



You keep me high

protodimension magazine

ISSUE #7

WINTER 2011

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FROM THE SHADOWS

By Norm Fenlason

I used to wander through the shelves of my game store looking for their discount box: that collection of small press offerings that distributors made the store owners buy in order to get the hot selling products they and their customers really wanted. Mark-downs, out-of-print, fringe, and sometimes really smelly books could be had for spare change. I loved browsing through a couple of boxes and finding the rare gem (like SPI's first edition of *Dragonquest*, boxed, in mint condition for \$2 and believe it or not, *Over the Edge*). Wow.

Now I look at my local retailers with nostalgia and I support them, really I do, but their shelves are not very deep. They carry the hits—the mainstream; but I am not a mainstream kind of guy—I'm a niche lurker. Look at the book *The Long Tail* to understand the niche market and where I spend my \$\$.

One could argue, but *Dark Conspiracy* is a niche game. So I was delighted when in 1998 Mike Marchi, Geoff Skellams, and Marcus Bone launched *Demonground: Reflections of a Darker Future*. Now I could have fringe RPG material online. Stored on my computer and not on my bookshelves (I had cycled through two complete collections of gaming materials due to interstate moves by that time—lost some “first editions” I would have preferred to keep and don't get me started about my comic collection turnover, but a diverge).

Online books to me, made so much sense. But the business case for online books had not materialized at that point, and only “free distribution” was possible due to the perceived lack of security in protecting intellectual property rights. Now I own a Kindle, an iPad, a work laptop, a work desktop, and a home desktop all of which can read online books. (If you are reading this, you probably have a similar situation if not all that technology.)

Desiring the ease of online documents, it was only natural for me to invest in small publisher offerings through DriveThruRPG/RPGNow. Through Facebook, I can actually reach out to the producers of those products for firsthand feedback and clarifications—something unheard of when *Demonground* launched back then.

So being a fringe kind of guy, I am a devout customer of DTRPG/RPGN. I look to their small press offerings because that is where the cutting edge is—hidden among a lot of sediment, but it's there if you look for it. When the web programmers at DTRPG/RPGN offered a means of subscribing to pushed notifications I was at first dubious. But now I partake in a service that DTRPG/RPGN provides that allows a customer to receive emails on new or on-sale products sold from their online stores. I can “subscribe” to receive notices from preferred publishers, product types, or product lines, or RPG genres. So what, you say? Sounds like spam to me, you say? Tch, tch, tch. The future is now.

The leftover box containing all that fringe stuff is now delivered to my inbox. The brick and mortar stores can now concentrate on mainstream publishing. I can get the weirdness I thrive on. Win-win.

Now 8 years after *Demonground's* disappointing demise, *Protodimension Magazine* is distributed online. Like the Europe of the Dark Ages, PDM is attempting to attain the “glory that was Rome” and aspires to be a successor of *Demonground's* legacy. For that the flow of contributions from our reader base must continue. I am very pleased with what we have received so far (and we got some great stuff by Linden Dunham and Dave Shuey) and dream that it will continue in the future. And while I may be late, I will continue producing PDM as long as I have a spare moment to work it up! That is my commitment to you.

Cheers!
Norm Fenlason

When a Cold Heart Comes to Call

Serial Killer Stalks Streets

This headline has loomed over mankind since Jack the Ripper carved up his first victim. Newspapermen see it as a sales bonanza. Police see it as the most significant challenge they may face in the protection of the public. Psychologists see it as another opportunity to study the workings of a disturbed mind. All, however, fear the hour when they or someone they love might come face to face with the hand of death.

This mini-adventure for *Dark Conspiracy* can be woven into an existing campaign almost anywhere, presuming the characters live or visit a large population center of some sort. Barring that, it can be introduced to the characters through a contact or relative who does.

You may introduce the killer with his first or second victim, or some weeks into the spree. In the latter case, the killer may have already acquired an alias, such as *The Count*, *The Dracula Murderer*, or *The Blood Banker*.

IN COLD BLOOD

The adventure should take place near the end of winter, during a sudden cold snap. If the area of your campaign does not allow for this type of weather normally, it might be a freakish weather pattern, or the characters could be summoned elsewhere to investigate. In any case, the events must take place while it is cold, preceding a gradual warm-up.

The killer in question leaves behind bloodless corpses with two puncture wounds in the jugular vein. This comprises the bulk of the information the press has available to it. Also publicly known is that several of the victims were found in isolated locations and were seemingly alone in the last few minutes of life. This is, in fact, true for all the victims, but the press does not know this.

Other information not released to the press includes:

- The puncture marks are three inches apart, far too wide for human teeth.
- DNA found around the wounds is inconclusive, meaning “not human”.
- No fingerprints or hair have been found.

A Mini-Adventure
By Dave Schuey
For Dark Conspiracy®

- ☛ Some mineral trace has been recovered, which indicates nearby wilderness areas.
- ☛ One witness, now in protective custody, claims to have seen a large cloaked figure in the area of one of the murders.
- ☛ There is no perceptible connection between the victims.

These facts may be leaked as the story progresses, providing you the opportunity to create mock-up news accounts as handouts. Not more than one tidbit should be released at a time, so as to build suspense.

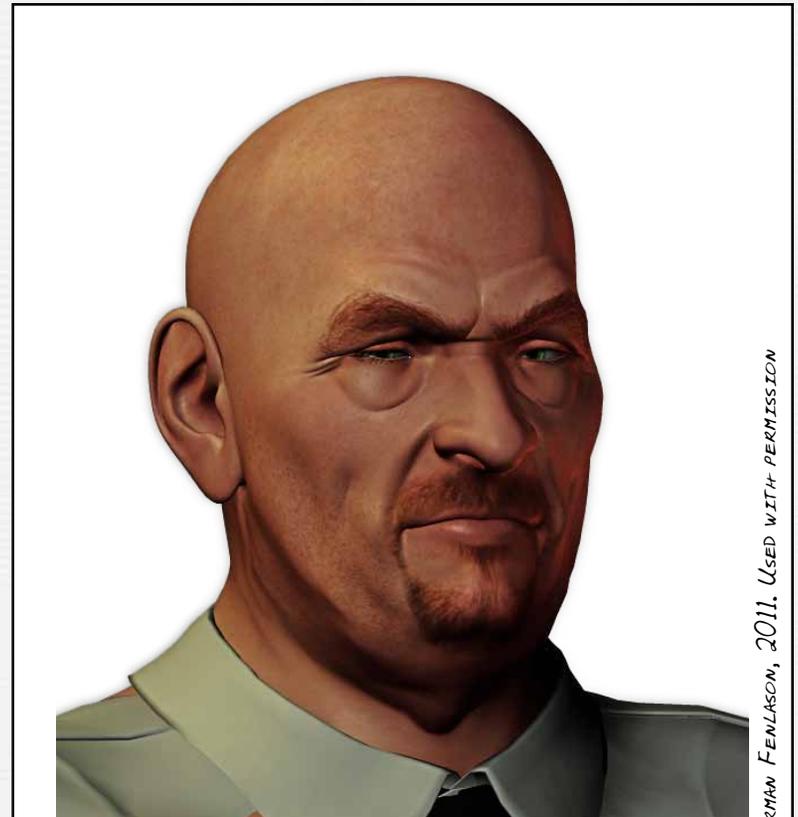
Regardless of how many victims the killer has taken, his comings and goings are always unobserved, save for the one witness. This Prole just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. A fact he has told no one is that the killer left the scene by flying.

“He was wearing this great big cloak, ya know? And after he killed that chick, well, the cloak turned into wings and he flew away! It was crazy! I know what you’re thinking, a little too much Dust for me. But I tell ya, he flew away.”

WITNESS TO EVIL

The police, of course, are overtaxed with crimes. While this case would, in our world and times, call for a large-scale investigation, in *Dark Conspiracy* they simply do not have the resources. This, combined with the fact that all of the victims are Proles, means that one detective with three patrolmen at his disposal is conducting the entire investigation.

That detective is Sergeant Kevin Abernathy. In his mid fifties, balding and about 30 pounds overweight, Abernathy is none-the-less a dedicated public servant. He would love to catch this killer, not only because of what it might mean for his career, but



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Det. Sgt. Kevin Abernathy

STR	6	EDU	6	Move	8/15/30
CON	5	CHR	6	Skill/DAM	5/3D6(Pistol)
AGL	4	EMP	0	Hits	20/40
INT	7	Init	3		

SKILLS: Act/Bluff, Computer Operation, Interrogation, Melee Combat, Observation, Small Arms, Stalking, Streetwise, Vehicle (Automobile), Willpower.



Victim	Gender	Job	Age	Crime Scene	New Clues?
1	Male	None	15	Alley	No
2	Female	Sales Clerk	18	Park	No
3	Male	Secretary	20	Playground	No
4	Female	Construction	22	Cemetery	No
5	Male	Manufacturing	24	Church	No
6	Female	Prostitute	25	Schoolyard	No
7	Male	None	30	"The Office"	No
8	Female	Self Employed	35	Home	No
9	Male	Criminal	40	Fleabag Hotel	No
10	Female	None	50	Alley	Yes

Roll 1D10 for each fact about the victim. If a *New Clue* is indicated, choose one from the list.

INSECTOID ET (BREEDER QUEEN)

STR	5	EDU	7	Move	4/12/20/30
CON	5	CHR	2	Skill/DAM	6/4
AGL	6	EMP	4	Hits	12/24
INT	7	Init	4	# Appear	1

Special: Armor value 1 (melee). Animal Empathy 10 (insects only -see main rulebook on Insectoid ETs). Project Thought 6. *Breeder Queens* can emit a paralytic pheromone, which requires creatures to make a **Difficult** [CON] roll each round they are exposed. The paralysis is total. Breeder Queens can store an entire human's blood supply in their second stomach and regurgitate it at will.

because he truly hates murderers. Unfortunately, Abernathy is an unimaginative police drone. He does things "by the book" and cannot think outside the box.

Abernathy's patrolmen use the Beat Cop template. Basic laboratory results are returned in three days. More sophisticated tests take three weeks. Cutting edge tests take three months.

Of course, unless the characters have some official authority behind them, Abernathy will not discuss details of the case. Successful **Difficult** [Persuasion] rolls will get him to talk in a very general way, but he will resist with all his ability any attempt to get him to divulge information not already known to the public.

BURIED DREAMS

Use the following chart to provide basic details for each additional killing.

List of New Clues

- ☛ Footprint-like impressions that make no sense. (see below)
- ☛ Flakes of insect carapace.
- ☛ Leaves from non-indigenous plants.
- ☛ Grainy surveillance footage of large, hunched, cloaked figure.
- ☛ Victim not drained. Blood tests show high levels of toxins/drugs.



The killings will continue, one about every three days. Always someone in an isolated locale, and with no further witnesses. After two weeks, the player characters may begin making Difficult [Foreboding] rolls. A power level of a Basic success will allow a vision of the next victim, already dead. Each Stage of Success above Basic will back the clock up two minutes. At Stage Four, a glimpse of the killer is caught.

The killer is, in fact, not a vampire. Also not human, but a sub-species of Insectoid ET. A bit larger than a man, with dark chitinous armor and wings, this female of the species is collecting blood to hatch a clutch of eggs she intends to lay in a nearby cave system. Her brood, if allowed to hatch, will number in the thousands and will move through the city like locusts.

Clever PCs may be able to intercept the Breeder Queen at the location of a future killing. If so, they will have an opportunity to destroy the creature while it is taking blood. If they tip their hand, she will simply scamper up a wall and take to the air. It might be possible to track her back to her lair at this time.

Most groups will likely choose to narrow down the area of the lair based on physical evidence and confront the creature during the day, as all the killings have taken place at

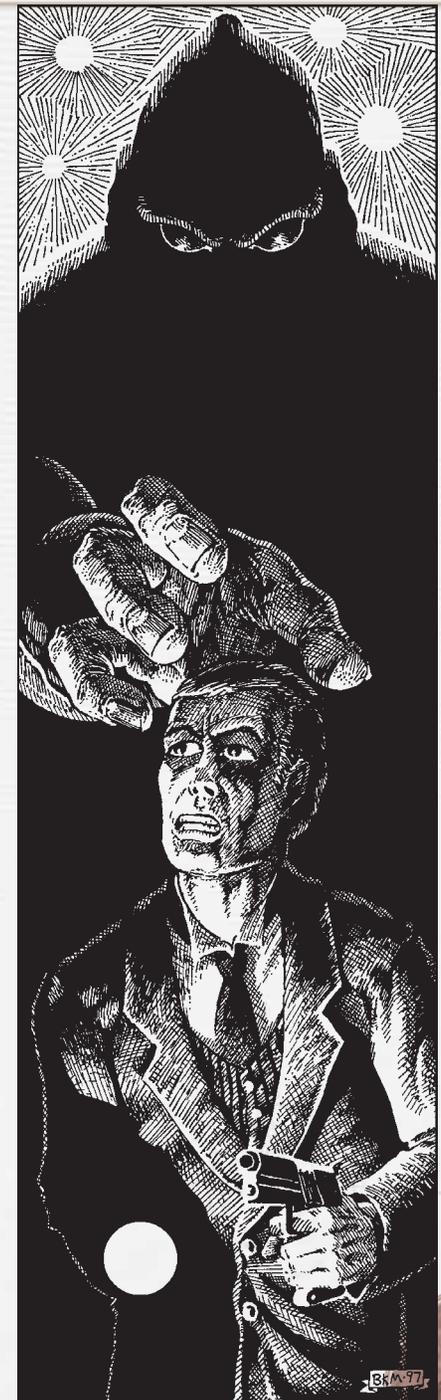
night. Attempting this is a **Difficult** [Tracking] roll. As with an Empathic skill, generate a success level. Basic success provides the general area of the woods. When 5 TOTAL success levels have been achieved, the caves have been found.

Any map of caves will do, as long as it is somewhat complex and twisty, like an insects nest.

The Breeder Queen will, of course, attempt to use her paralytic pheromone to escape, but not before attempting to drain the PCs. She is, after all, driven by her need to reproduce. However, she is not stupid, if the situation is too dangerous she will abandon this area and seek another. If she does this, her killings will be nightly, as she will need to make up for the blood supply she has had to leave behind.



DARK CONSPIRACY®



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dark story



Fiction
By Andrew Gardner-Blatch

The author is indebted to their own experience in No21b Old Street, whilst not being the strange and malevolent events experienced therein, it did colour and accentuate a feeling that materialised in this tale. Additionally I would like to thank Ms Magda Hosh and Ms Jemima Kensing for their perceptions of the events of 17th October 2001 at that address.

The author would point those who have an interest in the older properties along the Thames, to the singular old and strange buildings overlooking Tate Modern and HMS Belfast. A friend who had found many Elizabethan Artifacts at high tide here drew my attention to these shapes and physical sounds which haunt the river.

As he approached the house, Arkle was caught by the luminous quality of the night sky. He considered Mr Fuster's words about "The Terrible House" and felt that on a night like this the sentiment was easily caught. The crooked angles of deeply cast shadows and the grey, faint glow of moonlight on the old woodwork gave an unreal, strangeness to the streets. He shook himself, "No, this was another place, another time, and no time for ghosts".

The Thames flowed silent here and calm. Arkle looked out at the water and dark shapes of the bridges, crowding the rivers

course. At the riverside he looked up at the old house. It was jammed between newer warehouses and city office blocks. Arkle considered how strange that this area was silent, and yet had been the commercial centre of the city. He passed the warehouses, his footsteps a soft pad on the paving slabs—turning to a dull thud on the older cobbles. He was aware of the silence, that jarred with the dull thrum of traffic and the nightlife a few miles West of here. He felt very alone for a few seconds and turned, his attention caught by the moon and the stars. The vastness of the cloudless night, high and remote seemed for a dim moment to crush down. He reeled, and regretted the last rum, regretted too "house-sitting" for a living.

The agents—Hale, Hardwood and Bishop—had offered the job on good terms. He remembered the young exec, Monk, his cursory glances and dispassionate words.

"The job is £55 a night, lasts three nights. Start Tuesday at 11pm. It's hardly difficult as the house has a sitting tenant. The client's elderly relative. You check he's all right; check the building is all right. Check all alarms, all points of entry. Check the old chap has not left gas on, taps on, toaster on or set fire to his night-shirt."

"Is that likely?" Arkle asked.



Monk raised his eyebrows, “No, but legal requirements come first.”

“Do you need me to do it?” Arkle volunteered.

“Clearly, as I have spent time and money, not too mention your pay.” Monk replied. Arkle felt that Monk seemed hesitant and impatient.

Monk seemed to sense something and his tone softened “This is easy money, all you need to do is the usual checks, wait 45 minutes then leave. You will find tea and such like in the Night Porter’s Office. The old chap has a private annex on the second floor, the client’s offices, and private apartments are third and top. On your way out collect the Night Inventory and key from Prue.”

Arkle guessed that it was time to leave. He found “Prue” awaiting him in the foyer. A slim, dark young woman, dressed in black the pale pallor of her skin was an eye-catching contrast.

Arkle smiled and said, “Can I have the in-“,

She interrupted “I know, here.”

She handed him a white envelope with a scathing expression which seemed to say—

“Don’t bother trying it on, I’m fed up with men like you trying to pull the secretary.”

Arkle opened his mouth to apologise, though he dearly felt that he should but could not understand why, but she had already turned and disappeared behind the grey-smoked doors.

He stood alone in the foyer, a white, crisp envelope in his hand.



The cold air pulled him back to the present. He looked up at the house and could see a dim light shining faintly on the second floor. Arkle pulled the envelope out of his breast pocket. It felt heavy and bulky, slightly warm—the edges dog-eared. He tore it open, and found a silver Yale key and a single sheet of typed A4.

Arkle looked at the sign on the black door:

Messrs Oliver and Co.
57 North Walk
Upper Thames Street
London
Hours of Business

Right place. Arkle slid the Yale into the lock and turned, to his surprise it opened

easily and quietly. The streetlights feebly lit the entrance and near to hand was an old dial switch. Arkle turned it and a bright bulb came on, illuminating the entrance. To his left was a door marked

Night Porter

Ahead a flight of stairs went up to gloomy landing, lit by a large window. Another set of stairs disappeared down into darkness. The building smelt, that smell Arkle had faced so many times. It was the smell of houses when people had gone but as a faint reminder a whiff hangs about. He closed the front door, and with a feeling of relief heard the lock click. Arkle’s biggest fear for many years was that on entering a house a mugger would snatch in and stab him. They would then ransack the house while he lay bleeding on the hallway. While this seems a trifle imaginative, Arkle knew of at least two others in his occupation who had suffered that fate, those happening while both were staying in houses just a few miles away over in Lambeth. One had even got in closed the door, took off his coat and then was stabbed in the back. The police told him that the front lock had not closed properly; it was possible that his assailant watched and just got lucky. Arkle had vowed never to be unlucky. Recalling this he checked



the front door. It was secure, he distrusted Yale, but this was a mortise type. Arkle turned to his new quarters, for at least the next forty minutes.

NIGHT PORTER

He turned the Bakelite handle to reveal a light switch, which he clicked on. It was small room, 6 by 6. A wooden desk was positioned facing the outside wall, above it a barred window. The glass dark and dirty, but he could make out the shapes of bridges and buildings and probably someone walking past. On the desk was a blotter, green, a writing pad and a telephone. A small metal frame chair was placed under the desk. In the corner away from desk and door was a small sink, a kettle (electric) on a cupboard and a small fridge. Arkle stepped up to the cupboard and opened its single door. It was bare and empty, except for a jar of sugar, a mug and a small box of tea. The orange box boasted a smiling cartoon face and the words “Happy Eco-Tea”. Arkle felt nothing, he felt anything but “happy”, the silence seemed to grow and despite the simple luxury of tea, he felt forsaken.

Arkle filled the kettle and plugged it in, pleased to hear it creak slowly to life, despite the greasy, filth covered cable. The slowly building sound of the kettle seemed

to intensify the silence and Arkle felt more uneasy. Arkle turned to the desk, pulled out the old chair sat and read the other contents of the envelope. He opened the only drawer to the desk—inside was a bundle of keys, each one tagged and labelled. He put a tea bag into the mug and read the document. It was brief, in fact almost non-existent, no instructions as to what doors should be locked, no instructions how to turn off/on fire alarm. Nothing about the sitting tenant. Although the thought of someone else in the house cheered Arkle. He would knock and say “hello”, just in case the old chap thought he was an intruder. Arkle considered this, he was sure that Monk would have informed

Inventory

Oliver and Co, 57 North walk, Upper Thames Street, London

Ground Level

- Front door
- Porter’s window
- Back Door, under main stairs.

