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M A G A Z I N E



EXX

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# Mission:



GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY\* system is a game of high-tech horror set in the near future. Players have a wide variety of character classes to choose from, each of which may become involved in an adventure or campaign in a different way. This article suggests some adventures in which the game's various classes are most likely to get involved, making it easier for game masters to get the action underway.

## Anti-piracy

This category involves activity by both humans and Dark Minions (the evil aliens of the game), and it consists of attacks on shipping and aircraft. The motives include simple criminal activities such as robbery and extortion, as well as terrorist acts and Dark Minion searches for food or slaves.

The merchant marine class listing states that piracy and simple disappearances of merchant vessels are on the rise in the DARK CONSPIRACY game world. It also mentions that sailors on many ships conduct target practice daily, and some crews are even mounting big guns on their vessels. Unless the sailors involved are ex-Navy men, they are not likely to know how best to use big guns, so riding shotgun on a merchant ship thus armed is good employment for mercenaries who served in the Navy. For that matter, some shipments of goods could be so vital (or the corp (corporation) owning the ship could have such political pull) that the vessel in question gains itself a naval escort. This convoy-duty type of adventure is likely to be the most common one for a party composed of Navy personnel.

Other classes could be involved, too. If the ship is in an area where UFOs are reported (such as the Bermuda Triangle), it

might rate air cover, getting the U.S. Air Force involved. If the crew is too small or untrained to handle weapons well, it might be backed up by shipboard marines, soldiers, or police of some sort, depending on the value of the vessel or its cargo. If the ship's captain or owner has suspicions of paranormal phenomena being involved in the disappearances, he might actively seek out or advertise for mystics, parapsychists, professors, or even clergy. Psychic test subjects, cyborg escapees, martial artists, and bodyguards are other classes that might be pressed into temporary service just by being in the wrong place at the right time.

Some classes other than the merchant marine will have natural reasons to be onboard. Any sizeable ship would have mechanics, while large craft would have their own medical doctors and even clergy (ships' chaplains). A manager might be along on a commercial trip to keep an eye on the merchandise, a journalist might be assigned to a vessel to cover the story of disappearing ships, and drifters, the homeless, and rebellious proles might sign on as extra hands. Given the nature of maritime conditions, a captain might have a hard time conning enough regular sailors into going along. Bounty hunter and criminal types might then be hired in a revival of the good old press gang, scouring the streets for whatever human material is available. A private or government investigator could even sign on as a sailor for cover while trailing a lead.

Some rich corps might even maintain a few cruise ships. If this is the case, any character class might be on board as a passenger. This is a good niche for entertainers and members of the nomenclatura, and politicians and gamblers will be among the other frequent passengers. Some classes could even prove to be unexpectedly useful. If the GM decides that some disappearances are due to Dark Minions based on the mythical sirens, a good entertainer could save the day by keeping the passengers from jumping overboard or keeping the crew from steering the ship onto the rocks. Conversely, a bad entertainer might have everyone wearing earplugs as a matter of course.

Skyjacking is another variant on the piracy theme. With the existence of UFOs in the game, thefts of this type include

spacecraft as well as aircraft, so the astronaut is as prominent a class in this adventure as the commercial pilot. Air Force personnel could also be aboard a spacecraft, as might other government agents. Professors, mystics, and parapsychists could be present to make tests and conduct experiments, with psychic test subjects and cyborg escapees (including some who haven't escaped yet) being some of the subjects. Even environmentalists could be conducting some experiments of their own, and with all that high-tech equipment, mechanics and computer operators will be a must.

Some UFOs may make spaceship-snatching a habit. If a pattern can be discerned, NASA may try the Q-ship gambit, either by sending up an explosives-laden drone or by replacing the cargo and part of the crew with a team of heavily armed commandoes. When the alien boarding party opens the doors, the troops return the shipnapping favor. Mercenaries and Army and Marine troops are best for this type of operation, though explosives and weapons heavier than small arms may be ruled out because of the threat of everyone being killed by a hole blown in the hull. Martial artists and similar fighters might be used, both to avoid a messy, decompressive death and to take prisoners for questioning.

