:	.68 caliber Black Powder (BP)							
Wt:	5.1 kg							
Mag:	Takes 2 combat rounds to reload							
Price:	\$100 (U/C)							

THE TOWNSPEOPLE

The Townspeople have whatever skills are appropriate to rural life, and no skill in more modern activities, such as Computer.



Lijah

Veteran

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Husband of Lila, younger brother of Jedda.

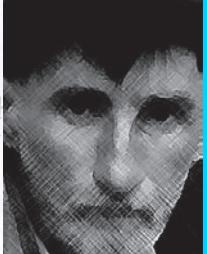


Lila

Novice

Damage: Unarmed Melee

Notes: Wife of Lijah

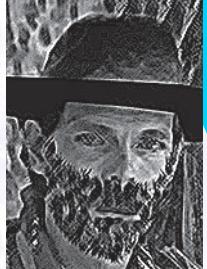


Thazar

Experienced

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Orphan, unmarried.



Jacca

Experienced

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Orphan, unmarried.

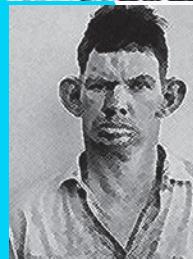


Jonah

Veteran

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Husband of Ester and father of Nate and Neb.



Neb / Nate

Novice

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Twin sons of Jonah and Ester.



Zabeth

Novice

Damage: Unarmed Melee

Notes: Wife of Jethro



Jeb

Experienced

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Son of Josh and Ruth.



Ruth

Experienced

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Club

Notes: Wife of Josh, mother of Jeb.



Josh

Veteran

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Husband of Ruth, father of Jeb.



Mose

Veteran

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Orphan, widower.



Micah

Experienced

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Orphan, unmarried.



Jethro

Novice

Damage: Unarmed Melee, Knife, Axe, Club or Musket

Notes: Son of Lijah and Lila, husband of Zabeth.

Ester (not shown)

Experienced
Damage: Unarmed Melee, Axe, Club
Notes: Wife of Jonah.

Townspeople images provided by Dave Schuey.



MARKET DIRECT

An Interview

with Literature Innovator, Jess Hartley

We pleaded and begged Jess Hartley, established author and an innovator in a direct to market patronage for literary works, to give us some insights. In between her trips to Tucson from her home in the mining community of Bisbee, Arizona, Jess took the time to answer a few of our questions. Once again, thanks Jess!

We read the story about needing a new laptop, but how much was Shattered Glass really about doing something new and different, pushing the envelop?

As someone who's spent most of her career thus far writing for other folks - magazines, publishers, game companies - this is really a new step for me. I've spent almost a decade doing work-for-hire writing and game creation. I'm grateful for the opportunities that such work has brought with it - the chance to reach a broad audience and make connections with a wonderful bunch of readers and gamers, as well as to be a part of some fantastic projects. However, there are some down-sides.

For readers, the publishing process can be slow and impersonal. We wait months, sometimes years, to read stories from mainstream publishers, and they reach us only if they've met certain criteria. They have to be not only well-crafted (which is a good thing), but also deemed marketable and profitable to the publisher. While the latter criteria is certainly understandable--every business needs to have a feasible profit schema--it also means that a lot of works never make it into the hungry hands of eager readers. As writers, we're faced with not only understanding the tastes and desires of our readership, and using our own creativity and insight to craft works that will be interesting, intriguing and satisfying to them... but to have a hope of getting those works to our readers through mainstream publishing, we also have to craft them in forms and media that are going to fit neatly into certain established places on the bookstore shelf, in sizes and shapes that are recognizable and easily branded - and while some works fit those criteria, others don't.

*Additionally, I think that mainstream publishing and bookstores serve a vital role for readers--they are the grocery store, the restaurant, the department store, the movie theater or television station that most of us go to for our day-to-day needs (and believe me, I'm firmly of the mindset that reading is a **need** for me and many others like me!) But I believe that there is also a valid niche for hand-crafted, small-batch, personalized creations. The original painting. The hand-arranged flowers. The live concert. The stage performance. And, in my case, the fiction created just for a select group of readers.*

The Shattered Glass Project is my home-cooked meal, my "made with the ingredients I know you love" dish, just for my Patrons.

(Jess Hartley from page 15)

However, I don't pretend that I'm the first author to experiment with direct-market fiction or even the patronage model. I'm blazing my own trail inspired (and occasionally advised) by those who have been pushing their own envelopes. And we're all following in the footsteps of some pretty ancient traditions. After all, medieval noble families were patrons of artists and writers centuries ago. The question is, how to make such an intimate reader-and-writer connection work in a modern setting, in a way that's satisfying to everyone involved. That, I think, is at the heart of The Shattered Glass Project.

Do you see your direct marketing approach catching on for other traditional print media, such as role-playing games?

I think there's definitely a place for it. I don't think it will replace traditional production styles, but then, it's not designed to. I wouldn't want to be limited (in my fiction reading or my game playing) to only those products that were direct-marketed. But I'm glad it's becoming a more common option in addition to traditional publishing and production.

Do you see big publishers piling on? Grabbing the idea? Baen showed some innovation in almost-direct marketing, do you see White Wolf or Wizards following?

I think that, while larger publishing companies are doing a lot of really innovative experimentations with the sorts of new models that modern technology is making available, the kinds of value that I'm striving for with The Shattered Glass Project is inherently a product of a very personal connection between reader and writer.

Thus, I think that while larger companies can support similar models, this particular experiment is something that can't really be replicated on a larger scale.

I see gaming like fringe, rare in density but large overall, like Anderson's The Long Tail. Do you plan to capture any of that long-tail market?

To be honest, I don't really "plan" how The Shattered Glass Project is going to turn out. I've already been stunned and amazed by the positive response, and while I hope to share some of that awe with my readers, I don't want to come to expect anything in particular from it. I don't want to taint the experiment with plans or assumptions on how it will all work out. I just want to be open to opportunities and to sharing them with my readers in whatever way will create the most positive relationship between us.

That Personae Patronage aspect of Shattered Glass is pretty unique. How did you come up with that? How hard is it to work an unplanned number of characters into the story?

Over the years that I have been writing games for White Wolf, I had the opportunity on a couple of occasions to offer up some goods or service as a part of a fundraising auction for various charities. I have often donated my author's copies of books I've worked on to auctions or other charity fundraisers, but at some point I came upon the idea of auctioning off being included in a product that I was currently writing. Over the course of various auctions, a lot of money was raised for charity in that fashion, and so when I started The Shattered Glass Project, I kind of threw it in on a whim. I was both thrilled and surprised to have

About the Author:

Jess Hartley is an established novelist, author, editor and game designer, whose work has been published in local, national and international publications. She was on the design team for the ENnie award-winning game, *Changeling: The Lost*, and contributed to the horror anthology, *Buried Tales of Pinebox, Texas*, which was named Best Anthology in the Predators and Editors Readers' Choice Awards.

Jess received international attention in the summer of 2009 when her blog articles on helping aspiring writers, artists and game designers use conventions such as GenCon to enter the market was featured on SlashDot, Reddit and other international media sites.

Although a native Northwesterner, she currently dwells in Southeastern Arizona, with her family and a menagerie of other interesting creatures.

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(Jess Hartley from page 16)

to close the Personae Patronages after the first 24 hours, due to overwhelming response!

I think that, like any situation where you're incorporating existing elements into a story, it will be challenging. And even more so when you're talking about representing reflections of people's real-personalities, especially in a story that will be dark. Bad things happen in dark stories, which means handling the use of Personae very carefully. But some of the Patrons have already given their permission to be used in appropriately eerie fashions, and I'm looking forward to working with my Personae Patrons to ensure that they are happy with how their Personae are represented in the story.

I missed that, you going to offer it up on your follow-on?

It seems to be a popular enough Patronage that I would hate to not include it where possible. I think people like to feel special, and we all want to be immortalized in some fashion. If I can help provide that for some of my readers, I think it's a win-win situation.

Speaking of your follow-on projects, what are your plans given the success of Shattered Glass Project? Any good stuff you can share?

Honestly, it's too early to say. We're still working too hard on crafting this phase of the Project to look much beyond the "create an awesome story, a beautiful electronic layout and a stunning physical representation" aspect. I'd love to see Shattered Glass (the short story) be only the first in a series of tales told in the universe I'm creating for it. But

in what form later aspects of the Project might be born? It's just too soon to predict.

Are you still writing games? What is your latest and what can we expect? Then of course, the obligatory, which is your favorite?

Oh yes! I recently finished a project for Mind Storm Labs: a series of short stories called The Adventures of Little Yoshida (<http://www.alphamegagame.com/store/product.php?productid=16195&cat=251>) which should be releasing soon. MSL was just fantastic to work for, and I'm really pleased with how the stories came out.

I've got another couple of projects bubbling away, but due to those pesky Non-Disclosure Agreements, I can't really say much about them yet. But one of them is a second project for a company I wrote for late last year, and I'm SUPER excited about it.

**Grins* You're not going to let me get away with the "I love them all" thing, are you? Okay, if I had to choose one, I'd be forced to pick Changeling: The Lost. But really, I do love each of them for their own reasons.*

Is your favorite your favorite because of the client, the creative freedom, the setting to play in, or just because it was a dream to write? And no "D - all the above" please!

I've collected fairy tales and folklore since I was old enough to read. So, having the opportunity to help create a game that dealt with a lot of those old themes and stories, while incorporating it into

a modern horror setting? That was just pretty much a dream project for me.

How did you get started? It's probably in your bio, but there is always a story in there somewhere.

*I got into writing for the gaming industry by accident, really. I'm very interested in writing novel length fiction, and approached White Wolf back in early part of the century (*grins* okay, so it was around 2002, but "early part of the century sounds so much cooler!") about joining their pool of fiction writers.*

This eventually led to me being hired to write In Northern Twilight, a novel set in the Exalted game world, and afterwards I was contracted to write a book for their new Werewolf: The Forsaken line as well. Being as though I was working on writing the novel as the core gamebook was actually being written, I became very familiar with the material, and when Ethan Skemp (the developer for W:TF) found himself in a jam and needed someone to help flesh out the spirits for the game supplement "Predators", he asked if I would be willing to give it a shot. Always eager for a new challenge, I said "sure", and from there the projects just kind of kept coming in. It's been really exciting.

I'm a typical fan, I idolize those that got there and am always wondering if I can get there too. Any advice for aspiring writers and designers?

Learn all you can about the industry. Talk to those who are working in it. Ask questions (respectfully). Don't hold onto potentially-incorrect notions about what working in the industry is like. And always, always, always, treat it like

(Jess Hartley from page 17)

the profession you aspire for it to become. (Oh, and read Conventions for the Aspiring Game Professional.)

Where can our readers find you on the web and how should they ask for you in their local stores?

Well, my website (www.jesshartley.com) acts as a central point for most of my work. I'm also on Twitter, Facebook, Myspace and LiveJournal (jesshartley at all of them - seeing a theme here?) Pretty much, check for "jesshartley" on your online social media, and I'm likely there.

As for looking for my work in local stores, there's a list of the game products I've helped write on my website. Since most game products are grouped by publisher rather than author, they can be hard to find if you don't know what title you're looking for.

And, some of it is only available in electronic forms, so I recommend checking out DriveThruRPG as well. (www.drivethrurpg.com) Just throw my name into the search window, and you'll find dozens of products I've worked on in a .pdf form.

I really appreciate you returning my email and taking the time to share your thoughts. Any closing words?

No, thank you for interviewing me, Norm. It's been a pleasure.

In closing - I always strive to make myself available to both readers and those who have questions about the industry. Folks are welcome to drop me a line at jess@jesshartley.com if they have questions or comments, and I'll do my best to help in any way I can.

Thanks to you, Jess. Keep on writing!



It's close, I can almost smell it...

Author Announces Fae Fiction Experiment

Bisbee, Arizona - March 21, 2010 - For decades, traditional publishing has been one of the only legitimate avenues for aspiring fiction authors. While the publishing industry offers countless positive opportunities and advantages for writers, there are also challenges. Some works or formats aren't economically feasible for large publishing houses to consider, leaving writers seeking new ways to get their work into reader's hands.

Technology and New Fiction

Recent advances in technology have opened a new world of opportunity for writers and readers to connect. From advances in printing--high-quality desktop publishing, Print-On-Demand (POD) and electronic .pdf file programs--to social media networking and safe electronic banking, technological tools are being developed at a break-neck speed, and writers are experimenting with how best to use them to address needs which are not being met directly by the traditional publishing industry.

"I'm a firm advocate of traditional publishing," stated Hartley, when asked about her direct-marketing experiment. "I've been a freelance writer for traditional magazines and game companies for years, and am currently seeking publication of a novel through the mainstream publishing industry. This isn't about opposing traditional publishing or doing an "end run" around the challenges of becoming published there. Those challenges are in place for a reason, and facing them forces writers to hone their skills--both writing and business-wise-- to the level they need to be."

Author Jess Hartley has announced a new urban fae fiction project, one that allows "Patrons" to support her fiction directly (and get exclusive access to it, as well as other benefits.) Known as "direct-market fiction" or "reader-sustained writing", The Shattered Glass Project invites readers to take a direct role in the publishing process through a variety of different Patronage options during the Spring of 2010.

Reader-Sustained Writing

But, Hartley points out, new technology offers authors options for experimenting with writing that isn't necessarily mainstream-marketable. "Poetry, short stories and novellas are much more difficult to place in the traditional market, which relies on the novel-length work as its main bread and butter. Direct-market fiction experiments can put these sorts of works into the hands of hungry readers without many of the concerns that would face a mainstream publisher. A story being supported and enjoyed by 100 enthusiastic readers can be a complete success in a direct-market situation, whereas it wouldn't pay for shipping through mainstream publishing."

The Shattered Glass Project

The Shattered Glass Project--featuring Shattered Glass, a modern fairy tale short story--was inspired by the convergence of two situations: Hartley's growing interest in these new forms of experimental fiction interactions, and the death of her laptop computer.

"I've been intrigued by the direct connection that reader-supported writing provides to both authors and their readership. It's a personal connection, and one that is very appealing to me."

Hartley mentions successful writers such as C.E. Murphy and Catherynne M. Valente, as inspirational in encouraging her interest in direct-market fiction projects.

But it took an unfortunate accident to encourage her to take the leap herself. "As a freelancer, I rely on my computer completely. Not only the actual writing process, but for research, for staying organized, and for the constant electronic interaction necessary to stay abreast of current trends, promote my work and find new job opportunities. When my laptop "bricked" on me, I couldn't wait for my next freelance check

to come in to replace it. I'd had lots of readers asking where they could find more of my work, so I decided to try something new."

And so, The Shattered Glass Project was born. Running for a limited time, between March 21 and June 21, 2010, Hartley is inviting readers to play an integral role in the creation of an urban fae story by acting as supporting Patrons, or even becoming a character in the story itself. Shattered Glass will be produced in both physical and electronic format, available to different levels of Patrons, in hopes of being able to provide an opportunity for every reader to enjoy it.

Patrons, Personae and Personalized Fiction

What makes The Shattered Glass Project unique? "For the first year after its inception, I promise Patrons that they will be the only readers enjoying Shattered Glass in its entirety," Hartley says. "In that way, along with being personally thanked in the book and the opportunity for Personae Patrons to actually be characters in the story, Shattered Glass Patrons will know that they're a part of something special. This isn't going to be just a story they read and forget. It's an experiment that they play a huge part in. It wouldn't exist without their support."

A life-long fairy tale enthusiast, Hartley plans on incorporating aspects of modern life and traditional folklore to create Shattered Glass, which will (appropriately enough) feature a fae laptop computer.

Three levels of Patronage were originally available for The Shattered Glass Project, ranging from \$5 to \$150. Response was so overwhelming to the Personae Patronage (\$150, which included a Patron's name and likeness being used as a character in the story) that the Personae Patronages were closed only 24 hours after The Project was announced to the public. Other Patronage opportunities will remain available throughout Spring of 2010, however.

More information on the Project can be found at the author's website: www.jesshartley.com

THE NECROMANCER

New Horror Art
by CosmicGhost

New to us anyway. I like this guy's whole catalog, You can find CosmicGhost's gallery on his website at deviantArt.

Here's what he says:

"My name is Balázs, and I'm a 17-year old student in a Grammar School, in Hungary. So I'm still an amateur, but I'd like to continue my studies in an Art University. I'm interested in a lot of things, I use both traditional and digital techniques. Usually my pictures are hand-drawn, and colored in photoshop."

Two websites:

<http://cosmicghost.deviantart.com/> (English)
<http://cosmic-ghost.blogspot.com/> (Hungarian)

I for one hope he keeps doodling!



ROTTEN FACTORY

A Demonseed

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

"It's better to be good than evil, but one achieves goodness at a terrific cost."

--Stephen King

GAME SYSTEMS OR SETTINGS

Overall this is a fairly generic Demonseed, one that is modern in feeling. *Spycraft 2.0*, *d20 Modern*, *Delta Green*, *Call of Cthulhu* in the current century, and naturally Dark Conspiracy, all would be appropriate.

THE SITUATION

There is a factory at the edge of town, long shut down, long abandoned and nearly forgotten, that has not forgotten its roots as the mainstay and supporter of the local community. Strange lights emanate, odd odors waft forth, and the local wildlife and domestic pets all know well enough to stay outside of the rusted fence and gaping wide open gates. Even the birds will not fly over the sprawling grounds.

Humans however are not so intelligent, or as aware of the unseen as are animals, so it could look like easy refuge for player characters looking to lay low for a few days.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON!

In order of escalating danger and potential harm to players and others.

Option 1: Bump goes the Night

The factory has been possessed by ghosts. Poltergeists or gremlins, as defined in the ghost or urban myth traditions, and have taken over the factory. While in charge of the place they can create effects related to the factory and the devices or vehicles within it. So turning on truck lights, operating old cars in the parking lot even when

dry of gasoline, all are the start of the mischievous actions that can be taken.

Option 2: Look to the skies

Aliens or similar beings, such as extradimensional entities, have entered into the factory grounds and chosen it as a base of operations. From within the hulks of warehouse and in the mold infested offices their schemes, be they experimentation, infiltration, or more culinary in twist, are coming into play and the local town will be the trial run for their nefarious schemes. This is where savvy player characters can shine, defeating things man was not meant to know about, or things that do not want man to find out about, and in return be able to sleep well at night knowing they have made the world a safer place for all. The ETs bring their odd technologies, their ray guns, their probes and saucers into play here

Option 3: It Lives

The factory has come alive. Be it by technomagical means, a massive Animator Spirit (for Dark Conspiracy), alien intervention, a super computer on the verge of sentience, or by other stranger circumstances, the factory is alive in the spirit of several stories and novels by a certain Horror-Author-from-New-England-that-sets-his-works-mostly-in-Maine. In this case, the Factory is alive, intelligent (how intelligent is up to the GM's decision), and has full control of the remaining devices within the grounds. This will make for a more combat oriented adventure, as the players will have to fight off jerkily moving forklifts, rusted out conveyor belts that lash and break in attempt to maim or murder the characters, as well as the potential for long term health issues such as tetanus. If this factory is instead of industrial potential, but of biochemical or pharmaceutical, then the range

(Rotten from page 21)

of near or deadly weapons increases dramatically. Essentially the GM could allow for any disease that was investigated or tested within the facility to exist as a chance for it to manufacture and use in defense.

Option 4: Defies all explanation

This is the no holds barred, weird, outre', Magical Realism, surreal answer. There is no explanation for what goes on. This is where all rules, physics, physical, mental, etc, are thrown out and whatever is desired to happen does. The walls pulse and breath with life of their own, space is warped, vertigo and nausea insinuate themselves into the player characters as the very fabric of quantum computing and energy is warped becoming inimical to human life.

SOME RULES AND SUCH FOR DIRECTION

The particulars will all depend on the game system and which of the three main explanation options the GM employs against or in conjunction with the player characters.

In general, under option 1, treat all of the actions, effects, attacks as little more than cosmetic. There is some chance that a free rolling car might hit the player characters, but keep all skill rolls, target numbers, etc. well within the average range, meaning unless the players are truly unlucky there should be only fear of damage not so much the possibility.

Under the second option, ramp it up a little bit. All skill rolls, target numbers, difficulties, etc, should be about two thirds (2/3rds) the way to the most difficult values to succeed at. The aliens should be

ones the PCs have encountered before, or heard of, to give them a chance to figure out the correct way to defeat them. In the case of extra-dimensional entities, an exorcism will most likely be the antidote to the disease of the other worlds.

The third option is the one the players will most likely suspect. In a Spycraft type setting a rogue AI could have fled and ended up in a forgotten corner of the WWW (a la the Collectible Card Game Heresy: Kingdom Come long out of print). In Delta Green or Call of Cthulhu Mi-Go could be the reason, a long forgotten alien tech fallen and come to life at the correct time, or even an avatar of Nyarlathotep filled with treachery and deceit expressed in modem dealings and in cryptic warnings that vomit forth from unattached fax machines, until the paper runs out, and continues if more paper is added. Have the factory be nearly omnipotent within the grounds, all suitable skills or knowledge are automatically successes and only in rare chances, would it miss with something like a pneumatic rivet gun, or other similar implement. This option will involve outside help most likely to pacify or overcome, unless the GM wants to introduce a potential new patron or contact.