Upper Floors

- First Floor Offices
- Landing Window
- Office Doors
- Landing Window

Second Floor

- Mr Oliver (Senior) Private Apartment

Third Floor

- Mr Oliver (Junior) Commercial Office and Private Apartment
- Office Door
- Private Apartment

NB All doors and windows must be locked.
 Keys in Desk Porter’s lodge.
 Alarms – fire check are on. Situated by back door.
 In emergency contact 999 - phone in Porter’s Room
 Agent contacted Mr J Monk – 0207 345 2347
 (Working Hours only)

Porter’s Note

Bring some fresh milk, unless you like your tea dark and black.

the resident, would it be wrong to disturb the old chap? After all it was gone 11...

He looked again at the document.



Arkle then noticed the handwritten addition; it was not Monk’s writing. Too, well too friendly, if writing could ever be friendly.

He recalled some graffiti sprayed on a wall in Lambeth—“Polite Notice” “Fugg off – tosser.”

Arkle considered the handwriting for a second—“Prue”, though this seemed even more unlikely. “Oh Shit.” He turned and opened the

fridge and spoke again “Bollocks.” The fridge was empty.



Maybe the old chap would let him have some. The kettle clicked as it came to the boil. Arkle picked up the inventory and left the Porter's room. The corridor was gloomy despite the electric light. Arkle could not see any other switches, and felt in his pocket for his trusty maglight. Arkle went to the staircase, underneath it at the top of the descending flight was a barred door, and next to it set on the wall a box. One little bulb glowed red.

Up the stairs he went, the landing window was closed. Arkle looked out at the street lit below; it was a side street, empty and cold. Despite being inside Arkle felt the cold; he watched the wind catch newspaper sheets and a plastic carrier. This brief image seemed to capture his thoughts, Arkle turned to go but then a deft movement in the street caught his eye. He turned off the torch and stood in the darkness, breathing slowly, watching the shadows. Then he saw it a movement, two kids, probably teens. They looked up at the building and then walked on. Arkle watched them disappear into the darkness and then he ascended the dark staircase, stopping at the next level.

A long hallway stretched out in front of him. Arkle quickly moved along checking all of the doors, they were all locked.

The hallway was silent except for his footsteps on the marble floor. At the end was a tall narrow window, which looked out onto the river. The city was a misshapen mass of brooding darkness, punctuated by the varicose veins of streetlamps. Arkle watched the river's slow, turgid, dark roll... for a second he felt uncomfortably lonely, it seemed that all of London was as dark and as empty as the building. Arkle could almost believe that the city was the building—on a vaster, crushing scale. And, and then he heard a noise, it was a radio. From somewhere in the building he could hear a radio and it was Radio 4. It was coming from above; Arkle hurried back to the staircase and went up to the next floor.

A dull light outlined one door and Arkle distinctly heard someone cough over the sound of the radio. The cough reminded him of his granddad's cough. Arkle walked along to the door, coughed himself (out of politeness) and then knocked. He heard someone "Just a tick", then numerous bolts rattled and the door opened.

A smiling face beamed at Arkle with pure friendly joy.

"Hello! You must be the custodian? I've just put the kettle on. Would you like a cup?"

Arkle immediately took to him. He was wearing dark trousers, a white shirt and a woolly grey cardigan. Arkle smiled back—"Yes. I would love a cup."

"Good ho! You finish upstairs, then we can sit down in front of the fire, have a chat and a cuppa." Said the older Mr Oliver. Arkle could see into the room. There were two large wing back armchairs facing an open fire, which crackled and blazed in a comforting, homely manner. Arkle could hear a radio—Radio 4 was on. "Great stuff! Be back in a mo" replied Arkle.

He headed up stairs to do the last few checks, bounding the stairs two at a time. He followed the corridor checking the doors, they were all locked, eventually he came to the last window. Like the other floors it overlooked the river, and the window itself was tall, narrow with an arch at the top. Below he could make out the footpath and beyond the dark waters of the Thames. On the edge of the water he could make out two shapes, one was smoking. Arkle could just see the bright tip of a cigarette. His mouth suddenly felt dry, he his palms had started to sweat, Arkle caught himself. What was he worried about? He was not sure, but some nagging, gnawing doubt crawled over him. He turned quickly moving down the corridor toward the stairs, his heart cheered by the thought



of tea. Arkle had not gone five paces, when he saw with surprise that the first door was open. He stopped, he remembered checking it? But it was open, only a half foot, but it was open. Arkle stood back and gently pushed the door with his torch. It slowly swung open, revealing by degrees a dark room, lit on by moonlight entering through an undrawn window. The window was open, the curtains flapping in the chill air of the night.

Arkle stepped in, instinctively flicking the light with his left hand. The light came on, fizzled and then the bulb dimmed and went out. "Shit."

Arkle stepped in further. He switched the torch on and slowly moved the beam around the room. The room was about twelve by sixteen, plain black marble floor. No furniture, only the curtains. Arkle stepped over to the window. He gripped the handle, an ornate dull brass handle and pushed the window closed. As it sealed, he thought he heard a shout from the street below, but this was muffled by another sound. The door crashed shut, sucked closed by the window being sealed. Arkle turned and nervously scanned the room once again, a dark shadow suddenly filled the far wall, Arkle span around, tensing his muscles.

A large cloud had scudded across the moon. Arkle breathed out and relaxed. Again he felt on edge, he was sweating more, across his chest and neck. Gripping himself—"belt up" he told himself. He moved across to the door and opened it and then quickly left the empty room. Arkle closed the door firmly, and sorted through the key bunch, deciding that it must be the one labelled—"Top Floor—Spare 1". The key fitted and Arkle felt himself relax as the lock turned and closed. Arkle then went along to the stairs and quickly descended his mind on tea and chat.

Arkle's mouth felt dry and parched. He went straight to Mr Oliver Senior's room, knocked and went in, suddenly realising it was the wrong room. It was completely in darkness. Arkle cursed, and went to leave but something caught his eye—as his sight adjusted he could see two large wingback armchairs. They faced a fireplace, the fireplace was empty and the whole room still...Arkle gasped—was the old chap having a laugh? Had he quickly cleaned the fire as a joke?

Arkle went in further and saw the old chaps head over the armchair on the left, he was sitting right back hiding—Arkle moved forward quietly and pulled the chair around, flicking on the torch "Booo!"

The face looked back unmoving, Arkle starred, the torch drooping in his fingers. The face was skull-like, the skin dried and a sickly hue, drawn tight over features locked into an expression of malevolence. The face was dead, this man was dead and had been for a long time...Arkle felt his legs going, suddenly it seemed that the face twitched...the corners of the mouth had moved, he could smell a repellent odour and a cold feeling enveloped him.

The torch fell from his nerveless fingers and then he was running, he tumbled down the stairs, hitting the floor hard. He clawed at the black marble floor, scrambling to his feet, tearing toward the front door. He could not remember opening it, only feeling the cold night air, bundling past the two figures outside, kicking one in the groin. The other he dimly saw pull a blade out and watched his foot lash out and heard the others' arm break with a dull snapping sound. Then he was running along the footpath, not looking back, he heard a door slam and what sounded like a scream muffled by doors, doors which sealed years behind them. He ran until the only sound was the Thames.



Where Have They Gone?

By Eleanor Williams

A little chill in the night.
You're almost there.
Quiet streets, safety of home.
No homeless begging
For coins or handouts.

You consider this
A good thing.
Used to be you couldn't
Walk a block
Without a panhandler.

Wonder where they went?
Probably some shelter
Some soup kitchen
Or religious organization
Has taken them in.

Scruffy little man
Passes you in the street
Muttering things
"They don't like it.
Nope, not one bit."

He moves from
Pools of light
To pools of light.
Muttering things
"Can't stop now."

On a whim,
You turn and follow
Keeping to the dark.
Past an alley.
Rustling of rats.

He stays to the light,
Still muttering
"Gotta find a place,
Gotta ..." He pauses
And looks around and at you.

His eyes widen.
He backs into
Another alley.
"No, no, no"
Voice fades.

You turn and follow
Into the alley.
Rustling of rats
The only sound,
And you see them.

One is swallowing
The scruffy man's head
And the other,
It turns toward you.

Rustling of rats.
You want to scream,
But no sound comes.
It is upon you,
All to black.
Rustling of rats.

Wheels of Terror

An Adventure
By Linden Dunham
For Cold City®

INTRODUCTION

“Wheels of Terror” is a *Cold City* adventure for 3+ agents of the Reserve Police Agency. It is presented in scene format as per “Prisoner #8”, the introductory scenario in the *Cold City* v1.1. Rulebook. As with that scenario there is no strict requirement to run the scenes in the order listed, although I have endeavoured to present them in logical sequence. “Wheels of Terror” can be run as a follow up to “Ich Bin Ein Braineater” from *Protodimension* #5 in which case one of the NPCs from that scenario may make an appearance in an Optional Scene.

BACKGROUND

By late 1944 German military manpower was being consumed at an alarming rate: On the eastern front the destruction of Army Group Centre resulted in 670,000 men killed, wounded or captured. In the west the closing of the Falaise pocket saw losses in the region of 450,000. In this relentless grinding down of the Wehrmacht the attrition of specialist personnel such as highly trained panzer crews was keenly felt. The Nazi scientific establishment proposed a radical solution to the manpower crisis: The near full automation of the panzer divisions, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine. This

goal was to be accomplished by utilising a newly discovered type of Incursor, known as “the Ghost”—an incorporeal creature with highly developed telekinetic powers. If Ghosts could be obtained in large numbers then “domesticated” and trained to operate tanks and aircraft they could replace human crews and relieve the pressure on the Reich’s dwindling manpower reserves. It was also hoped that Ghost crewed vehicles, being under the control of a single intelligence, would be more efficient than human equivalents.

Projekt Eisenmann (Iron Man), as it became known, saw the Ghost transferred from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute to the military research facilities located at the Telefunken building in Lichterfelde. The Incursor was implanted into a series of test vehicles: A Kubelwagen, an Opel truck and an Sdkfz 250 light half-track. Initial results were promising, but it was found that the Ghost had a deleterious effect on any vehicle it occupied, reducing its host to a rusty pile of junk within a couple of days. This was felt to be unacceptable, even when judged by the short operational life of most vehicles in battlefield conditions. The Ghost could keep one of these rusted heaps operational by telekinesis but the utility of such a wreck, even if mobile, was felt to be of little value.

The scientists working on Project Iron Man were instructed to find a way to stop the Ghost from turning its host vehicles into dust but were never able to accomplish this task. Destroying machinery seemed to be part of the Ghost's life cycle, a kind of feeding process. Attempts to interfere with it irritated the creature and ultimately left it in a weakened state as it was denied sustenance. By the time the Soviet NKVD arrived in Dahlem in Spring 1945 Project Iron Man had been abandoned and the Ghost had been returned to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute where it was kept in a half starved state in a series of infrequently large vacuum flasks. During the removal of material from the Institute the Ghost was loaded into an NKVD truck. Sensing an opportunity to escape it consumed its vacuum container and transferred itself to the truck. Over the next few days it recovered its strength, then hopping from vehicle to vehicle, worked its way back to the Telefunken building (a place it always associated with a plentiful supply of nourishment). It has remained on the premises ever since, and with the building re-designated as the US Army's McNair barracks has found a ready supply of vehicles to feed on in the barracks main motor pool. As a result the motor pool has unfairly acquired the reputation as one of the shoddiest out-

fits in the Berlin Brigade, its vehicles prone to breakdown and in constant need of servicing. McNair's vehicles are also often involved in accidents, due to the Ghost's penchant for taking control of vehicles when off base, and trying to return them home to the motor pool. In the most recent accident the commander of one of McNair's resident units narrowly escaped serious injury when his jeep ploughed into a wall. Fed up with the frequent mechanical failures, and fully aware of the Telefunken factory's previous function as a Nazi research centre, he requests the assistance of the RPA.

SCENE I — THE BRIEFING

Location: The briefing takes place at 0900 on 28th February 1950 at The Kammergericht. It is given by Major Spiegelman.

What Happens: Major Spiegelman tells the PCs that the RPA has received a request for assistance from McNair barracks in the American sector. Ever since the barracks was taken over by US forces its main motor pool has been plagued by a high rate of vehicular accidents and mechanical failures. The latest example involved Lt Col Alan Travers of the 16th Constabulary Squadron. His jeep apparently developed a life of its own, travelling several hundred



yards seemingly of its own volition before swerving violently and ploughing into a wall. Travers sustained minor injuries while his driver suffered a concussion. The Colonel has said that he believes that the problems with the motor pool stem from barracks' former role as a Nazi research centre but isn't sure how. Uncovering the connection is a job for specialists, like the RPA.

Major Spiegelman doesn't have any other relevant information. The PCs will have to make their own enquiries at the base in order to find out what's going on and then determine the best way of dealing with it.

SCENE 2 — ARRIVAL AT MCNAIR

Location: The McNair barracks are situated in south west Berlin. The former Telefunken complex is a sprawling modernist construction that retains the appearance of the scientific/technical establishment it once was. It is currently home to the 16th Constabulary Squadron, a unit formed from various cavalry formations, and charged with keeping the peace in the American Sector.

The PCs enter via the main gate in Goerzallee. They are expected and are provided with an MP escort to Lt Col Travers' office.

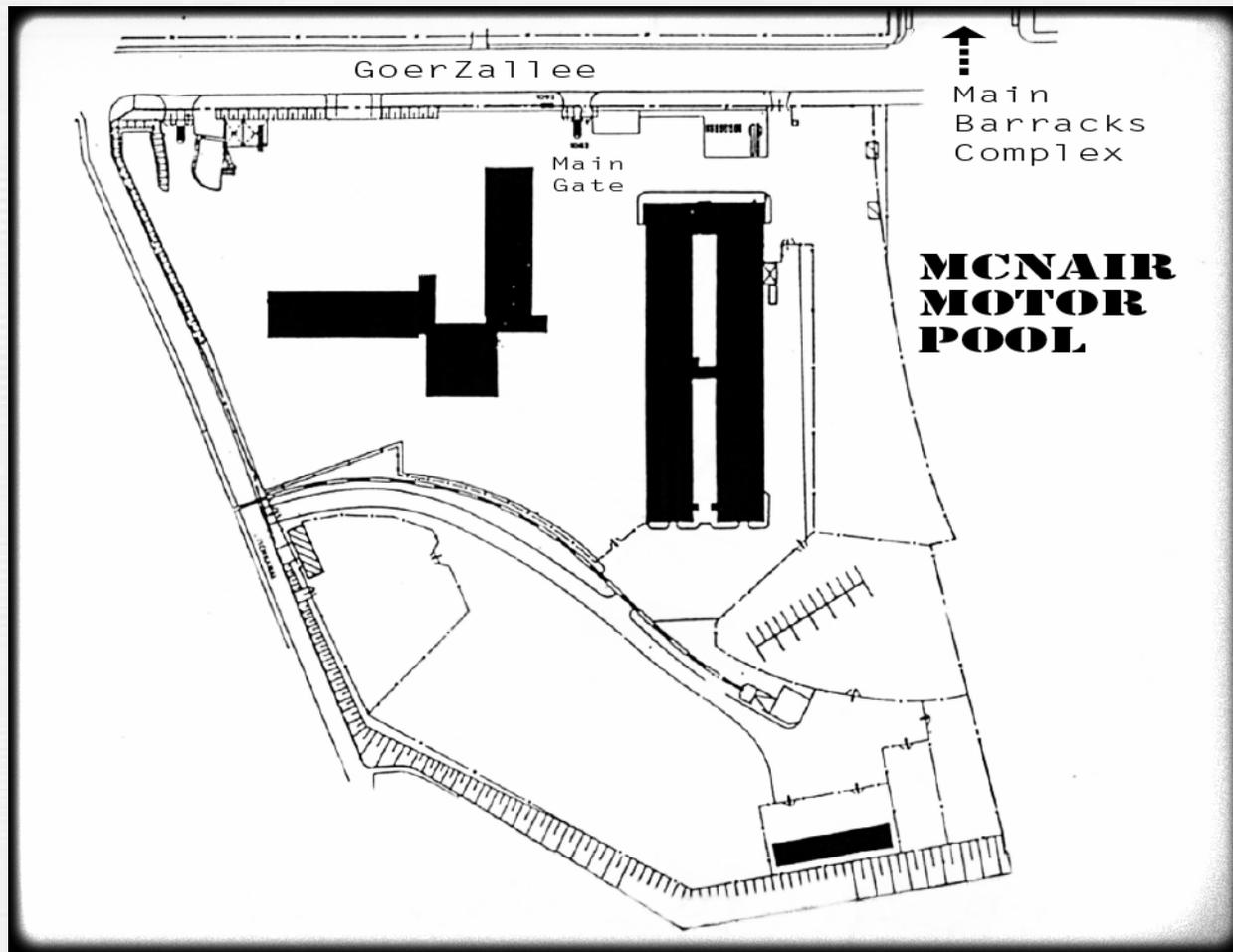
What Happens: The PCs are greeted cordially by Lt Col Travers. He briefly reiterates the points made by Major Spiegelman in the briefing scene. He states that the accident with the jeep was the last straw, and he has received permission from his superiors to call in the RPA to resolve the problem with the motor pool once and for all. Travers will do his best to answer any questions the PCs might have. He can tell them that the accidents began as soon as the US Army took control of McNair in 1948 and that they come in two types: Mechanical failures due to extreme fatigue of vehicle components, and vehicles going out of control while off base and attempting to return to McNair seemingly of their own volition. Travers lets the PCs in on his own theory that the problem stems from McNair's previous use as a Nazi research facility: "Could be something to do with magnetic fields." If quizzed about this theory Travers is unable to provide any supporting evidence but says he read somewhere that the Germans were experimenting with magnetism towards the war.

The PCs are free to enter all non-restricted areas of the base, and question which-

ever personnel they consider appropriate. Travers suggests starting with his driver Corporal Hickman who is currently in sickbay or the motor pool where the jeep is being looked over by mechanics.

Optional Extra: Although the RPA has been given jurisdiction in this matter Travers' superiors aren't happy about foreign nationals (especially ones from communist countries) being at large on a US Army base. To ensure that the PCs confine themselves to activities relevant to their investigation they are assigned a chaperone/liaison: Staff Sergeant Durkin of the military police. He sticks to the PCs like glue throughout their time at McNair and politely but firmly guides them away from sensitive areas or reminds them of the





they are reminded in no uncertain terms that Durkin is to accompany them at *all* times.

SCENE 3 — THE MOTOR POOL

Location: A huge vehicle park lying to the south of the main barracks complex and separated from it by the main thoroughfare of Goerzallee. It contains numerous jeeps, trucks and M8 Greyhound armoured cars. There are also vehicle workshop and storage buildings on site.

What Happens: The PCs are shown to one of the repair shops where Lt Col Travers' jeep is currently being examined. The senior mechanic present Master Sergeant Patrick Mulligan shows them the wreck. He explains that mechanically there is nothing wrong with the jeep and the crash damage is minor and could be repaired. However, the bodywork and several structural components are eaten through with rust and the jeep will have to be scrapped. MSgt Mulligan is at a loss to explain this. It cannot be accounted for by the age of the jeep, exposure to climatic conditions, nor is it accident damage. Mulligan has seen similar effects on other motor pool



vehicles and tells the PCs that he and his mechanics are kept constantly busy repairing a multitude of minor faults and checking for new ones. Not that they get much thanks for it. Shoddy maintenance is usually cited as the reason for the unreliability of McNair's vehicles, something Mulligan takes as a personal slight: "I look after the trucks here as if they were my own. I don't know why they keep breaking down. Maybe it's something in the air?"

PCs who examine the jeep for themselves find that its condition is exactly as Mulligan describes. Apart from the rust it shows every sign of being properly maintained.

There is no sign of the Ghost. It has migrated to a deuce-and-a-half truck and is biding its time.

SCENE 4 — CORPORAL ANDREW HICKMAN

Location: Corporal Hickman is currently in the 279 th Station Hospital which is located in nearby Dahlem. The hospital occupies a collection of turn of the century red brick buildings set in extensive grounds.

What Happens: The PCs are met by PFC Charles Parrish, one of the hospital orderlies. He advises them that Hickman sus-

tained a minor concussion in the accident. He is well enough to talk to the PCs but is being kept under observation a little while longer to be on the safe side. Parrish will remain present throughout the interview with Hickman unless the PCs tell him to leave.

Hickman provides an account of the accident. At 1000 hrs yesterday he was driving Lt Col Travers to a meeting at Andrews barracks. They left McNair via the main gate and headed northeast along Goerzallee. Suddenly the steering wheel was wrenched out of Hickman's hands and the vehicle made a violent u-turn in the middle of the street, then accelerated back towards McNair. Hickman tried to regain control of the vehicle, at first to no effect. "I was pumping the brake pedal, grabbing at the steering wheel but no good. It was like wrestling with someone a lot stronger than me." A few seconds later the mysterious force released the wheel, but with Hickman still exerting pressure the jeep veered wildly to the left and ploughed into a wall. Hickman hit his head on the windscreen, hence his concussion, while Travers sustained minor cuts and bruises.