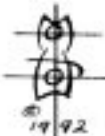
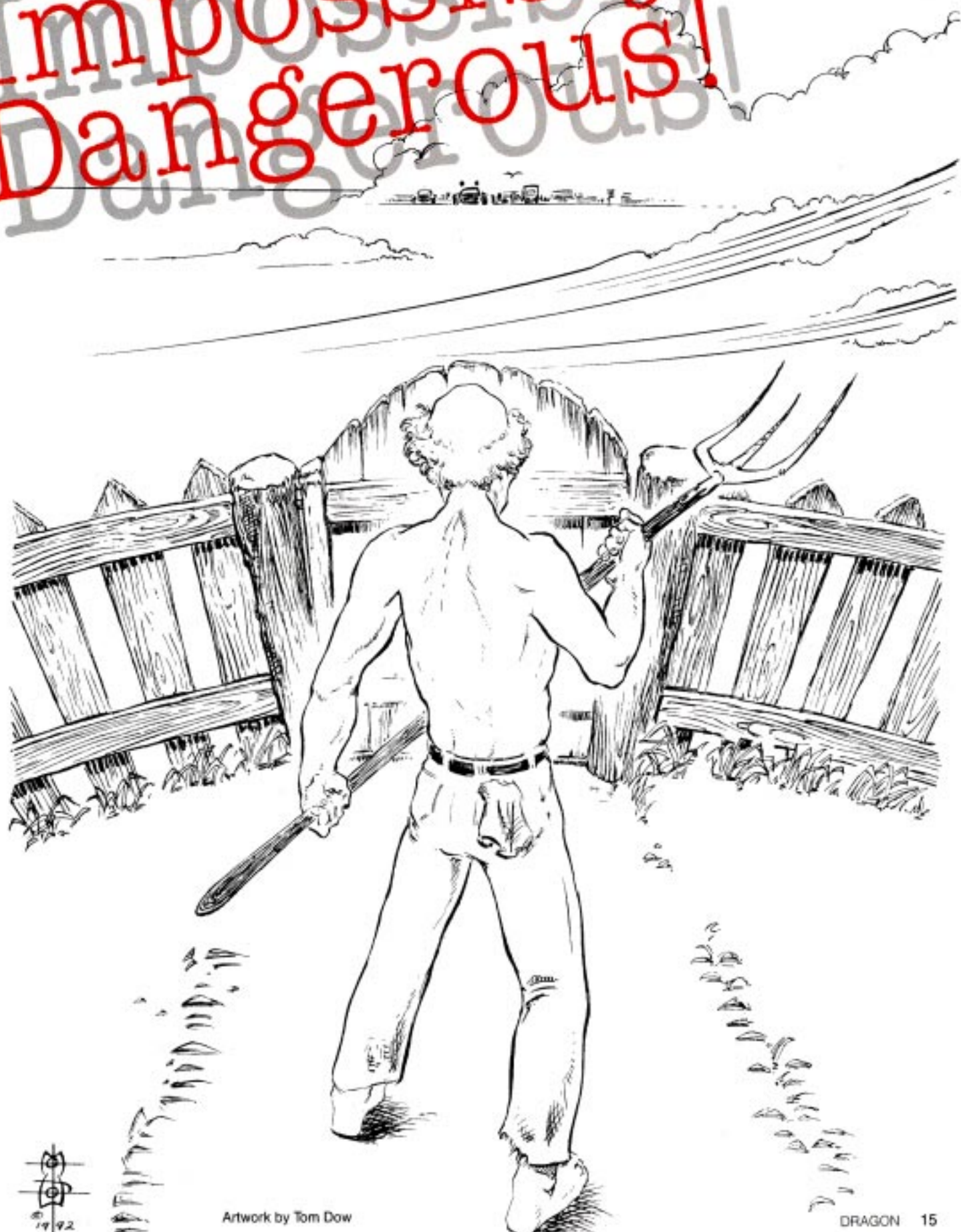
## Corporate espionage

This is another perennial favorite among campaign themes. The DARK CONSPIRACY world features giant megacorporations whose personnel (at least the high-ranking ones) are among the handful of people on Earth who live lives of luxury in the time-honored tradition of R. Talsorian's CYBERPUNK\* and FASA's SHADOWRUN\* games. Indeed, the DARK CONSPIRACY game is a variant on the themes of those two games, with the emphasis on supernatural horror rather than hardware. The huge corps are enemies of the common people and the government, both of whom have people working openly or clandestinely against them. The corps are also at odds with each other. Finally, some of the corps have been infiltrated by the Dark Minions, or at least have members influenced by the latter.

Espionage takes several forms. Government agents, federal and local law-enforcement officials, journalists, and

GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY\* game

# Impossibly Dangerous!



Artwork by Tom Dow

private investigators all snoop into corporate business as a matter of course. A computer programmer can go the hacker route to dig up dirt from the company's own electronic files. Mystics, parapsychists, psychic test subjects, and some professors and cyborg escapees may try more exotic means of investigation.