For the fourth option there are no rules to cover. This is the most nebulous and the GM should not be constrained by the rule set. This is where a mixture of all of the above, a sense of reality being no longer in play, as well as just bizarre and unexplainable situations happening, such as: warm water the color of mustard flowing from floor to ceiling in one room, and endlessly circulating with no apparent means to it, extreme temperature differences with flames licking on ice covered hallways and offices filled with stalactites so cold that touching them causes cloth

or paper to combust into flames, where taking a single step could lead into an alternate past, or onto a distant world with no chance to return. Use this option for a TPK if you as the GM are feeling sadistic perhaps, or just want them to all wonder if you, as the GM, are sane or not.

INSPIRATIONS

There are two main elements that have inspired this Demon Seed. The first comes from the web site Web Urbanist. This Demonseed was inspired by the many images of abandoned and derelict factories and towns with pictures that are available on Web Urbanist, located at <http://weburbanist.com/>

A good starting point is The (WU)ltimate 33-Part Guide to Abandoned Places at the following URL, <http://weburbanist.com/2008/12/05/abandoned-deserted-building-town-city/>

The second source of inspiration is the song "The Last Spike" by The Cowboy Junkies from their CD titled Black Eyed Man. This is an anthem for the dying small town and rural America and Canada.

There is a third potential media available to pull ideas from. That is the Xbox Game Modern Warfare 2 in the multiplayer game mode. All of the different maps in the multiplayer (the only mode I have played yet) are in various states of destruction and or ruin. From the turned over boxcars of Derail, to the blown up buildings of Invasion, to the rubble and blown out windows of Favela, each map has something different that could be used for inspiration. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Warfare_2

CTHULHU READS!

READ AN RPG BOOK IN PUBLIC WEEK

February 28th - March 6th

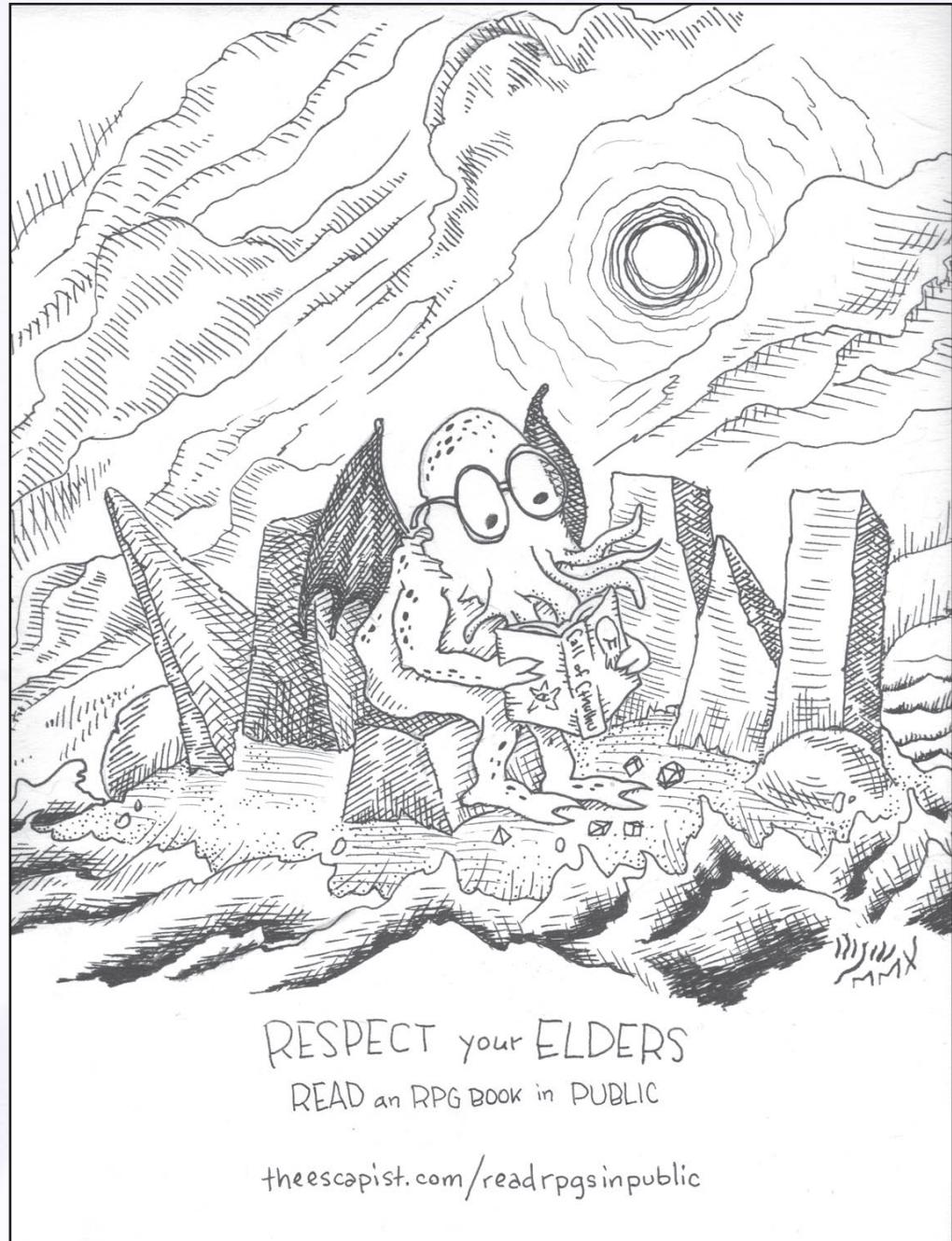
July 25th - 31st

September 26th - October 2nd

Read An RPG Book in Public Week is an event that happens three times a year, during the weeks surrounding March 4th, July 27th, and October 1st (starting on the Sunday on or before, and ending on the Saturday on or after). During these weeks, roleplaying enthusiasts are encouraged to take their favorite RPG rulebooks out with them and read them in public - on the bus, in the coffee shop, at lunch, at the park, or anywhere (as long as it isn't disruptive to work, school, church, or any other functions).

The point is to make the roleplaying hobby more visible, to get it "out of the basement" and into public areas where more people can see it. This will make others more aware of the hobby - some may ask you what your book is about, giving you the opportunity to explain the hobby to them. A few of those may be interested enough to try it themselves. Former gamers may see what you're reading and think about the great times they used to have with roleplaying, and possibly even try it again.

For more information on this and many other aspects of role-playing advocacy, visit Bill Walton's main website at <http://www.theescapist.com/>.



THE PRECONTINENTAL ORDER

An Organization

By Ryan Quinn
for **Spycraft 2.0®**

Had I been listening to the mad speculations of a lunatic, or to the scientific conclusions of a lofty genius? Where did truth stop? Where did error begin?

-- Jules Verne
Journey to the Center of the Earth

BACK TO THE BLUE

There's no question — planet Earth is on the brink. With the population consuming available space faster than we can build skyscraper apartment complexes or capsule hotels, and nuclear conflict a household discussion topic for decades, it's only a matter of time before the human tribes erupt into war over the most basic of needs. This world simply wasn't made to support twenty billion people.

Or... was it? Members of the Precontinental Order, freedom-lovers and contrarians of the highest magnitude, argue that we haven't even approached the limits of human expansion. While census operators wring their hands and nations toy with birthing restrictions, the Order sings a simple song: "*We came from the oceans, and we can return.*" Compared with the dry lands our ancestors colonized, the sea may as well be infinite in size, scope, and natural resources. The Precontinentals swear they know the way to prevent World Wars 3, 4,

and 5 — humanity just needs some room to stretch its legs.

Well, its fins, anyway.

AGENDA

The history of the Precontinental Order is the history of the wildlife photographer and the nature documentary. In the late 1950s, capturing

PRECONTINENTAL ORDER

- | | | |
|----------|---|---|
| Goals: | 3 | (Enlightened Evolution, Protection, Visionaries) |
| History: | 2 | (Changing of the Guard, Golden Age) |
| Image: | 4 | (Prominent Goals, On Record Methods, Secretive Leaders, On Record Members, Secretive Sites) |
| Sites: | 4 | (Advanced Lab, Harbor, Records Office, Training Ground) |
| Tools: | 6 | (E-III, G-IV, R-IV, S-IV, T-III, V-IV, W-II) |

(Precontinental from page 24)

underwater images made the move from scientific research to common entertainment. Colored images of the world beneath the waves flooded western homes thanks to the promotional efforts of famed environmentalist Jacques Cousteau, and the natural, alien beauty of the undersea touched thousands of people. Some of these people were fundamentally changed.

At the time, the founders of what would become the Order were little more than a loose group of Harvard and Yale students in a New England seaboard study. The group didn't even consider themselves activists, but rather artists fascinated with the ocean, mildly paranoid skeptics gripped with the heightened nuclear terror of the 50s, and intellectuals speculating on the population explosion of the baby boom.

"We could go there" became "we could live there," and over decades (and with the rising age, retirement, and bitter philosophical disagreement of several members of the original group), the sentiment eventually became "we *must* live there." To this day, most Precontinental leaders firmly adhere to the belief that colonizing the oceans and convincing the Earth's governments to extend their reach downward isn't simply an attractive option — it's the *only* option.

Though the majority of the Order's efforts are accessible and generally inoffensive (conservationism and international research, for example), it's highly unlikely their unusual message would have found any true purchase — if not for one very important genetic breakthrough...

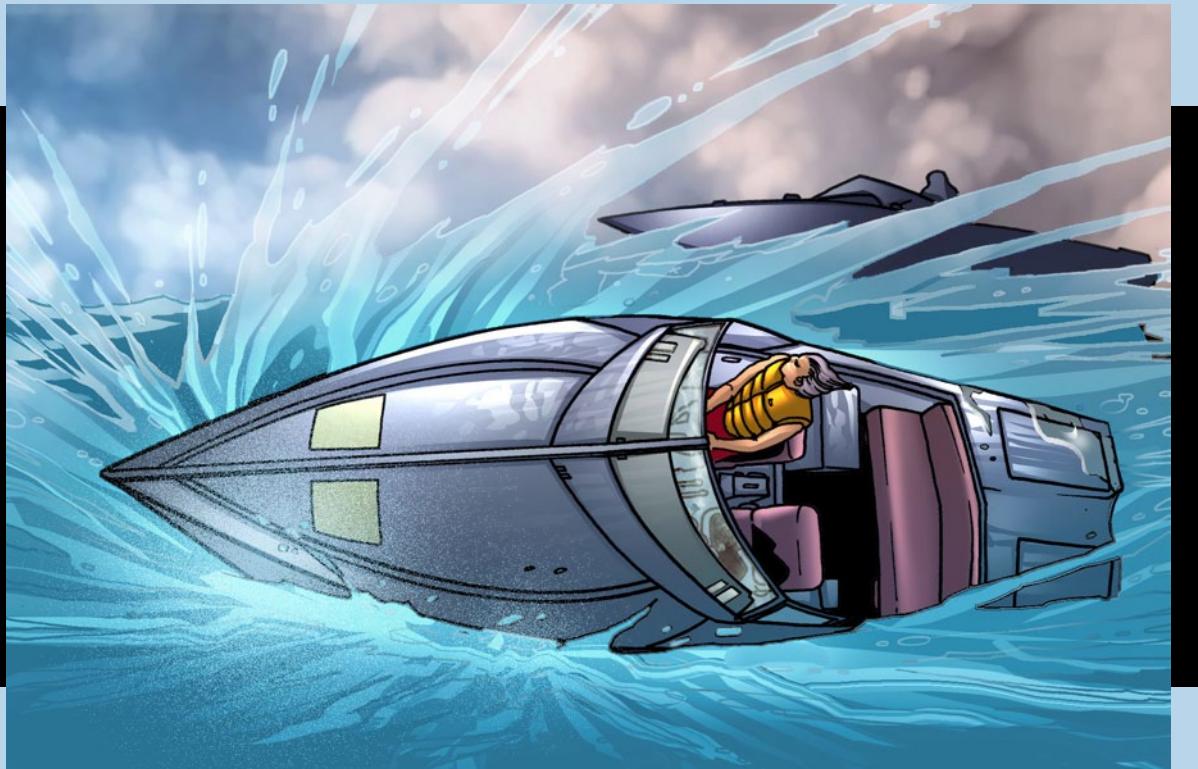
REDEFINING LIFE ON EARTH

In the early 80s, the burgeoning Order had evolved into a wealthy New England environmentalists' social club with comparatively few investors. It's not entirely clear how these fringe biologists managed one of the greatest discoveries of the modern age, though many well-connected members suspect foul play, and point to the sudden, brutal, and criminally overlooked death of founder Dr. Joni Berman as proof. Berman was last seen mere days after the discovery was announced, retiring to the back porch of her beachfront Gloucester home. She washed up on a nearby shore the next morning, drowned after a prolonged beating, and within a month the remaining Precontinentals settled into their new home, a Boston high-rise emblazoned with their new moniker: Northeast Aquatechnology, Inc.

Funding for the move came from a raft of new investors from the United States, France, Italy, and Russia, all interested in exploiting the group's discovery: that with the right equipment, humans could breathe underwater. Many pursuits followed: testing organs for resistance to deep-sea pressure, growing slick skin grafts that wouldn't bloat with absorbed water, and coordinating week-long sessions of eye surgery to help swimmers see in minimal light. The Precontinentals' wild-eyed dream suddenly looked like a very real possibility: they wouldn't return to the sea but their grandchildren might.



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(Precontinental from page 25)

METHODS

The Precontinental Order's core membership seeks to remain borderless, forming loose cells that operate largely independently, especially among island nations, but all cells embrace consistent methods. They nearly always cooperate with local governments, at least publicly, assisting marine endeavors of all sorts. This helps them stay on the right side of news agencies and the common man, and also lends legitimacy and credibility to their

message, which they hope world leaders will soon embrace.

Each Precontinental cell employs its own means of developing the Order's power base, though all present themselves as faces of the famed non-profit conservationist group, and provide no-strings attached support to local environmental agencies, especially to help clean up oil spills, test water quality, and the like. They also subsidize residence programs

for promising biologists and oceanographers, doing their best to subtly indoctrinate them to the Order's philosophy. The most promising and dedicated of these students are eventually recruited, filling out the Order's ranks.

Agents working with or for the Order can expect lots of exposure to local bureaucracies, and to be paired with local experts in small and non-democratic nations. When the Order pursues a political foothold, high-powered meetings at posh coastal villas are far more common than gatherings at research laboratories — it's critical that the Order's operatives appear strictly humanitarian (akin to the Peace Corps or *Medecins Sans Frontieres*), so they prefer to project the image of an interest group rather than a research collective.

NORTHEAST AQUATECHNOLOGY, INC.

Privately, of course, the Order engages in many other missions, ranging from defense to research, investigation, and sabotage. Operatives draw on a wide variety of tools to safeguard humanity's future on earth: electronics and tradecraft gear remain fairly commonplace for a clandestine agency, and weapons are limited due largely to the organization's *mostly pacifist* nature, but vehicles include a variety of watercraft (personal and remote-operated), as well as insulated land craft that can take to the seas.

Those publicly espousing the organization's tenets rather than simply looking for a paycheck can expect far more as they rise in rank. At first, devotees can request specialized training: in swimming, watercraft piloting, and nearly any life science. Top operatives willing to risk their lives to further the cause can volunteer to go under the knife and receive

(Precontinental from page 26)

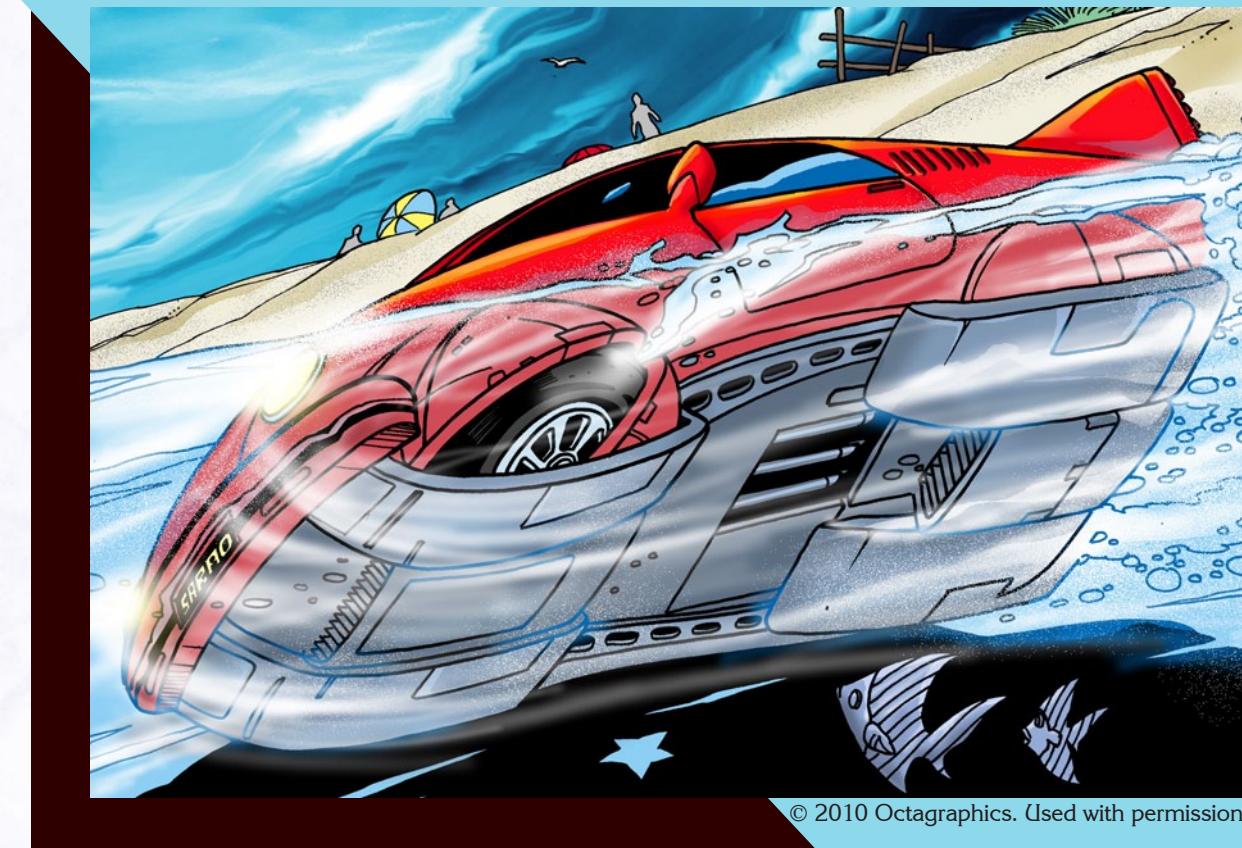
modifications to prepare them for life in the depths: increased lung capacity, wider light spectrum vision, and even artificial gills or feet webbing. Immense secrecy surrounds these operations — they're performed exclusively in off-the-grid laboratories, carefully watched by the Order's most elite surgeons and guards. Only operatives who prove a lifelong commitment to the Order are even considered, and only after a vote of support from at least two independent cells.

The organization's research is advanced but also quite uncertain at present; only the most senior operatives may subject themselves to more than one body modification. The Order's genetic experiments are meant to be introduced to humanity more... holistically... and they're not in the business of creating mermaids or shark-toothed freaks regardless.

OPERATIONS

Since its inception, the Order has struggled to reconcile its public activism with its private research. Each cell approaches this problem in its own way, and each weighs the value of legitimacy against the furthering of the Order's scientific goals. One cell might drum up support by organizing a flashy protest against offshore drilling in the same week another isolates, bribes, and — if necessary — kidnaps a marine biologist to secure their findings.

Despite this inconsistency, all cells share a few major focuses, and securing relevant genetic research — plus keeping it out of the hands of those who might misuse it, share it, or, worse, use it to promote their own agenda — nearly always tops the list. Operatives are also expected to keep tabs



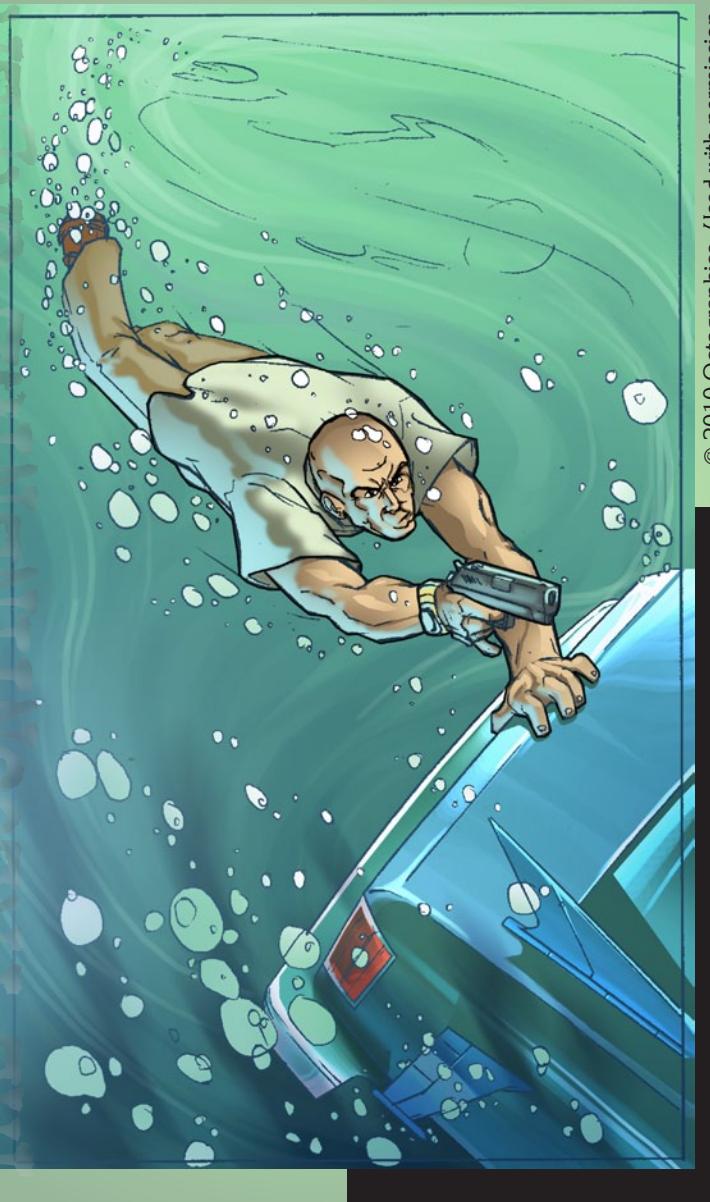
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on emerging figures in the fields of hydroculture (underwater farming), architecture (in particular, the creation of artificial islands and landmasses) and life sciences, and do so not only by planting bugs and tapping phones but also by spreading propaganda and stealing research.