Hickman hasn't previously experienced any problems while driving Lt Col Travers but is aware of the motor pool's reputa-

tion. Up to now he has gone along with his fellow drivers' view of the mechanics as a pretty lacklustre bunch. After yesterday he's wondering if there's something more to it..."like some kind of ghost in the machine, y'know?"

SCENE 5 — CRASH SITE

Location: Goerzallee. The wide street lying to the south of McNair barracks. A roped off area by a partially demolished garden wall indicates where Hickman crashed.

What Happens: The jeep left enough rubber on the asphalt for the PCs to confirm that the accident happened exactly as Hickman described: A sudden U-turn at the end of the street followed by a wavering progress back towards McNair before suddenly swerving into the wall.

If the PCs canvass the neighbourhood they will turn up half-a-dozen witnesses that saw the crash and all of their accounts



support Hickman's story. One of them, Heinrich Rothe, a bearded Kriegsmarine veteran, provides a colourful description of the corporal's attempts to regain control of the vehicle: "He was fighting with the steering wheel, like a helmsman trying to keep the tiller straight in a storm."

Optional Extra: Another witness Jutta Kendler complains about the amount of US Army traffic that passes along Goerzallee, particularly the noisy truck convoys late at night. These are primarily black market transports taking goods to Mulligan's various contacts.

OPTIONAL SCENE — RESEARCH

Location: Any that seems appropriate e.g., RPA archives/records office, public library, offices of a PC's parent agency (CIA, SIS, MGB etc), McNair mess hall.

What Happens: The PCs are seeking information that will help them complete their assignment. They consult documents and/or various persons with the relevant knowledge. A Reason or Influence based conflict roll may be necessary. Information that will assist the PCs together with the suggested degree of challenge in obtaining it is listed below:

☠ **Weak, or none:** Constructed in the 1930s the Telefunken complex was originally an electronics factory. During the war it was a centre for the development of military technology with its most notable invention being the radar directed anti-aircraft gun. In 1948 the buildings were occupied by the US Army's Berlin Brigade and renamed McNair barracks in honour of the late General Leslie McNair who was killed in the Normandy cam-

paign. McNair is generally regarded as the best of the US army's Berlin barracks with pleasant living quarters and extensive facilities.

☠ **Moderate:** As above, but the complex's wartime use also encompassed the development of "Wunderwaffen"—secret weapons that were supposed to turn the tide of war in Germany's favour. Some of these weapons were built using "mate-



THE GHOST



Attributes

Action: 5

Influence: 4

Reason: 3

Traits

- (+) Highly developed powers of telekinesis
- (+) Can understand human language when it wants to
- (-) Likes to stay where the food is
- (-) Capricious

rial” provided by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in nearby Dahlem.

☠ **Challenging:** The PC learns of the existence of Project Iron Man—the attempt to fully automate the German armed forces using an “Incurator component” supplied by the Virus House. The project was not a success and the Incurator was returned to the Virus House in early 1945. The contents of the Virus House were removed by the Soviet NKVD after the capture of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute during the Battle of Berlin.

PCs with links to the MGB or GK-11 discover that the NKVD removed a sealed vacuum flask labelled “Ghost” from the Virus House in Spring 1945. When the truck carrying the flask was unloaded the container was found to have decayed into a pile of rust. The truck itself suffered a catastrophic breakdown shortly afterwards, inspection revealed the drive shaft, engine block and bodywork rusted right through. A thorough investigation by the NKVD was unable to account for the damage although it was theorised that the Germans had developed some sort of corrosive agent as a weapon, a sample of which had leaked from the flask and destroyed the truck.

Some of this information may be readily available to PCs or NPCs with a scientific background or connection to the scientific establishment, e.g. *The Disillusioned Scientist* from the Generic NPCs section of the *Cold City* rulebook may well have worked at the Telefunken site or the nearby Virus House and be quite knowledgeable about Project Iron Man. He may be willing to trade what he knows in return for something from the PCs.

SCENE 6 — GHOST HUNTING

Location: McNair barracks motor pool, possibly at night.

What Happens: The PCs should have established that some strange entity has taken up residence in the motor pool. They are left with the problem of flushing it out and eliminating it. The PCs will no doubt come up with their own plan for accomplishing this. A couple of possibilities are discussed below:

☠ **Ride With the Devil:** The PCs take one of the motor pool’s vehicles for a spin to see if it exhibits the same behaviour as Cpl Hickman’s jeep. Given the size of the motor pool the chances of selecting an Incurator inhabited vehicle purely at random are very low. If the PCs use some credible methodolo-

gy in their selection or if the GM fancies giving the PCs a fright then they do end up with the vehicle currently occupied by the Ghost. As long as the PCs remain within the confines of the barracks the Ghost remains dormant. However, if they leave McNair it becomes annoyed and tries to take control of the vehicle and return to the motor pool. Any resulting struggle between the Ghost and the PC's driver should be treated as a Strength-based conflict. Success for the Ghost results in a return to McNair, while success for the driver means that they keep control of the vehicle although the steering wheel feels like lead for the duration of the journey.

On arrival back at McNair if the vehicle is left unattended the Ghost will find a way to transfer itself to another host.

☠ **The Wait:** The PCs stake out the motor pool in the hope of seeing unusual activity that will give the Ghost away. During the day nothing happens to disturb the routine of vehicle maintenance and the comings and goings of assorted jeeps and trucks. In the evening the motor pool is much quieter and the Ghost is able to move surreptitiously from one host to another. The

Incursor is very careful and attempts to observe it should be treated as a conflict against its Reason/Action attribute. Success for the PCs results in them observing a deuce-and-a-half truck roll slowly forward from where it is parked and bump up against the rear of a jeep. A faint blue glow appears in the truck's radiator grill and seems to flow into the jeep before fading away. The PCs have just witnessed the Ghost transferring itself from one vehicle host to another. The whole process takes one hour unless interrupted, of course, in which case the Ghost is forced to remain in the truck.

OPTIONAL SCENE - "LET'S MAKE SOME REAL MONEY!"

Location: The repair shop visited in Scene 3, but this time at night.

What Happens: The PCs become privy to Sgt Mulligan's black market dealings. This scene can be run if the PCs stake out in Scene 6 fails to spot the Ghost, or if they have become interested in what Mulligan and friends might be up to.

The PCs notice lights on in the repair shop. If they get close enough to observe proceedings inside they see Mulligan and half a dozen mechanics standing in a circle,

in front of three parked trucks. They are all raising glasses of whiskey in a toast. Mulligan has a brotherly arm around PFC Parrish and is addressing his men:

"Boys, I want to introduce you to a good friend of mine: PFC Charlie Parrish from the 279th Station Hospital. Charlie here's going to be joining our little outfit, in charge of medical supplies."

Parrish nods enthusiastically and says, "Penicillin, barbiturates, morphine... Whatever you want I can get it."

Mulligan again: "With Charlie on-board we're really gonna be earning. Here's to him, and here's to Berlin, the greatest city in the world, she's gonna make us rich!"

The men down their drinks then disperse, climbing into the trucks and driving out of the motor pool and onto Goerzallee. They remain in convoy until they reach a cross roads near the Teltow Canal where they split up to meet various buyers—contacts of Mulligan who sell the goods on at street level or to other black market operators. The buyers are a varied mix of Berlin residents, military personnel from other zones and/or Volkspolizei in the Soviet Sector. Following any of the trucks results in the PCs witnessing a rendezvous with some seedy characters in an out of the

way location. Goods are offloaded from the truck and exchanged for dollars (or other goods if of sufficient value, e.g. art or antiques). The consequences of any intervention by the PCs should depend on the outcome of a *Conflict* roll.

Optional Extra: If the PCs have played Ich Bin Ein Braineater then the truck they follow heads east into the Soviet sector eventually pulling into the massive abattoir and cattle market south of Landsberger Allee. It is met by an Opel truck containing Helga Raumer and a couple of heavies. The heavies are ex-army Landsers, able to swallow their pride at taking orders from a woman because they appreciate that Helga is a lot more business savvy than they are. They are armed with Luger pistols which they won't hesitate to use if challenged although any gunfire will be to discourage pursuit rather than deliberately shooting to kill.

OPTIONAL SCENE — BREAKOUT!

Location: McNair Barracks Motor Pool, the area where the vehicles are parked.

What Happens: An action packed climax to the adventure, probably best suited to pulp themed campaigns. The Ghost realises that the RPA team are close to discovering its existence. Reluctantly, it decides it must leave McNair before it is exposed and de-

stroyed. Assuming control of a Greyhound armoured car it smashes its way out of the barracks and trundles along Goerzallee sending terrified civilians scattering before it. Any vehicles that get in the way are crushed under its rugged wheels, or shot up by its 37-mm cannon and machine guns. The Greyhound heads east crossing the Teltow canal, traversing the districts of Templehof and Neukolln, and on towards the Soviet sector. It blasts its way through the first Soviet checkpoint and keeps going as the Ghost looks for somewhere quiet where it can stop and transfer to another host vehicle.

Of course an American military vehicle running amok in the Soviet sector is going to cause a diplomatic incident which, given the strained relationship between east and west since the Berlin airlift, could easily escalate into something worse. The PCs must act quickly to head The Ghost off. Ideally this scene should conclude with the PCs immobilizing or destroying the rogue Greyhound before it causes too many casualties. The wreck will require careful handling (see Scene 7 below).

Optional Extra: For an even pulpier (and almost certainly ahistorical) climax, the Ghost assumes control of a Pershing tank that had been left at the motor pool after

developing engine trouble while on exercise in The Grünewald. It will behave in a similar fashion to the Greyhound armoured car described above, but if the tank reaches the Soviet sector it is eventually destroyed in a battle with a trio of Soviet T34/85 medium tanks. If the PCs try to stop the rogue tank they should be allowed to commandeer weapons and transport from McNair. Whether the selected items qualify for the tool bonus (see *Cold City* p. 59) in any conflict should be judged in the context of the Pershing being designed to take on German heavy tanks like the Tiger and Panther. Rifles and pistols aren't going to be much help, but a bazooka might if the PCs can manoeuvre for a flank or rear shot.

SCENE 7 — EXORCISING THE GHOST

Location: Anywhere that the PCs have managed to locate and isolate the Ghost. It's host vehicle has been destroyed, or at least disabled so that the Ghost is unable to operate it using its powers of Psychokinesis.

What Happens: Depends very much on what the PCs decide to do with the wreck. If they attempt to move it, perhaps by loading it onto a tank transporter or recovery vehicle, they run the risk of The Ghost escaping and assuming control of a new



host. The safest course is to leave the wreck *in situ*. It turns into a heap of rust within a couple of hours and the Ghost starves to death shortly afterwards—the debris is suffused by a blue glow that waxes brightly for a few seconds then fades to a pinpoint of light and then finally nothing...

Another possibility is to decant the Ghost into a suitable holding vessel (e.g. a vacuum flask as used by Project Iron Man personnel) and then transport it for study by the likes of GK-11 or BERB.

Complications may arise from third parties wanting access to the wreck and challenging the RPA's jurisdiction. If the Ghost made it as far as the Soviet sector there is every chance that GK-11 will take an interest and send a detachment of troops to cordon off the area and chase away the RPA interlopers. Of course the PCs' own agendas may come into play here as well, particularly those influenced by membership of scientific organisations.

Optional Scene - "Maybe We Can Reason With It..."

Location: Any place where it seems appropriate for the Ghost to initiate contact with PCs.

What Happens: The Ghost tries to communicate with its human antagonists. It

lacks the power of speech and its psychic abilities don't extend to telepathy. Instead it will use morse code, using vehicle headlights or manipulating vehicle parts to tap against each other. If cornered or injured it will beg for its life in broken German, or English, promising to leave the motor pool and go somewhere else. The PCs are faced with the dilemma of killing the creature or allowing it to escape to cause trouble somewhere else.

This scene is probably best suited to noir flavoured campaigns where the PCs are often forced into doing unpleasant things by the nature of their work with the RPA.

SOURCES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Wheels of Terror" is an expanded version of the scenario seed of the same name from my "Dark Conspiracy in a Cold City" article that appeared in Protodimension #5. The title is taken from the novel of the same name by Sven Hassel.

The Ghost is, in all but name, the Entropic Gremlin created by Theodore J Kocot jr for GDW's Dark Races Compendium Volume 1.

Berlin Brigade – McNair Barracks:
<http://www.mcnair-barracks.us-berlin.com/>

Very informative site with plans of both the main barracks and the motor pool.

US military installations in Berlin:
<http://www.berlin-brigade.de/us-ins/us-ein.html>

Rough and ready looking site, but with lots of useful information on the US military presence in Berlin.

"Berlin: The Downfall" by Anthony Beevor.

The optional scene featuring Mulligan's black market operation was inspired in equal parts by UK Channel 4 drama "Red Riding: 1983" and BBC sitcom "Early Doors".

My thanks to Neil and Jo Burton, Jason Ellis, Andrew Gill and Lillian Wood for play testing help.

All NPCs in this scenario are entirely fictional and no resemblance is intended to any real life US Army personnel who may have served at McNair barracks, or elsewhere.



Ghost

POSSESSED VEHICLE:
M8 GREYHOUND ARMoured CAR



Attributes

Action: 5

Influence: 4

Reason: 3

Traits

As for the Ghost, plus:

(+) Fast

(+) Resistant to small arms fire

POSSESSED VEHICLE:
M26 PERSHING HEAVY TANK



Attributes

Action: 9

Influence: 4

Reason: 3

Traits

As for the Ghost, plus:

(+) Powerful armament

(+) Heavily armoured

NPCs

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALAN TRAVERS

Officer at the end of his tether

Attributes

Action: 2

Influence: 3

Reason: 3

Traits

- (+) Used to being obeyed
- (+) Doesn't stand on ceremony
- (+) Excels at administration
- (-) Missed the war by a month
- (-) Why the hell am I here?



MASTER SERGEANT PATRICK MULLIGAN

Black market operator

Attributes

Action: 2

Influence: 3

Reason: 3

Traits

- (+) Natural leader
- (+) Capable mechanic
- (+) Has many contacts
- (-) Greedy
- (-) Amoral



CORPORAL ANDREW HICKMAN

The Driver

Attributes

Action: 3

Influence: 3

Reason: 2

Traits

- (+) Expert driver
- (+) Knows the top brass
- (+) Intimate knowledge of Berlin roads
- (-) A bit lazy
- (-) Boring - only interested in talking about cars



NPCs

PFC CHARLIE PARRISH

Medical Orderly

Attributes

Action: 2

Influence: 2

Reason: 4

Traits

(+) Medical knowledge

(+) Actually quite educated

(+) Knows his way round the hospital

(-) Wants to be a player

(-) In over his head

STAFF SERGEANT JIM DURKIN

Unsmiling Snowdrop

Attributes

Action: 3

Influence: 3

Reason: 2

Traits

(+) Physically imposing

(+) Imperturbable demeanour

(+) Can handle himself in a fight

(-) Inflexible - does it by the book

(-) Heavy handed



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-ed.



ROLEPLAYING TIPS

GAME MASTER TIPS AND ROLE-PLAYING ADVICE

Flash Backs

Welcome to Flash Backs, a series of ongoing reviews looking back at classic modern horror roleplaying scenarios and support products – be they great or not so...

The goal of this column is to have an open and frank discussion about some of the adventures that moulded my thoughts and ideas on gaming modern horror. I hope also to bring other feedback to each article, be it from you, the reader, or from others who have played or run these scenarios.

In this first 'season' of reviews, I'll be focusing on the small run of official *Dark Conspiracy* (DC) supplements that were published by *Game Designers' Workshop* (GDW) from 1991 to 1993. This collection was more of a hodgepodge of horror gaming ideas, rather than a cohesive approach to the *Dark Conspiracy* setting (something that was seen, and I believe admired, in the Fiddleback Trilogy written by Michael Stackpole). Nevertheless, it is worth taking the time to look at these adventures (especially as they are now available once again, albeit in electronic format), and explore the good and the bad in each.

Among the Dead is an 82-page adventure published in 1992 by GDW for the *Dark Conspiracy* game line. Complete with GDW's higher than average layout and

art standards (at least for the time), this scenario is one of the best produced in the series. A good read, it brings Russia—in the world of *Dark Conspiracy*—to life, but fails to provide a completely compelling story at points.

The adventure itself is divided into seven main sections, five which describe the storyline and events the characters will find themselves encountering, while the final two detail the setting and history of the plot's two main locations – New York and Moscow.

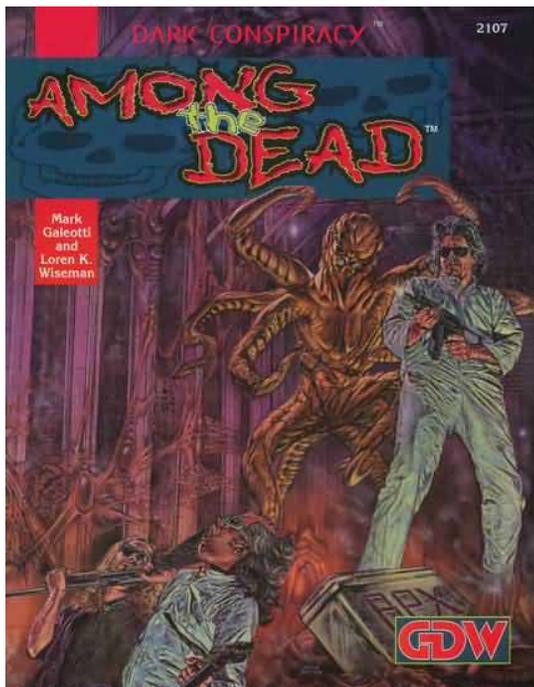
THE HOOK

Probably one of the best, and arguably most interesting, aspects of this scenario is its hook – or how the characters get involved in the story. Here the group are approached by a rich Russian immigrant, Alexander Lobov, and are asked (or hired) to discover what has happened to his niece, Annya Makasheva. Annya is one of Lobov's few remaining relatives, and was working her way to be with him, when she suddenly vanished in New York.

While this is not an overly original introduction to an investigative adventure, it is the presentation of this initial lead—a series of hand written letters—that really brings the players into the story, and adds that little bit of 'something special' to the hook.

A Classic RPG Review
By Marcus Bone
For *Dark Conspiracy*®

*Remembering Classic Modern
Horror RPG Material from
Years Gone By*



Among the Dead, 1992 GDW (GDW 2107) - ISBN 1-55878-107-2

Design: Mark Galeotti and Loren K. Wiseman

Development: Lester W. Smith

Cover Art: Nick Smith

Interior Art: Paul Daly. Earl Geier and Rick Harris

Art Direction: Kirk Wescom

Graphic Design and Production: Steve Bryant. Lamont Fullerton, Ami Jontz and Rob Lazzaretti

Typesetting: Michelle Sturgeon

Proofreading: Anne Bedard and Michelle Sturgeon

I've personally used this hook, and the handout letters, on a number of occasions; it is, in my opinion, a great way of getting a group of players invested into a plot. The addition of something physical (in this case the handouts), which lays out the first logical steps in the investigation really helps the game get over the 'hump' of an initial session (where the players generally are still getting into character and are usually a little lost as to the goal of the story that confronts them!).

THE CHASE

Once the characters accept the job for Lobov, they quickly discover that Roosevelt Island Children's Hospital—the hospital where Anya worked as a nurse—is covering up some rather suspicious activities. The sections *The Big Apple* and the *Hospital* detail the investigation into these leads, and draw the characters deeper into the mystery.

Suffice to say that the party should quickly discover that Anya's disappearance isn't the only thing of interest going on at the hospital, and that they are now on the trail of some larger, more sinister, conspiracy. Amongst such discoveries are crates labelled *BPX*, which will quickly become the 'white rabbit' (i.e. consistent lead) for the rest of the adventure.

This part of the adventure also concludes with one of the ickiest revelations I've read in a role-playing game, and when you throw in the characters suddenly being trapped in Moscow (I won't spoil why or how these two events occur) you can be assured that I was suitably 'creeped out'.

Into the Light is a very brief section which deals with the direct aftermath of the characters arrival in Moscow. This is likely the first opportunity the group will have to draw weapons and cause a little mayhem in the adventure, although, equally, they might be a little cautious as to the motivations of the various parties they will encounter here. However, once the goals at least of one of these groups are clarified, it becomes obvious that the characters are now deep within Russia with little chance of an immediate return to New York (nor any other place in the US in general!).