Politicians and nomenklatura might not do the actual spying, but they might be bankrolling those who are. Street people such as drifters, proles, and the homeless may keep a watch to see who goes in and out the gates, and gangers could do the same. Finally, people whose jobs require them to visit a company or work there all the time, such as truckers, medical doctors, paramedics, attorneys, mechanics, managers, factory workers, and security guards (bodyguards, mercenaries, or soldiers at a military base), may be planted to obtain inside information.

A psychiatrist could subtly pump a corp employee for information during the course of therapy; if that doesn't work, various tell-all drugs could be used during the course of the patient's treatment. Other employees could let something slip while talking to some idol (an athlete, entertainer, politician, or clergyman). Some public employees, such as mail carriers and garbage men, visit a company's headquarters on a regular basis, becoming such a familiar sight that they might get away with certain liberties that would get a perfect stranger tossed in the slammer.

For real inside information, consider the opportunities when a new corporate headquarters is built. The civil engineer might be persuaded to show off the plans of the new building. If not, the plans can be briefly stolen from him or copied. Construction workers are also in a good posi-

tion to reveal things such as where hidden areas and heavily constructed storerooms are located. Theoretically, commercial and military pilots and astronauts also could pick up much information on "fly-overs," assuming they had legitimate reasons to be passing over the building site in the first place.

There is also the reverse side of the coin: counter-espionage and security. The same people who spy would be good at sniffing out spies as well, while computer programmers could devise special electronic security systems for the firm's electronic files. For physical security, bodyguards and mercenaries are quite useful, as are policemen and military personnel for mid-to high-security projects. On the other hand, a secret headquarters may be in the most run-down part of town, guarded only by the local gangers, homeless, and proles. The theory here is that a place that is unimpressive from the outside will not need a big security force because it is less likely to attract attention, as opposed to a place surrounded by tanks and artillery pieces, which would practically scream "Secret base!" to the world. Finally, some research labs could be in space, manned and protected only by astronauts, scientists (professors, parapsychists, etc.), and possibly Air Force personnel.

### Protect the pioneers

This "Old West" scenario works surprisingly well in the world of the near future. One look at the map of the U.S.A. on page 66 of the DARK CONSPIRACY rulebook shows that a sizeable part of the country is now out-law country, where the only law is the occasional state police patrol on the interstate. Things get worse when the area in question is close to the so-called

Demongrounds. Many farmers and small-town residents either cannot afford to move to the city or refuse to (a wise move, considering the state of those urban areas that are now playgrounds for the wealthy). Beset on all sides by greedy corporations, criminals, and Dark Minions, country folk need all the help they can get.

The farmer and local law-enforcement classes are the ones most likely to be used in a campaign concentrating on a rural community's efforts to survive on its own. Clergy, mechanics, and medical workers are other good local characters to use. An entire campaign could be constructed around the residents' day-to-day survival efforts (such as the farmers trying to keep their machinery going) while fighting off wild animals, Dark Minions, criminals, and corporate takeovers, not to mention the occasional storm, drought, or cloud of radioactive fallout for variety.

Other character classes may have good reasons for visiting the small towns, aside from checking on friends or relatives. A journalist could be doing a series on how America's small towns are faring in these hard new times. A trucker could be delivering supplies, as could a commercial pilot or merchant marine in some circumstances. Drifters, the homeless, and construction workers often roam about, looking for work. Environmentalists could be checking conditions, while a bounty hunter, private or government investigator, or a state or federal law-enforcement type could show up on the trail of criminals. A manager could be sent in to see if the local town has the work force and facilities for setting up a plant or warehouse.

Even athletes and entertainers might tour the countryside in the DARK CONSPIRACY game's version of "Farm Aid," and politicians could do the same to show the rural folks that they are not forgotten. Celebrities need security such as bodyguards, mercenaries, martial artists, and gangers—even military or police personnel, in the case of VIPs or particularly lawless areas (like the neighbors of a Demonground area). Last, but not least, criminals and cyborg escapees could show up on the run, looking for refuge that they might not find.

If a small town or rural community is being besieged by wild animals, criminals, corporate thugs, or Dark Minions, its people will need substantial help to survive. At the very least, this means arms shipments and other supplies, thus providing employment for truckers, commercial pilots, merchant marines, and the security types who guard the supplies. With shipments of arms or machinery, a business manager might even be required to come along with his wares, to teach the locals how to handle the stuff.