Keeping the oceans clean and pure is crucial to the Order's long-term goals, and cells have historically cooperated with local governments (most notably in South America) to set up 'sting' operations

intended to tag, arrest, or eliminate pirates and drug smugglers. Violent operations are common, but more so is the bait and switch, in which operatives pose as buyers to lure scavengers with a derelict vessel in waters they frequent. The Order also donates money and personnel to help clean up oil spills, using its clandestine arms to assess, identify, and when necessary, expose the guilty parties.

Lastly, and perhaps most visibly, the Order builds, architects, and designs: mobile research barges,



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insulated floating laboratories, and half-submerged ‘coastal’ homes, while slick-talkers secure funding from sources on both sides of the law. Operatives protect and entice private donors, involving themselves in nearly any public seaside construction that can accommodate a water quality survey, and inoffensively keep their fingers on the pulse of the waves in every nation on the planet.

STRUCTURE

The Order’s internal structure is largely associative — there’s no operational headquarters, per se. Instead, individual cells create power blocs by region (or, where the Order is extremely prevalent, as in France or Chile, by nation), and these blocs vote on mission priorities and allocation of funds. Some blocs resemble political action committees, while others are barely attentive to conservationism until they’ve exhausted their pursuit of scientific breakthroughs. Again, they share certain commonalities.

Nearly all blocs have a nerve center (usually a private lab) near the coast. This location is used for research and Order gatherings, but never soliciting visitors. Landlocked cities and towns typically do not see a strong Precontinental presence.

Committees comprised of individual cell leaders vote on major decisions. A bloc in Antarctica that cares mostly for research might completely ignore the Order’s greater needs if its most prominent members feel they’re a waste of time. Thanks to the Order’s loose structure, few complaints arise.

In most cases, the Precontinentals recruit for passion before talent. Anyone can be trained as a research assistant or public activist but not everyone can be made to believe mankind’s future lies beneath the waves. Two exceptions are operatives and scientists; these highly skilled personnel are so highly sought that the Order chases nearly anyone who can be swayed with money or glory, so long as they can keep their mouths shut. Given the Order’s size and the esoteric nature of its goals, an operative who undertakes a single mission or provides financial aid or comfort might be treated as a trusted ally — though this is still a far

TABLE 1: PRECONTINENTAL ORDER REPUTATION

Condition	Reputation Gain/Loss
Objective (Recruit)	+1
Triumph (Profession or Science)	+2
Exposure (Any “incidents”)	-1
Multiple deaths during any Endangered Bystanders event	-2

(Precontinental from page 28)

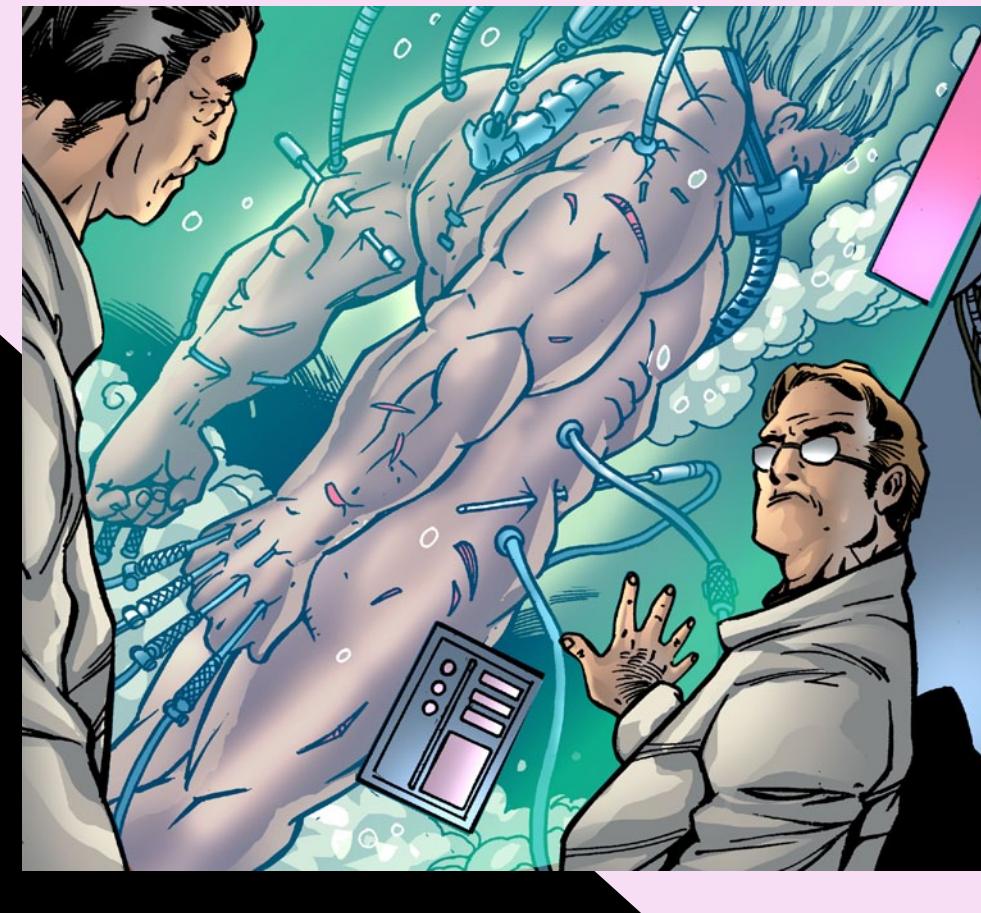
cry from those dedicated followers benefiting from the Order's most guarded secrets and advances. The Order's trust is relatively straightforward to gain, but it's extremely careful (even stingy) with its confidence.

Successful Order endeavors are broadcast to all members in the bloc, usually through encrypted channels. As a small fish in the sizeable pond of international factions, the Order motivates its troops by constantly projecting an image of success. Even a flattering article in a tiny local paper could be bouncing through every member's lines by the next morning.

THE PRECONTINENTAL ORDER IN YOUR GAME

The Precontinental Order is a unique beast in the Spycraft universe — its lack of national allegiance keeps it from having a major unified front, and its approach changes according to the cell and allies involved. Rather than introducing it as a single monolithic organization, a GC might sprinkle its operatives through a campaign focusing on other groups and goals, each cell seemingly an isolated unit supporting local governments and infiltrating other local factions. Only by comparing these experiences do the agents become aware of the Order's technological and genetic prowess, and its ultimate goals.

The GC can alternately recruit agents directly into the fold. Though the Order isn't as widespread or powerful as some groups, it doesn't demand sole allegiance, allowing agents to retain their standing even with governmental home offices, so long as their mission objectives don't conflict. As an added bonus, the Order's localized structure might let a relatively untested agent make a quick name for him or herself simply by volunteering to take on dangerous operations. In the Order's relatively thin ranks, a capable spy has plenty of room to impress, and with enough clout and success he could even land a regional command role in short order.



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Missions engaging the Order should involve an immediate and high-risk impact on its goals — lobbying to divert funding for marine exposure programs in schools may help the Precontinentals

TABLE 2: VEHICLES

Vehicle	Size	Occ	A/T	MPH	D/S	Upg	Comp	Cargo	R/F	Qualities	Year	SV
SPSS	H (2x10)	4	2/5	10/11	9/+6	1	25/+1	5 tons	20/D	LOB (Radar S, Sonar S, Thermal S), SEN (Radar 1), UINC	2000s	\$1 million

TABLE 3: GADGETS

Picks by Caliber	PR	Cap	Rng	SZ/Hand	Battery	Save	Weight	Comp	Year	SV
<i>Caliber IV</i>										
Pressure Sheath	4	—	—	N/—	—	—	—	30/+3	2010s	—
Pulmonary Pocket	4	—	—	T/—	—	—	1 lb.	40/+4	2010s	—
Sunlight Lens	3	—	—	F/—	48 hrs.	—	—	40/+5	2010s	—
<i>Caliber V</i>										
Fins	6	—	—	S/2h	—	—	2 lbs.	30/+2	2010s	—
Gills	7	—	—	T/—	3 hrs,	+10	0.1 lbs.	30/+3	2010s	—

(Precontinental from page 29)

in the long run, but it's not the stuff of espionage. Defending a research base still under construction, infiltrating a group of speedboat drug-smugglers, or silencing a photojournalist writing an article about a web-fingered swimmer... These all hit at the very heart of the Order's deepest goals, and offer plenty of action and intrigue to boot.

REPUTATION

Furthering the Precontinental Order's goals and avoiding unwanted attention can bolster an operative's Reputation with the organization, as shown on Table 1: Precontinental Order Reputation (see page 28).

GADGETS

Universally, the Housing for Order "gadgets" is an operative's body (which is typically Medium). See Table 3.

Fins

Webbing is grafted between the character's fingers or toes, creating makeshift 'fins' that propel him through the water with ease.

Mechanism: Skill check (Swim) (Caliber V)

Additional Rules: With a successful Swim check, the character can move his normal Speed, rather than at 1/4 his Speed (rounded down).



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(Tommorow from page 30)

Gills

Limited-functionality gills are placed somewhere on the character's body, usually somewhere they won't be immediately visible.

Mechanism: None

Additional Rules: The character can breathe normally underwater until the gadget's battery runs down.

Pressure Sheath

This installation requires over a month of painful surgery and treatments, adapting the character's body and bloodstream to the deleterious effects of deep sea pressures.

Mechanism: Save boost (Caliber IV) — applies only to Fortitude saves for Pressure Damage

Additional Rules: The character is immune to The Bends (see *Spycraft 2.0*, page 349).

Pulmonary Pocket

The character's lungs are modified, not replaced, with a circular sac that greatly increases his air capacity.

Mechanism: Save boost (Caliber IV) — applies to Fortitude saves for Suffocation

Additional Rules: The character can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to four times his Constitution score (see *Spycraft 2.0*, page 349).

Sunlight Lens

The character's eyes are modified through extensive laser surgery, radiation, and partial cone



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VEHICLES

Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible (SPSS):

Commonly called a "Narco sub" due to its use as a drug-smuggling vehicle, this watercraft isn't technically a submarine, as it can't dive; instead, the majority of the vehicle glides under the water, making it extremely difficult to detect via radar or sonar. See Table 2.



FIREARM ACCESSORIES

Weapon Options

by Zvezda

for *Dark Conspiracy*© 1/2 ed

Vertical Foregrip

An additional handgrip provides better control when firing. In case of a weapon normally fired with one hand subtract 2 from the recoil (instead of just one) when the weapon is used with both hands. Additionally the shooter does not have to be stationary to gain this benefit. When a "two-handed weapon" is equipped with a foregrip subtract just one point off the listed recoil rating. Some foregrips can store batteries to power additional devices attached to the gun.



Restriction: not available for weapons above Blk 5 and weapons with Blk 0

Price: \$30

Retention Lanyard

The Tactical Retention Lanyard is a coil-cord lanyard designed for prevention of loss of weapons and other equipment during high activity. The weapon remains attached to the operator by the lanyard even after falls or knock-downs. It features an adjustable loop with a release buckle to assist detaching the retained equipment from the belt loop. It is available in various colours and patterns. Some variants have a programmed breaking



strength of approximately 50 kg to prevent the user from getting entangled, while others are engineered to be almost indestructible.

Restriction: can attach almost everything to the lanyard

Price: \$12 - 50

Barrel Extension

Through the use of specialized barrel extensions (such as 0.3 cm, those that are often seen on competition-grade pistols) the overall accuracy of the weapon can be substantially enhanced. The base Range of the weapon is increased by +5m, the Bulk is increased by +1 and 0.5-1.3 kg are added to the weapon's weight.



Restriction: none

Price: \$350

Brass Catcher

In the days of DNA testing, fingerprints and psychometry it is rather unwise to leave any clues behind; not even ejected cartridges. A brass catcher keeps the empty brass in a box or bag attached to the weapon. Depending on the model, and the guns calibre, it holds between 20 and 100 ejected



(Accessories from page 32)

cartridges. It attaches to a weapon with Blk 2 or less it and totally negates the weapon's conceal ability.

Restriction: none
Price: \$10-100

Bipod

A bipod can be attached to every fire arm to provide the user with additional stability when firing from a stationary position. The base Range is increased by 25% (Rng 60 would become 75) for both, aimed and quick shots, while the recoil is reduced by 2 (for SS and Brst) as always, to a minimum of 1.



Restriction: none
Price: \$100-200

Stock

A stock can be attached to the weapon for additional control. The stock adds +8m to the base Range and also subtracts 2 points of the weapons recoil (to a minimum of 1). The stock can be used with every weapon which dose not already come with a stock.



Restriction: Bulk must be higher than 0
Price: \$150

Recoil Compensator

To some extent the recoil of a firearm is the result of gas moving out of the muzzle and pushing the gun back. A recoil compensator reduces this recoil by diverting the gases to the sides. The recoil compensator reduces the weapon's recoil by 1 per level.



Restriction: none
Price: \$ 100 Lvl I; 200 lvl II; 300 level III.

Duckbill Choke

This choke has been engineered to provide a shot pattern wider than it is tall. By spreading the pellets a lot wider it increases the shotgun's effectiveness in close range engagements against multiple targets. The duckbill halves the listed range for the weapon, but it provides the user the benefit of the shotgun's 10-round burst rule for medium and long range. It can not be used to fire slugs.



Restriction: Shotguns only
Price: \$100

Reflex Sights

Basically a reflex sight presents a target dot into the view of the shooter who simply superimposes it over the target. Targeting is faster because the shooter looks down the axis of the weapon and the red dot sight is already in the field of view. Reflex sights are completely unaffected by rain, smog, snowfall etc. For pistols and other short range weapons like shotguns reflex sights lower the difficulty to hit a target by one level on close and medium range. The give no benefit beyond medium range. For rifles the difficulty to hit a target at long, medium and close range is reduced by one level. For a trained shooter, the reflex sight is a powerful tool. Reflex sights can only be used with aimed shots, they have no effect on quick-shots. Another advantage of the sight is, that if two people with the same Initiative are fighting, the one with the reflex sight will go first regardless of the weapon's bulk.



Restriction: none
Price: \$ 300 – 1.000



LIVEATHAN

Setting Elements
by Michael Pevzner
for All Systems

*"Deep into that darkness peering,
long I stood there, wondering,
fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams
no mortal ever dared to dream
before."*

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Countless times we have seen a few determining the fate of millions. But never before have we seen millions determining the fate of few.

Welcome to a future closer than you would hope. The prison system in the United States of America has been privatised, the new amendments to the constitution allow the individual to do more or less whatever he wishes, and LIVEATHAN is a reality show that captivates millions of people worldwide. The show revolves around the Pandemonium prison, situated on an artificial Island in the Gulf of Mexico. It is a prison for those defined by law as "devoid of rights"—by the sentence of the court of law, they are stripped of all human and civilian rights they once had, and the people watching the show are allowed to determine their fate. And the people do indeed. The entire world, in fact, with various levels of legality in different countries.

One should note that the courts of law tend to issue such a verdict much more often than one would expect, for reasons which have less to do with

the depth of their moral understanding and more with the depth of their pockets.

In the Pandemonium prison, cameras and microphones are situated virtually everywhere. The prisoners undergo tortures, tests and experiments, and excited viewers worldwide are glued to their TV screens, eager to see these prisoners suffer. All of these viewers proceed to vote for the prisoners that should, in their opinion, be executed. The other prisoners move onwards in the prison's wings, getting closer and closer to their inevitable execution in a deadly spiral with no way out.

But Pandemonium houses a dark secret known only to a select few. The head of the prison, the High Warden Emmanuel Kadder, has his own plans and his own reasons to run the show...

WHAT THE PRISONERS UNDERGO

The prisoners in Pandemonium undergo a series of weird tortures, experiments and tests, which are meant, formally, to present the prisoners to the

(Liveathan from page 34)

audience in the fullest, so that the viewers can reach their conclusions in the most educated manner possible. De facto, the real reason behind some of the “experiences” that the prisoners undergo isn’t really clear to anyone.

The most common are “normal” forms of torture—those are taken from an immense variety of cultures and traditions. The only rule is that they are never lethal, although they can certainly cause permanent damage. From the prisons of Iran, through the magnificent tools of the Inquisition to the wonders of the Chinese culture—no method has been forgotten or overlooked, and the High Warden Emmanuel Kadder together with his loyal assistants invent new and diverse methods of torture all the time. These tortures are often—though not always—followed by various odd and often vague inquiries. Sometimes the prisoners are questioned regarding the crimes they have committed, other times they questioned regarding the kind of sweets they enjoyed when they were kids.

Other than tortures, the prisoners are often subjected to various psychological, sociological and mental tests. They are given intelligence tests and professional questionnaires, they are asked to draw pictures and match shapes, they analyse Rorschach blots done in the blood of former prisoners, and they are made to run naked on treadmills covered with rusty spikes while electrodes are attached to their heads. Often it is the prisoners themselves who are asked to torture and question their fellow prisoners—preferably their friends.

The life of a prisoner in Pandemonium is completely unexpected and lacks any form of organisation and order. Each day the prisoners wake up to a new day with fierce kicks in their ribs from

the jailers, and they have no clue whatsoever what horrors the new day holds in store for them.

But the ultimate experience is that delivered through the process of Consciousness Projection. It is a wonderful technology, developed by Emmanuel Kadder himself, which allows one to project the consciousness of a person into a different consciousness—real or artificial. The use of this technology allows the prisoners to undergo various experiences which don’t affect their physical bodies whatsoever. One of the regular uses of Consciousness Projection—in a so-called “educational experience”—is having the prisoners relive their crimes from the victim’s point of view. These experiences are recorded and then transmitted worldwide.

WHAT THE TELEVISION VIEWERS GET

The entire prison (except for a single wing) has hundreds—if not thousands—of cameras and microphones. These are installed everywhere—the hallways, the torture chambers, the dining rooms, the showers, the bathrooms, the prisoner cells... there isn’t a single spot which the cameras can’t see and a single sound that the microphones can’t record. All this data is translated across 15 channels on the TV and via live streaming free of charge. Every person on the planet is entitled to watch LIVEATHAN and enjoy what their eyes see and what their ears hear.

Everyone is free to vote for the prisoners that they think should be executed, via various means—mostly via SMS messages and websites—but it is also possible to vote through a phone call or using snail mail. LIVEATHAN promises every person on

the planet that should he want to vote, nothing will prevent him from doing so.

With an extra charge it is possible to manually select the cameras one wishes to watch at a given moment.

The ultimate experience that money can buy among LIVEATHAN viewers, however, lies in the technology of Consciousness Projection—those who are truly rich can buy themselves hours during which their consciousness is connected to that of a prisoner of their choosing. During this time, they experience everything that happens to the prisoner as if it happened to them in the flesh, although they have no actual control over the prisoner’s body. It is an expensive pleasure, which only the richest of the rich can allow themselves, and it is also a distinctive status symbol—there is nothing that expresses your status in the society better than the hours you spend with your mind in Pandemonium. It is also an experience one cannot truly describe without actually undergoing it, which helps keep the status and prevents those whose finances (or conscience? what a joke!) prevent them from truly experiencing LIVEATHAN from lying about it.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION OF PANDEMONIUM

Pandemonium is built on an artificial island in the Gulf of Mexico. At any given moment it can contain up to a thousand prisoners, two hundred in each of its wings.

Pandemonium is built in the form of a pentagon, with another reversed pentagon inside of it (see drawing on page 36. Inside the structure the especially thick walls, which are made of a mixture of silver and sulphur, are designed by Emmanuel

(Liveathan from page 35)

Kadder himself. The walls form—if you would cut away the roof and look at the prison from above—a perfect pentagram across the entire structure. This detail, however, is not known to anyone but those with a need to know—as well as a small portion of the engineers who built the prison. But those have all since died under various mysterious circumstances.