Probably more than a little lost, and with Anya's trail gone cold, the characters are directed to discover the meaning of the *BPX* labelled crates. This investigation is the subject of the next section, *Down Amongst the Dead Men*. Again this part of the story is quite open, with a number of avenues of exploration available to the players. Eventually, all clues lead to one project; the upgrade of Moscow's underground rail system by the Metro 1 company, and

more importantly their work on the former Proletarian Square station. Once inside they discover that something very sinister is happening underground and that the abomination that resides within must be destroyed.

Fortunately for the characters there is plenty of help available to them in their adventures in Moscow: Major Vladimir Samsonov, case officer of the Aliens' Board (the only government organisation offering any hope of the group returning to America); Zhao Qing, an employee of Metro 1 who has become highly suspicious as to the purpose of its project; and others who help to ensure that players don't get too lost in this strange new world.

After the (likely) destruction of the underground station, the characters come to the attention of the city's controlling committee (which likes to call itself – Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland) the results of which are the subject of the section labelled *Steel Angel*. With the fate of the characters' exit visas in the hands of this committee it probably doesn't come as a surprise that, in return for the appropriate signatures, the group is asked to undertake one further task. This mission takes the characters to Kazan (a city politically aligned to Moscow), where it is soon revealed that not only have some

200-odd people disappeared, but reports of werewolves run rampant!

This portion of the plot is much more linear than those previous, and the characters quickly discover that a Gulag and a powerful Dark Minion are responsible for the rising fear within the city. Again, it is up the party to destroy this evil, a task that once more allows the characters to display some military finesse. Upon their return to Moscow, they will learn that Samsonov has located Annya, who is currently sedated and in a sanatorium! Her release and the entire group's return to America sees a successful conclusion to the adventure.

EXTRAS

As noted, the final couple of sections of this supplement detail aspects of the main locations presented in the adventure. The *New York* section notes the city's founding and how the metroplex has grown to become New Boswash. With a focus on Manhattan island (map included), it briefly describes the island's key neighbourhoods, and provides examples of some of the types of encounters one might have there. Further notes detail the city's government and police structures, as well as its transportation systems.

The *Moscow* section is considerably more comprehensive (which is unsurpris-

ing given that the supplement's target audience is likely to be much more familiar with New York than Moscow. This includes an overview of the city in the *Dark Conspiracy* setting (again with a large map) and describes how the Red Army is organised in running the city.

A final couple of subsections round out the book; *Russian Nightmares*, details six Russian legends as Darklings to add your adventures, while *Weapons and Vehicles* details 10 Russian weapons (some of which have previously appeared in the *Twilight 2000* supplement *Infantry Weapons of the World*) and two Russian vehicles (the Volga Sedan and GAZ Sportabout). Both of these make good additions to the core adventure and they add much to the feeling of the Moscow setting.

OPINIONS

It's hard to exactly say what I think of *Among the Dead*. On the surface it is a pretty interesting adventure set in a totally new location (the core setting of *Dark Conspiracy* being very American-centric), but as much as the setting is inspiring, the actual adventure is not.

After, as I noted earlier, after a fairly good introduction, the scenario breaks-up into what feels like three loosely connected adventures; each of which could have

rightly deserved an eighty page supplement all to themselves. The first section is definitely the strongest in my opinion, with enough investigation in New York and the hospital to really drag the characters into a ‘conspiracy’. The second section, the investigation in Moscow, is almost as good, although I’ve experienced players feeling a little lost and confused when they reach this point, especially with the immediate change of focus within the plot. Unfortunately, the third section, in Kazan, is by far the weakest, with a story that feels very linear and a plot line that is not very exciting at all. The fact that the motivation is quite contrived (i.e. do as we demand or you don’t get home!) just adds to this for me, and it is a rather disappointing way to finish up what has otherwise been a very entertaining story.

While that might have brought a low note to the supplement, the worse sin in the book has to be the sudden dropping of Annya’s story line from the main plot. From experience, this just confuses the players, and adds considerable work to the Referee in the attempt to focus the players on the BPX angle. I get the feeling that the first section, the one I like the most, was actually added to the Russian plot after it was submitted to GDW (hence Loren K. Wiseman’s credit – although don’t quote me on that, this is pure conjecture!).

However, I can understand why something like this might be; most *Dark Conspiracy* characters (let alone their players) would be US based, and getting them involved in a Russian story line would be immensely difficult without some solid hook. I don’t want to sound too down on the Russian portions of the adventure, the author Mark Galeotti obviously knows his stuff (in fact looking him up on the web, it seems that he is currently Academic Chair of the Center for Global Affairs at New York University and an expert on Russian security), but these never quite flow as nicely – both in depth and quality – as the first part in New York.

On a more positive note, I do appreciate the open structure of the core story, and the way which information is readily accessible. It rarely feels as if the plot is being ‘railroaded’ (apart from the ‘directive of the committee’ of course), with information and leads available in a natural progression and important plot points presented in such a manner as to be easily inserted when and where the Referee feels most appropriate. It is rare (outside of Call of Cthulhu) for adventures from the 80’s or 90’s to follow this open structure, and here it adds much to the quality and sustainability to the story.

Finally, on a personal note, I’ve run this adventure a couple of times now, and in both instances have found it difficult to progress the story past the character’s arrival in Moscow. I don’t know why, perhaps being thrust unknowingly into chaotic and corrupt Russia is too much of a shock for the players? Despite this, I do recommend *Among the Dead* to any Referee looking to change up the traditional *Dark Conspiracy* setting, and take their game in a totally different direction. I would liked to have seen a few more suggestions about other types of adventures characters could have in Moscow (or Russia in general), and potential Referees should look closely at expanding the final portions of the plot, but beyond that it is a solid addition to the *Dark Conspiracy* game line. As in any role-playing game with a modern or futuristic setting the game is set in North America, especially with the United States being the default country to build from. Later on, if As in any role-playing game with a modern or futuristic setting the game is set in North America, especially with the United States being the default country to build from. Later on, if we are lucky, the game picks up and sourcebooks begin to appear giving finer detail on aspects of the world.



Grim Wisdom

A “Grim” Interview
By Lee Williams

This issue Lee swaps words with James “Grim” Desborough who is Postmortem Studios...and no, not those kind of words!

We recently conducted an interview via email with noted UK games writer James “Grim” Desborough. As we have now added his excellent political-conspiracy RPG *@ctiv8* (as in ‘activate’) to *Protodimension’s* list of supported games we thought this would be a fitting juncture to include his words. Hear ye!

PDM:

How did you first get into gaming, and more specifically what made you become a game writer?

GRIM:

I’ve always written or told stories ever since I was little. I used to read to the other kids in the playground at school and it was a natural progression to go from that to doing the ‘choose your own adventure’ books, specifically *Fighting Fantasy*. My friend Russell was a fanatic for those and owned them all. While I couldn’t afford as many I picked up some as well, learned the rules and went through them and then, even before I’d heard of ‘proper roleplaying’ I was playing them with other kids with me reading and them choosing what to do. After that it was the orange *Fighting Fantasy* for making and running your own games and that was it, I was hooked. My first proper game was *MERP* which, on

reflection, may not have been the best starting point but I’ve been gaming ever since.

I always wanted to do something creative, whether it was in games or comics—my two great childhood loves. Back then it seemed like a viable career so I kept at it, playing and creating and eventually putting my ideas to paper, initially in some cheap photocopied fanzines and completely unofficial, amateur and illegal fan bits and pieces for *Cyberpunk*, published as *Dead Hamster Games* and sold at *GamesFair* and *GenCon UK*. Unsurprisingly that didn’t really lead anywhere but me and my friend Steve thought we’d give it one last ‘hurrah’ and pestered every single games company in existence with our ideas, eventually getting our proper break back in ‘99 with *The Munchkin’s Guide to Powergaming*. Since then I haven’t really looked back.

PDM:

Which product of your own are you most pleased with?

GRIM:

That’s a tough one. I like all of them for different reasons—otherwise I wouldn’t do them in the first place. That’s the nice thing about publishing for yourself. I can’t limit it to just one, so I’m going to pick three.

Blood! for the detective skills it took to sort that out. Hentacle for it's amazing success despite all the strikes against it. I only made it on a bet! Lastly... I think @ctiv8, because it was sort of prescient of things like Wikileaks and Anonymous and because it was liberating to make an overtly political game.

PDM:

What game or games do you most enjoy playing, and which do you most enjoy refereeing?

GRIM:

I'm never entirely happy unless I'm the Games Master, that's always been my role and that's the side of the table I'm most comfortable on. When I do play I like something I can get my emotional teeth into most of the time so I tend to like modern horror or investigative games. I so rarely get to play that it's hard to pick games that I enjoy playing but I'd probably pick out Call of Cthulhu, Mage (Second Edition oWoD, accept no substitute) and Cyberpunk, which I always loved.

When I'm GMing... well, I'm a system whore, so I'll run anything. I enjoy running my own games in playtesting because there's a thrill when something

works that you don't get playing other people's games. Still, I loved GMing Kult, Unknown Armies, Cyberpunk, Old World of Darkness, Legend of the Five Rings and SLA Industries, many of which we had epic campaigns in.

Now that I'm getting some more regular gaming going again I'm itching to run Solomon Kane, Legends of Anglerre and Starblazer Adventures.

PDM:

How has the internet and social networks impacted your work and your business?

GRIM:

My business as it exists now wouldn't be there if not for the internet. I sell my personal work primarily via electronic means, I submit freelancing via the internet. I hire artists and receive their submissions via the internet. I shudder when I think what things must have been like before.

Social networks have been a boon, helping me meet new people, find new talent, get work and stay in touch with a lot of people at once as well as promoting my stuff to people who are genuinely interested. On the flipside of that it can also often be a distraction though, to be honest,

I generally find that to be a help too since my brain is almost always zooming around at nineteen to the dozen.

PDM:

Where does the inspiration for new products come from? How much does the current "feeling" from social networks affect product decisions?

GRIM:

It can be anything really. I just write down every wild idea and intention I have as they come to me. Can be dreams, television, books or film (or more likely frustration with those). It can be idle discussion with friends or a 'what if' daydream. I'll sometimes throw my random ideas out on Twitter or Facebook and see if they get a reaction or, often, other ideas will come from things other people talk about or link to that gets my brain going.

PDM:

How much do you use freelancers and how does their use impact your product's budget?

GRIM:

I hardly ever use other writers, if I do it's generally for shorter pieces or ideas that I don't like to put together myself, or



@ctiv8 is a modern conspiracy game, where the players are the members of the conspiracy. A cross between Mission Impossible, Global Frequency, Wikileaks and Anonymous the players take the parts of specialists from around the globe, activists who want to take direct action to make the world a better place. A mysterious computer program, existing through distributed filesharing technology, connects people with causes together and helps them get the ball rolling. One game you might be hunting down a paedophile ring in Eastern Europe, another you might be breaking into a warehouse to replace a shipment of Bibles with ration packs for a disaster area.

You might break into a government facility to steal a vaccine or hack into a bank and redistribute their bonuses to their most indebted accounts, you might even assassinate former presidents to show that nobody is immune to the consequences of their actions or the commission of war crimes.

You don't play one character for every session that you play, rather you and the other players create a roster of characters with specialist skills, knowledge and outlooks that can be drawn upon according to the needs of a particular mission.

Adventures? All you need for inspiration is to watch the evening news...

For Protodimension Magazine readers only: @ctiv8 for US\$1.00 at RPGNow: Use this URL:

<http://www.rpgnow.com/index.php?discount=16783>

the 'heavy lifting' on jobs I find a bit more tedious. Artists I use constantly though. I keep my budget as low as possible but always try to include some original, new art. I want work writing, so it makes sense that I give people work doing art. Since I do practically everything else myself, the money spent on freelancers is pretty much my whole budget—other than time.

PDM:

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our queries.



(Apart from **@ctiv8**, Grim's portfolio includes the 100 Series (books of 100 plot seeds), **BLOOD!**, and the free **Neverwhere** game based on Neil Gaiman's work. Grim also markets artwork from such luminaries as Bradley K McDevitt. He lives in the southwest of England where he acts as servitor for a cat.)

The Container

Witchcraft Fiction
By Kevin Dawson

3:35PM, Sunday, April 23rd
North Olympic National Park,
Washington

The afternoon sun shone down on a dirt access road with a lightly treed meadow off to one side and a thicker forested hill to the other. Distant thunder warned of a storm headed this direction. A state patrol car pulled up next to a green and white, state park truck on the side of the road. Two officers stepped out into the cold breeze and joined two park rangers at the front of their vehicle.

The taller, older, male officer shook hands with the grey haired ranger, “Gentlemen, I’m Officer Turner and this is my partner Officer Crawford.” The younger female officer nodded in greeting. Officer Turner looked to be in his mid thirties or fit, early forties with short-cropped dark hair, and wore the air of a man used to authority. By contrast Crawford looked newer to the job. The kind of new that made the uniform look less than comfortable. Even if she wasn’t obviously a lot younger, it would have been easy to see who was training who.

The older of the two rangers gave a tight-lipped smile, “I’m Dan Riley and this is Carlos Rodriguez.” The younger Hispanic man leaned forward and shook hands as

well. Riley was all grey hair and weathered skin. Despite obviously being the oldest of the present company, he was light on his feet and full of vitality. A six o’clock shadow of grey facial hair and a beat up baseball cap with the North Olympic National Park logo on it placed him firmly in the good ol’ boy class. Like Officer Crawford, Rodriguez was obviously the recruit. Clean shaven and a great deal less aged, he at least seemed to have a more comfortable uniform.

Officer Turner continued, “It was a hell of a drive out here so I hope this is more than just a squatter.” He ran his hands through his own lightly graying hair as he took in the scenery.

Riley pulled a piece of paper from his jacket pocket and unfolded it. “No sir, we’ve got two separate accounts by local hikers. The first was an out-of-state couple who reported hearing terrible screaming from the cabin.” He looked down at the piece of paper. “... it was as if someone were being tortured to death... That was this morning at about eleven. Then about noon a local fellow swore he saw a dead woman hanging from a tree not far from the cabin.” He handed the paper to the officer as Carlos looked uncomfortable. “That’s when you were called. The fellow that lives in the cabin is a man named Delbert Johnson.

He's leasing the cabin through the summer and has a wife and kids staying with him. I've talked with him once or twice during my rounds and he seems like a nice enough guy."

Officer Turner looked over the very unofficial report and handed it to his partner. They had already run the name on the way up here and it had come up clean. "Do any of you have any training with firearms?"

Carlos professed to only having used guns for hunting. Riley said, "I did some time in Nam."

Officer Turner thought for moment before giving instructions. "Alright, Mr. Riley, I'll want you to circle wide around the back of the cabin and watch to make sure no one bolts. Mr. Rodriguez, you go with him and spread out a bit, but keep Mr. Riley in sight. No side-arms out of the holster unless you're in immediate danger. We still don't know what the situation is and there might be a reasonable explanation for everything." He looked at the barely discernible road leading into the forest and then at his cruiser. "Can we drive the cruiser up there?"

Riley pondered the road, "You'd be better off in my truck. For that matter we'd all be better off until we get closer to the

cabin. It's about two miles back, and this road ain't so good in spots."

At that point they all turned to see a blue sedan coming up the main road. It pulled in behind the patrol cruiser and everybody watched as a sharply dressed younger man stepped out and walked towards them. He had brown hair, green eyes and a clean shaven, angular face. He wore an expensive looking leather coat over a grey, designer suit, white shirt and black tie. His black dress shoes were about as shiny as Officer Turner's badge. Turner noticed the government plates and the slight bulge under the man's left arm. That combined with the "official" look on the younger man's face cinched it. The Bureau was here and he was about to be outranked.



**One and a half hours earlier, same day
Buck Rogers Coffee House, Downtown
Northport.**

The same sharply dressed young man was sitting at a window table enjoying a mocha cappuccino while reading one of his favorite local rags, a "newsletter" called the X-paper. He was busy being mildly amused by a story on the recent disappearance

of a fishing boat from Northport harbor. Apparently there had been numerous reports of sea monster sightings in the area where the boat went missing. One old fisherman who chose to remain unnamed, go figure that, told of a close encounter with the beast. According to his report the beast had one large eye and might have...

"Da Da Daaa Da Da Dummmm..."

The theme song to the Godfather sang out its tinny announcement from the man's coat pocket. He briefly tried to continue reading before realizing what that particular ring tone meant and hastily reaching for his phone. He quickly composed himself before flipping it open and placing it to his ear with a monotone. "Yes."

A man with a similarly even voice spoke on the other end, "Duty calls." a short pause, "Are you available?"

Even shorter pause, really just enough to be considered a pause, "Of course."

".. Nice to hear. Pay for your drink and drive towards North Olympic National Park. You've got a long drive ahead of you and I want you there quickly. I'll explain while you're driving."

He tossed the paper down on the table while quickly scanning the room, "I al-

ready paid for my drink, or didn't you notice?" He turned and headed out the door. The grey street was packed with cars and pedestrians hurrying back to their bicycles from lunch. He shouldered into his coat, switched the phone to his left ear and walked towards his blue sedan as the man continued his instructions.

"Take Highway 14 to the park's west entrance. From there you're looking for a park road... 313. It'll be on your left about 2 miles in. Once on that road look for a ranger's vehicle and a state patrol car. Unless both are there... keep driving, you'll need them both. Turn around and head back to the turnoff and wait till the patrol car arrives. Once they're both there, wait a few minutes and then join them."

He was negotiating downtown traffic on his way to the freeway now. "How will they feel about me..."joining" them?"

"The local police are never comfortable with the FBI..."

He smirked to himself, "But it's federal land and I, being the FBI agent that I am, have a great reason right?"

Another pause, "Yes... you do. A man named Delbert Johnson has acquired something he shouldn't have. He's living in

the cabin you're headed towards. Tell the police whatever you want, but make sure you accompany them and help them in dealing with whatever they find. Number one priority is to retrieve the container."

"Container?"

"We're not sure of its exact nature, but it will probably be small enough to carry easily. You'll know it by its essence signature. Keep your shields up when handling it, close it if it's open and bring it to this address... 4156 W. 34th Street. Got all that?"

"Yes sir."

"Click."

"Pleasure talking to you too, we'll have lunch some time."

The drive was boring, but the traffic was light heading out of the city. As luck would have it, he spotted the state patrol car just as it was turning into the park entrance. He waited a few minutes and then followed. The side road was right where it was supposed to be.

As he turned onto the uneven dirt road he began to concentrate. Essence gathered and he quickly made the necessary gestures and spoke the invocation. Both license plates on his car subtly altered their ap-

pearance. The numbers and letters grew fuzzy and rearranged themselves. Small letters spelling out "U.S. Government" appeared in place of the standard "Washington" that had been there. Next he flipped open his wallet on the seat beside him. In the little sleeve where his license was, a faded but official looking FBI identification card appeared. Lastly a shiny gold badge suddenly came into being at his belt. He checked his hair in the rearview mirror and had to make a quick correction on the steering before he veered off the road.

"Never cast and drive," he chuckled at his own stupid joke.

The patrol car and park truck came into view around the next bend. As he eased his very non-off road car in behind the cruiser he gathered a bit more essence and worked a touch more magic, this time augmenting his aura to exude confidence and authority. The illusory plates, badge and ID would probably be more than sufficient, but the aura would keep any of them from even thinking to check authenticity. Now he just had to move things along before his illusions began to fade. Whatever waited up at the cabin would probably require more magic, and he couldn't really afford to expend more of himself before then.

As he stepped out of the car he felt it right away. The distance was too far to get specifics, but there was a large collection of essence from the deeper woods to the right of the road. A rough set of wheel ruts led off into the trees nearby. It was a hunch, but he guessed the cabin was down that road.

“Officers, gentlemen, who’s in charge here?” Mitchell was almost in awe of himself, they didn’t have a chance.

Turner met his eyes and said, “I’m guessing you are now.” The others seemed willing to let him do the talking.

His face remained stern, “That’s correct officer...” He looked at Turner’s ID pin, “... Turner. I am now in charge.” He flipped open his wallet while hitching his coat to the side to show the “badge”. He made sure to keep the ID open until they stopped looking. “I’m Agent Mitchell. Delbert Johnson is wanted in a federal matter.” he glanced up the narrow road, “Has anyone gone up already?”

Officer Turner shook his head, “No, we just arrived and were discussing how best to approach. Can you tell us anything about the suspect?”

‘Mitchell’s’ thoughts raced, “I’m not at liberty to say much... What did your computers tell you?” He put an extra dose of authority into his voice as he asked the question.

It seemed to work as Turner answered without a trace of suspicion, “He’s got a clean record, like I’m sure you already know. What I want to know is if he’s dangerous?”