In many cases, outsiders will be necessary as fighters in the front lines if the locals are not to be annihilated. Mercenaries and bodyguards are naturals here, though other fighter types such as gangers



and martial artists can be used. Environmentalists of the DARK CONSPIRACY world are already in the habit of fighting to prevent further ravaging of the land, and the various investigator classes will be pressed into service in an emergency. In areas near Demonground, parapsychists, professors, psychic test subjects, and mystics will be drawn to investigate; their talents will be useful against supernatural foes.

In extreme cases, to be used mainly by combat-happy players and GMs, a newly discovered resource could make the government decide the local grounds are valuable enough to fight over; a preemptive strike may even be made against the local Demonground. In either case, large-scale employment of police or military forces will be used. Anyone who saw the movie *Aliens* will know the potential for conflict inherent in such a scenario.

If you really like government and military involvement in such cases, try an adventure where the beleaguered community is a NASA or military base on the moon, or a space station. This is even more like *Aliens* than the above examples, and it provides plenty of opportunities for shooting it out with ray-gun-wielding ETs (extraterrestrials). Some Dark Minions could appear as lone, powerful extraterrestrial monsters, such as the Monster from the Id in the movie *Forbidden Planet*. (Well, if you can use tabloids to provide ideas for adventures in this game, why not SF and horror movies?)

For a novel spin, you could have a campaign that combines this category with the first one. In it, the PCs would be members of a truck convoy or the crew of a merchant ship or cargo plane, or are the military or security types guarding them. In this campaign (as opposed to a lone adven-

ture, as suggested in the first section), the adventuring would consist of traveling all over the country and perhaps the world, delivering supplies while fighting off criminals and Dark Minions, dealing with suspicious local law officers, and adapting to local customs before lynch mobs show up. This would be the equivalent of the science-fiction campaign where the PCs pilot a spaceship as a freighter, or a campaign based on West End Games' TORC\* game centered on the realm runner and profiteer character templates.

A variant on this is to form a marauding band of PC raiders (criminals and gangers) and rampage around, but the lack of a secure source of supplies and equipment, particularly guns and ammunition, does not make this a good option for a long-term campaign.

### Quick-reaction force

This is another DARK CONSPIRACY game favorite, with the PCs working together as a team that runs down leads concerning the activity of the Dark Minions, and takes action against them when they appear.

Most PC teams are composed of civilian free-lancers, who can be of any class, but official forces composed of police, government agents, or military personnel could easily be created. In fact, if the real world started turning into its DARK CONSPIRACY game counterpart, you can bet that government-sponsored teams *would* be created. SWAT teams, groups of FBI agents, and military commandos on the order of the Green Berets, SEALs, SAS, and Spetsnaz would all be turned on the problem, probably long before things got as bad as they are in this game world.

Since the primary purpose of the quick-reaction team is to destroy the Dark Min-

ions wherever they appear, the bulk of the party will be composed of fighter types, whether military personnel or civilian classes such as mercenaries, bodyguards, gangers, and martial artists. A few intellectual types such as private investigators, professors, parapsychists, and mystics will also be along to provide the brains that direct the brawn, and the more mystical types can also fight foes that cannot be defeated by gunfire alone.

Some classes will be more involved on the fringes of this type of adventure than others. Politicians and nomenklatura are good candidates for masterminds who finance the team's efforts and give them their marching orders. Journalists and private investigators may do no more than uncover traces of the presence of Dark Minions and point the team in their direction. It is even conceivable that high-profile figures like athletes, entertainers, politicians, and members of the clergy may receive pleas for help from desperate admirers because the latter have no one else to turn to.

Fans of other horror RPGs will be most familiar with this type of adventure, as it is a standard set-up for Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* (CoC) game. DARK CONSPIRACY game PCs with psychic powers don't have nearly the same abilities that CoC spell-casters have, but the Dark Minions aren't nearly as powerful as Cthulhu and his cohorts. In fact, DARK CONSPIRACY game players will have an easier time of it, as they have more high-tech weaponry, and the bulk of the monsters in the game are perfectly vulnerable to ordinary or modified weapons (such as ultraviolet lasers).

### Explore the ruins

This adventure sounds more suited to TSR's D&D® and AD&D® games than the DARK CONSPIRACY game, but in fact it is quite appropriate. The rulebook makes it clear that there are many ancient sites on earth where the Dark Minions can come out into the normal world. Caves, mountain peaks, and the sites of old Native American villages are all good places to investigate. In fact, the PCs could go to these places even without knowing the Dark Minions are there. A professor could lead an expedition there to do mundane research, with a heavily armed party along due to the unsettled nature of the times. This is the best type of adventure for introducing new Dark Minions based on the creatures of myth and legend.