The inner pentagon forms the Penthouse, though the name is somewhat misleading as it begins already at floor level. This is the palace and dwelling of the High Warden Emmanuel Kadder. It is a huge, luxurious structure, containing a multitude of bedrooms, a swimming pool and Emmanuel Kadder's library, dedicated almost entirely to the occult. Enormous metallic doors, styled to look like heavy wooded doors connect the Penthouse to each of the prison's wings.

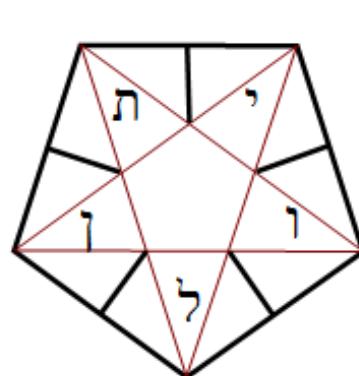
Everything between the inner pentagon and the outer pentagon is the prison proper, which is divided into five wings. These wings are called:

- Lamed 
- Vav 
- Yod 
- Tav 
- Nun 

They are organized in increasing order of severity of prisoner treatment. Fresh prisoners begin their way in wing *Lamed*, where the jailers tend to be nicer, the tortures less frequent and even the food is edible. As the prisoners receive more and more votes from the viewers, they are transferred further into the wings, just up to the wing named *Tav*. The

final wing is wing *Nun*—it is the only place in the prison proper where there are no cameras and no microphones, and no prisoner ever comes out of it. Officially, it houses prisoners which are not a part of the reality show, and those whose names cannot be published for various reasons.

Prisoners whose time in wing *Tav* has come to an end undergo an “execution”—this is what the general public believes. In fact, the process only looks like an execution on the television screen (and no Consciousness Projection is allowed to the execution itself—it is a very dangerous thing to do, according to Emmanuel Kadder). The prisoners don't actually die in the process. This is why LIVEATHAN always uses methods of execution which can be faked—usually lethal injection which isn't actually lethal or an electric chair with lower voltage than it is supposed to have. After the “execution”, the prisoners are secretly transferred to wing *Nun*, where they reside until their actual execution.



The Other Prison

The personnel of the prison, except for those working in wing *Nun*, consist of people hired for the job. Everyone has the chance to be accepted to the position of a jailer in Pandemonium, but only a few pass the rigorous tests and get accepted from the multitude of people wanting to get the prestigious job. The jailers wear unique elastic armour and carry gas and electricity-based paralysing weapons. No one kills the prisoners in Pandemonium without the viewers deciding so—but the jailers are perfectly equipped to prevent the prisoners from posing any serious threat to them.

Emmanuel Kadder's real purpose in LIVEATHAN isn't a prison and it isn't a reality show. Emmanuel Kadder has signed a contract written in things far darker than blood. He is a provider of souls, and in return, he and his men—the Soul Devourers cult—gain power over forces man was never meant to control. The souls of the prisoners killed in Pandemonium are taken Below, into endless dungeons beyond the perception of mere mortals, into corridors lit by the fury in the eyes of mad murderers and shaded by the darkness in the souls of men, into deserts of dark and viscous ash, forever falling down from the chimneys of crematoria where innocence, love and sanity are being burnt.

In these places, souls are a powerful and valuable resource. Furthermore, murdered souls tie within themselves fragments of the souls of the murderers, and the stronger the bond was in life—the stronger it is in death. Emmanuel Kadder provides a resource which was, up until now, quite rare—souls with millions of murderers. And not only are they murderers, but they have an intimate familiarity with those murdered—they see them, hear them, and sometimes even feel them from within through

(Liveathan from page 36)

Consciousness Projection. With each soul that goes Below, the millions of viewers lose some of their own soul.

Pandemonium was designed and built as an instrument to facilitate the passage of souls into the Forbidden Halls beyond our perception, and this passage slowly breaks and peels the barrier between the worlds. As the souls of the prisoners come closer and closer to their bitter end, so does the barrier between the worlds grow thinner, weaker—and the prisoners feel it, they can feel the thousand rotten, skeletal fingers sent out to grab their souls, they can feel the reeking breath of a thousand hungry mouths, opening up to devour them like ancient graves which lay for centuries on the bottom of a swamp. The closer a prisoner gets to wing *Nun*, the more do the two places—Pandemonium and The Other Prison—become one. Bleeding scratch marks of the broken fingers of prisoners on the walls of their cells, writings left in blood on the walls in languages that none can understand, dim lights that come out of nowhere, figures caught in the edge of one's vision—all of these can be seen more and more often the further one progresses through the wings.

And finally in wing *Nun* the two realities meet together. Here there are doors opening to places that don't exist, which sometimes appear and other times disappear, here the blood of murderers flows through the pipes instead of water, here the walls peel with the skin of children whose childhood was stripped from them; here there is no present and no future and no past, no here and no there, no up and no down. Here rules The Other Prison.

And here walk the Other Jailers.



The Other Jailers

The Other Jailers are those responsible for the actual execution of the prisoners, although it remains unclear whether it is their sole purpose, or if they have other reasons for being in wing *Nun*. They speak to virtually no one other than Emmanuel Kadder himself, and even to him they speak only rarely. Emmanuel Kadder believes that they come to Pandemonium to have a taste of the real world—to the extent that the wing *Nun* can be called that.

Nobody knows who the Other Jailers were in their past—if, indeed, they have a past at all.

The Other Jailers don't only kill the prisoners, however, sometimes they torture them but leave them alive for a time, and sometimes they can be seen walking through the halls with no apparent purpose whatsoever.

Here we describe three of the Other Jailers—those who visit wing *Nun* most often. The names provided

are the names they to use to refer to each other, as far as one can tell.

QLIPHOOTH

Qliphoth looks like a 16 year old lad. His face looks gentle, though he usually wears a cynical half smile, while his eyes are completely black. He wears trousers of black cloth that appear quite thin, which grow wider towards his feet and obscure them completely. His upper body is exposed.

His grey skin seems broken and peeling, like soil which is too dry, and black, viscous blood drips from the deep cracks in his body and face.

His voice is as broken as his body. It sometimes rises to an ear-hurting falsetto, and other times drops to a bass coming out of depths where no man has ever set foot. Sometimes he screams so loudly that the walls tremble, and other times his voice is hoarse and barely audible—all of these varieties tend to appear within the scope of a single sentence. But always his voice is followed by a distant echo of faint rumbling, as the sound of small pebbles falling down an endless, steep slope.

Qliphoth's tortures focus mostly on the prisoners' skin—he enjoys peeling and cutting it, hanging the prisoners on burning rusty hooks driven through their body and so forth. Other times his touch creates sickly blisters on the skin and face of the prisoners, or causes various dermatological diseases—of these he especially favours *noma*.

THE STRAW MAN

The Straw Man wears a heavy, grey robe covered with blood and stodgy slime. His face is never seen through the robe, but in the darkness yawning in the place where his face should be one can sometimes see shades that appear like thousands of tiny blind worms, twisting and crawling over each other.

When he speaks his voice is moist, viscous and twisting like thousands of worms, and so are his words—he tends not to finish his sentences, or ends them where they are supposed to end.

The fingers sticking out of his robe are long and bony, unnaturally thin, and their colour is the colour of wheat. As he walks through the hallways of Pandemonium, he tends to hold one finger against the wall, producing the sound of chalk against blackboard, leaving a trail of broken lime, bleeding with dark blood.

The Straw Man enjoys more subtle and psychological forms of torture. His wormy words penetrate the minds of prisoners like slow poison and cause them to do his bidding and conform to his will. He forces the prisoners to fight each other to the death; he makes lovers into enemies and enemies into lovers. His favourite method of execution is making the prisoners tear out the heart from their own chest with their bare hands.

THE NUTCRACKER

The Nutcracker is brutality made flesh. He looks like a twisted and bloody hybrid of man and very old and rusty machine. His entire body is torn apart by pumps pushing viscous blood and black pus and heavy, rusty cogwheels, slowly and endlessly

screeching as they turn about their axes. He has no head whatsoever—instead there is only a gigantic cogwheel, its axis of rotation located somewhere in his upper chest, and it slowly turns, coming out of the right shoulder and disappearing again in the left one. The Nutcracker wears no clothes at all, and the colour of his skin is akin to the colour of the rust on his cogwheels.

When he speaks, his voice is dry and metallic and his words appear out of the screeching of his cogwheels and the nasalization of the pumps.

His greatest pleasure is to destroy and break. Mostly bones, but anything else also fits. He doesn't even need to touch to do so—it is enough for him to glance upon the unlucky victim for the prisoner's bones to begin cracking, breaking or crumbling. He often leaves his victims alive, though unable to move, weeping in pain on the filthy floor.

When he walks through the hallways, stepping slowly and heavily, one can sometimes see the stones in the walls breaking and cracking, oftentimes flying as if in random between the walls of the corridor. It is said that some especially unlucky prisoners were caught in these stony meat grinders when The Nutcracker came for them. Of note, however, is that The Nutcracker always returns the walls to their original state when he is done playing with them, which means he knows how to build as well as how to destroy—but this productive side of him is left to the stones alone.

THE DARK SIDE OF CONSCIOUSNESS PROJECTION

The process of Consciousness Projection has one unpleasant side effect—should the one observed die in the during the projection, the observer gains a

brief glimpse of the Forbidden Halls into which the deceased's soul travels—and those residing in these halls can see him in return.

The experience is far from pleasant. As the one observed dies, the observer feels himself dragged into a dark vortex of a thousand staring eyes and fingers sent to rip and tear and drag. When the Forbidden Halls are revealed to the observer, not everyone gets to see the same thing. Not everyone ends up in exactly the same place, not to mention that the human mind cannot perceive the Worlds Beyond too well, and thus everyone creates ways to fill the gaps of what he cannot see, cannot grasp and cannot put into understandable form.

Most find themselves in a great hall with grey, cracked columns that disappear in the darkness above. The hall is constantly shaking, as if caught in the middle of a tremendous earthquake, and stones often detach from the walls and columns and crash to the ground with horrible noise. Sometimes the columns are replaced with grand ancient trees, full of branches of rusted metal. Other times the floor of the hall is instead a sludgy swamp, and underneath the water one can see human or almost human faces, torn with their last expressions of terror.

In the hall there wander many beings, but no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to grasp them—no mind can give form and meaning to these beings while in their native world. One only remembers their glaring eyes, staring at the unexpected visitors, shining with deep red, or perhaps these are empty eye sockets, viscous blood pouring out of them and down onto the face...

These eyes convey a single message: hunger.

(Liveathan from page 38)

In reality, the whole experience isn't a long one—the mind of the observer disconnects itself a few seconds after the death of the one observed. Subjectively, the experience may last longer than that, though it rarely does. The observer remembers the entire incident as a bad dream. The details escape him like sand running from between the fingers. The “natural” explanation given is that the mind “falls asleep” as a result of the traumatic experience and enters a momentary REM cycle.

But those who have experienced it cannot shake the feeling that it was far more than a dream. Far deeper, far more real—and far, far scarier.

This is the reason why no prisoners, no matter how hard they suffer, should die in Pandemonium—outside of wing Nun, that is. Emmanuel Kadder doesn't want anyone to discover the truth behind LIVEATHAN and doesn't want anyone else to strike a bargain akin to his own.

Nevertheless, accidents happen and it is impossible to prevent them all. The Soul Devourers of Emmanuel Kadder make great efforts to track down those who were observing a prisoner while he died, and most of the time they succeed. But even in this field, there are mistakes and not everyone can be tracked down. Not to mention that the Soul Devourers aren't the only ones who know how to look.

EMMANUEL KADDER AND THE SOUL DEVOURERS

Emmanuel Kadder is the High Warden of Pandemonium and the brain behind LIVEATHAN. In his past he was a biologist and a researcher in the field of brain science. It was he who developed the technology of Consciousness Projection. During

one of the experiments, a terrible malfunctioning of the equipment led to the subject's death—and in the moment of death, Emmanuel Kadder, who was on the other side of the machinery, glimpsed into the Worlds Beyond and the Forbidden Halls. He met Qliphoth, who made him an offer—and Kadder accepted. Until this very day, Emmanuel Kadder is the only one to speak with the residents of the Forbidden Halls. Perhaps it is because he was the first one to visit them thus, and they don't need another man for the job.

Emmanuel Kadder is the head of a cult which he has called the Soul Devourers. The members of the cult are handpicked by Kadder himself, for reasons which aren't always clear. The members of the cult are always busy looking for potential candidates—mostly among practitioners of the occult and the black arts.

In return for the souls he provides, Kadder and his men receive the power of witchcraft and black magic. They are able to bend reality around them to their will, they can see the fates of men and reach out their hands to the delicate weave of these fates. They can also prolong their own lives—it is possible that Emmanuel Kadder is currently immortal, or close to being immortal. Their power grows with every soul that passes from the prison into the Forbidden Halls, but this power is still limited, and even the power they possess takes years to master and use to its full potential.

Some of the jailers in Pandemonium come from the ranks of the Soul Devourers—and only members of the cult are allowed into wing Nun.

Kadder himself lives in the Penthouse in the centre of Pandemonium, where he leads a life full of

cocaine and girls—though he will probably have to let go of the girls and the public relations, before his appearance—too young for its age—begins raising unnecessary suspicions.

Other than that, the Penthouse houses a gigantic library dedicated almost exclusively to the occult, which contains some extremely rare books. Emmanuel Kadder spends many hours in the library reading, and he always strives to enlarge his collection.

THE REST OF THE WORLD

Although most of the world is caught in LIVEATHAN's charms—or simply doesn't care,—there are those who aren't happy with the situation.

There are those who know nothing, but object to the show for ideological reasons having to do with cruelty and the violation of human rights—but honestly, who listens to hippies? More serious are those who know a thing or two, or at least suspect, and these are divided into several categories.

First, there are those who have no background in the occult but can put two plus two and have noticed a few strange things having to do with the show, the prison, Emmanuel Kadder or anything else having to do with the subject matter. Legally, Emmanuel Kadder is completely immune—his money can buy all the lawyers in the world and he'll have some remaining for dessert, and he can certainly bribe the law enforcement agencies as well. Thus, those who want to investigate the subject do so independently. They don't always find what they are looking for, they don't always make the same decisions regarding what they do find—and thanks

(Liveathan from page 39)

to the Soul Devourers, they don't always survive long enough to tell the tale. But they certainly exist.

Second, there are many groups of people who deal with the occult. And there are those among them who understand, or at least can guess with a great deal of accuracy, what Emmanuel Kadder is doing and what the prison is being used for—or, at least, what it can be used for. None of them have the resources to build another such prison as competition—not with the Soul Devourers always ready to interfere. Many of them wish for Kadder's downfall, for various reasons: some believe he is disrupting the balance between the worlds, which can lead to catastrophic results; others just want a slice of the cake.

Some of these groups are attempting to locate people who have glimpsed at the Worlds Beyond through Consciousness Projection, in hopes of gleaning some information from them, finding a way to deal with Kadder or simply use them as bait for the Soul Devourers.

IDEAS FOR A GAME

A game that uses this material will likely revolve almost entirely around LIVEATHAN and Pandemonium—there is little point in incorporating these elements in a game without giving them the centre of the stage.

Following are several ideas for a game built around LIVEATHAN.

LIFE AND DEATH IN PANDEMONIUM

The characters are inmates in Pandemonium. The game describes their lives and experiences,



(Liveathan from page 40)

their interaction with the other prisoners and Pandemonium while they are moving onwards through the prison's wings. Pandemonium provides many interesting opportunities for role-play—even if brutal, cruel and with a sad ending. Consciousness Projection opens up almost endless opportunities for interesting scenes. It is perfectly possible to assume that several different persons can be simultaneously projected into a certain scene.

Also, as the characters move further down the line towards wing Nun, they will become more and more exposed to The Other Prison. Although the characters have no real way to find out the truth behind LIVEATHAN this way, it's still a great way to introduce supernatural horror into the situation, to make it even more twisted and disturbing.

Of course, one would need very specific players in order to have fun playing such a game.

PRISON BREAK

As an extension of the previous idea and with a bit more optimism, it is possible to run a game revolving around the characters' escape from Pandemonium. It is important to remember that everything happening in Pandemonium is being monitored and recorded, making the planning of an escape attempt rather hard to accomplish. But that's what wing Nun is for. It isn't specified how much time the prisoners spend in there—it can be an hour, it can be a year. This depends on Emmanuel Kadder, the cult members, the Other Jailers—but most of all, it depends on the GM. The planning of an escape in wing Nun can be quite interesting.

In wing Nun, it may be possible to receive messages from the world outside through

mysterious and occult methods—perhaps a group of people who deal with the occult manages to contact certain prisoners this way, or perhaps the characters themselves know a thing or two about the occult and manage to contact the outside world while in wing Nun, and thus bring outside help to assist them in their escape. Perhaps some of the Other Jailers have grown tired of the prison and don't find it useful anymore, or maybe there have been disputes in the Worlds Beyond.

Such a game can be brought to an epic ending with the characters causing the destruction of the prison and the exposure of Emmanuel Kadder and his cult.

SNOOPING AROUND

The characters begin the game as a group of people with no special prior knowledge on LIVEATHAN, but they suspect some things are wrong about it. Perhaps a mutual friend of the characters found something out and proceeded to get killed under mysterious circumstances shortly thereafter. Perhaps the characters have—almost accidentally—matched a series of seemingly unrelated events into a disquieting pattern, with the common element being the reality show LIVEATHAN.

Such a thing fits for a campaign of horror and investigation with a somewhat Lovecraftian touch to it, seeing that the Soul Devourers will likely find out about the characters and attempt to stop them from completing their investigation.

Eventually, the characters may find themselves locked up in Pandemonium, after the Soul Devourers didn't manage to stop them any other

way. From there, the game may proceed to one of the previous two options.

TWO CAN PLAY THIS GAME

The characters are members of a group of people who deal with the occult and practice black magic. They know the truth behind LIVEATHAN to begin with, or at least can guess it with much accuracy, and want to act against Emmanuel Kadder—perhaps they want to destroy the prison and bring LIVEATHAN to an end, perhaps they want to be part of the deal, or maybe they want to build such a prison themselves. Whatever their goals are, however, the Soul Devourers will attempt to stop them from reaching them.

This fits for an action-horror campaign with lots of mysticism, occult and black magic involved. Once again, the characters may eventually find themselves in Pandemonium—perhaps they'll even try to break in. This would be a good place to run an epic escape as described under "Prison Break".

WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN CANNOT BE UNSEEN

The characters have undergone a process of Consciousness Projection together (maybe as part of an elite hanging out of sorts), all watching a single convict—who died in the process. As a result, the characters glimpsed into the Worlds Beyond.

This can serve as a starting point for the characters' search for truth, as per "Snooping Around", above. As an incentive, the characters may realise that something is very wrong after the Soul Devourers begin hunting them down in an attempt to kill them. Maybe an NPC who also participated in the event with the characters is the first to die

(Liveathan from page 41)

at the hands of the Soul Devourers, at which point the characters understand that they are in serious danger and need to do something about it.

USING THE ELEMENTS

Emmanuel Kadder and the Soul Devourers

The Soul Devourers, under the leadership of Emmanuel Kadder, are the main force acting against the characters, and they have many different ways to do so. Outside of Pandemonium they prefer using subtle and non-direct methods, since they have no desire to expose their supernatural abilities. What they do have at their disposal is money—lots of it. With this money they can hurt the characters in very much natural ways.

First and foremost, on the non-physical level, the characters will likely have to deal with the law. Policemen, judges and lawyers can all be bought and the characters can be framed. They may also be blackmailed directly, without bribing anyone. The characters need to understand that there is a very rich and powerful organisation acting against them and that they can trust no one. At best the characters have a certain base of operations, like the circle of occultist they're all members of, but they might find traitors among their own ranks—especially if those are people looking for power, not justice.

On the next level, the Soul Devourers will hire people from outside the cult to do the wet job of disposing of the characters. They will not, at first, go against the characters themselves—they don't want to expose their powers without the utmost necessity, and don't want to risk themselves either.

The Soul Devourers will come for the characters in person when everything else has failed, and they will do their best not to expose themselves and to make everything look perfectly natural.

Even among the Soul Devourers, different cult members possess different levels of power. What they can do and how effectively they do it is up to the GM, in accordance to the situation he wants to create. There are no clear limits for their power—they can alter and bend physical reality, they can control the minds of men and they can change the weave of fate. One would assume, of course, that even the strongest of the Soul Devourers are limited in power—if they could take over the world, they would have probably done so.

If the characters themselves come from a background of occult and black magic, their powers may even be close to those of certain members of the Soul Devourers—but one must remember that the Soul Devourers get their powers from a much more direct source, and their potential in raw power is greater by far.

The Other Jailers

The Other Jailers operate only within the confines of wing Nun—but is certainly a large enough place to have a significant portion of the game occur entirely within its walls. In this environment, the Other Jailers are designed to be “bosses” of sorts in a game where the characters attempt to escape from wing Nun.

The Other Jailers cannot be actually defeated in the direct sense of the word—no matter how much power the characters posses, they cannot fight the Other Jailers face to face and win. Even though the

Other Jailers don't normally use their powers to their full potential, they are far, far more powerful than a human being can ever be. But there are ways to deal with them nevertheless.