Mitchell looked at Officer Crawford and the apprehension was clear on her face. Something about this call was making her nervous. The younger, Hispanic ranger was also showing signs of stress. It might have been the essence exuding from the cabin, but he didn’t think a mundane would be feeling it from so far. “I don’t know what Mr. Johnson is involved in up at that cabin, but if it was peaceful, would the park service have called the state troopers in?” He grimaced, “Would I be here?”

After that they seemed to accept that Agent Mitchell had no secrets that he was going to reveal. Officer Turner filled him in on their plan and he agreed with it, stating that he would take a flanking position once at the cabin. Turner grabbed the shotgun from the cruiser, they all piled into the blazer and Riley drove up the road and into the shadow of the trees. “U.S. Government”

morphed back into “Washington” as thunder boomed a little closer this time.



Dan Riley crouched low behind a twelve inch tree trunk, the smell of pine sap strong in his nose. About fifteen feet away Carlos was in a similar position behind his own tree. There was a little too much white showing in the young man’s eyes and his hand kept straying towards the nine millimeter at his hip. Riley made a note to keep a close eye on Mr. Rodriguez. They were both about fifty feet from the backside of Delbert Johnson’s cabin, having moved quietly into position just a few moments ago. He could just make out a four-foot high stack of cut firewood and a low window on the back wall of the cabin. There was no back door.

Agent Mitchell parted ways with Officers Turner and Crawford as they neared the cabin. Several large, fallen trees lay across the path leading up to the front door. A rusty axe was buried in one of the trees. As the two state troopers approached the front door, Mitchell circled around the right side and crouched down in the brush with his .45 out. He could clearly see a strange essence hanging like a heavy aura about

the cabin. Gathering a bit more essence he called forth a protective shield against both physical and magical damage. A slightly transparent suit of magical body armor encased his torso. He watched as Officer Turner stepped up onto the low porch.

As Turner stepped up he could clearly see a length of rope and a wide, dark red stain on the pine boards. He quickly pumped a shell into the shotgun he had brought from the cruiser and stepped up to the side of the front door. Officer Crawford saw the rope and stain next. She drew her nine millimeter and aimed it at the door from about twenty feet back.

Turner made sure that his partner was ready before knocking twice on the door and shouting, "Mr. Johnson, this is the State Police!"

The leaves in the trees rustled as the wind picked up momentarily. A deep, loud, angry voice answered back from within, "GO AWAY! We don't wish ta be dishturbed!"

Turner exchanged a glance with Crawford. Despite the slurring of words, there was something else odd about Mr. Johnson's voice. It was unnaturally deep. He considered the possibility that the suspect might be on drugs of some sort.

Riley heard the exchange well enough from his own position and the hairs on his neck prickled. He looked over to find Carlos had pulled his weapon and was visibly shaking. He began to motion to Carlos to put his gun away but then realized he'd rather join him in the action. His own grip was a little moist on his .357 as he watched the window.

Mitchell was watching the side window that he guessed looked in on the bedroom. The essence seeping from the cabin was making his pulse race slightly. He could just make out the two park rangers crouching in the brush behind the cabin. If the situation was affecting him this way, he was guessing the others were highly on edge by now. A small face appeared at the window. It was a little boy with blonde hair. He seemed to be scanning the brush and Mitchell had to stop himself from ducking. Movement would be worse than his slightly exposed position while the child was actively searching.

Officer Turner steadied his nerve and called out again, "Mr. Johnson I need you to come outside right now!"

"I shaid GO AWAY! Yer Dishturbing ush!"

Turner reached forward and slowly rotated the handle on the door. It wasn't locked and he pushed it inward while sweeping the room with his shotgun. The living area was approximately twenty feet by forty feet. A futon couch, small table with four chairs and a wood-burning stove cramped up the walking space. A door in the right wall looked to lead to a bedroom. He could see partially into the left door and the kitchen beyond. The only light came from the now open front door, the kitchen window, and the sliver of illumination that made its way through the heavy drapes on the large window next to the door.

Riley motioned for Carlos to stay put and started to duck-walk towards the back of the cabin. He chanced a whisper before leaving his position, "Don't you point that thing in my direction." He was headed for the window as Carlos nodded.

Mitchell watched the window on his side slide up and the little boy hopped nimbly to the sill and dropped down to the ground. He thought the move to be oddly fluid and graceful for a boy of four or five years old. He edged closer through the brush. The sound of his passage effectively hidden by the steadily increasing wind moving in the trees overhead. Still, he had taken no more than five or six steps when



the boy's head swung around. As their eyes locked the little boy's visage smoothly morphed into a hideous, tooth filled grin and then back again. The thing that was obviously more than a child whispered something in an unfamiliar tongue and began to lope towards him in a completely unchildlike fashion.

Officer Crawford had now taken up a cover position at the front door threshold as Turner sidestepped across the left side of the living room. He could hear muffled crunching sounds coming from the bedroom. As he neared the kitchen he spotted a smear of blood on the wall and floor. "Mr. Johnson, this is your last chance to come out. Put your hands where I can see them and step out of the room!"

There was movement at the bedroom door as Turner began to squeeze the trigger of his shotgun. A little girl of maybe ten years of age stepped out with a tear streaked face. His finger relaxed as his heart skipped a beat. What the hell was the problem with him? Had Crawford seen how close he came to blowing away a little girl? He looked quickly at her and then back at the child.

The girl didn't step away from the bedroom door as she said in a tear choked voice, "Daddy says to go away. He don't

want company right now and you're making him angry." Before either of the officers could reply she had stepped back into the darkened room and out of sight.

'Shit!' Turner thought to himself. 'If he's got kids in there this could get really bad. Where's Agent Mitchell anyway?' He stood irresolute with shotgun pointing towards the floor.

Outside Riley had just made his way to the woodpile. He edged to a position under the window and glanced to make sure Carlos was still in place. His aged back protested somewhat at all the crouching. Slowly he turned and eased upward, his leg muscles straining as he peered into the window.

At first it was too dark to make out anything. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust. When they did, his first thought was one of confusion. Something sat on a double bed in the middle of the small room, bringing up the mattress edges with its weight. A long, distorted line of bare flesh with a row of knobby bumps was all there was. As his mind pieced together the image his jaw dropped and he stifled a scream. It was a back. A monstrous back and two massive, muscle bound shoulders. Unable to turn away or even close his eyes, he watched in stupefied horror as the thing

turned towards the door and revealed more of its naked self.

One shoulder was slightly bigger than the other and its head seemed to jut from the front of the torso more than from the top. Its arms were ape-like and ended in thick-wristed hands the size of basketballs. In one hand, the thing held a shredded human leg, the femur bone glistening whitely. It raised the bloody appendage to its razor-toothed mouth and Riley saw that the thing had no nose or ears and a heavy brow that hid its eyes in shadow. He was dimly aware of a second, smaller creature perched atop a dresser next to the door. If either had looked towards the window he would not have been able to move or defend himself in any way. Tears formed and ran unstopped down his face.

As the little boy-monster raced towards him, Mitchell summoned the essence necessary to attack. "A fíriel! Manen Usintaráca indonya!" A jet of pulsating blue fire raced from his outstretched left hand towards the charging creature. It was clear the creature saw the blast, erasing any last doubt that what he faced was a mundane child. The creature jumped high into the air in an attempt to dodge the soulfire but the energy clipped its outstretched leg, cartwheeling its small body. The blue fire raced



up its torso quicker than the eye could follow, engulfing the thing and causing it to cry out in high-pitched screams of agony. It hit the ground and writhed at Mitchell's feet, alternately looking like a small boy then a hideous, deformed creature.

'Crap! I'm losing it!' thought Turner as he took a step backward to better scan the kitchen. At that point he nearly did lose it. A female torso with only a head lay in a thick pool of arterial blood in the center of the tile floor. Her hair was a slightly darker blonde than the little girl's. Bloody rags that might have been a blue blouse and skirt lay crumpled on the counter. The entire kitchen was splattered with tiny drops of blood from floor to ceiling. Turner felt a wave of nausea sweep through him and had to brace one hand against the door jam. In barely more than a strained whisper he said, "Crawford... call it in, get back up."

Crawford kept her gun trained on the bedroom doorway. She could tell something had just changed by her partner's face. Her heart sped up as she reached for her com unit at her shoulder, "This is 4320 requesting back up. Repeat, we need backup immediat..."

There was a blur of movement from the bedroom doorway. Crawford saw blonde hair and hesitated a moment. Turner just

started to bring up his shotgun as the creature that had been a little girl bounced off the floor and hurtled into his face, sharp teeth clacking together mere inches from his throat. Somehow he managed to interpose the shotgun crosswise between himself and the hissing thing and push it off and to the ground. Crawford screamed and took a panicky shot that embedded itself into the log eight inches above her partner's head. Both officers froze as the goblinoid girl scuttled away from Turner and hopped nimbly onto the futon.

From the bedroom came the deep voice, "NO PEASH, NO PEASH, MUST HAVE PEASH, AAARRRGHHHH!"

Riley's limbs finally thawed as the grotesque giant levered its massive frame up from the bed. Without really thinking he scrambled around the side of the cabin, first on all fours and then in a low run.

He was dimly aware that he was whispering, "...who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." Forget the fact that he hadn't seen the inside of a church in thirty years.

As he came around the corner he saw Agent Mitchell put a round into something that was squirming and screaming in the brush at the FBI agent's feet. He had to blink and wipe away the tears to be sure he really saw what he thought he saw. Some

sort of military body armor made of glowing material was strapped onto Mitchell's body, arms and legs. He closed his eyes tight and shook his head as if to clear it, his gun clenched deathly tight in his hand. None of this could be freakin' real!

The cabin shuttered and the bedroom wall nearest Riley and Mitchell cracked and splintered. One of the fifteen-inch logs that made up the wall was torn inwards causing the logs above it to collapse down, knocking the window frame free and shattering glass. This was enough to bring Riley back into action, as he stumbled away from the building and towards the strangely glowing FBI agent. Mitchell whispered "Vantela tier, pella firima" and the mystic armor seemed to gain more solidity as he jogged towards the porch. From behind the cabin Carlos kept screaming, "Dan, are you alright?!, Dan, are you ALRIGHT?!"

Dan Riley wasn't answering.

Both Turner and Crawford aimed and fired at the girl/monster on the futon right after the splintering wall gave way in the bedroom. With amazing speed it jumped high and twisted away from both shotgun blast and pistol shot. The buckshot made a loud PINGING as it ricocheted off the wood stove. Turner was pumping another shell into the chamber as two things hap-



pened simultaneously. The goblin girl again launched itself at his face and the giant thing that used to be Delbert Johnson squeezed its bulk through the narrow bedroom door, dragging a splinter-ended log in its meaty fist.

“HOLYSHITHOLYSHITHOLYSHIT!” Crawford went nuts and tripped over the door lintel backwards, landing hard on her backside. This only stopped her for as long as it took to twist and crawl just like a very fast infant off the porch.

Turner was whimpering too, although he was able to bring his shotgun up and shoot with wild eyes. Unfortunately for him, he missed the giant thing and instead put a hole in the ceiling boards that rained material down on its head. Its beady eyes focused on him and he began to inch towards the front door while pumping another round.

So intent was his focus on the giant that he almost lost his throat to the smaller creature. Again he used the shotgun to deflect the attack, but this time he felt a searing pain under his jaw and up to his ear as the goblin’s talons dug into the flesh of his neck. Blood sprayed from the wound as the creature bounced from his chest and clung to the wall like a monkey. Turner clutched his throat with one hand while aiming with

the other. He was about to squeeze the trigger when his world turned upside down.

The giant’s makeshift club smashed into his shoulder and torso with terrific force. He felt bones snap as his body spun and slammed into the wall, coming to rest on its side. All was grey and red as his vision swam. The girl-goblin screeched with laughter and advanced.

Riley was now operating purely on adrenaline. His mind shut out everything but the feel of the gun in his hand and the action taking place in the cabin. He watched Officer Crawford half crawl, half fall off the porch, babbling incoherently. There was a horrible tittering laughter coming from inside and no sign of Officer Turner. Maybe it was the sight of a woman in distress or maybe he was just crazy, but he was up on the porch before he realized it, smashing out the living room window with the butt of his Desert Eagle. Mitchell was right behind him, .45 leveled at the front door.

Both men were nearly knocked off the porch as the giant kicked the front door off its hinges and emerged from the cabin, bellowing and growling with fury, log raised high. It was completely naked and quite hairy. Red tinged spittle flew from its

mouth as it swung its head wildly from side to side.

Crawford had somehow kept hold of her gun while scrambling away. She turned to judge the distance between herself and that thing, just in time to see her partner cartwheel into the wall and slump to the floor. That proved enough to snap her out of her blind panic. As the Giant emerged from the cabin, she got to her knees and steadied her shaking wrist for a shot. The loud report of a 9mm rang out twice. Two holes appeared in the creature’s torso and its head swung in her direction. The panic started to reassert itself as the giant leapt off the porch and towards her with surprising dexterity.

Some of the deck boards buckled under the weight of the giant. Riley had a hard time keeping his feet and fell hard into the outer wall of the cabin. Using the wall to steady himself he raised his gun and fired into the back of the leaping creature. A much larger hole appeared in its shoulder, causing its arm to spasm and its powerful swing to go over the head of Officer Crawford.

She rolled and fired two more shots from a prone position, each entering the giant’s stomach and causing it to shudder. With five gunshot wounds that would have been deadly to a human, the beast raised its club



high into the air, intent on crushing Officer Crawford into a bloody pulp.

“CRACK, CRACK!” Twice more gunshots rang out. The giant’s head snapped to the right with each shot and blood and flesh spit out from the left. Mitchell, just five feet behind the giant, lowered his .45 as the creature fell hard across the legs of Officer Crawford. He spared a quick, reassuring smile before loping up to the porch and into the cabin.

Just inside the door, Turner was still conscious, and desperately resisting the smaller creature’s attempts to rip out his throat. His left arm was all but useless and it was just a matter of moments before the creature won. Suddenly its weight was gone and his head was filled with a horrible ringing as Mitchell fired two point blank shots. The goblin-thing skidded to a rest at the door to the kitchen, half of its head no more than a red smear.

Somewhere outside Carlos Rodriguez’ shrill screams could be heard dwindling into the forest.

While Officer Crawford and Riley tended to Turner’s extensive injuries on the porch, Mitchell searched the cabin. He spent some time tearing apart the bedroom before finding what he sought in

the kitchen sink. It was a painted bronze pyramid about nine inches tall. The top six inches comprised the lid and was lying next to the base in the bloody sink. The essence was thickest around the container. It flowed around his shields as if seeking a crack by which to enter. He gently lifted the lid and fitted it back into place. He ran water from the tap and cleaned the blood from its surface before carefully wrapping it in a towel from the cupboard.

Stepping out onto the porch, he took a moment to appreciate the gentle rain that had begun to fall. He knelt next to Riley and looked at Turner, “Will he make it?”

Officer Crawford didn’t look up from her work, “Life Flight’s on its way. We’ve done what we can for him, but there may be internal injuries.”

Both Crawford and Riley had the look of functioning shock victims with pasty complexions and shaking hands. Neither of them even glanced at the towel wrapped package.

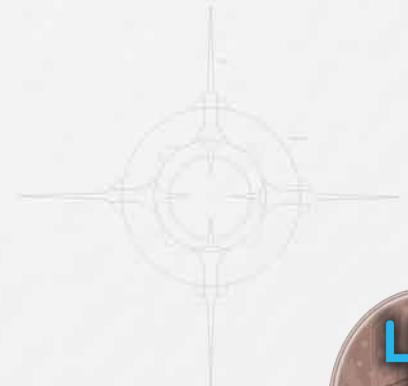
He stood up and walked down to the once-giant Delbert Johnson. Sometime during the search of the cabin, Mr. Johnson had transformed back to his normal form. The wounds to his head made his features

unrecognizable. He looked very pathetic lying naked in the dirt.

“I’m gonna go see if I can find our friend Mr. Rodriguez.”

They didn’t even look up.

With the container tucked under his arm, “Agent Mitchell” walked down the road towards his car. He had a drop off to make downtown, and traffic this time of night could be dangerous.



Canadian Content

In Dark Conspiracy the United States is detailed just enough to wet your whistle and set the stage for GM's to build upon. Being a true blue Canadian I normally run my games with a Canadian feel, running games in my surrounding areas and introducing some Canadian myths and legends into the fold which makes the game my own.

Listed here are three creatures of Canadian Myth and Legend (which I have taken liberties with as well).

INUNNGUAQ

These mysterious stone figures known as innunguaq can be found dotted throughout the land, they are often mistakenly called Inukshuk. Inunnguaq are stones set up to appear man-like. These stone monuments at one time were used for communication and survival, often marking a trail and letting others know that someone was here. Though this is not the case, according to myths and legends these represent powerful guardians that emerge to protect the land and its people

Now Inunnguaq's have been imbued with magic by native shamans to become animated rock beast, usually as guardians or protectors. These protectors grow to 4 meters tall.



Strength:	22	Education:	2	Move:	2/10/15/20
Constitution:	24	Charisma:	1	Skill/Dam:	5/5d6
Agility:	5	Empathy:	1	Hits:	30/60
Intelligence:	2	Initiative:	4	# Appear:	1

Northern Dark Races
By Tim Bisailon
For Dark Conspiracy®

SKINWALKERS (HUMAN FORM)

Strength:	*	Education:	*	Move:	*
Constitution:	*	Charisma:	*	Skill/Dam:	*
Agility:	*	Empathy:	*	Hits:	*
Intelligence:	*	Initiative:	*	# Appear:	D6

*As per human stats

SKINWALKERS (BEAST FORM)

#Appear:	D6	Initiative:	*	Agility:	*
Attack:	*	Strength:	*	Skill/Dam:	*
Move:	*	Constitution:	*	Hits:	*

* As per the target animal

Among the native cultures in North America there are legends of people turning into animal form to flee the horrors of war. People would shred their skin when they shapeshift into animal form which allowed them to blend into their surroundings; deer, foxes, bears and wolves are the most popular forms. Skinwalkers are not were-creatures but are often mistaken for them since they can shapeshift into the form of an animal. However, they must be wearing a pelt of the animal to be able to transform.

WINDIGO

Strength:	14	Education:	1	Move:	2/8/15/30
Constitution:	15	Charisma:	1	Skill/Dam:	6/6d6
Agility:	9	Empathy:	2	Hits:	30/60
Intelligence:	4	Initiative:	5	# Appear:	1

Windigo are solitary creatures. They stand 4 meters tall resembling a mutated kodiak bear with a lipless mouth and razor sharp teeth. These creatures have claws the size of short swords. Their breath has a strange static hiss like an old time radio, so when things go quiet and this strange noise is heard all around one can be sure that this creature is nearby. A Windigo leaves footprints full of blood, constantly on the search for anyone to eat since they are always hungry. Sometimes, the Windigo chooses to possess a person instead, and then the luckless individual becomes a Windigo himself, hunting down those he had once loved and feasting upon their flesh.

FRIENDLY FIRE

A Mekong Delta Adventure for
3 to 6 Players



A Mekong Delta Adventure
By Peter Bowkett
For Call of Cthulhu®

KEEPER-ONLY SYNOPSIS:

The characters are American soldiers during the Vietnam conflict (1965-1975). They are separated from their unit, at night and during a monsoon. One of the characters, the radio operator, receives orders for the party to proceed to a friendly village for extraction by a Huey 'slick' (unarmed). On the way to the village the party will not be molested by any Viet Cong (VC) forces, however they will encounter several booby traps.

At the village the player characters will be welcomed with open arms. Unfortunately, the village is in fact a VC stronghold, riddled with tunnels and bolt-holes. Within the tunnels, the VC conceal a terrible secret—they are attempting to use the Mythos to defeat the imperialist American and allied forces.

PLAYER'S INTRODUCTION

After an uneventful patrol in terrible weather the PC's platoon is preparing to be extracted from a landing zone (L.Z.) when a hidden VC force opens fire across the clearing. The player characters are forced to find cover straight away.

After the ambush the rest of the PC's unit will be either safe or dead. The radio opera-

tor will receive instructions to proceed on foot to a nearby village which is said to be under friendly control.

JOURNEY TO THE VILLAGE

The journey is not entirely without incident...

ENCOUNTER #1-PUNGI STAKES

The character on 'point' must make a *Spot Hidden* roll, if successful he will see this trap before he steps upon it. However, if he fails and steps on the trap he must make a *Luck* roll, and if this fails he will take 1d6+1 damage and make a CON vs 3d6 *Disease Resistance* roll. If the point man misses the *Spot Hidden* but makes his *Luck* roll, he does not fall into the trap, but then the second character must run through the sequence and so on.

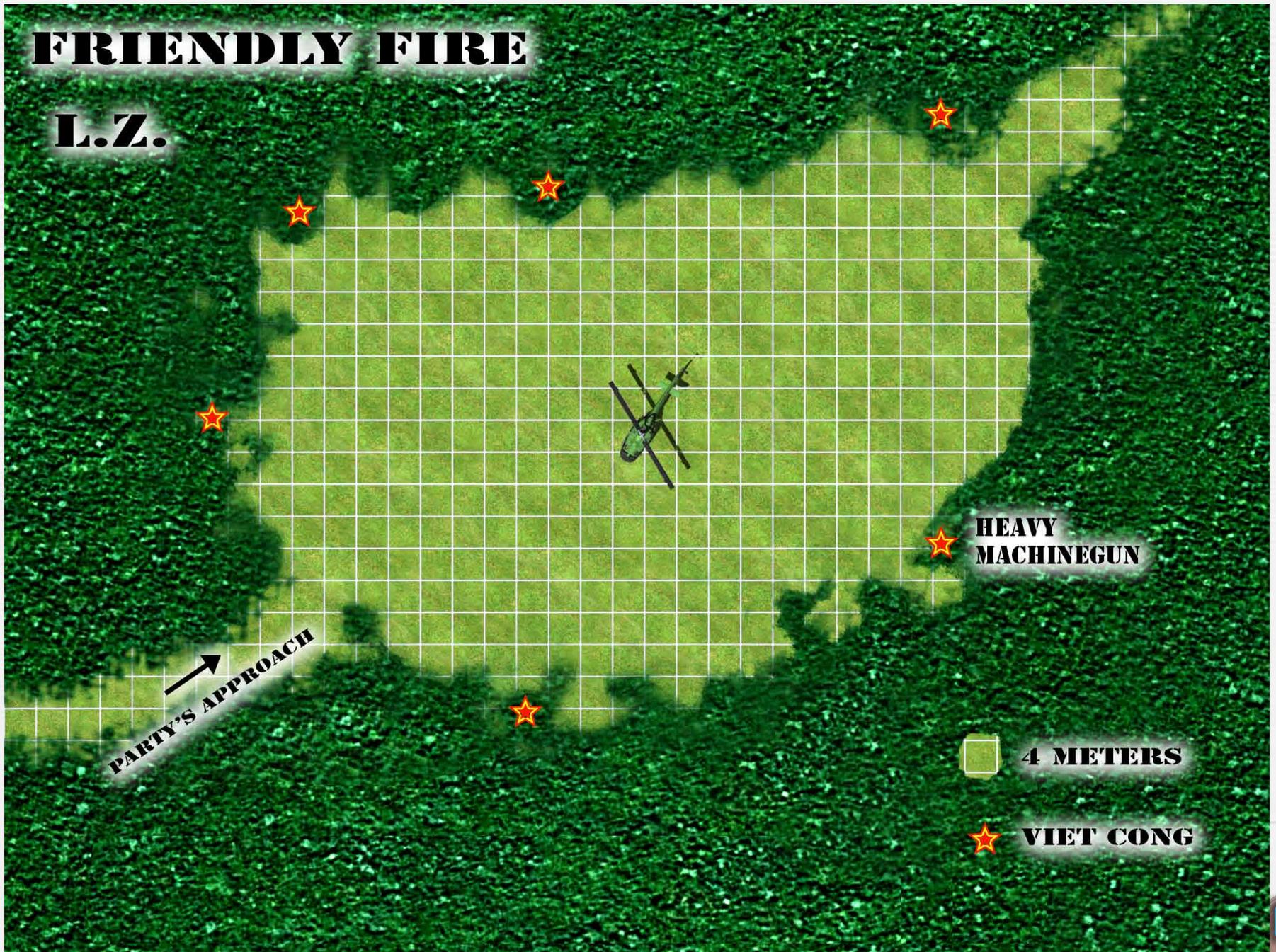
ENCOUNTER #2-GRENADE TRAP

Unless the lead character makes a successful *Spot Hidden* roll he will set this trap off, causing panic as the pin flies from the grenade...fortunately it is only a smoke grenade, set up years before to warn the original Viet Minh of approaching French troops.



FRIENDLY FIRE

L.Z.



HEAVY
MACHINEGUN

PARTY'S APPROACH

4 METERS

VIET CONG



ENCOUNTER #3-THE VILLAGE

When the party finally arrives at the village, the local elder greets them warmly. Any minor wounds are tended to, and food and drink are supplied. An empty hooch at the edge of the village is provided for the party to rest inside.

'It's so quiet here'

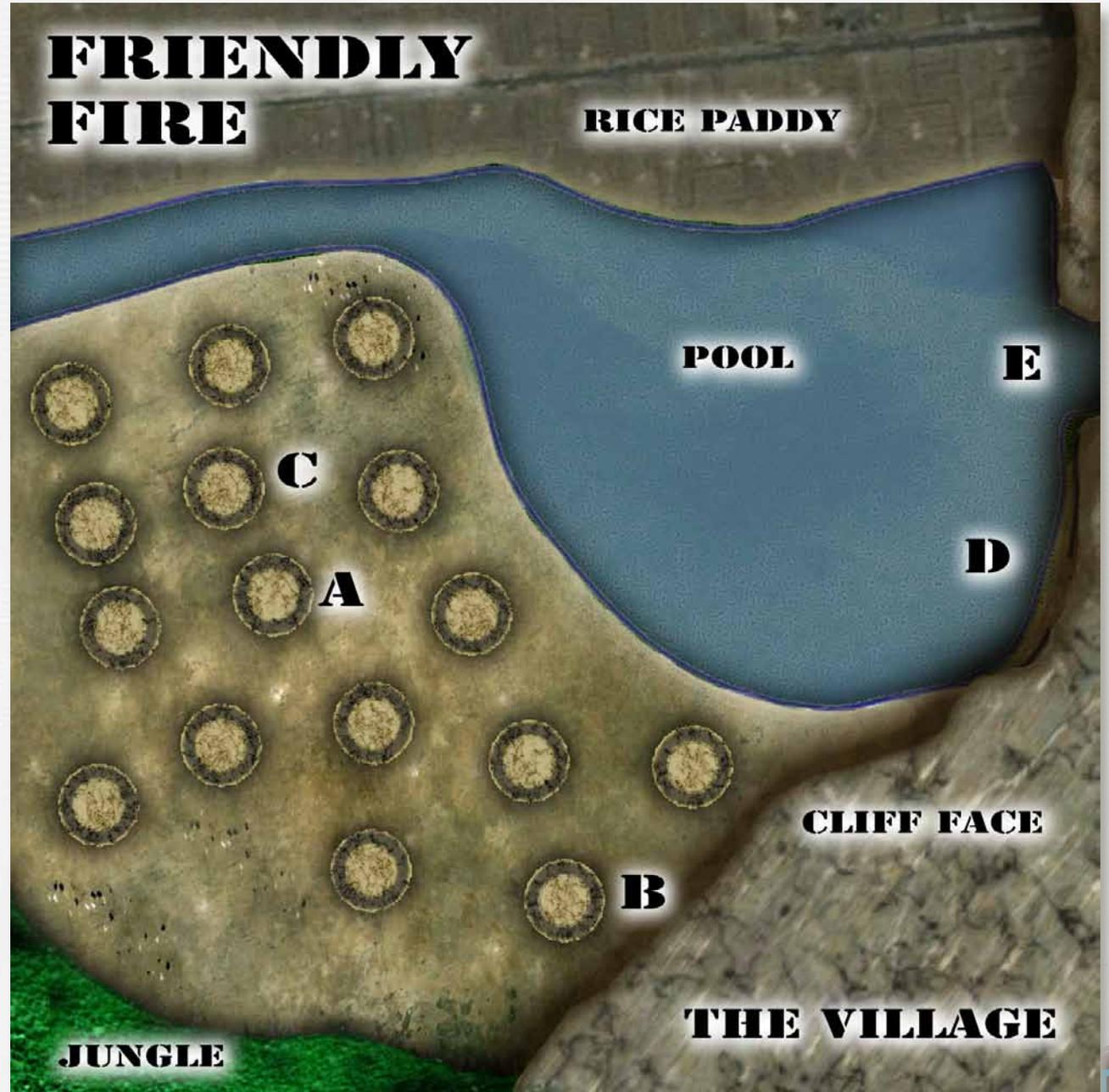
The following morning, the party may want to have a look around the village. The people seem very quiet but are not hostile and do not obstruct the party's tour of the area. It seems like they have nothing to hide...or maybe they aren't worried about the PCs for some other reason?

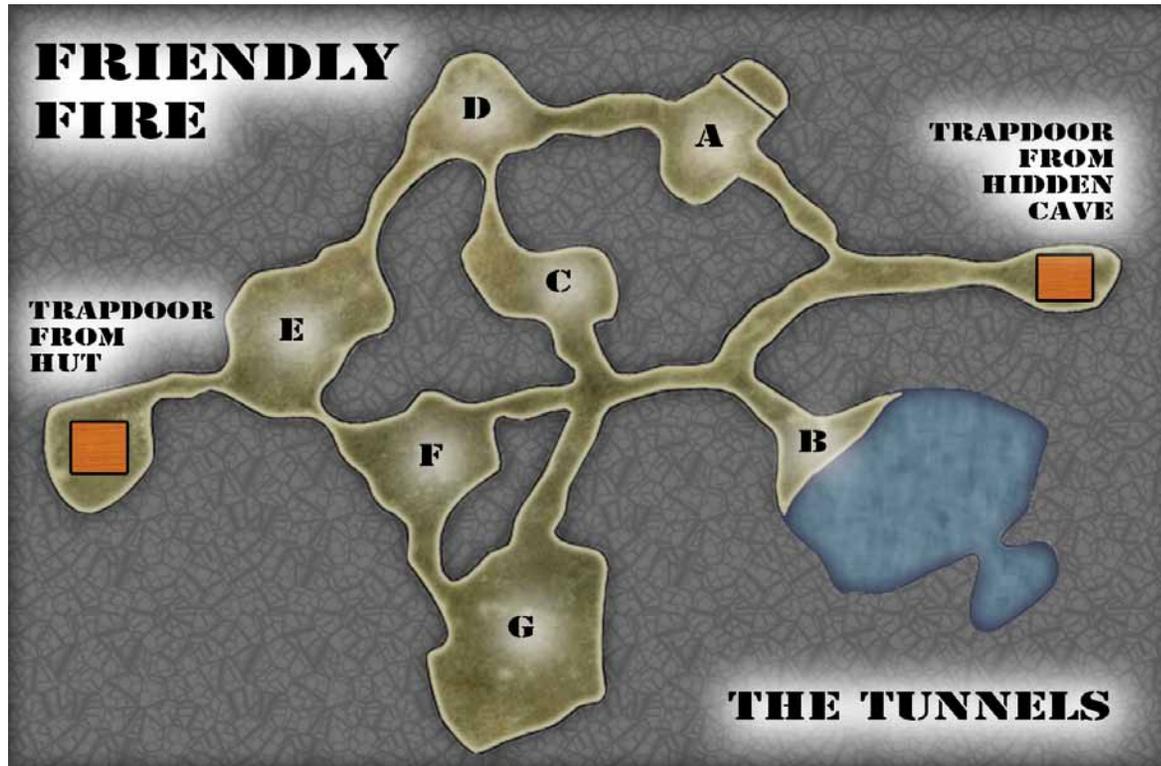
After an hour or so, one of the PCs will realise something if he makes a successful *Spot Hidden* roll. He has the strangest feeling that one of the huts next to the headman's residence seems to have had more people going into it than have come out again...

An investigation of the hooch reveals a hidden trapdoor in the centre of the floor, and below it there appears to be

Map Key:

- A - Village Elder's hooch
- B - Party's hooch
- C - Hooch with concealed trapdoor
- D - Underwater ledge
- E - Cavern under waterfall





Map Key:

A – Unholy Temple

Two zombies are inside this chamber, guarding a large ancient book that rests on a pedestal. Both zombies appear to once have been American soldiers. (see Creature Stats, below) Both zombies are armoured in some way and only take half damage from any weapons. Impaling weapons do not affect them at all.

On the raised platform at the back of the room a large book rests upon a pedestal.

This book is a copy of the R'lyeh Text that has been translated into Vietnamese. Reading the book gives the following: SAN Loss 2d8, Cthulhu Mythos +12%, spell multiplier x4.

B – The main part of the floor in this room appears to be a waterlogged pit, about 3 feet deep. The remainder of the floor is littered with bones and green rags. A closer inspection reveals dog tags among the remains of American soldiers.

The cave at the rear is the lair of a ghost (see Creature Stats, below)

C – Radio Room

A single VC soldier is here, armed with a copy of a Tokarev pistol. (Use average VC stats as listed in appendix but replace Rifle skill with Pistol).

D – Hospital

This chamber is empty.

E – Tomb

There are two VC guards in here (see NPCs, below, for stats).

The floor of this chamber is filled with urns full of ashes. These are the remains of dead VC who are here to await resurrection. A count will reveal a total of 99 urns.

F – Store room

This room contains sacks of rice, 7.62x39mm ammunition (AK-47 ammo), a box of grenades, 50 AK-47 rifles and 50 Chinese-made copies of Thompson SMGs.

G – Workshop

Contains various tools and hand lathes for weapon repair and equipment maintenance.

a set of VC tunnels. Naturally, going down there will mean that the villagers' peaceful attitude will probably change very quickly.

CONCLUSION

The ending of this adventure is completely open to the individual Keeper. It can be used as a one-off for those who like to try different eras, or as part of an ongoing campaign. It could also quite easily be linked to certain other events in South East Asia at the time of the Vietnam conflict, for those of you who are into *Delta Green*®.

NPCS

AVERAGE VIET CONG

All stats at 9, Skills: 30% in one weapon (usually AK-47, one at the ambush site is using an RPD machine gun), *Camouflage* 50%, *Hide* 40%, *Spot Hidden* 40%, *Throw* 30%.

VILLAGE ELDER

STR 13, CON 13, SIZ 13, DEX 8, APP 5, SAN 22, INT 9, POW 8, EDU 12, HP 13. Magic Points 8, Damage Bonus +1d4.

Skills: *Machete* 40%, *AK-47* 65%, *Cthulhu Mythos* 15%, *Hide* 25%, *Sneak* 90%, *Spot Hidden* 55%.

Spells: *Create Zombie*, *Elder Sign*, *Resurrection*.

VIET CONG TOMB GUARDS (THE TOMB)

All stats at 9, Skills: *AK-47* 40%, *Sneak* 30%, *Hide* 40%.

CREATURE STATS

ZOMBIE #1

STR 18, CON 26, SIZ 11, POW 1, DEX 7, MOVE 6, HP 19.

ATTACK=35% (*maul*), 2d8+1d4 damage.

Zombie #2

STR 15, CON 23, SIZ 11, POW 1, DEX 8, MOVE 6, HP 17.

ATTACK =40% (*maul*), 2d8+1d4 damage.

GHAST

STR 25, CON 20, SIZ 29, INT 4, POW 11, DEX 15, MOVE 10, HP 25.

ATTACKS: *Bite*=40%, 1d10 damage; *Kick*=25%, 3d6 damage.

Skills: *Sneak* 70%, *Hide* 70%, *Dodge* 30%.

SAN Loss 0/1d8.

WEAPON STATS

MI6AI

Damage 2d8, Range 100, #Attacks 2 or Burst, Ammo 30, HP 11, Malfunction 94%

COLT I9IIAI

Damage 1d10+2, Range 15, #Attacks 1, Ammo 7, HP 8, Malfunction 99%.

AK-47 (ALSO CHINESE TYPE 56)

Damage 2d6+1, Range 90, #Attacks 2 or Burst, Ammo 30 rounds, HP 12, Malfunction 00%.

TOKAREV TYPE PISTOL

Damage 1d8, Range 15, #Attacks 3, Ammo 8, HP 8, Malfunction 98%

RPD Light Machine Gun

Damage 2d6, Range 100, #Attacks Burst, Ammo 100, HP 12, Malfunction 97%



The Coney

A New Dark Race
By Tad Kelson
For Dark Conspiracy®

THE CONEY

Strength:	8	Education:	4	Move:	3/10/20/40
Constitution:	5	Charisma:	7	Skill/Dam:	5/1D6*
Agility:	8	Empathy:	8	Hits:	13/26
Intelligence:	6	Initiative:	4	# Appear:	1

Special: *Dimension Walk.* *Heat Leech,
Optical Illusion of fading

Appearance: The Coney is a pale, gauze like entity. In appearance they are much like a wedding veil or perhaps a bunch of lace and gauze in the rough outline of a human female, albeit one thin and emaciated in structure. The Coney do not touch the ground and are very reminiscent of traditional and modern stories of bride ghosts, where a new bride perishes on her wedding day and afterwards haunts her new husband searching for the love and warmth she was denied in her untimely demise.

The truth of The Coney is that it, or they, are a subspecies of spirits that have become trapped within the folds of a single outfit, or a collection of clothing or rags.

Game Function:

The Coney functions as a being that has no ulterior motive or agenda, it just exists and its existence is inimical to human and other sentient life. There is neither rhyme nor reason to actions or activities. GMs are encouraged to use the following table to give a sense of randomness to The Coney and its actions. Modify to suit the actual encounter being run.

NOTE: Most of the time The Coney will use its Dimension Walk skill to move away from danger once damage equal to 75% of its maximum is taken. At this point consider it defeated and award experience appropriately.

The Coney Action Table:

Roll 1D10 and consult the following table each time something happens (attack, movement, vehicle moving, sun rises, moon rises, etc. but not turn by turn)

THE CONEY ACTION TABLE

Die Roll	Action
1	The Coney attacks the nearest entity, trying to envelop them, this lasts for one round then The Coney leaves using Dimension Walk.
2	The Coney drifts as per thrown grenade scatter chart until it encounters a wall then uses Dimension Walk to leave the area.
3	The Coney sits on the ground and appears as if it is weeping. If disturbed it will lash out once and then return to the sitting pose.
4	The Coney appears to begin dancing and utterly ignores all actions taken around it, unless attacked then once 75% damage is done it Dimension Walks away
5	The Coney drifts in and out of view, as if drifting from one dimension to another. This is a simple optical illusion that can be foiled with Thermal Gear. Otherwise treat it like a curious spirit type entity that will observe the Players and their actions unless attacked, when it will retaliate with an active attack (see below) by striking and using the drain heat ability continuously until the target that first attacked it dies or is able to flee, at which point roll again for an action
6	The Coney randomly chooses one PC and follows them close enough for the heat draining to take effect. It will ignore attacks taken against it until 75% damage is done to it at which point it Dimension Walks away
7	The Coney will walk in a counterclockwise fashion for a few minutes, before choosing a random direction (roll using compass points) in which it will move until it encounters an obstacle then roll again.
8	The Coney stops movement and holds the arm like appendages up into the air and slowly spins in a circle for several hours.
9	The Coney moves as if holding out arms attempting to hug the closest female figure, enveloping her in its icy hold until the target dies or The Coney takes 75% of its total damage at which point it Dimension Walks away. If there are no females The Coney will slowly fade away using the Dimension Walk ability.
10	The Coney moves as if holding out arms attempting to hug the closest male figure, enveloping him in its icy hold until the target dies or The Coney takes 75% of its total damage at which point it Dimension Walks away.

The Coney has two forms of attack: a passive attack where they naturally leech heat from the surrounding area, including inhabitants; and an active attack where the Coney must strike a target.

Passive Attack:

This attack is the result of a Heat Leech ability. It affects everything within the area of influence on an equal basis. It is similar to the heat leeching abilities of The Pale, except it does not require an empathic connection and is less powerful and slower to take effect. The effects take place in a radius of 8 game inches (approximately 16 meters or 16 yards) and require The Coney to be still and effectively be concentrating. The referee should use the passive attack whenever player characters are in the vicinity of The Coney.

Heat Leech is a strange and exceptional ability and causes the following effects:

- ☠ The severe cooling of human-sized creatures, causing them to shiver uncontrollably.



- ♥ Human-sized creatures must pass an Average test of Constitution nature of the attack.
- ♥ Those who do not fall unconscious have their movement rates reduced to 25%; their effective DEX is quartered; and all tasks become two levels more difficult.
- ♥ Human-sized creatures will have 1 point of wounds inflicted to every hit location from frostbite. This is not counteracted by heavy clothing or armor due to the extradimensional nature of the attack.

These effects occur each combat round, from what is essentially a bleeding over of extradimensional cold, and so it cannot naturally be protected against.

Active Attack:

When The Coney needs to attack in self-defense or as a part of random actions, The Coney rolls fir hits as if using unarmed combat. If The Coney rolls and hits in melee combat, and the blow hits the torso region, then 1D6 damage is inflicted, with armor not protecting at all. It is up to the

referee to decide if Empathic abilities will safeguard against the effects or not, however it is recommended that Empathic abilities used in protection should fail.