First of all, it is possible to run away from them, if they are sufficiently distracted at the moment. Second, they can be talked to, and probably can also be tricked, even though they are far from being stupid. While powerful, they are not all knowing.

It may also be possible that the Other Jailers are working against each other—who knows what agendas exist in the Worlds Beyond. In such a situation, the characters may use this enmity, at the very least in order to escape in the ensuing chaos. Theoretically, some of the Other Jailers may even help the characters. If all the characters want is to be in the position Emmanuel Kadder is in, it is certainly possible that the Other Jailers find them more fitting for the job.

Thanks!

Thanks are due to Rani Sharim and Netanel Lifshizz for all sorts of help.



REPORT ON THE VIABILITY OF

A Short Story

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

Report on the Viability of Test Objects and Test Subjects

Test report of experiments recently conducted per direction of <redacted>.

Abstract

The scope of this testing is to report on the viability and utility of the test articles and subjects. This report will be used to determine future funding and direction.

There were a series of tests conducted recently to verify viability of delivery systems, mass displacement devices, as well as zone control methods and methodologies. These tests were conducted as far from local habitation as was possible. In several instances, difficulties arose and in one case the testing was observed by local inhabitants. Despite these difficulties, all tests were conducted successfully and this test report details the setup and results of the testing.

All of the testing was conducted using standard sampling and retrieval procedures, following all safety and decontamination processes. At no time were test personnel in any physical danger due to environment, habitat, or other factors.

The key objectives were all met, testing and sampling were all held to the highest quality possible with zero cross-contamination

Introduction

The test subjects consisted of four elements. The first was an analysis of the physical, chemical, and emotional components of a biological entity found in a can.

The second test was a mass displacement device, illustrating the utility and potential of the device.

The third test was a mind control device, a sub-dermal implant, intended to prevent local detection.

The last test was a series of biometric studies of a jungle dwelling creature, with some potential for utility and use to our other future studies.

Body

One set of test engineers were utilized to conduct all the testing. There was some travel involved in the testing, as well as some minor issues relating to how they were scheduled and conducted. The main details are below in the Results section.

The purpose of the testing is to validate proof of concept designs as well as to determine whether these lines of research and study should even be continued.

Test Articles

There are four tests in this report.

The first Test Article is a biologic that was accidentally located in a can that was obtained in a raid in the eastern hemisphere. The can was a standard sized one for the location, and after the primary test subject was tested to destruction, subsequent investigation of the ancillary objects obtained during the obtaining of the original test subject, this was located. The curiosity of the find has prompted the testing cycle that was conducted. Due to the short timeframe involved, and concerns over deterioration, the tests were conducted as swiftly as possible. There were no appropriate surgical

devices, so locally obtained plastic silverware was used to prod and manipulate the biologic.

The biologic appeared to be some sort of flesh, with small teeth embedded along the outer circumference of the entire entity. There was a filmy, pearlescent fluid in the can that took up the rest of the volume. After opening the can the testing commenced.

The second test was a demonstration of a mass displacement device. If successful it would help to reduce the footprint of obtaining main test subjects for the normal test cycles. In order to conduct this test it was determined to move unloving biological items to begin with. A standard flying disk was used to transport and deploy the device.

Once at the test site the device was detonated.

The third test was intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of some prototype mind control devices. As they are intended for the native population, they were inserted beneath the outer dermal covering of two of the males of the largest bipedal species, and later activated with interesting results.

The fourth and last test covered in this report was a series of tests conducted on a previously unnoticed species found in an equatorial jungle by a scout team. It was retrieved and demonstrated a high degree of potential intelligence as well as utility so some basic and routine non-destructive tests were conducted.

Results

The various tests were all successful to various degrees. Follows is a more detailed set of results.



Figure 1: Test Subject One, Biological subject in a Can
The biologic was tested for contagious diseases, sensitivity to light, humidity, pressure changes, as well as extremes of temperature. At the start of the testing, it was determined it was chemically alive, with no indication of a nervous system analogous to the indigenous life forms previously tested.

Standard cultures were obtained, scrapings, and no infectious diseases were detected under laboratory conditions. Once that was concluded it was exposed to the local environment and further tests were conducted.

It showed no reaction to changes in light, either from total darkness up to maximum illumination. Following that the environment was altered from no moisture, up to saturation levels for ambient air temperature. At the greatest value of humidity the biologic exhibited some slight change in hue, deepening approximately three shades with no other changes noted.

Once that was completed it was immediately subjected to a high pressure environment, with a total atmosphere equal to a gas giant. It showed no damage other than a flattening of the overall structure. After that it was subjected to an immediate and rapid decompression venting to the outside and taking it to an absolute vacuum. Again no response was detected save some deformation with the exiting of the oxygen.

Last set of tests conducted were temperature. The inside of the test chamber was lowered to match that of the vacuum, reaching to 5 degrees Kelvin. The outer fluid covering froze and remained intact.

Then it was subjected to a temperature, reached as fast as the test chamber could obtain an interior temperature of 670 Kelvin. The outer covering was converted to a gaseous form and was ablated away leaving the biologic dried and cracked.

At the end of the testing it is concluded this is some form of artificial biological device, and worthy of further study back under more concrete and extensive facilities.

<Paragraphs redacted>.



Figure 2: Witness to the Mass Displacement Test (Female Subject)

The second test was of a mass displacement device. It is intended to replace manned retrieval teams, instead pulling in test subjects and items without making the local inhabitants and dwellers suspicious.

Due to a miscalculation in the time conversion the time of the test was not in the middle of the dark cycle, but in the middle of the light cycle. This was due to a mis-calibration of the time conversion standard from local time to standard time and back again.

Despite this the test was carried out, the flying disk was able to deploy the test device. It was detonated, but due to the time mistake the detonation was observed. It is estimated less than 10 locals observed, and only one was

close enough to have observed any physical effects. This is recorded in Figure 2 above.

Based on the current population of the world wide test subject population of over 6.8 billion, and with only 10 potential observers, this comes to be a rounded off observation rate of .000000147. This value falls well below the potential noted threshold, and is well below the maximum allowed value.

The device detonated, displacing a standard collection box worth of un-living former biological samples. It left the manufactured and worked metallic and other non-biological materials.

Based on this and the subsequent retrieval by flying disk of the mass displacement device the test is considered an unqualified success.



Figure 3: Two male subjects, in two primary colors, mind control exercise

The third test conducted was of another prototype. This was of a mind-control device, also intended to aid in finding and testing local test subjects. Two males of the predominant bipedal species were tranquilized and the mind control devices were implanted under the scant dermal covering this species possesses.

Once the subjects were returned to their natural habitant a series of signals were sent to test the range and efficacy of the implants. The creatures displayed abnormal behavior, including mating patterns indicative of the opposite gender of their species.

Unfortunately shortly after the tests were initiated, before actual test commands could be sent, the test subjects suffered severe physical trauma and perished.

While this could be considered inconclusive, the fact that just the carrier wave induced such radial behavioral modifications indicates great potential for the implants.



Figure 4: Jungle creature held by human male, under observation

This is by far the single test subject with the most potential. It was discovered by a survey and sample team while scouting in an equatorial jungle location. They were searching for a small sub-species of the dominant bipeds, and during their radar sweeps discovered this specimen. Recognizing a potential kindred spirit, they gently obtained the subject before locating the main test subjects.

Those main test subjects along with the rest of the destructive testing will be covered in a separate report.

This subject was exposed to our cultural icons, similar as to discovering a feral child of our own great race. It demonstrated a great aptitude for learning, mimicking the sequence within a few series of demonstrations. Then a series of simple mathematic tests were conducted, which did not go as well as the visual testing. This could be attributed to the difference in digits on the upper limbs, from our own. Despite that difficulty, the test subject tested equal to a small child in our developmental stages, and the test engineers feel that it has potential to be a productive member of our greater community.

The final aspect is the safe consumption of our core foodstuffs, lending credence to the superior nature of this minuscule entity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All of the testing is considered to be successful. Both of the biological series of tests yielded positive results, leading to a desire for more extensive testing.

The two devices tested both performed to expectations, and further funding, testing, and development is recommended.

With the greatest potential being the last test subject. The test engineers feel that further study, as well as obtaining of a viable breeding population, is warranted in the small biological specimen. This would yield a great boon to our overall society, to be able to introduce a new member into the overall good.

References

All testing was conducted in accordance with standard collection and detainment practices. At no time were the collecting personnel subjected to unprotected exposure and all precautions were followed.

Extensive visual recordings were made of all phases and are available on request.

Appendix

A short recording made of locally obtained test subject, held in seclusion post the testing of the subject entity, prior to the destructive testing the other test subject was subjected to.

[Record mental and physical]

With his hand holding the strange little creature, the one that was brought back from some distant jungle, he waited to hear the results of the many tests.

It had taken all too many days to find out, what would be the final outcome.

Too many sleepless nights waiting to find out the final judgment, yet soon it would be resolved.

Still it was strange to think that this little thing was more important than he was.
Strange indeed.

[End Record mental and physical]





STARING

A Poem

by music-freak101

*I step into the cold night.
I feel you but I can't see you.
I feel piercing pain shoot
through my back.
Are you stabbing me?
Is my time finally up?
No.*

Visit music-freak101 on deviantArt:
<http://music-freak101.deviantart.com/>



MEMORIES OF A KILLER

Fiction

by Peyton Bisailon

Flash Back.....

He sat in his room listening to songs that were played on the violin as he wrote down short little tunes that would one day become a full song. His hands danced across the page composing whatever came into his head. The music danced around the room as he continued to jot down what he wanted, the young boy was truly in love with what he did. As the song came to a sudden stop he turned his head to see his mother standing there looking rather angry with him. Watching her take another step closer, he stood up to see what she had to say. He never really got close to his mother ever since his father had disappeared. As he watched, she moved over to his desk and picked up a sheet he was working on; she simply stared at it.

"Elric, how come you're not like normal boys who play with toy cars and trains? Instead you insist on composing what you call music..." she stated, and before Elric could answer she had already ripped the sheet in half. He looked back at

his mother with such pain in his eyes as the pieces fell to the floor. "You remind me so much of your father...that's why I can't love you." she said once more as she clenched up her fist. Elric knew what was coming and it was coming fast so he made a break for it. The young boy ran for the kitchen, Only to have her follow right behind him. Though he knew there was nowhere else to run now since he was already cornered, which made him panic.

Covering his ears as she started to yell at him, Elric was scared and had no idea where to go at all. Trying to tell her to stop though he couldn't, the young boy felt helpless and weak. As the yelling continued he looked past his mother to see his older brother Jon standing in the doorway bleeding from his eye. His mother must have gotten to Jon already, either that or Jon was trying to protect his younger brother by keeping their mother out of Elric's room. As she still continued to yell, Elric grabbed the knife off the counter and clenched it tightly in his hand. Elric had had enough of it and simply lashed out.

(Memories from page 50)

"SHUT UP!" he yelled, and with that the knife he held went through his mother causing her to fall to the ground; blood dripped from the knife. Opening his eyes to see what he had done, he dropped the knife to the ground. As his brother pulled him into an embrace the older sibling simply told him that.....

"It is going to be okay...." Jon said as he looked at his brother. They gathered all the things they needed and ran for it. Leaving all their old memories behind, the two boys set out on a new path though what they didn't know at the time was that it led to a path of killing.

.....Flash Back End

"Elric!" a voice yelled close by, causing the sounds of violin music to fade away.

"Elric!" the voice yelled once more, louder this time, and the music was gone.

"Elric!" the voice went off again and this time it sounded a tad bit angry with the male who was asleep.

"Elric!" the voice yelled once more, and Jon smiled once he saw two eyes shoot open.

Elric opened his eyes to see his older brother standing there with crossed arms, and a brief case sitting on his desk. Right away Elric knew what it was, Jon had a bunch of body parts in there that he was going to use for his latest art project. Sitting up straight to look at his brother he also noticed a vial of blood on his desk. Smirking was Elric's way of saying "Thank you" since his brother was kind enough to bring him more red blood, so Elric could continue composing his music. Looking back at

his brother, Elric wondered what he wanted since he never really bothered Elric in his office.

Jon stood there and smiled before he spoke, "You ready to head out?" he simply asked waiting for Elric to clue in that it was their coffee break time. Elric stood up and looked at the time before answering his brother.

"Can't, sorry, I have a surgery to attend to in a couple minutes," Elric answered as he reached for his doctor's coat. Looking back at his brother he opened the door and waited for his brother to leave alongside him.

"Alright later then?" Jon asked with a smirk as he started to walk away. Elric simply nodded as he locked up the office and walked to the other end of the hall. As Jon glanced back at his brother he couldn't help but remember the first time he had to actually kill someone in order to survive.

Flash Back.....

They stayed from hotel to hotel every single night in order to keep warm and not have to stay out on the streets. Jon noticed his brother was changing ever since the night he killed their mother but it was a good thing. Jon had to make sure Elric was well and safe from harm, so in order to get what they needed Jon would do anything to keep both of them safe. As he went through Elric's bag he took the knife that he brought along and placed it in his coat pocket. Making sure his brother was still asleep Jon went for a walk around the block to see what he could find.

As the cold air brushed against his face he noticed a young, quite wealthy-seeming male

crossing the street, heading in his direction. Jon acted fast and without ado stabbed the male right in the heart. As the blood splattered everywhere Jon moved quickly and took the male's wallet. Once he was finished he looked down at the body like it was a piece of art and it truly brought amazement to his eyes. As Jon held onto the knife he continued to cut open the man, over and over again. Enjoying what he called art, he grabbed a sheet of paper from his pocket and placed it on the man. Gathering some of the blood onto the sheet it turned out to look like some kind of demented butterfly. Smiling, he folded the paper back up and placed it in his pocket to keep; after all it was his first artwork using human blood.

From that moment on Jon knew that his art would follow the path of dead bodies. He went back inside smiling as he went back to his room wondering what else he could do.

.....Flash Back End

The lights flickered constantly as the sound of screaming came from within the room. The patient was trying to break free but couldn't since he was strapped down, wondering what else the doctor would do to them. Elric looked through his surgery tools trying to figure what he was going to use next.

"You monster! How are you even a doctor?" the male yelled as Elric made his way over to the table.

"It's simple really, after my brother and I were taken in we used the family in order to get what we needed, and the perfect cover up was to be doctors," Elric answered coldly as he cut into the guy's arm with a butcher knife. Grinning at the fact that the guy was screaming set something off in

(Memories from page 51)

Elric's head. The sound of classical music took over as Elric started to hack away at the guy. Looking at the male as he hacked away, Elric said, "Just call me Dr. Hell." and with that Elric continued to hack away.

The best part was that no one heard a sound.

Jon was in his office working on a piece of art with many different hearts blending them all into one big masterpiece. The heart in the center was of the man who took care of him and his brother for several years before they killed him. That was another day that the two of them would remember for a very long time.

Flash Back.....

It was a rainy day and two boys just got back from school for the holidays, visiting the one they called "Dad." As the two arrived home each of them went straight to their rooms, each doing what they did best. Elric was playing one of his new songs that he had composed out of blood on the violin. It was truly a lovely melody, though Elric's head was filled with violence and blood as he played the song.

Jon was in his room painting a picture with human blood of several people who he enjoyed very much killing. He could hear the music off in the distance but continued to paint the picture he loved so much. Looking over to a frame he looked at the picture he first did when he was younger and then went back to the painting. Though their father never knew what the boys did, he was led to believe they were going to be doctors. As Jon continued to paint he groaned once he heard his father call him and Elric both down for dinner so he could catch up on their studies.

The table was quiet as the three of them sat there eating, Elric was too busy tapping his fingers like he was playing a piano. Jon was making a picture out of his food which he thought tasted rather disgusting. The silence was broken when their father finally spoke up; after a cough he let out the first words at the dinner table.

"How are your studies going?" he asked as he took a sip of his wine, "Fine...." Elric said, he was usually first to answer. Father looked over to Jon who was playing with the knife and looked back to Elric who just simply shrugged. "Jon, how are your studies?" he asked once more. Jon looked up at him. "Not so well..." he answered which brought a surprised look to his father's face. Jon looked away and went back to the knife and started to carve into the table. "How come? Are the classes boring, or you're not as smart as your brother Elric?" he asked the older sibling with concern.

"It's not that, I'm just on suspension that's all." Jon stated as he glanced at his brother, who slowly got up from the table. "Suspended for what?" their father asked, rather surprised at finding that Jon had been suspended. "You see, this guy was really ticking me off so I attacked him and almost killed him." Jon answered bluntly and then stood up himself. Their father got up as well and then to make matters worse started to yell. The boys had never seen that side of him before, but knew it was coming. Jon walked over and placed a hand on his shoulder while Elric moved behind him, with a knife.

"Don't you touch me boy when you dishonoured our family!" father yelled, then felt a sudden burst of pain fly through him. "Sorry dad." Elric said, passing the knife to Jon who bent down looking at

the man laid on the floor. Bending down to his ear Jon simply whispered in his ear, "We were never your family, you were just a fool who fell for the two poor kids act." and with that Jon cut off the head, then passed the knife back to Elric. The two of them took turns slicing the body. After a couple of hours the body was in a dozen pieces. Elric took some blood for his music while Jon went for the heart which he would use later on. Throwing the body parts into the fire place, the two sat there watching the body burn into a crisp as they drank some whisky.

Once the news was let out the old man had passed away, everything in his will was left for Jon and Elric.

.....Flash Back End

Elric finished off his patient with a swift cut to the neck, then gathered what he needed and threw the body in the basement fire place where no one ever seemed to look. As he left the room of course he would have to tell the "Bad" news to the family waiting outside in the hallway. As soon as he walked out into the hallway the family rushed to him to find out what had happened. Elric simply placed a mask of great sorrow on as he told the family what had happened. Placing a hand on the woman's shoulder he looked deeply into her eyes and then spoke.

"I'm truly sorry but there was nothing I could do to save him." and with that the family started to break down in tears causing Elric to make a run. He hated when people cried, it gave him a headache so he told a nurse to lead the family out while he went back to his office to grab his violin. It didn't take long for Elric to grab what he needed and get to Jon's office. Jon wasn't there but Elric knew

(Memories from page 52)

where he was. Elric decided to wait in his brother's office. Stepping inside he could see his brother was working on a project but was out of materials so of course he would go out and get some. Taking a seat Elric leaned back and looked at the ceiling.

Jon was busy in his own operating room hacking away at a innocent man as well, all he needed was the heart but he took his time getting what he needed. As he looked away for a second he heard someone speaking to him.

"What do I call you? So when I get out of here I can sick the police after you." the male had said. Jon only smirked and then turned around to answer, "Dr.Kill." was all he said, and with a simple swish of his finger the guy's head had fallen off. Grabbing the heart he placed it in his brief case and decided to clean up the mess left from five victims. It was a sight he enjoyed, from cutting their heads off to the point where he finished severing the limbs. Once cleaning was finished he made his way back to the office to finish his piece of art work. As he opened the door Elric stood up right away and Jon smirked as he sat down in the chair and pulled out what he needed to finish his painting.

Elric pulled out his violin and started to play while Jon started to paint once again. Looking over to his older brother he simply asked him one simple little question which drifted with the music that Elric played.

"You know what today is right?" the younger brother asked as he continued to play his music.

"Of course I do, five years today we've been killing people and haven't got caught yet." Jon answered as he continued to paint. With that moment the two

of them both had the same memory come to their head.

Flash Back.....

It was their first day at the hospital as actual doctors, interns no longer. The two of them were assigned to work together, and thier first job was to save as many people from a bus crash as possible. The two went to see what their patients were like and found they were criminals from a prison transfer, the bus driver having collapsed at the wheel. All dressed in orange, covered in blood, hurting badly, the desire to torture them ran through Elric and Jon both. With a swift look at each other the boys closed and locked the door behind them only to release the maximum pain they could bring on the poor useless beings.

Screams echoed around the room too many times to count as fingers, toes, hands, legs, arms, noses and ears flew across the room. Once the outside part was done it went to the inside starting with lungs and livers. The men in the room screamed for help which the brothers found quite funny, since they were killers themselves and now were calling for help. Elric was the first to finish since he was quicker then his brother, who took his time finishing everyone off. As the blood went everywhere the two looked at each other and laughed. Both covered head to toe in blood, the brothers noticed one was trying to get away form the hell they had created.

Elric caught up with him and cut off his leg causing him to scream while Jon worked from the inside and Elric from the outside. Once he was taken care of the two looked around just to make sure no one else was alive. When the coast was

clear the two changed their scrubs in the back and burned them and then changed into clean clothes like nothing happened.

Their story was that when they got there the convicts were already like that, and blamed it on a couple of nurses who were known to act out dark fantasies. Of course everyone believed him since they had the evidence all set up against the other three. These two killers got away with everything and they found it truly quite funny and amazing. For five years since then the brothers had got away with everything...



OUTBREAK GENERATOR CHARTS

A Plot Device

by Citizen X (Joe Klemann)

Ever wanted to run a zombie horror game or perhaps some sort of post apocalyptic scenario where aliens or other strange entities have begun taking over territory and forcing humans to reconsider their role on the food chain? A GM often makes a lot of preparation for his “home city” or location for the game to be set in, but in such a situation, it may quickly become advantageous for the players to keep moving away from the epicenter of the outbreak. This can create problems as they move from town to town, city to city, or across regions of countryside. The players are likely to not know what they’re about to get into...and you might not either. This is a quick tool to generate the level of outbreak present in these areas, what enclaves of survivors might be left, the supplies available in the region and the response of authorities. It should provide many ideas for possible adventures for players who arrive even for a short time in a region or to show the difficulties they will have attempting to travel away from areas that are undergoing an outbreak.