Self-Defense:

A successful melee attack against The Coney inflicts 1D6 of damage due to utter cold to the attackers striking body location. Again due to the extradimensional basis for the attack, armor does not protect when landing said blows. Example: a character strikes The Coney with a machete. The character will take 1D6 damage to the arm holding the machete.

Dimension Walk:

When The Coney need to use their Dimension Walk Skill, it is an Easy Task for them—an Average task difficulty when in combat. They ignore effects of discontinuity when departing or arriving this dimension and suffer no recognizable effects of Assimilation. The Coney are naturally adept at moving from one dimension to another. Only during combat would The Coney need to roll a skill task to use Dimension Walk.

Note that The Coney are extradimensional and can be encountered in the Astral Plane and the Interstices. (See the Empathic Sourcebook for details on these locations.)

CREDITS

The Coney was inspired while talking to Tim Bisaillon about creatures and impressions in horror oriented Games.



“Peter, at 1:40 this afternoon at the main branch of the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue, ten people witnessed a free-roaming, vaporous, full-torso apparition. It blew books from shelves at twenty feet away. Scared the socks off some poor librarian.”

–Ray Stantz
Ghostbusters



Not Much Larger Than a Cat

Minion Hunter Fiction
By Joel Steverson

Maxwell swept the sheen of sweat from his forehead with his shirtsleeve. It was taking Justine longer than usual to bypass the security system. It wasn't that they might be discovered, rather the thought that knotted Maxwell's stomach was that she might realize he wasn't listening to her. Justine had a temper. She also prattled incessantly while she worked. Maxwell had learned to make the appropriate noises and replies that gave the illusion he was engaged in the conversation, but he hadn't actually heard anything in the last five minutes.

His eyes drifted back to the uncontrolled zone across the narrow, murky river. Nothing stirred in the shanty town of ramshackle buildings and shadow-cloaked detritus, and that twisted the knot in his stomach. Their guise of a corporate maintenance technician and her bodyguard should have drawn some attention. The electronics suite in their borrowed repair van would fetch enough on the black market to feed several families for the rest of the year. Few of the proles would risk harassing them, but Maxwell had expected a drooling audience.

"Know what I mean?"

The rising pitch in Justine's sandpaper voice triggered Maxwell's question-re-

sponse grunt, and momentarily drew him into the conversation.

Justine continued, "It wasn't so long ago that people feared the government and practically begged the corporations to take over. Now, ask anyone with a private education and they'll tell you the only thing that will save this country is for the government to take control back from big business..."

Justine's fingers thrummed the keyboard as her diatribe on corporate proliferation drug on. She had some special affinity for computers and electronics. Maxwell had seen her do some incredible—explanation defying—things. Bypassing a print reader in this part of town seemed almost a waste of her talents.

When Justine came to a pause in her rant, he piped in, "Good point," even though he had no idea what he was agreeing to.

Maxwell tugged the strap on his MP-5, settling it into a more comfortable position on his shoulder and continued searching for spectators. Across the cracked-asphalt parking lot, lifeless trees clawed at the winter sky; a drab overcast of sinister clouds threatening to drench the humid city in dirty rain. A flock of Ravens squabbled over the remains of something in the tall,

dead weeds on this side of the river. With a frustrated squawk a defeated corvid stalked away.

Justine turned onto a favorite tangent, “The rich keep getting richer, leaving a growing number of mikes to fight over a dwindling supply of table scraps...”

Maxwell tried to find something else to focus on. It was unusually warm for winter. A tan, long-sleeved shirt and his RamTech vest were more than enough to stave off the chill. Two or three more jobs and he’d have the money to visit someplace where it actually snowed. Not that he’d actually take the trip, but it was pleasant diversion.

A heartbeat later the magnetic locks disengaged, with a loud thump, and a section of the eight-foot security wall receded and rolled away to the right. Over by the river, the flock cawed indignantly. Maxwell chuckled to himself, not entirely sure why the birds amused him.

“Paydirt,” Justine said.

“I thought you might be losing your touch,” Maxwell jibed.

Justine smiled. “Maxie, you’re so cute. This is a MaxiGard DJ-432 reader. My grandma—bless her soul—could override it and unlock the gate faster than you

can spit, but the repair ticket I planted yesterday said I was going to upgrade the firmware.” Justine folded her keyboard and tucked into a cargo pocket. “No corporate tech can do that job in less than ten minutes.”

“I don’t get it.”

“How long have you been doing this job?”

“I don’t know,” Maxwell said crossing his arms. “Maybe a year now.”

“You might be Ford-Revlon in a firefight, but you’re never going to live to enjoy your success if you don’t start paying attention to how things work.”

“Uh-huh,” Maxwell said, bracing himself for the lecture his self-appointed mentor was about to deliver. At twenty-nine, she was only six years his senior, but she harped on things like an overprotective parent.

“You got to come at these things sideways,” Justine said, hefting her workbag and strolling around to the passenger side of the van. “Any change in the security system gets extra scrutiny. I could have hacked the corporate net and granted us access, but that would have sent up a red flag. We’d have had five minutes inside before

they were on to us. No one thinks twice about a repair order for a faulty reader. Ten minutes after we’re gone, nobody will even remember what we look like.”

“Got it,” Maxwell lied.

“Ready?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

Maxwell set his MP-5 on the dashboard and hopped in the van. The gate rolled shut behind them as he guided the van into a parking spot. The warehouse was a mixture of red and brown brick that might once have looked fashionable, but like most of mike-town now looked barely serviceable. Numbered, rollup doors ran the length of the building, flanked by two drab, gray, entrance-doors set atop short flights of metal stairs.

Maxwell killed the engine, and turned to Justine. “Do you wonder what’s in them?”

“Nope.”

“You don’t?”

“I don’t.”

“Really? I always wonder. Ten recovery jobs in the last six months. All of them for something that can’t be much larger than a cat and you don’t wonder?”

Justine giggled. “You have a funny way of looking at things, Maxie.”

“You know I hate it when you call me that.”

“Of course I do,” Justine said with a wink.

Maxwell fixed her with a mock glare. “I just want to know what’s so valuable.”

“No, you really don’t.” Justine laid a hand on his shoulder. “I’ve never been more scared than on the jobs where I knew what I was stealing.”

“Oh?”

“Seriously,” Justine said and then abruptly shifted gears. “Now, put on your game face and let’s get this done.”

“Okay.” Maxwell nodded, and reached for his MP-5.

“Whoa fellow,” Justine said. “Leave that here.”

“Why?”

“We’re just getting a work order signed. That’d be suspicious.”

Maxwell sighed. He felt naked without the submachine gun, but he still had his Desert Eagle riding on his hip. Leaving his

MP-5 on the dashboard, he hopped out and followed Justine up the stairs. Inside, a cavernous expanse held clean, orderly rows of box-laden pallets—spaced several meters apart—and a handful of laborers. A faint, musty odor that spoke of grease, sweat, and old wood wafted on the air.

Justine proffered her clipboard to a muscular man in careworn jeans fussing over a pallet jack. “I need your manager to sign off on my work order.”

“Oh, that’d be Denny,” he replied in deep baritone. “I think he’s still at lunch. Here, I’ll sign that for you.”

Justine cradled the clipboard against her chest. “No can do. If I don’t get a manager to approve the work, and something goes wrong,” she tucked a stray lock of her short auburn mop back into place, “it’s my ass on the line.”

“Whatever lady.” The man shook his head. “Denny will be back soon. You can wait in his office. End of these shelves, make a right, down the hall, second door on the right.” He waved them off.

“Okay, yeah. I’ll do that,” Justine said letting an ornery edge in her voice.

If the man noticed her tone, he didn’t react.

A dozen rows of shelving ran the length of the warehouse parallel to the roll-up doors. An aisle, wide enough for two forklifts, divided the lengthy run of general storage from the secure storage area on the left side where eight short rows ran perpendicular to the aisle. As with general storage, numbered placards hung overhead indexing the warehouse like an oversized supermarket. Maxwell scanned them, quickly picking out the number he was looking for.

“Third row on your left,” he whispered.

“Got it.”

The third row—much like the rest—was a twenty-foot-high bank of industrial shelves. Unlike the rest of the shelves, which held neatly stacked shrink-wrapped boxes and crates, on pallets, only secure containers graced these rows. Made from high-impact polymer alloys and equipped with tamper-proof electronic suites, they were designed to keep the casually curious at bay, but wouldn’t stop a determined effort.

Maxwell touched a button on the side of his sunglasses. His thick, curly, black mullet hid the wire running to the thermal tracker tucked away under in his vest. The tracker monitored every heat source

within thirty meters and displayed the results on the inside of his opaque sunglass lens. One blue dot on the display marked Justine while eight red ones catalogued the various laborers within range. Most were milling around near the front of the warehouse. He gave Justine a subtle nod. She flitted down the aisle, quiet enough for the noisy warehouse.

Maxwell started his count. Justine had to find the correct container, bypass the security system, extract the contents, tuck it away in her workbag, and get back to him. He'd bet her dinner that she couldn't do it in under a minute. The timing wasn't critical, except that the longer it took, the greater the chance of a random worker coming down the aisle. Maxwell knelt and pantomimed retying his bootlaces.

Ten.

He looked to his left, careful not to turn his head. Out the corner of his eyes, he saw Justine pointing at a stack of secured containers, her left hand brushing over them as she looked for the right number.

Fifteen.

A ninth blip popped up moving parallel to Justine and dangerously close according to the thermal tracker. Maxwell swore

under his breath. His throat mic picked up the hushed epithet and broadcast it to Justine.

"What?" Her reply crackled in his ears.

Maxwell caught himself before swearing again. "Company. Two rows over," he whispered. "Do we scrub?"

"No. The more times we try, the riskier it gets. Can you stall?"

"I'll try."

Maxwell made a mental tally of their surroundings; good fields of fire and no visible security. Fighting their way out with side arms wasn't out of the question, but it wasn't plan A.

Twenty-five.

He glanced at Justine. She pulled a PDA from her workbag and pointed it at the containers. Maxwell checked the tracker. The rest of the employees were safely distant, but number nine was coming around the corner ten meters away. Sweat beaded up in Maxwell's armpits. He finished his knot and timed getting to his feet just right to nearly collide with blip nine.

Thirty.

"Hey, watch it," the man said, holding up his hands.

Maxwell looked up. "Oh, sorry."

Blip nine was dressed in jeans, a green shirt—with a collar—and corporate logo stenciled over the left breast. He wore a stern face with hard lines and squinty brown eyes that seemed as though they automatically distrusted everyone. He had foreman written all over him. A white nametag with black letters labeled him Denny.

"Who are you?" Denny asked.

"I'm Maxwell—"

Denny interrupted, "Who do you work for?"

"Midsun Enterprises," Maxwell answered tapping the crescent-sun logo on his vest.

He needed Justine. She was glib and had a way with people. Maxwell's stomach tightened and the acidic burn of bile clawed at the back of his throat. Face to face encounters always felt like being on stage at his third grade recital.

"How'd you get in here?"

"Through the door," Maxwell said hesitantly.

Denny scowled. "I don't have time for your lip."

"I didn't mean..." Maxwell stammered.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm contract security."

"For who?"

"Me," Justine said, coming up behind Maxwell.

He almost succeeded at not looking relived. Denny didn't seem to notice.

"Priscilla Sanders, Corsec, Inc," she continued as she stepped to his side and held up her clipboard. "I have a work order here to flash a MaxiGuard reader. Are you the foreman?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good," Justine crooned, and then took control of the conversation before Denny could get a word in. "The guy up front said you were probably down one of these rows. You guys sure got a lot of stuff stockpiled here. Ever worry about the proles across the river?"

"What?"

"Well," Justine blabbered, "I was afraid to come out here, with you guys being so

close to the uncontrolled zone and all. Had corporate send Maxwell," she reached up and patted her bronze-skinned accomplice on the shoulder, "just to make sure I got here and back okay. So, you worry about the proles across the river?"

"I—"

"I sure would. I mean, they're all so poor and desperate. I just shudder to think what might happen if I ran into—"

"Can I help you with something?" Denny interrupted.

"Oh, yeah, I tend to get to talking, and well, sorry. Here," she handed over her clipboard. "I did a firmware upgrade on your DJ-432."

Denny scanned the clipboard, scratched a quick signature and handed it back. "You can find your way out?"

"Sure," Justine bobbed her head. "Thank you," she added as Denny strode away. Then, turning to Maxwell said, "You owe me dinner."

"I lost count," he replied, clicking off the tracker.

"Fifty-eight seconds," she said, and started towards the front door.

"Doesn't count."

"Sure it does."

"Uh uh."

Justine pursed her lips. "What? Because you lost count?"

"That's right."

"Nothing doing. A bet's a bet."

Maxwell pushed the door open and looked back over his shoulder as he held it for Justine. The upturned corners of her pert mouth went slack and her green eyes grew wide. He knew that look. Letting go of the door, he spun, his right hand flying to his holster and flipping off the flap.

Halfway between the repair van and the brick and iron security wall, the air rippled with electricity and the tang of ozone. A shimmering blue-white ball of light exploded like fireworks into a vertical disk, edged in crackling energy. It coalesced into an improbable view as though the image of another room was being projected. Diffuse sunlight peaked through the clouds, bright enough to make the disk cast an oval shadow on the worn asphalt, but it failed to penetrate the darkness of the room. Ominous shadows, cast by some unknown source, cloaked a person sized silhouette

in darkness. Maxwell blinked at the image, but it remained frustratingly real.

Justine gasped.

The silhouette rose from what might have been a sitting position, and apparently unafraid of the crackling wreath of electricity, moved towards the disk. Like an actor about to walk past the camera, it grew larger and larger in the “frame,” and then stepped through to the parking lot. Though the chamber beyond remained dark, the silhouette shed its cloak.

Maxwell tasted a bitter mix of breakfast and bile in his mouth, and spat. His mind raced to assemble what was happening, but it was like two puzzles had been mixed together. What he saw couldn't be real and yet no other explanation presented itself. The thing standing in the parking lot wasn't human.

It looked like a character from an old science fiction movie. Gray, impossibly smooth skin covered an overlarge head with angry dark eyes and a thin mouth. It was short, a meter and a half at most, clad in a form fitting jumpsuit over a wiry frame. Excepting that it was real, moving closer, and pointing a small baton in their direction, it would have been comical. Alien or not, hostile actions were univer-

sal. Maxwell stepped in front of Justine and in one fluid motion pushed her inside, grabbed the door, and yanked it shut.

“What the...” Justine trailed off.

“I don't know,” Maxwell said, his voice near to cracking, “but it's heading this way, and I don't aim to stick around and find out.”

“That's a shame, because he's actually quite friendly.”

Maxwell whirled to face the voice, his Desert Eagle ready. Denny stood, three meters away, at the center of a loose semi-circle. The rest of the warehouse staff fanned out to either side, trapping Justine and Maxwell against the door.

“How's about you put down your pistol and we skip all the formalities?” Denny asked in a voice full of mock friendship.

“Formalities?” Maxwell asked, stalling for time. Nine to two, and they're all unarmed. They must think they can take me in a rush, he thought.

“Oh, you know,” Denny said, sing song, “the part where I tell you we know about the box and you deny it.”

“Box? What box?” Justine piped in following Maxwell's lead.

“Oh, come on,” Denny said with exaggerated despair. “Do we really have to do this the hard way? It's a small pine box, covered in Japanese writing, monitored by a remote sensor that red there,” he pointed at Justine, “failed to notice.”

“I'm just here to fix—” Justine started.

“No,” Denny cut her off. With a deep rumble he said, “Twenty of them have been stolen

in the last year.” Then, softer, sickeningly pleasant, he added, “Now hand it over, or there'll be fighting and bloodshed, and we'll kill you and take it anyway.”

“Well,” Justine began, “when you put it that way...”

And she ducked.

The Desert Eagle had been a popular sidearm for the last fifty years. It was reliable, easy to service, and it had a nine-round magazine.

“One for each of you,” Maxwell yelled as he drew down on Denny and squeezed the trigger.



Maxwell savored the wash of adrenaline and the time dilation effect that came with it. Nothing was as euphoric as a good hard fight. He felt as if he were hyper-accelerated moving against a cadre of sloth-like opponents. He imagined he could see the bullet as it struck the foreman high on the chest, pitching him back. Maxwell swept left, on to his next target before Denny hit the ground. Three successive shots and three lackeys to the left of Denny dropped. Maxwell stepped in front of Justine and drove a powerful side kick into the fourth laborer, connecting a heartbeat before the man would have grabbed her.

Maxwell pivoted right, lining up for the remaining four and shouted, "Run!"

Justine bolted towards the aisle.

The workers came in a rush, heedless of certain death. It was like plinking targets at the carnival. Maxwell dropped all four before any could close the three-meter gap.

He tossed a glance after Justine, seeing her round the corner at a full sprint. The worker he'd kicked was on the ground gasping for air and Maxwell spent his final round making sure he'd never get any.

The door swung open. The gray alien stepped in. It was a race. A race, that in an

instant of clarity, Maxwell knew he would lose. He thumbed the release and snatched a replacement magazine from the pouch on his hip, but the alien was faster. It brought the baton in line. A flash issued from the end, and a searing, prickly pain sprang from Maxwell's chest enveloping his body so fast the point of origin barely registered. His muscles crunched in knots. He couldn't breathe. Agonizing seconds ground by until every cell wept.

When Maxwell finally sucked in a gulp of air his knees buckled. The ground raced towards his head, but his arms wouldn't move to break the fall. A jolt of pain—mild in comparison—accompanied a loud thump as his head hit the concrete. Spots swam in Maxwell's vision and his stomach and bladder threatened to loose their contents.

His Desert Eagle clattered across the floor, colliding with a pair of booted feet. Maxwell had seconds to react. Scythe through the target's legs, then reclaim the pistol, slide the magazine home and finish the job, but his body wouldn't respond. Every attempt to flex a muscle sent waves of pain crashing upon his driftwood body. A booted foot swung, and his Desert Eagle skittered away.

"You should have picked the easy way."

As Maxwell's vision refocused, he found Denny towering over him. A bloody furrow ran from nipple to collarbone where Maxwell's bullet had skipped off subdermal armor plating. Three of his lackeys were at his side; what should have been fatal injuries, reduced to minor wounds thanks to cybernetic enhancements.

"Go get the package," Denny commanded.

"What about the girl?" a lackey asked.

"We only need one to interrogate," the alien answered. Its voice was a deep and menacing contrast to its size. The alien eyed Maxwell for a moment and nodded to Denny.

A crushing kick chased the air from Maxwell's lungs, and he welcomed the darkness that followed.



RASPUTIN



A Dark Lord
By Norm Fenlason
For Dark Conspiracy®

Yuri Kanachevy was born in Stalingrad in 1943 in the ruins of World War II. His parents were workers in the Stalingrad Tractor Works and fought in the Battle for Stalingrad. His father was later killed in Soviet military operations in Bulgaria. His mother went back to work in the tractor works while young Yuri was raised by his grandmother. In 1954 Kanachevy's family moved to Tbilis in Soviet Georgia. There, an adolescent Yuri came under the notice of Bernard Bernardovich Kazhinsky. The adolescent Yuri astounded Kazhinsky with latent empathic abilities that prompted Kazhinsky to focus his studies on parapsysics. This encounter proved to be Yuri Kanachevy's introduction into a clandestine world of Soviet human experimentation.

Kanachevy went with Kazhinsky to the Ukrainian Academy of Science in Kiev in 1961. By this time Kanachevy was an accomplished Neuropath demonstrating a superb command over the elemental protodimensions. What went unnoticed by his research assistant tutors was his progression in parapsychology studies. Many of Kanachevy's works were inspirational and formed the basis of much of the Soviet parapsychological work. However, because of Kanachevy's *persona non grata* status, others published his work and received accolades he should have received. During

his time spent in Kiev, Kanachevy seesawed from manic depression, exhibiting severe bipolar behavior. He intentionally withheld himself in the experiments causing test failures and skewing the statistical results. His outbursts of temper occasionally caused significant laboratory destruction.

SCIENCE CITY

A visit by Professor Leonid L. Vasiliev brought relief to Kanachevy's intolerable circumstances. Vasiliev arrived with an academic entourage, including a KGB officer, from the Leningrad Brain Research Institute. After reviewing Kazhinsky's works and seeing through the thin veil of plagiarism, Professor Vasiliev, supported by KGB research funding, took Kanachevy back to Leningrad with him. Unlike Kanachevy's relationship with Dr Kazhinsky, Yuri became close friends with Professor Vasiliev.

The Kanachevy/Vasiliev combination proved to be quite productive through the 70's. Volumes of basic empathic research data were accumulated including proposals for some basic empathic booster drugs. It was at this point that the KGB sponsors decided that the whole effort was a critical state secret and decided to move the research to another location. The KGB moved Kanachevy and his experimenta-





tion, which by now involved world-leading parapsychology, to the *Academgorodok* or Science City, near Novosibirsk in western Siberia. There the research was closeted in a research unit called Special Department Number 8 of the Institute of Automation and Electrometry. Although Special Department 8 focused research on information transmission by bioenergetic methods, Vasiliev insisted that information was received at and could be commanded to tissues at the cellular level.

GENETIC MANIPULATION

In published results at the Institute of Clinical and Experimental Medicine

and at the Institute of Automation and Electrometry, cells were noted to be able to pass information through a crystal barrier. In unpublished results, Kanachev himself was able to pass information to cells inside a lead case. Later researches revealed that in addition to information passing, Kanachev could command changes in genetic code interpretation. That is, how a developing cell reads its DNA to form its function. In effect Kanachev could command cells to change their purpose and behavior. Kanachev was excited about the results and had altruistic visions of providing regeneration or transplant organs. His KGB sponsors in the middle of the Cold War had visions of their own – visions of

causing heart failure or other incapacitating damage to enemy soldiers, agents or politicians.

COLD WAR REALITY

The clinical toxicologist for Novosibirsk and a KGB colonel, Dr. S. V. Speransky, took control of the experiments in 1982 and ordered Kanachev removed from the position of researcher and into the position of psychic test subject. Kanachev was placed under sedation to prevent him from repeating his fiery outbursts of Kiev and placed under the supervision of the husband and wife team of Yuri Korabelnikov and Ludmilla Tishchenko-Korabelnikova. These trained empaths sympathized with Kanachev and provided him with empathic training and although still operating under the effects of controlling drugs, Kanachev's skills improved dramatically. It was during this training, and partially due to the use of experimental psi-boosting drugs, that Kanachev discovered his special genetic protodimension. It was also during this period that Kanachev was exposed to some Dark Forces operating behind the Iron Curtain that took notice of him. Kanachev operated in this mode for some time with his power growing daily.



BIRTH OF A DARK LORD

The KGB, operating under orders from Moscow, ordered Special Department Number 8 shut down. They had the communications experiments sent to Moscow's A. S. Popov Scientific-Technical Society for Radio Engineering, Electronics and Communication (NTORES). The cellular bioenergetic manipulation experiments were moved to the Laboratory for Bio-Information in Novosibirsk. The Laboratory for Bio-Information was a cover for the Kanachevy experiments and operated by the Korabelnikovs. Through subtle methods that even his teachers little understood, Kanachevy manipulated the Korabelnikovs, slowly reversing their roles, with Kanachevy becoming the master. To the outside world, Kanachevy still appeared as the subject. In reality, he was the scientist experimenting with genetic and mind control. While his studies were not published soon Kanachevy had the entire lab staff under overt or covert control.

KGB INTERVENTION

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, direct KGB control eased, but experienced KGB analysts understood the between-the-lines communications of reports coming from the Laboratory. The KGB leadership

ordered investigators in. These investigators were authorized to terminate anyone failing to comply with their edicts. Moscow had extrapolated Kanachevy's power from previous reports and suspected the worse.

Agents entered the complex of the Laboratory for Bio-Information in February 1990. A fierce firefight immediately erupted inside the main buildings between KGB Special Forces and security troops loyal to Kanachevy. The KGB forced themselves into Kanachevy's main lab and shots were fired at Kanachevy. Yuri Korabelnikov was killed in this fight, but the KGB agents would pay tremendously as Kanachevy exercised his newfound powers. Kanachevy, drawing from his elemental genetic protodimension, infected each KGB agent with a horrible virus that invaded their system in seconds. The virus carried instructions to normal cells that changed their internal programming, causing a near-explosive violent genetic mutation. The results were terrifying to observe. One agent apparently escaped, but had been infected with a virus causing Black Death-like symptoms which killed him within a couple of days. But the damage was done since the agent took the



virus back to his command post, infecting everyone there. The infection spread through the *Academgorodok* killing most of the premier former-Soviet scientists. Moscow ordered the destruction of Science City and launched an RT-2M Topol nuclear-tipped missile from the Ukraine. Kanachevy was expecting this sort of response and had previously prepared a protodimension in which he and his followers rode out the nuclear blast.

TRAP

Dark forces advising the Moscovites, explained how Kanachevy had escaped the nuclear attack. It also explained that Kanachevy would reemerge in the same



vicinity and a trap could be set there. The Soviets maintained a group of long endurance TU-95 bombers carrying specially devised chemical weapons in station-keeping orbits near the former site of Science City. Satellites kept the location under constant observation in order to call in the chemical weapon strike as soon as Kanachevy reemerged. Kanachevy had by this time grown even stronger than Moscow's dark advisors expected. From

the safety of his protodimension, he could sense the bomber and the trap's plan from the minds of the pilots. Kanachevy simultaneously emerged from his protodimension and seized control of the pilot's minds. He caused the pilots to attack Special Department Number 24 located in Alma Ata in Kazakhstan. Kanachevy believed that Special Department Number 24 was the location of experiments carried out under the auspices of Moscow's advisors.

It is not clear what the results of that strike were, but the action set the stage for competition yet to come between dark forces over the next 4 decades.

RASPUTIN LIVES

With this third attempt on his life, Yuri Kanachevy, no longer quite human, assumed the name of Rasputin, the legendary monk that was so hard to kill. Rasputin's influence later spread to the west along



DART PISTOL

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	Recoil		Rng
						SS	Brst	
Dart Pistol	SA*	1*	Nil	1	24	2	-	7

*When the payload is empathically tailored by Rasputin, the ROF is 1 per phase (SS). The payload contains a viral contagion that causes damage to be set by the GM.

Rasputin's Custom Dart Pistol – This dart gun is custom made to fire a 7mm payload-injecting hypodermic. The payload can be any liquid or semi-liquid substance. A box magazine contains 24 rounds. The payloads are preloaded, but Rasputin can alter the payload “on-demand”.

Ammo: 7mm Hypodermic Darts

Weight: 0.9 kg

Magazine: 24

Price: \$750 (-/-)

RASPUTIN

Strength:	3	Education:	10	Move:	4/7/12/24
Constitution:	4	Charisma:	12	Skill/Dam:	1/1
Agility:	4	Empathy:	25	Hits:	220/400
Intelligence:	14	Initiative:	5	# Appear:	1

Skill / Asset

<i>Human Empathy</i>	5/30
<i>Willpower Drain</i>	10/35
<i>Change Environment</i>	14/39
<i>Project Thought</i>	5/30
<i>Project Fear</i>	6/31
<i>Small Arms (Pistol)</i>	6/9

with the Russian Mafias coming to the notice of western Minion Hunters. The name Rasputin quickly struck fear in the Minion Hunter community as his capabilities, hostility, and ruthlessness became apparent.

Rasputin is able to draw elemental biological material from a protodimension that he alone has discovered. He does this similar to how an Empathic Sorcerer can *change environment*. Specifically, Rasputin can call forth a quantity of genetic material and command it to assume complex and distinct forms under his control. This matter is protoplasmic in that it has no intelligence or volition beyond that with which Rasputin imbibes it. The larger the quantity of matter, the more difficult is the task of calling it forth. However, quantities less than a gram are automatic and called forth almost instinctually. This talent Rasputin uses to load his dart gun.

DART GUNS

Rasputin's special dart gun is a handgun containing 24 darts in a box clip. In addition to minor damage caused by the round itself, a payload may cause additional damage. Each specially





made round contains an empty chamber. This chamber is filled from the genetic protodimension using Rasputin's special abilities prior to firing. The small amount of matter in the round is configured using Rasputin's empathic cellular control abilities. Rasputin configures each round uniquely for the target at which he shoots. Prior to shooting, Rasputin reads the target empathically. Then Rasputin encodes the genetic matter to suit the target using that reading. The effect is that the dart is genetically encoded to do maximum damage to the target. However, *maximum damage* may not be the effect that Rasputin wants. He can alternately encode the material to perform some other genetic manifestation. Rasputin uses positive encoding to grant forms to his minions. He uses negative encoding to torture his victims. Note that Rasputin can inject this material using an hypodermic, he just uses the dart gun in combat.

The net result of all this empathic activity prior to shooting at a target reduces the automatically firing dart pistol to a single shot per round. Should Rasputin not desire to encode material, the weapon fires semi-automatically.

cold-blooded and ruthless as a cobra and more deadly. The Minion Hunter community calls her Tish and reports of her activities are nearly as feared as Rasputin's. Tish has been genetically altered by Rasputin to serve his purposes. In her own calculating way, she has asked for and received the modifications she wanted, for which she is extremely loyal to Rasputin. Other chief minions such as local bosses and others have traded their loyalty for genetic improvements. One distinct physical feature common among Rasputin and all his minions is the overly large cranium. Ludmilla also uses a dart gun identical in manufacture to Rasputin's. However, Tish does not have Rasputin's abilities to manipulate the genetic material in real time, but the payload is still deadly. She uses pre-loaded darts containing a horrible, though not genetically tuned, mutagen, which has negative effects on most targets. Other minions may be granted use of a similar weapon and supplied with the horrible special rounds. Without Rasputin's special ability to manipulate the payloads, these weapons fire semi-automatically.

Source:

<http://www.biomindsuperpowers.com/Pages/Ebon1.html>

MINIONS

Ludmilla Tishchenko-Korabelnikova survived the attacks at Novosibirsk and is presently Rasputin's chief minion. She is as



RASPUTIN IN HIS HEADY
EARLY DAYS AS A DARK
LORD!



DECREPIT BLADE



Dark Weapons
By Tad Kelson
For a Pair of Systems

The corroded metal blade known in some circles as The Decrepit Blade can be dated back to the late 6th or early 7th century central Europe, which is when and where it allegedly was created.

The most accurate information points to a minor Saxon warrior as the original owner of the weapon. Despite a lack of prowess, from all accounts that have been gathered he was unusually successful, partaking in many battles, gathering trophies and spoils, as well as a foreign bride taken on a raid and subsequently hauled back to his village.

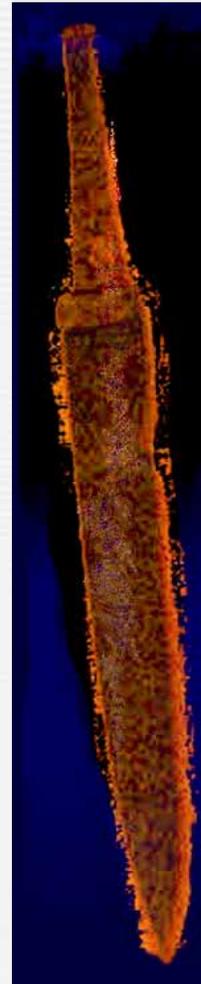
After the bride comes into the picture is where his successes truly come into focus and in a scant space of weeks or months (depending on what account is referenced), the two of them had taken over control of the village and began to rule it with the blade and fist as the main implements of control.

As I with most fear and terror based reigns, it ended poorly on the end of a spear in his back and with his captive female taken by the one that was wielding that spear. At this point things drop from all historical records up until a minor comment was found in a

diary kept by a monk living in what is now western France, on the pages given over to describing a raiding party that passed close to their sanctuary. The notes indicated it consisted of, 'desiccated and emaciated men fighting with strange vigor with a vibrant dark haired female riding alongside and behind them, urging them on in a barbaric tongue, unheard of in that part of the land.'

Further descriptions of the raiders and the female with them match up to accounts recorded verbally and later written down of the obscure warrior and the prize he had taken in battle, a tall dark haired female with a figure suitable for an earth goddess representation, and with a compelling way about herself and voice.

No further records exist, and pure luck and circumstance has kept even this much detail available to modern historians. The weapon is a long blade, of construction similar to the dominant knives of the time period. Called a Seax or a Langseax by many weapons historians, it measures approximately 60 cm (1.97 feet) of blade, with a single metal tang to take a wooden or similar substance



hilt with no metal guard to the construction. The blade is straight on one side with a slight slant about a third of the way from the end, with the other side coming to a point, making it a chopping weapon. Comprised of a dense iron that was heat forged, it bears metallurgical similarities to iron and metal found in meteorites, suggesting the origin of the blade. Chemical and structural analysis shows changes in the metal suggestive of forging under heat to treat it and strengthen it. Overall it is a typical weapon for the time period, if a little longer than most. No trace remains of the wood used for the original hilt. It is a dark blade, the iron in it somewhat corroded but in extraordinary shape for the age of the weapon.

Currently the weapon has gone missing from storage and would be of interest to the correct collector or museum curator.

Please note that within each system / setting the abilities and disadvantages are different. This mostly reflects the system differences most so than anything else. However it does make it nearly a different weapon / device / tool and that adds to the utility.

DARK CONSPIRACY

Background:

The Decrepit Blade is an artifact of a darkling. Having come out of obscurity where it languished for centuries, it now has a hunger or thirst calling for use, and with madness waiting all the time.

DC2 Rules:

Composed of psychoactive iron, the Decrepit Blade interferes with the fine workings of those in close proximity, often leading to mental afflictions such as obsessions, megalomania, and paranoia. These usually manifest while otherwise distracted such as during hand to hand combat. The wielder will experience almost overwhelming feelings of persecution and paranoia. At this time make a Difficult Roll versus CHA (Charisma) [which is roll 1d20 vs. Attribute rolling < the Stat to succeed]. If the roll is failed the wielder will perceive all living beings or mobile machinery within sight as foes, intent on stealing this weapon, and all of whom must be dealt with using the edge of the blade to stop the perceived threat. An Average Roll versus CHA (Charisma) is necessary once all targets are dispatched or the wielder is incapacitated in some fashion. If not the effect can become permanent (Game Master decision).

The Decrepit Blade, DarkTek Melee Weapon

User Cost: Control 3, Detection 1, Special (Incipient Insanity, see below)

Wt: 5kg

Price: n/a

Damage: 1d6 + STR Rating

Hit Mod: +1

Special: Increased ability to hit. Only when using this weapon, instead of the usual Difficult [Melee Combat (Armed)] (the asset) to hit, the challenge is Average [Roll versus 2 times Melee Combat (Armed)] (the skill level only).

Melee Weapons Specialty does apply to using this weapon. Use either *Machete* or *Sword* as the applicable specialty.

CALL of CTHULAU

Background:

An ancient cultist weapon, it now hums and throbs with the energies of death and destruction. It could easily be linked to Nyarlathotep over most any other entity of the mythos. Otherwise it would be only a curiosity if not for the strange effects it has on those that own it.



Coc 5.5th Edition Rules:

Keeping in mind the idea of magic weapons is not common to Call of Cthulhu, the Keeper can consider it more like an alien artifact, one that was created over a thousand years before and now is only a museum curiosity. The intent here is to treat it more like a Tome, with specific traits associated with it which will come into play if it is ever used. Otherwise the specifics can easily be overlooked in this setting, as most Investigators will not think to take an ancient sword into battle with the Mythos, and if someone does, it will not avail them too far.

The Decrepit Blade

Damage 1d6 + db, Inflicts the wielder with a low grade Mental Disorder (chose one or accentuate existing phobias, etc), increases susceptibility to madness (SAN loss of 1d4+1 the very first time used in battle but any result that would be coma, catatonic, etc. would result in a fighting berserk mood instead flailing with the weapon at all about the wielder)

Using the weapon for an extended amount of time or just having it in immediate possession (such as stored in a ship cabin, small house, etc) will

leave lasting impressions. Treat this as akin to reading a tome or book. The timeframe is 6 months (24 weeks) for just possessing it and in combat is up to an individual Keeper. At this point the owner must roll vs. POW. Success yields 1d3 SAN loss and +4 Mythos Knowledge (a generalized sensation of things experienced by the sword and the meteorite it came from before crashing to Earth and being forged), while a fail yields 1d6 SAN Loss and no Mythos Knowledge gain. This is a single event and success or failure is a one (1) time shot.

Lastly in the hands of a female, the blade confers a 1 point Bonus to both POW and APP after a month of time in her possession. This will affect the later rolls. The reason for this last effect is unknown, and from a Keeper perspective not very likely to come to light, unless a feminine companion to a character is close enough, long enough, to gather the benefit, and then more than likely the SAN loss and Mythos Knowledge gain.

As it is composed of iron from a meteorite, the blade is more immune to heat, taking twice as long to heat up as other metals and cooling twice as

fast, this is a side effect and not likely to come into play unless a character is attempting to destroy it. Placing it within a standard forge will not destroy it as would ordinary steel. It would need a bit more heat (it survived entering the atmosphere) and Keepers are suggested to adjudicate this as suits the tale, not the players or their characters.

POTENTIAL HOOKS AND CRANNIES

The blade serves as a foil, or something to be located, either for the players own use or to prevent it from falling into the hands of something worse. It can always be used as a focus type device for evil, or for sacrifices to be made, regardless of the system it is utilized in.

Overall The Decrepit Blade is intended not to be used, but as something the characters should wish to prevent being used by someone or something else.

The description and depiction of the weapon comes from this Wikipedia article

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seax>





In the 1960s when not only the USSR but also half of Europe was under the iron fist of Moscow's rule, a group of minor dissidents in Kiev started a comic strip. The star of this comic was Octobriana, the first homegrown Russian superhero. At the time there were no Western comics available, and she started out doing superheroic things. In later stories however, she became a mouth-piece for the writer's philosophies, which were based on the original ideas of communism rather than the Stalinist and Iron Curtain ideas of that time. The western world first became aware of Octobriana when the original comics made it out of the Eastern Bloc, and she became a favorite among independent artists.

As you might expect, in the world of Dark Conspiracy things evolved somewhat differently. The rich farmlands of western Russia have become battlefields many times during recorded history. In the last 200 years Napoleon tried to invade, the First World War and the 1917 Revolution took place, and the savagery of the Great Patriotic War (WWII) have all left their mark. This is not just true of the landscape, all of the death and suffering has left such a dense psychic residue that in some areas even non-empaths can sense something happened there.

It is in one such area that the real Octobriana is said to have been born. She is the physical embodiment of the true communist spirit, or at least that is what the legend says. From the late 1950s she has fought against corruption in the government, standing up for equality for the masses. She is known to be a fierce fighter, carrying many weapons and skilled in the use of them all, and with the red star emblem on her forehead to remind the evil and corrupt what she is.

After a quiet time during at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, Octobriana has once again reappeared, only this time she fights not just the corrupt politicians, businessmen, and mobsters but also the Darklings who ally themselves to these corrupt humans. She is still as fierce as ever, and as deadly, and has

become the Russian minion hunter's equivalent of Zena Marley, but much more direct and forceful.

In fact, the Dark Conspiracy Octobriana is the great grand-daughter of the original communist corruption fighter. All of the female line of the family have empathic abilities, and her grandmother's were awakened by the psychotronics experiments in the 60's and 70's of the old Soviet regime. In the case of the current Octobriana, the rise in Darkling activity around the world has brought her to realize that she has the ability to fight against it just as her grandmother fought against injustice.

Physically, Octobriana is an attractive woman with long blonde hair and a superb physique. This is immediately obvious, as she seldom wears a lot of clothing unless it is wintertime. Male characters may well have a tough time concentrating when they first meet her. Her long hair is tied in a high ponytail with what appears to be a genuine leopardskin band, and she wears a necklace of predatory animals' teeth with an amulet in the centre. Around her torso she carries a heavy chain, sometimes used as a melee weapon. The belt around the waist of her snakeskin trousers carries her holsters and ammunition and equipment pouches.

She always carries several weapons, but her signatures are a large caliber Smith & Wesson revolver and a big knife called a kriss. In recent times she has been seen using two large semi-automatic pistols of indeterminate origin. Though she is most associated with combating what she sees as corruption and evil in Russia and its Eastern European neighbors, Octobriana has reportedly been in action as far away as eastern China and southern Africa.

If encountered by player characters she will quickly determine the veracity of any cover story, and their true intentions. She is typically blunt-speaking to the point of rudeness, but she knows how to tell friend from foe and is one of the best allies anyone could hope to have.

Catch you next issue!
Lee Williams (morthrai)





The Abyss Triumphant

by Clark Ashton Smith, 1912

The force of suns had waned beyond recall.
Chaos was re-established over all,
Where lifeless atoms through forgetful deeps
Fled unrelated, cold, immusical.

Above the tumult heaven alone endured;
Long since the bursting walls of hell had poured
Demon and damned to peace erstwhile denied,
Within the Abyss God's might had not immured.

(He could but thwart it with creative mace. . . .)
And now it rose about the heavenly Base,
Mordant at pillars rotten through and through
Of Matter's last, most firm abiding-place.

Bastion and minaret began to nod,
Till all the pile, unmindful of His rod,
Dissolved in thunder, and the void Abyss
Caught like a quicksand at the feet of God !