Below are five (5) charts to aid the GM in ascertaining the level and effects of the outbreak.

Overall State of Occupants (roll 1d6)

1. Calm and Organized
2. Nervous and Jumpy
3. Disorganized and Paranoid
4. Hateful and Isolationist
5. Chaotic and Extremely Paranoid
6. Complete Rioting and Survivalist

The overall state is just to measure the average attitude of members of the community to be encountered, the more at ease the occupants; the more likely they are to help out the players who arrive. A roll of 1 would be a state of affairs similar to what was in existence before the outbreak was discovered, or came into existence. The states decrease while the die roll value increases.

Presence of Creatures (roll 1d10)

1. No Presence (Yet)
2. Sightings in surrounding countryside
3. Occupants have killed one or two, but suspect more...
4. Outskirts have minor infection, but perhaps they are being mopped or cleaned up
5. There is an emerging trend of infestations...
6. Infestation is present but may be controlled
7. Small Infestation
8. Medium Infestation
9. Full Infestation
10. Swarming with the enemy...

The presence of the creatures in a region or community is a quick way to determine the amount of resistance the players are likely to encounter. If the characters expend special efforts to avoid infected areas or move away from a known epicenter then the GM may wish to modify the chart to what makes sense for the game. Note, a region could be completely uninfected, but that does not mean that members in the region might not be in a panicked state at the thought of infection or that the military control units may not have locked the area down for staging their raids into infected zones.

Local Authority (roll 1d10)

1. Barely armed band of civilians
2. Armed civilians
3. Local Law Enforcement and armed civilians
4. Local Law Enforcement
5. Heavily armed Law Enforcement
6. Local military or militia and Emergency Services
7. National Guard and FEMA
8. CDC and full-blown Military response
9. Special Forces Military and Top-Level Government agencies
10. Black-Operations Purifier Squads 1.

The region's local authority determines what kind of people are in charge of protecting the area from the creatures and possible infection. You, as the GM, might roll twice if you want to have multiple competing authorities in the area. Depending on the level of infection, the armed groups may be very small and isolated. If the overall attitude of the region is paranoid or chaotic, the authorities may simply be killing anyone it considers a rioter or potential risk of infection...which gets to the next part of the Outbreak Generator...

The response of the authorities can vary and be altered if it doesn't fit what you consider the overall state of the region, although you could just as easily

Authority's Response (roll 1d10)

1. Ignore the infection/outbreak
2. Half-assed clean up response
3. Cooperative effort to eliminate the threat
4. Contain the problem and wait for help
5. Evacuation, Medical Services for wounded, and Containment
6. Containment and Cover-Up after Evacuation
7. Martial Law and Fascist purges of infected zones
8. Zealous cooperative clean-up with no evacuations
9. Complete systematic purging of infected zones and then cover-up through murder and intimidation of witnesses
10. Seal off the whole town and burn everything in it. Nothing escapes.

be calm and organized about destroying a heavily infected town, even if that is somewhat sociopathic.

Supplies could include fuel, working vehicles, tools, and weapons; as well as the more obvious food, water, and medical equipment. The supply stores of a region may not necessarily be easily accessible even if abundant, players may still have to haggle with local authorities or break into abandoned businesses or even heavily defended

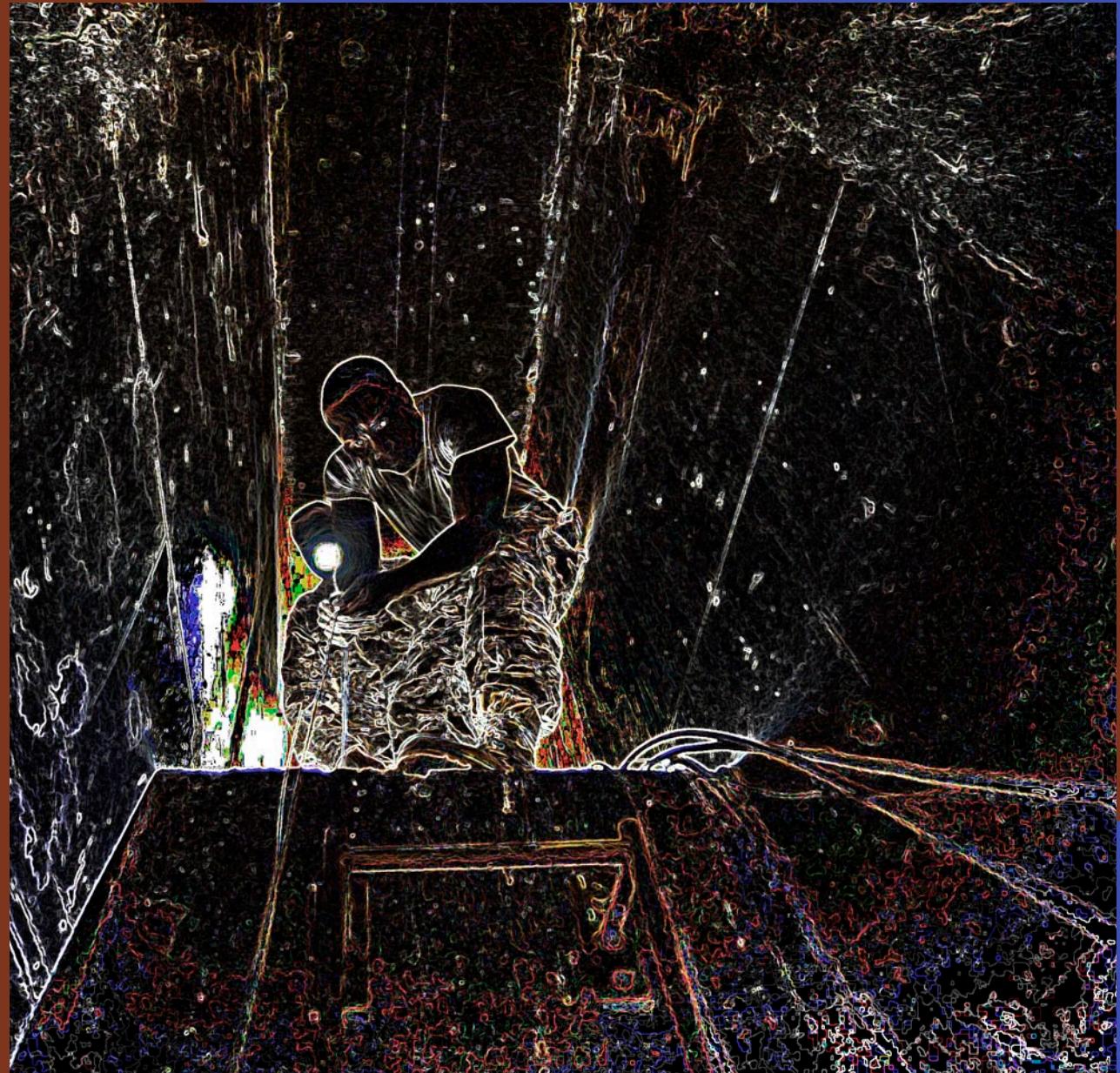
Regional Supplies (roll 1d8)

1. Bone Dry. The community was caught unprepared.
2. Almost no supplies that isn't already taken or half-used.
3. Dwindling stores of goods
4. Sparse and thin supply stores
5. Sparse but moderately stocked stores of supplies
6. Sparse but abundant stores of supplies and food
7. Good stores and stocked up supplies and food
8. Surplus of Guns, Gear, Medical Supplies, and Food

locations. Those survivors in a region severely lacking supplies may actually attack and rob the players for the supplies they have and if it's bad enough, acts of cannibalism or worse may even occur in order to gain basic necessities...

These charts should be able to give rough ideas as well as plot hooks and aids for GMs using them in their games.

*Happy Hunting.
Citizen-X*



MOTORWAY: THE GREMLINS' PLAYGROUND

A Proto-Dimension

by Linden Dunham
for *Dark Conspiracy®* 1/2 ed

DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENT

Motorway is an extradimensional reflection of the orbital road systems that encircle many large cities on Earth. In campaigns using the limited access method of dimensional travel it corresponds to roads like the M25 around London, the Washington DC beltway or the Peripherique in Paris. In flow chart based campaigns it can be reached from Mechanica and Gothic as well as Earth (see diagram). PCs visiting Motorway are advised to do so in a vehicle. The nature of this proto-dimension means that it is an unfriendly place for pedestrians.

Motorway is annular in shape. Essentially it is a hundred mile circuit of eight-lane highway, running through open countryside, sometimes rising above the surrounding landscape on embankments, or dropping below it in cuttings. The highway is bounded on both sides by metal crash barriers with another barrier running down the central reservation. PCs looking inwards from the road will see the outskirts of a city in the distance. Looking outwards the view is of a rural landscape of fields, trees and

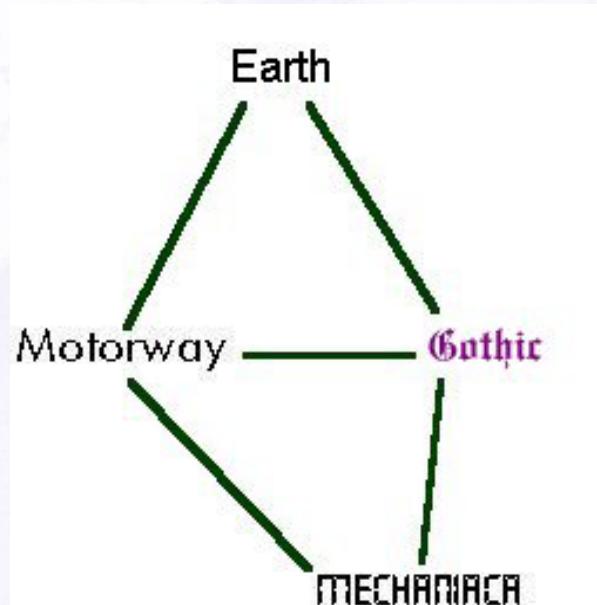
Name: Motorway

Type: Halfland

Discontinuity: 2

Assimilation Effect Value: None

hedges with the occasional small town or village visible on the horizon. All terrain features including the sky are just a little too brightly coloured to look natural. PCs who misspent their youth playing computer and/or arcade games will be reminded of the graphics in driving simulators. They may also remember that in many games the off road terrain was impassable or drastically slowed the speed of the player's car. Motorway possesses a similar effect: Anyone who leaves the highway immediately encounters a relativistic barrier (see Proto-Dimensions Sourcebook, page 17) that rapidly halts any off road progress. Other than the few instances detailed below this proto-dimension has no real



existence outside of the highway. The road carries traffic around and around in a continuous loop. PCs exploring Motorway encounter numerous cars, trucks, buses and the occasional motorcycle. All are recognisable models by established real world manufacturers but have one thing in common: They have no driver, or indeed any living occupants. PCs may be forgiven for thinking they've stumbled into some kind of extra-dimensional hideaway for Animator Spirits. The truth is only slightly stranger. Motorway is home to hundreds of Entropic Gremlins. See **The Locals** below for further details.

The monotony of the road is broken at irregular intervals by junctions. These take the form of large roundabouts either elevated above or sunk below the level of the main highway and connected to it by slip roads. The junctions are all signposted well

in advance although the destinations they purport to give access to are nowhere that any PC has ever heard of, being unlikely combinations of elements from Earthly place names e.g. Uxington, Saint Arlington. Distances are also given but it is not clear whether the figures are meant to represent kilometres or miles. The figures also change from sign to sign without any rhyme or reason although for some unknown reason they are always prime numbers. Thus the first sign the PCs see for Uxington states that it is 13 miles/kilometres away. On encountering a second sign a few miles down the road the distance will have increased to 29. Despite the bizarre signposting the junctions do seem to offer the prospect of escaping the endless loop of main highway. This is an illusion. The roads that appear to lead away from the junctions towards the distant towns and villages merely bring the driver into contact with the relativistic barrier. Anyone who tries to take a turn off finds themselves on a two-lane road going nowhere very slowly, until they turn the car around or reverse back to the junction.

The only places in Motorway that offer any respite from the road are the service stations. There are five of these scattered along the circuit at intervals of twenty miles. Like the junctions they are signposted and although the text on the signs is gibberish the universal symbols for telephones, WCs, fuel, etc. should make it clear what is being referred to. Drivers taking the exit for one of the service stations hoping to find a comfortable rest stop will be severely disappointed. The slip road leads to a bleak car park enclosed on three sides by wooden fencing (separating the car park from the relativistic barrier. On the non-enclosed side is the service station proper: a large, but unprepossessing building made from slabs of concrete and sheets of dark glass.

PCs who venture inside find that it is just an empty shell. There are only unlit, echoing, empty rooms where the shops, food courts and toilet facilities should be. A staircase off the main concourse leads to a covered bridge over the highway. At the far end of the bridge is another staircase that goes down to another service station on the other side of the road. The station is the mirror image of its opposite neighbour.

At the rear of the main building is a filling station: A forecourt with ranks of pumps and a kiosk. On closer inspection it is apparent that each pump is inoperable. The dispensing nozzles are moulded to the pump body and there are no price or fuel gauges. The PCs may find this disconcerting unless they've already figured out that, due to its unusual physics shift, they don't need fuel in Motorway. The kiosk is as empty and featureless as the main building.

After exploring a couple of these desolate places the PCs are likely to conclude that they offer travellers nothing except the opportunity to rest up for a while, or change drivers in relative peace. However, the service stations are inhabited from time to time, and not by the kind of people who welcome other visitors. See **Encounters** below for further details.

PHYSICS SHIFT

Motorway's physics differ from Earth's in a number of respects. These differences won't be readily apparent to first time visitors:

Fuel for Life: Items and equipment that rely on any form of energy will work without drawing on

(Motorway from page 58)

their power source. Thus a car driven in Motorway does not consume any fuel, a battery operated torch never goes flat, etc.

Rust Sleeps: The effects of entropy are variable in Motorway, much as they are in Gothic (see Proto-Dimensions Sourcebook, page 92): Metal never rusts, or becomes fatigued, and items of equipment will never suffer mechanical failure except as the result of deliberate or accidental damage.

New For Old: Entropic Gremlins in Motorway are able to move from machine to machine within seconds rather than the sixty minutes it takes to accomplish such a transfer on Earth.

THE LOCALS

Entropic Gremlins

Motorway's physics shift makes it a favoured haunt of these energy hungry darklings. The Gremlins are able to satisfy their appetites by taking up residence in a vehicle and remaining in the proto-dimension on a permanent basis. The Gremlins seem largely content to spend their time cruising round and round on the highway. A few of these capricious creatures, possibly out of boredom, indulge in such entertainments as high speed racing or demolition style derby contests in which cars are driven into each other head on. These activities often leave the loser, and sometimes the winner as well, with a badly damaged vehicle, which the occupying Gremlin has to hold together using its telekinetic powers. The Gremlin will be eager to acquire a new vehicle as

soon as possible. If the PCs happen to be passing in their car then they could be in trouble...

Dark Elves: The fey folk sometimes visit Motorway to harvest Entropic Gremlins, which are then let loose on Earth. Dark Elves visiting Motorway on a Gremlin hunt usually set up camp in one of the service stations. They rarely stay for longer than a week. There is no food or water in Motorway and all food and supplies have to be imported.

Mechanicals: The machine lord named Ford has recently discovered the existence of Motorway. To date he has only sent a small scout group composed of Mk I Steriloids to the proto-dimension. The scouts were attacked and virtually wiped out by a band of Dark Elves with only a single Mk I escaping back to Mechanica. Although badly damaged the survivor was able to provide Ford with a full report of what it had seen in Motorway, including video footage. Ford was intrigued by the apparently intelligent machines of this neighbouring proto-dimension and began to consider the possibility of using them as the basis of a new improved series of Steriloids.

Ford realises that such a project will require him to capture some examples of Motorway's self-willed autos. He intends to send a raiding party to the proto-dimension, primarily composed of Mk I and II Steriloids but with a Mk III accompanying to take care of any Dark Elves or other hostile life forms.

Of course Ford and his robot servants don't know that the vehicles in Motorway are controlled by non-machine intelligences.

ENCOUNTERS IN MOTORWAY

Rent-a-Wreck

Investigators arriving in Motorway without a vehicle may be able to procure transport locally. Empty vehicles can be found on the hard shoulder, in service station car parks or on slip roads. Such vehicles will have been abandoned by their Gremlin "drivers" and thus are likely to be low quality models, or in a poor state of repair after being used in a roller derby.

Rush Hour

Every morning and evening at approximately 07:00 to 09:00 and 16:00 to 18:00 the traffic flow in Motorway gets noticeably heavier. In some places the road becomes congested and traffic slows to a standstill. The reasons for this are unclear but may be related to the effects Motorway's physics shift has on the Gremlins. As in Gothic a periodic inconvenience is the price Gremlins have to pay for abundant food. Unlike their armour dwelling cousins Motorway's Gremlins seem to bear this imposition with good grace.

PCs caught up in one of Motorway's twice daily traffic jams may find it unnerving to be surrounded by a horde of empty cars but they are unlikely to be attacked unless they provoke a Gremlin in some way e.g. by excessive horn blowing or cutting in front while lane dodging. The only real danger is if a Gremlin likes the looks of the PCs vehicle and decides it would make a nicer residence than the vehicle it currently occupies: The PCs feel a barely perceptible nudge of their back bumper as the Gremlin transfers from its car to the PCs' vehicle. A

(Motorway from page 59)

Gremlin occupying a PCs car will initially be content just to feed and lets the driver retain control for quite some time. It will make its presence known at an inopportune moment, such as when the PCs have returned to Earth or are involved in a chase or vehicular combat. If the car is left unattended for any length of time the Gremlin is certain to take off on its own, speeding away into the distance leaving the PCs chasing after it with little hope of ever catching up.

Duel

The PCs encounter a large tanker driving at around 40 mph in the middle lane. When they overtake the tanker, the Gremlin controlling it takes exception to this manoeuvre. It accelerates, overtakes the PC's vehicle and swings in front of them only a few inches away from their bumper. The referee might like to have the PCs make a Difficult: Vehicle Use task roll so as to brake in sufficient time to avoid bumping into the tanker and sustaining a minor damage hit (or use the collision rules on pages 118-119 of the main rulebook).

The PCs only have two realistic choices at this point: Follow the tanker or overtake again. If they choose the former they spend the next couple of hours pottering along behind the metal behemoth, which takes great pleasure in braking at random intervals and occasionally letting out mocking blasts from its horn. Eventually the Gremlin gets bored with tormenting the PCs and turns off at junction or into a service station. If the PCs choose to overtake the tanker again the Gremlin becomes enraged and the tanker accelerates once more, bearing down on the PCs from the rear with the obvious intention of running them off the road. PCs in a high

performance car such as a Firefly or a Kamikazi can easily outrun the tanker. However, Motorway is a relatively small enclosed place. The odds of encountering the tanker again are quite high, and the Gremlin inside won't forget. Tovaritsch and Contempo owners are in big trouble, and will have to rely on some skilful (or lucky) manoeuvring to survive.

A well armed party may be able to blow the tanker to bits but the Gremlin will use its telekinetic powers to hold its vehicle together for as long as possible. If the tanker is critically damaged the Gremlin may try to transfer to the PCs car, take control and crash it. Alternatively it decides that revenge is a dish best eaten cold and bides its time before acting in the same way as the Gremlin in Rush Hour above.

Breakdown

The PCs come across a Conestoga truck parked on the hard shoulder. A single motorist, a middle aged man wearing a baseball cap, is standing beside it looking distressed. The motorist is a free roaming Ravager (see Dark Races, page 81) that has escaped from its ET masters having stolen a medium sized dimension walk device (currently stored under a tarpaulin in the back of the truck). The Ravager recently arrived in Motorway by accident: It has no real understanding of the stolen dimension walk device, simply using it to travel to a random dimension in order to escape the pursuing ETs. The beast is beginning to get hungry and, believing itself to be on a close analogue of Earth has decided to pose as a broken down motorist to lure some prey. So far all it has seen are driverless cars speeding past and pointedly ignoring the stopped truck. The Ravager is puzzled to say the least.

If the PCs stop to help the Ravager it questions them in an effort to find out more about this strange world it has ended up in. It will do a good impersonation of a disorientated, slightly Dobie-ish truck driver who is completely mystified as to how he came to be in Motorway. However, the Ravager's true nature soon asserts itself and it will launch a frenzied attack when the PCs seem most vulnerable e.g. when a couple of party members have their heads buried in the engine of the truck and are about to realise there's nothing wrong with it that replacing a few pulled wires won't fix.

If the referee wants to give the PCs a really hard time, a group of humanoid ETs riding in a large modular floater arrive on the scene just as the Ravager is dispatched. The ETs are looking for their escaped servant and the stolen dimension walk device. They won't be concerned by the death of the Ravager but will be prepared to fight the PCs for the dimension walk device. The ETs are armed as the referee deems appropriate.

The Enemy of My Enemy

The PCs discover a large quantity of metallic debris scattered across the road. The driver of their vehicle must make an Average: Vehicle Use task roll to avoid it (modifiers to the roll for excessive speed are at the referee's option). Failure results in one minor damage hit to the vehicle (major damage for a catastrophic failure at the referee's option). If the PCs stop to inspect the debris then an Average: Observation task roll is needed to deduce that it is in fact the remains of two small beetle like robots. PCs who have encountered Steriloids before recognise them as Mk I models. The Steriloids have been run over and crushed by a large vehicle.

(Motorway from page 60)

If the PCs carry on along the highway, after a couple of miles, they encounter (ideally at some distance) a Mk III Steriloid directing a number of Mk II models in pursuit of an articulated tractor/trailer truck (possibly the tanker from the **Duel** encounter above). Normally the truck would be able to outrun the Steriloids but it has suffered heavy damage: Several of its tires are gone and there are thick black clouds belching from its exhaust. The Steriloids will catch up with it in a few minutes. They intend to attach an Inhabitor (see Dark Tek sourcebook, page 15) to the truck and once the device has gained control of the vehicle return with it to Mechanica through a gate Ford has sited at a junction underpass.

The Mk III Steriloid will detect the PCs approach and traverse its primary energy weapons to bear on their vehicle. However before it can shoot help for the PCs comes from an unlikely source: As the Steriloid carrying the Inhabiter clamps it to the truck the Gremlin inside transfers itself to the Steriloid. Using its psychokinetic ability the Gremlin takes the robot over and opens fire on the other Steriloids with its energy beam. The robots are surprised by this and lose their first phase in the combat turn but quickly adjust to the situation and begin to return fire. The Mk III turns its primary guns away from the PCs towards this new threat. The PCs now have the chance to get away from the Steriloids while they are distracted. If the party is well armed and/or feeling confident they may decide to join in on the side of the "rogue" Steriloid. If they are victorious and the Gremlin survives they won't receive anything approaching gratitude from such an unpredictable and alien creature. The Gremlin/Steriloid ignores them and goes on its way in its new body, or shoots at them if they give it a reason

to, regardless of how trivial. If the Steriloid has been badly damaged the Gremlin will try to jump to an item of PCs equipment, ideally their car, with the usual consequences.

PCs who survive this encounter may wish to seek out and close the gate to Mechanica. This requires turning their vehicle around and undertaking a tedious search of several road junctions before they find the gate which is guarded by a handful of Mk I Sterilods. They will fight to the death to defend the gate. Reinforcements from Mechanica may also enter the fray.

ADVENTURE IDEA: THE CARS OF DEATH

There has been a spate of hit and run accidents in the PCs hometown. Pedestrians have been run over, cars forced off the road and motorcyclists knocked off their machines. Witnesses claim that the vehicles causing the accidents were all driverless, appearing to behave as if they had a mind of their own. The police have recovered two vehicles and forensic examination has proved were involved in several recent car crashes. At the same time, both vehicles are in such a state of poor repair that they should have been unable to move let alone cause the accidents they're alleged to have been involved in. In addition both vehicles were officially scrapped several years ago.

If the PCs investigate they eventually track the rogue cars to a derelict filling station out of town. It has been occupied by Dark Elves with a medium sized dimension walk device. Another group of Elves in Motorway with an identical device is sending Gremlin possessed cars through to Earth using the relay method of dimensional travel.

If the PCs defeat the Dark Elves at the filling station and capture their dimension walk device they can use it to travel to Motorway and investigate further. If the PCs use the relay method they arrive in the Dark Elf encampment in Motorway, which could well be fatal. If the PCs activate the device's secondary mode they arrive some distance away from where the Elves are based. This allows the PCs to explore Motorway for a while, getting used to its strange physics and encountering its peculiar inhabitants before finally meeting the Dark Elves: The PCs see three cars ahead of them in the middle distance driving fast and erratically. If the PCs accelerate and close the gap they find two GDM Lancers chasing a Chrysler LeBoeuf. Every so often a jet of fire spews from the front passenger window of one of the Lancers which always seems to miss the LeBoeuf. PCs who succeed in an Average: Intelligence task roll realise that the Lancers are "herding" the LeBoeuf down the highway. As the three vehicles approach a service station the Lancers move to force the LeBoeuf onto the turnoff. At the top of the off ramp humanoid figures are briefly seen before being suddenly obscured by a shimmering black cube.

The PCs have discovered a group of Dark Elves harvesting Empathic Gremlins. The Gremlins are shepherded towards a dimension walk device using Darkling Empathy and Project Thought or if these fail, as they may do in the fraught atmosphere of a high-speed chase, with blasts from a bolter. Once coerced through the dimensional portal the Gremlins are left to their own devices with dire consequences for whichever region of Earth they materialise in. Motorway's physics shift soon ceases to apply once the Gremlins have left the proto-dimension. The sudden loss of perpetual

(Motorway from page 61)

nourishment is a major irritation to the Gremlins and they can usually be relied upon to lash out in anger, causing widespread destruction and mayhem in whichever place is unfortunate enough to have received the new arrivals. A Gremlin onslaught could be the opening stages of a sustained campaign to create a new area of demonground. Alternatively it could be something the Elves are engineering purely for their own malicious enjoyment.

If the PCs take on the Dark Elves, then, in addition to the crews of the Lancers (one driver plus one "shepherd"/gunner), there are thee Elves with the dimension walk device: one operator plus two guards/lookouts. The Elves have taken up temporary residence in the service station. Their other vehicles, two Winnebago Nomad Campers and an Orca truck are in the car park.

The PCs may ultimately triumph over the Dark Elves but there will be one loose end that they can never resolve: it will be impossible to explain how two supposedly scrapped cars came to be completely rebuilt presumably while in Motorway. Similarly, if the PCs return to Earth in a vehicle taken from Motorway, its registration records (assuming they exist in the chaotic world of Dark Conspiracy) also list it as scrapped, or written off in an accident. Perhaps Motorway is a kind of afterlife for the souls of dead motor vehicles?

SOURCES/AFTERWORD

London Orbital by Iain Sinclair (Penguin Books Ltd) 2003

Full Metal Jackoff by DOA w/Jello Biafra (Alternative Tentacles Records) 1990

Duel (Dir: Steven Spielberg) 1971



The Hitcher (Dir: Robert Harmon) 1986

Car Wars by Steve Jackson Games 1982

I've deliberately refrained from stating which side of the road vehicles drive on while in Motorway. I'd suggest that referees make this determination for themselves, depending on own preference. For a slightly surreal twist in location based campaigns the referee could make the side dependent on where the PCs enter the proto-dimension. Travelling to

Motorway from London's M25 means that the PCs encounter Gremlin traffic on the left hand side of the road. If the PCs subsequently visit Motorway again, but travelling from Paris's Peripherique, they find the local traffic and signage on the right side of the road.



THE BIG LONG WAIT

A Short Story
by Tim Bisailon

Image © CW Kelson III (Tad), 2010. Used with permission.

The morning sun shone through a crack in the boarded up window, a ray of light slicing through the dark room like the glowing edge of a sword in a blacksmith's workshop, illuminating the room revealing the stirring of dust particles in the air. Little universes going about their business and not worrying about the big picture at all.

The sound of humming rattled about the dismal apartment, it was the refrigerator on its last legs and by the sounds of it didn't have much time left to keep things cool. Any day now it would give up the ghost and simply become a huge paper weight.

Cockroaches scuttled across the floor picking up small morsels of food and claiming them as their own. There were several of them in the vicinity and each of them had a purpose, though they scattered like ashes in the wind when someone moved.

Max Cube stirred from his slumber, shifting on his makeshift bed, which was simply a mattress

on the floor—his internal clock kicking in and his body going through the process of evicting the mind from the land of sleep. Max's body rolled and tossed and eventually his eyes cracked open revealing bloodshot eyes. He cringed from the morning light. It felt like his brain was on fire and he let out a small groan of discomfort.

A gunshot rang in the distance.

It was the alarm clock that officially started his day. He threw the cover off, an old ratty comforter that had seen better days and rolled out of bed. He stood and stretched working out the kinks and getting the muscles prepared for the long day ahead.

He shambled to the kitchenette and picked up the kettle and swished it around a bit and felt that it had enough for a cup or two. He plugged it in, hunted for a semi-clean cup on the counter. He peered inside to the contents and gave it a quick rinse out. He then put in a

(Long Wait from page 63)

scoop of instant coffee, two spoons of whitener and a heaping spoon of sugar.

As the kettle was working on the process of turning cold water into hot, he headed to the bathroom and splashed some water onto his face. He took a long look at his face and decided to shave as well.

The kettle whistled, sending a cockroach scuttling away from inside the coffee cup, as if it had signaled a klaxon warning. Max stepped out looking 10 years younger than when he went into the bathroom. He poured a cup of java.

The liquid tasted like pure heaven to him. He closed his eyes and let the flavour dance over his taste buds before it continued its way down. He sat down at the table and flipped open his laptop, a sexy voice greeted him.

"Morning Max," it said.

"Morning Maggie," Max replied with a wry smile and then his fingers danced over the keyboard.

"Accessing data," Maggie said. "Incidents 4. Shift 13 per cent."

Max swore softly. Shift went down 2 percent since yesterday. His fingers moved across the screen as he looked at the ley lines on the map, homing in on the nexus point close to where he was. There was no spark, no nothing, and if he didn't get out of here soon than there be no sign of life as well.

More gunfire this time closer. Something major was happening nearby. Max got up and grabbed his two revolvers and went to the window. He peered out

between the boards and looked around and didn't see any movement at all.

"Okay girls," he muttered aloud. "Get ready for some action."

In the distance he could see a dog running down the street. Behind it he could make out three or four forms chasing after it.

"Aw hell," he shook his head in disgust.

If disease or sickness didn't kill you, you could count on hunger do you in, since the food sources were scarce and few and far between. One had to ration it out enough until the next time you had to go out and scavenge. Three lost souls had gone crazy from the hunger and now where tracking a dog.

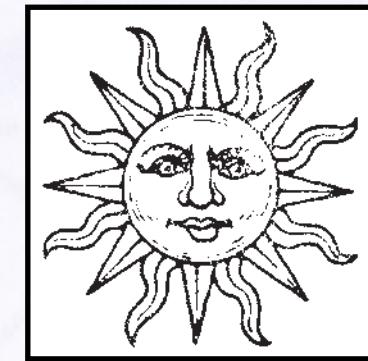
Max decided he wouldn't interfere in this matter unless his position was compromised. He knew with all the shooting and yelling going on that it would attract unwarranted attention. He could make out now over a dozen sunken eyes, blood thirsting creatures being drawn to the noise. He bit his tongue and didn't yell a warning to the hungered that would blow his cover.

The men finally realized what was happening and their bullets begin to flow like a heavy thunderstorm. Max fought every inch of his moral fiber and stayed rooted to his spot. There where too many out there now and in a matter of moments the three men would be consumed down to the last morsel.

He tore himself away from the window and sat down on a kitchen chair and turned on the ham radio. A woman was preaching about the 'pocalypse. Max smiled and sipped his coffee, then he fished

around in the ashtray and found a cigarette with about a centimetre of tobacco left. Though the filter was smeared with ruby red lipstick he didn't mind as he lit it and took a long drag from it.

He released the smoke after holding it for several long moments. The haze swirled and drifted amongst the dust particles. It was going to be another long, long day of waiting.



THE STRAYER-VOIGT INFINITY GOLD SPECIAL

High Class Handguns

by Kevin O'Neill

for *Dark Conspiracy®* 1/2 ed

High class handguns for the wealthy Minion Hunter

Strayer-Voigt Infinity Gold Special: Composite frame; 9mmP; .40S&W; .45ACP; USA; mid-1990s.

Strayer-Voigt specializes in creating pistols based on the venerable M1911A1 design, and the Infinity series is their main offering. Through the use of their online 'gun builder' feature, the Infinity series is available in eight different calibres, five different metals, with over fifteen options for frame & slide serrations, various compensator designs, different rear & fore sight configurations, seven different hammers, as well as nine different triggers amongst other cosmetic options. With the level of customization available, the range of variations are almost 'infinite' hence the name Infinity.

All Infinity pistols feature very high levels of workmanship and finishing giving them almost flawless functioning.



Strayer-Voigt Infinity Gold Special, Composite Frame (Automatic Pistol)

	ROF	DAM	Pen	Blk	Mag	---Recoil---		
						SS	Brst	Range
Infinity Gold Special, 9mmP	SA	1	Nil	1	17	3	--	12
Infinity Gold Special, .40S&W	SA	2	1-Nil	1	14	3	--	14
Infinity Gold Special, .45ACP	SA	2	Nil	1	12	3	--	15

Ammo: 9mmP; .40 S&W; .45ACP

Wt: 0.7 kg; 0.8 kg; 0.8 kg

Mag: 17-rd; 14-rd; 12-rd

Price: \$1,870 (S/C); \$1,890 (R/C); \$1,910 (R/C)

The premier selection, Infinity Gold Special, features a gold plated titanium coating on the barrel, with composite frame and a grip that is available in a variety of colours. The extended sub-frame is cut to allow the mounting of tactical lights, laser aimers and so on. Another attractive feature of the Infinity series is that an individual pistol can have its calibre changed by merely swapping out the barrel, magazine and cartridge ejection claw.

This entry deals specifically with the Infinity Gold Special as fitted with a composite frame, ambidextrous safety and adjustable rear combat sights and the three most common calibres.

In Dark Conspiracy

This is the luxury model of the M1911A1 design. These are the handguns you'd expect to see the wealthy own, or perhaps the best funded of the Minion Hunter groups. Very glamorous, and yet with a reputation for being very reliable. Overall, a cut above the mainstream in personal firearms, when you take the Infinity into a Demonground you're not just hunting, you're making a statement.

Magazines: Extended magazines are available as follows (note that the Extended mags add +1 to Blk):

(Strayer from page 65)

9mmP: Standard, 19-rds; Long, 23-rds;
Extended, 29-rds

.40S&W: Standard, 17-rds, Long, 21-rds;
Extended, 24-rds

.45ACP: Standard, 13-rds; Long, 14-rds;
Extended, 18-rds

Calibre Change Kits: While Strayer-Voigt doesn't actually sell these kits, enterprising shopkeepers can easily assemble them by ordering the appropriate parts from Strayer-Voigt. Each kit consists of the barrel, magazine and cartridge ejection claw for that calibre. To swap over the various parts is relatively easy but some skill check should be made if only for the fiddly job of changing the ejection claw. Dark Conspiracy 1st edition: Easy vs. Smallarms. Dark Conspiracy 2nd edition: Average vs. Smallarms. If using the extra skills from Twilight: 2000 2nd edition, make the check vs. Gunsmith

9mmP Kit: \$373 (-/S)

.40S&W Kit: \$393 (-/S)

.45ACP Kit: \$403 (-/S)



BIG GUNS AND BIGGER STUFF

Gear in a Modern Setting - House Rules
by Kevin O'Neill
for **Dark Conspiracy®** 1/2 ed

Acquiring Gear in a Modern Setting

Big Guns and Bigger Stuff are alternate rules for determining equipment availability for the Game Master and Player Characters. This is intended for use in the Dark Conspiracy game system and setting although it's also suitable for use with other modern/near-future RPGs.

Most players of RPGs are familiar with acquiring gear for their PC. The items that make life a little easier, or make combat, a bit less dangerous, as well as day to day use and so on. So how do you decide if the item is in stock at the local dealer or broker? In most cases it's a simple decision for the Game Master to make. If the PC wants to buy more food you can just let them go to a place that sells food, but what if they want body armour or what if you don't want to make a particular item readily available?

You could make an instant decision, as GMs have been doing for decades, or you could make notes on the item for future reference. If you're lucky, your game books may have an availability chart to show how easy/hard it is to obtain a particular piece of gear. However many game books and systems do not cover these eventualities.

For a game like Dark Conspiracy, each item description lists a code that indicates how easy or hard it is to acquire the item, either via a contact or without a contact. Unfortunately there is nothing in the rules to allow the GM to randomly determine if the item is indeed available. So the following table was created to assist the GM in checking for item availability. This table is an expansion of the one found in the Twilight: 2000 RPG (which uses the same item availability concepts). Additionally it includes a wider

Equipment Availability for Dark Conspiracy:

Availability codes are expressed as follows: (S/C), where the letter to the left indicates availability without a Contact and the letter to the right indicates availability with a Contact.

Codes in use for equipment availability (in order of highest to lowest availability).

A = Abundant
V = Very Common
C = Common
S = Scarce
R = Rare
E = Extremely Rare
- = not normally available

Equipment Availability

Roll 1D20 and consult the following table:

Location	Abundant	Very Common	Common	Scarce	Rare	Extremely Rare
Metroplex	19	17	15	12	6	3
Major City	18	15	12	8	5	2
City	16	13	10	6	3	1
Town	12	9	6	3	1	-
Village	8	5	2	1	-	-
Encounter	7	6	4	2	1	-

Example: If an item is V (Very Common) and the PC is searching for it in a Major City, then any D20 roll of 15 or less indicates that it is available for acquisition.

Examples of availability:

Abundant: cheap alcohol, cheap cigarettes,

Very Common: typical civilian clothing

Common: compact cars, processed/preserved foods

Scarce: fresh foods (as in non-preserved & minimal processing), high fashion clothing, expensive liquors

Rare: Rolls Royce coupe, cutting edge medical gear/treatments

Extremely Rare: high tech military/espionage gear

-: Dark Tek (Dark Conspiracy), alien technology

(Big Guns from page 67)

range of Availability Codes added to the ones from the Twilight: 2000 & Dark Conspiracy codes of Very Common, Common, Scarce and Rare.

While it was created specifically for the Dark Conspiracy game to determine how likely an item is to be found in a given locale, with a little work it can be configured to work with many other modern settings.

Obtaining Equipment Through Contacts:

In many RPGs there are literally dozens of items that a PC can simply walk into a store and purchase. Yet there are just as many items that can't be bought in such a manner. In these cases the PCs need to have a "friend" who can facilitate the purchase. This is a Contact who can grease the right palms and open the correct doors e.g. it's obviously easier to get controlled medical supplies if you're friends with a pharmacist.

However, Contacts will not supply items *gratis*, they too have to contact someone, make a bribe or pay for research on an item. All of which cuts time from their own jobs to find the thing you want or cover up the sudden lack of gear from the stocktake and so on. Like anyone, they expect to be fairly compensated for their efforts. Sometimes this will be purely monetary, while other times it might require a favour.

Paying for Items Obtained from Contacts:

Items obtained through a Contact are subject to random price fluctuations. Sometimes a seller might have more items than they want and will offer it cheaper than expected. Sometimes the item may

be exceedingly difficult to locate and the expenses incurred will be added to the final price.

In all cases the following formula is applied to decide the final price to the PC:

Roll 1D10 for price increase/decrease

1-5 = decrease

6-10 = increase

If a decrease is rolled; roll 1D10/2 for a 1D5 result. The result of the 1D5 roll is multiplied by 10 with that figure being the percentage that the listed price decreases.

If an increase is rolled, roll 1D10. The result is multiplied by 10 with that figure being the percentage that the listed price increases - meaning that an item could well be 100% more expensive than the list price.

The Game Master is encouraged to use the price fluctuation to create a story for the player character when suitable. For example: the PC has asked to buy some military radios from a trusted Contact and the price fluctuation indicates an increase in the list price of 50%. The Contact tells the PC that the price is higher than expected, "You know what it took to get these? I had to bribe two sergeants and a corporal to say that they were lost on a training exercise. Then I had to pay my brother to keep his mouth shut when he found them in the back of the truck."

While this isn't strictly necessary, I've found the players in my own group have warmed to the idea and have begun treating their Contacts like living, breathing people rather than just a one-stop shop for gear.





MECHANISMS

Fiction

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

Eventually we figured a few things out. What ever happened was not caused by the Austrians, French, or even the Americans. It came from much farther way than even China. Just how far no one can tell for certain. Only that they came from someplace that mankind had not imagined up to this point in history, and it appears as if our history has ended.

Their mechanisms seem constructed of a black pitted dark iron like material. Dense, much heavier than our own steel or iron would be. More like a granite in weight. They use it for all their devices, their weapons being huge bombard like devices, throwing three foot long needles, more like spikes, from far beyond our range of vision. Rarely have we gotten very close to one.

Sometimes you will be moving in the open, attempting to stay to the shadows, and then like a sniper comes the spikes. Occasionally you can hear or feel them, they have a feeling like mad dog spittle a flying, you might feel them and if you are swift enough dodge out of the way of the incoming death. I have seen friends just standing still and suddenly

this black spike erupts from their body and they are hurled to the ground or into a remnant of a wall impaled there on their killer.

When that happens there is no time, occasionally a flight will come or none at all. There is no sense to the reason or when it will occur. So all there is to do is curse the death once you are safely out of the open, and underground or within a building. So far it seems they are not able to view through solid stone, and thick layers of wood also defeat them. So once behind cover, then the tears can flow for the life snuffed out like a cheap fat tallow candle wick.

I barely remember when it all began; I was so young and impressionable. One bright day the clouds came over the city, lending a sense of shadows to everything, including the Thames. It felt like the entire world, all the objects, things, beings and peoples within suddenly grew a second shadow that hung thick and clinging to all surfaces.

The military had no chance at all. The land powers were helpless; the navies fared scant better, so long

(Mechanisms from page 69)

as they stayed out of sight of land. Still on occasion one would be sunk, we heard, by the black quills darkening the sky and piercing the iron and steel hulls sufficient to render the vessel unable to float, and it would sink below the surface, murdered without warning or chance to intervene on its own behalf. How long they lasted I still have no idea, I have not met a survivor from any vessel as of yet.

So that day it all changed, the shadows came up from the ground, coalesced clean from the smog and soot of the modern coal fired age. They came from the mines and the dark places in alley ways, as well as from behind the bright sunshine. The slipped in between the time it takes for an eyelid to blind, there when the lid rises once again to behold the difference.

Then the sky turned black, the sun no longer was visible, and when someone looked into a mirror, I have heard, they could not even see their own reflection. Or so it has been related to my ears.

Then a tarry rain started to fall, all across the entire world at once, from the Thames to the Merrimack, to the Missouri across to the Yangtze, and the Volga and Nile, from all the rivers there rose up a cloying mist that scalded and burnt the flesh of those it touched. London, my parents told me before their deaths, London screamed as one in pain, the buildings could be heard to weep with groans as if from an earthquake and countless birds fell from the skies struck dead. I did not see this, they had me hidden away with relatives in what they thought was the safety of the wine cellar. Later we learned how fortunate I was indeed.

But this mist spread for miles until it ceased expanding and then just seeped into the ground,

poisoning it for life from that point on. Then things appeared, vast shadows overlaying the buildings and skies, shadows that had no distinct forms, but writhed like the tentacles of an octopus or a kraken seizing prey before devouring it alive. These shadows did nothing save cause heart failure in the weak and to drive the poor and destitute leave of all their senses and set them to shriek in madness and frothing foaming mouths filled with diseased spittle. Still I was tucked away in the cold cellar with relatives I barely knew at all. Later we learned how fortunate I was indeed.

After all this, things began to wander into strange ways, fires went out, boilers ceased heating and coal and oil no longer obeyed the laws of combustion. That is at least not in a reliable sense of the term. Instead sometimes the oil and coal would meld together, turning into monstrous things that reared up and devoured those they had obeyed in the past, for the centuries that mankind had them tamed to the toil and flame. Now the lifeblood of the modern age was in rebellion as well. Wood would burn, at times, spitefully and the smoke was acrid and oft times caused wheezing and potentially boils and welts to form if not ventilated properly. Still there had to be a way to survive otherwise none of us would have. Our parents figured it out as they went along, making the new rules as they were discovered.

My parents died; at least they left this poor world in their sleep, next to each other in their slumber as they had spent their entire married life. My mother never truly recovered from the news they received within days, we think, of the death of my older siblings that lived in Manchester. They were overcome along with most of the city all at the same time. Mother never truly believed it, and

Father soldiered on as best he could. By moving us down into the basement, re-enforcing it with wood scavenged from the upper floors, moving the beds down there, to aid in keeping us away from prying eyes and wandering terrors.

Daily he would wander the city, meeting with other men all veterans of the Great War so recently past, and devising plans to defend the city, citizens, and families from what ever else was on the way, they surmised. They took their old helmets, gas masks, uniforms, and rifles, ready to do what they could, while there was still nothing definite they could confront. Sometimes one of them would get a shot off at something they say that did not belong to the works of man. Still never was there an artifact recovered, there was no proof. The government during this time, I think, was so paralyzed it was unable, just like my mother, to come to its senses and work on something to aid us all. Not that I think it would have made a single difference, they were already here and no one was the wiser yet to the condition.

But they did what our people have always done, chin up and soldiered on in the face of madness and the unending gloom. They scouted out the enemy forces, kept track of where they observed them to be found, they organized ambushes and worked to take the fight to them. All in vain, their efforts, all in vain. The best thing to come out of it all was the use of the old gas masks and helmets, our parents had needed in their great conflict. That is a legacy we maintain now. Without them, at times we could not breathe, and it seems the steel of the helmets often times will foil a mechanism that is looking for someone or something. Something with the steel I presume. A lesson I took to heart and later

(Mechanisms from page 70)

implemented as much of it over the tops of our living spaces as time passed.

So at times there are still piles of coal dust that will coalesce into some towering form. Arms akimbo, striding from place to place looking for a life to snuff out, even like we did burn the coal to power our cities, to heat our homes, to cook our food, every so often. Or a pool of oil or other petroleum product will slither into a snake or eel like form, sliding between the cracks of masonry or along the buried pathways that man once strode, looking for more of its own kind to add into a serpentine visage maw filled with ragged fangs of solid oil.

Things will form at times, from somewhere, or no where it feels, things that are hurtful to the heart and painful to the eyes. Occasional one of us will lose the use of their vision from something they have witnessed, and it seems they are weakened for the experience. Other times a peculiar madness will descend, where the victim will sit and draw endless swirling shapes in the dirt, oblivious to any dangers. More than one friend of mine has sat there while a mechanism stomped up just next to them, and with a casual pass of their weapons obliterate someone I had known, just erasing them from existence.

None of us remember when the seasons disappeared. It was sometime after it all started. But when exactly, none of us are really quite sure; in fact none of us are really quite sure what year it might be right now. The sun never rises, it never sets, the moon has gone somewhere, and the stars seem to be twisted out of shape and somehow they show up through the perpetual grey skies, a mockery of the night showing how the two halves of light and dark now intermingle into a single shapeless blob of existence.

There is a small cadre with me, only a few dozen of us here in this part of the city. We lurk along the crumbling brick and mortar walls, staying as low as possible.

I think we are shrinking, or the world is stretching, or just something is altering what I see, as sometimes the walls are larger than they were in my memory. I could have stood next to them back when I knew there were more of us, and now they at times tower, and sometimes they are nothing but dust and impressions that a wall or other edifice once was in that location.

Our world has turned into a ghost town, in a more literal sense, inhabited by the still living while it has passed on to a perpetual state of increasing decay.

My Annie has given up. She was with us while we were out scavenging a different part of the city than our usual haunts. One moment she was there, the next just gone. It happens, one of us loses hope, gives up the fight to live, and we disappear. None know where or to what eventual fate those that surrender suffer. None have returned as of yet as well, still we search also, perhaps to find our lost tucked away safe from prying eyes. At we tell ourselves that they could be safe away from here.

None of it makes any sense of course. That is, not to a sane rational man's way of thinking. There is something moving under the ground. We can feel it at times. Between our breaths as they slow in the fitful slumber we all endure.

Annie was the one who was holding out for us, for the day under a blue sky or as evening fell, in a white dress, that we would be together. She was the one holding out.

Now she has disappeared. One moment she was there beside me, the next she was gone. It happens at times, when someone loses what keeps him or her moving. What ever it is that makes them a human being, gone, then they may disappear. Sometimes in the duration of a single blink of the eyes, there and then they are not. Sometimes though, they will just lose all hope, all breath, all strength, and those we take back to make as comfortable as possible while they still linger with us.

Each time we awake, a few more of our bones are visible under our thinning skins. Eventually, I suspect, we shall be like the mechanisms, all skeletal. Save in our case, it shall be all bones.

Sometimes in our sleep our dreams wander across our poor world. Ever since things turned, we only dream of how things are. As if the world outside has imprinted, or perhaps infected, our inner minds. There is a faint voice I think I hear sometimes, makes me wonder if I am asleep or awake often when it drifts across my consciousness.

Poor George lost his leg. A reminder to be careful that nothing stays the way we remember it. But as we were traversing a stretch of road, a spot gave way. George started to fall in and Samuel was close and they clasped hands preventing George from tumbling in. Well something down there in the solid rock snipped his leg clean off, happening so fast the passage seared all the vessels carrying blood, so all he lost was what was in his leg from mid-thigh down. It was so sudden that he did not feel a thing. One moment walking, then a stumble, pull up quarter of his leg. Never any pain during or after.

Well shock overtook his nerves when he fell trying to walk. I had to club him quickly to keep the noise

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down. We all took turns ferrying him to our shelter. Back there he was in rough shape, physically worn out and all. Somewhat peevish for the lump I gave him.

Still having ghost feeling where his right leg was formerly. Nothing to be done for that save locate some sort of replacement so as he would not slow us down much. That finding is for another time.

The boils and sores are so hard to endure at times. Only on the bottom of our feet and heels though. No matter how deep the knife goes in it never pierces the pain to lance it. I have watched myself drive a knife fully into a comrade's foot; it all it did was littler more than grate on bones and never emerged from the other side.

Just grates on bone and pain.

I caught a glimpse of a mechanism in the distance. I am confident it did not notice me. I did hear the chuff of its weapons and far away to my left arose a cloud of dust and shriek of mortal metal being torn apart. I do not know who or what perished at that moment. I only know it felt agony.

The gardens are failing again, I sent a few small parties to our old locations, to ascertain their reuse potential. Often they have lain fallow long enough to bear a few more rotations of crops. Viable seeds of other plants are on priority I have for us all. That is without more diversity in our diets as well as the crops, the end it inevitable from malnutrition and weakness. .

Once they report back, it will be decided where we shall migrate back to once more. Also time to update the Gas Masks. It pains me to do so. Only

among the Hallows and Mass Fields do we find newer canisters. But they are foul places indeed, foul. Not to mention disheartening and disturbing, the ground shifts under each step, the air still reeks of ammonia and methane as well as the faint almond taste of the memories of the gas and other weapons the Army used when the first mechanisms arrived here in London. Of course we still work to maintain them. I prefer the use of paper superior for my comfort in the canisters. Most of us use cloth there, silk does not filter well enough, I could always taste grit and bone dust when I had silk filters.

There is a faint voice I think I hear sometimes. It is not Annie, as much as I long for her sweet presence and calm nerve under fire. No it is another voice, like what I would imagine a ghost would sound like were they coming in across a telegraph wire and somehow you would be able to hear their voices. All dark and hissing with strange undertones to it, in timbre all trembling and afraid, with words that make no sense even when as the voice speaks in good English words.

So last night, arbitrary as there is no sun, no moon, no day and no night, just a limbo like hazy gray affair to the sky, with shadows which seemingly bounce from one location to another as if sources of illumination were their, shining down in some fashion that was undetectable to the human eye. But when we sleep we call it night, and when we are awake it is day, so as to remain as proper people should, in a regimen.

During our sleep, once again the dreams all came to all of us, showing us how our parent's world died and from the remnants of that world it evolved into the world that we dwell within at this time. We all saw the darkness spread from one end of the globe to

another, watched the rivers writhe in such pain that they exuded the poison gases that slew so many millions of the human species.

The paroxysm and death throes of many millions of people, churning the major cities into puking charnel houses where the scant survivors, such as ourselves, picked through the carcass of the decaying corpse once known as The Earth.

We watched as the mechanisms came here from no where and everywhere simultaneously. Watched how their black pitted dark iron like materials were constructed by wraiths made of pain and poison, watched as their metallic hearts started to beat in arrhythmic patterns, linked to odd gaits and stillness punctuated with jerky motions that end in death for men, women, children, and the animals of the world.

We writhed in our sleep while watching it all unfold in our dreams in slate grey and pale dust colors showcasing the end of it all, leading up to where we are now.

It lasted our lifetimes, and forever it seemed a nightmare without an end in sight.

It felt as if we had been there, well some of us had been and this serves to remind us of the state we are currently in. I checked after we all arose, three more were missing, their meager possessions and the clothing they had gone to rest in, lying where they had been. No trace remains of their mortal remains, if such even applies. Nothing to show they ever were there besides the rest of us.

There is a faint voice I think I hear sometimes. It drifts in and out of my dreams as well as when I am about the city. In the waking state and in the

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sleeping state, I hear the voice; is it an echo of all the dead that have gone before me, or something else? When the voice wakes me, I lie there in the dim light that cannot be surmounted and wonder where do the dreams come from, outside or is this place so much that it is on our insides as well? I cannot tell if it is male, female, or some other conjuration of vocal apparatus perhaps. There is no telling at this point.

Took a small group with me, not heard back from the parties sent to scout the old camp locations, no longer will I wait, it is close to the end point, without new crops somewhat soon we shall have to split up, or more will just go away as they also lose faith in my abilities.

It will take several days to reach the furthest location. There are some underground spots we can use to transverse some of the rougher locations. Places where the rubble is so dense and sharp that even the mechanisms have issues in surmounting them. Our poor feet could not make those climbs, the stone and metal has become as sharp as a razor to shave with, and the makeshift footwear, not even a pair of proper boots have we seen in many a while, no our rough shoes and boots are not up to the task to come.

There are fifteen of us when we set out, a good proportion of my main core survivors. We are in touch with others on occasion, work to enact some trade, swap stories and patterns observed, let people see other people. But the remnants are pitiful in number at this stage, which is another priority for me.

No signs of my scouting parties. I conclude they have perished. I watched one of my people die today. It was sudden, one moment she, I forgot her

name now as I recount this, one moment she was walking up ahead of myself and a few others, head down, mask on, helmet strapped on, her crossbow at the ready in case something attacked, and then she just collapsed. Not in a heap mind you, instead all of her body, skin, bones, organs, fingers, eyes, all of her flesh and fluids went and evaporated into a small puff of dust. One moment alive, the next a heap of clothing with what remained of her blowing away in a sudden gust of wind, afterwards we collected her gear and taking her bow for myself, it being slightly better than my own, we continued onward.

A few more sleep times later we are at the farthest location that used to be utilized by us. I sent the youngest one of us, relative term since biology is unreliable anymore, down into the hole and a short while later he came back up and said it was all clear.

Making our way down inside it, I examined the wall and ceiling reinforcements, all seemed secure. The wood lining it all was still solid as the day we ripped it off some neighboring homes and installed it with crude wooden pegs and hand chiseled metal square headed spike like nails. It all seems to be in fine working condition, and the soil has come back fairly well.

I believe we shall migrate back to this location, it should last a while. The few females we have left will want to try once more to reproduce I suspect, a couple of them have hinted, and there were few mechanisms that we noticed on the trip here. I will send a trio of runners back to let them know and to have them start moving this way.

It will be patchwork at best; our bodies are not entirely the same as they once were. I only use my

father's old straight razor on my beard infrequently, sometimes only for the idea of shaving more than to remove any hair that would interfere with the fit of my mask. The females tell me their bodies do not respond to the passage of time as they did before the world changed. Additionally we have found that not all of us can even reproduce, everything seems a bit poisoned. Still with this better shelter we can only try and try again.

I believe we have found a substitute for the missing portion of George's leg. As most of us wait for the others to arrive in our new location, I have taken to scouting about again, seeing what is different than the previous visits. Out there a ways, about half my strengths worth of walking, I came across a derelict mechanism. It is not the first; I think they war between themselves at times. This one was in fairly intact condition. Taking my patience to the limit, slowly I advanced until I was over it. I could almost see my own visage in the dull metal, that reflects and absorbs light at the same time. My mask turning my face into a insects appearance, pitted steel helmet I took from my parent's nightstand when I found them dead in their bed, my fathers heavy coat and tuck bag full of what I have to carry, along with the crossbow I had gotten, with a bow made of mechanism metal as well. A common sight here in the now.

I looked down, at the misshapen lumps that if rounded could be wheels in the inner chest area. It has to be almost three times my height and the dead queen only knows how heavy it might weigh in at. The gears in the limbs, none were just true, in their turning at times they would not mesh, so how do they move? Something that has puzzled us people since we started coming across bits and

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parts. How can they move, with no engines, no boilers, no signs of a motor of any sort or shape.

There is a nice large chunk of the lower leg that could be levered off easy enough, strap it to the thigh of George, not elegant, not a shred of give or bend, but it would give him two limbs, leg and metal, to stand on. With a nice square pad on the bottom, he could learn to balance once more I reckon.

Looking it over some more, before getting to work, the lack of eyes always bother me. It has a head, like a ball of clay left in the sun on one side often times, a pair of shoulders to hold the arms, a squat torso more akin to a boar than a man, with the legs longer in proportion to the body than is seemly. With gears in the chest, no pulleys to the limbs, and wheels that would never roll down a hill holding it all together, just another monstrosity. I find a piece of metal to use to pries off the thing's leg and after that roll it over. Looking for the weapons they carry, would come in handy if we got our hands on one, and taught ourselves how to fire it. No such luck this time, maybe they all take them to use on each other when we are not looking.

Back to the new campsite, the parties have not all returned; the others have not made the expedition all the way over here yet. Time to work on shaping this new limb for George, for when he arrives with the others, then tend to farming, I have the remainder that came with me to here working on cleaning up the gardens as well as salvaging what seeds and stock still remains here in our cache. That will need stocking, as well as the masks, the trip to The Hallows I dread and wish to put off as long as possible. Which shall not be very long at all?

Some sleep times have come and gone. My people had arrived while we rested last. They are all here, well most are. Lost a few, one drifted away, two more fell to ambush and perils, I have not the full details. Matters little, by the time we head in that direction all things will be different.

Even our faithful George has arrived, I show him what I have been crafting, and it fit fairly well. Some of my older people dislike it on sight, worried that it might attract others to the scent or some strange feeling. It has not been my understanding that it will happen when the mechanism it was once attached too has been destroyed. Were it somehow functioning I fear and dread other occurrences. The younger among us are used to the idea; a few of us do sport replacement hands and arms made of it, while none of the older will dare to touch the stuff.

My sense of purpose remains, strong, despite the losses and the upsets that life has sent to me, my sense of what needs to happen remains pure. Still it is good they have arrived, once again we can work to expand our species and look for more answers and solutions to the mechanisms that plague our world, to turn back the clock and make this our home, not theirs.





From Under The Floorboards

The Cross Inn A location for any system

protodimension magazine

Greetings all. This issue I present you with a location for use in your game, the Cross Inn, which is based on an historic local pub in my area. Hmm, a tavern for use in a non-fantasy setting...whatever next I wonder!

The Cross Inn sits on what was originally a crossroads on the Bristol Coach Road. The oldest parts of the building date back to the English Civil War period, and are reputedly haunted by the spirit of a Royalist (or Cavalier) soldier who has become known by the nickname Oswald. The crossroads were also the site of the local gallows back in those times, so there is a definite negative psychic charge in game terms across the general area.

The pub itself is now far larger than when originally built, having been extended along one side in the early 19th century and then having the old courtyard and stables roofed over in the late 1960s to provide a large restaurant area at the rear. This room is also used for weekend events such as live rock bands, discos and karaoke.

The front bar area is still completely in the traditional style, with flagstone flooring and hefty wooden tables. This room contains large flatscreen TVs for showing sporting events, and has a 'snug' area in one corner by the old fireplace for those wishing to converse in some semblance of privacy.

Along the right hand side as you walk through to the back room, there are two alcoves. One of these contains the dartboard but is used just as supplementary seating when there is no game in progress. The other is a comfortable family area with sofas, designed to bring in people with children at lunch times.

There are four ensuite rooms that can be rented on a night by night basis, at reasonable rates which include either breakfast or a packed lunch for early risers. The food and drink on offer is generally good, though the restaurant never gets

overly busy due to the inn now being surrounded by all manner of other restaurants and take-away outlets.

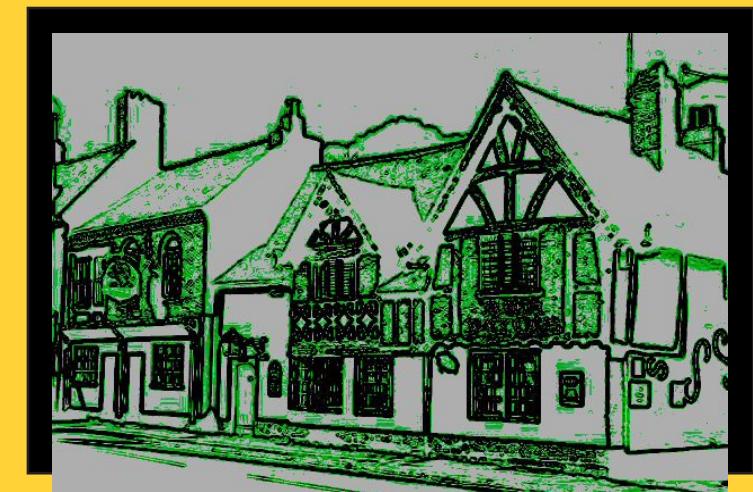
The Cross is also the birthplace of what can only be described as a unique cocktail, known as the Jaap Stam. If you want to have some fun with a PC, get them to drink one of these. Also, make sure that as a stranger, all the locals will be watching them to see their reaction!

(For those who are interested, a Jaap Stam consists of half a pint of mild ale, two large shots of black vodka and a can of Red Bull mixed in a pint glass. Just in case anyone might want to try it!)

The Cross Inn is based on Ye Old Black Cross Inn, one of my old haunts. If you use it in your game do a Google image search and you will see from the architecture just how old the place is. In fact, if your game involves time travel at all the Cross would make a very good reference point...



Lee Williams



THE BRAINCASE FACTORY PRESENTS

INTO THE Woods

SCRIPT: M. NIXON © ART: S. DIETZ



protodimension magazine

<http://www protodimension org/zine>



*"Deep into that darkness
peering, long I stood
there, wondering, fearing,
doubting, dreaming dreams
no mortal ever dared to
dream before."*

Edgar Allan Poe
1809-1849