In the DARK CONSPIRACY world, of course, not all ruins are ancient. Many small towns have been abandoned, as the inhabitants have been kicked out by corporations, have abandoned the hard life and moved to the city, or were wiped out by the Dark Minions. Most of the ruins the PCs investigate will be what the rulebook refers to as the Demonground. The designated spots on the map on page 66 of the

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## Mission: Impossibly Dangerous!

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rules just show the major areas; smaller spots can show up anywhere, with more large and small sites showing up all the time.

Many role-players would get a particular kick out of adventuring in scenarios set in their real-life hometowns or neighborhoods. In the DARK CONSPIRACY game, you can base an entire campaign there. See your hometown converted into Demonground, where you must stalk through the homes and businesses you are familiar with and root out the sources of evil. Conversely, your community could be an average struggling community in the new world order. In that case, you can fight to keep your hometown from becoming Demonground, as well as fighting off packs of wild animals, bandits, and corpsponsored thugs. You could even fight to get shipments of supplies through to all the communities in the general area. The possibilities are endless.

The fighter and investigator types must be more closely balanced in this type of adventure than in any other. Espionage adventures favor investigators, while all the rest rely mainly on combat specialists. Aside from the standard types of both, the more exotic classes can come into play at times. A journalist could cover a particularly important expedition, or could do it

all the time if the publication in question was a science-oriented one. Archaeology-minded members of the nomenclatura could finance expeditions, and the more jaded characters might even go along.

Drifters, homeless characters, rebellious proles, and even gangers might sign on to do the more physical work, just to get spending money. Construction workers and civil engineers could also get involved, both in the actual excavation work and in constructing shelters for the research team. The transport classes (truckers, commercial pilots, merchant marines) could take the team to the site and make regular supply runs.

An entertainer might consider a location with exotic ruins to be a great place to shoot a video or movie. Politicians with dollar signs in their eyes might want to turn the ruins into a tourist attraction (as if anyone could afford vacations any more, or dared travel). Once the attraction was official, public employees might be assigned to run it. If hired help is scarce, local authorities might have a chain gang of convicts do the digging. Any sizeable expedition will need a doctor and at least one mechanic along. Even an environmentalist might invite himself along, just to make sure that all that digging doesn't upset the local balance of nature.

### Big-game hunting

Despite the title, the purpose of this

adventure isn't mere sport, nor is it just another term for a search-and-destroy mission that the exploration and quick-reaction adventures specialize in. Rather, the purpose of the hunt is to either capture a specific beast and bring it back alive for study, or to kill it and use its body parts as either research materials or ingredients for something special. In short, the PCs in this adventure are the DARK CONSPIRACY game's equivalents of the suppliers of spell components in fantasy RPGs like the D&D, AD&D, and SHADOWRUN games.

Consider all the reasons for bringing back creatures or their body parts. Did alligators turn into dragons as the result of radiation, or was it a mutation caused by genetic experimentation? If the latter, then whose experiments were they, human's or Dark Minion's? Lesser vampires and moss zombies are living humans who were infected by diseases or parasites, so capturing them or taking samples of their blood and tissues could be vital in finding a cure for their conditions. Of course, there is always the "knowledge for knowledge's sake" scenario. This is particularly true when the quarry is a Dark Minion "pet" kept over from prehistoric times, such as the sabre-toothed cat.

Nearly all the character classes involved in the exploration of ruins can be used here, either during the hunt itself or as employees at the facility where the creatures finally end up. This is a great scenario for the GM to introduce new beasties. Not only will a new creature be an unknown quantity, but its existence will be the reason for the expedition in the first place. Fighting unknown monsters is always hard, and a "bring 'em back alive" expedition where the use of lethal force is prohibited makes it that much harder. If the PCs wind up killing the creature for selfish reasons like self-defense, they might find themselves unemployed (not to mention unpaid).

There is the reverse of this adventure, too, where humans are the prey, and the hunters are ETs or other Dark Minions. Aside from the simple kidnapping of lone travelers in the country or on a deserted city street, this scenario has been covered in the chapter on piracy and skyjacking.

As can be seen, there is a multitude of possible adventures in the DARK CONSPIRACY game. Whether you're shooting at giant squids with shipboard-mounted tank-breaker systems, stalking bloodkin trolls in Kentucky's Mammoth Caves, or lobbing mortar rounds on the local garage to kill the slither that's taken up residence there, you'll find plenty of action and adventure in this science-fiction world of the near future.  $\Omega$

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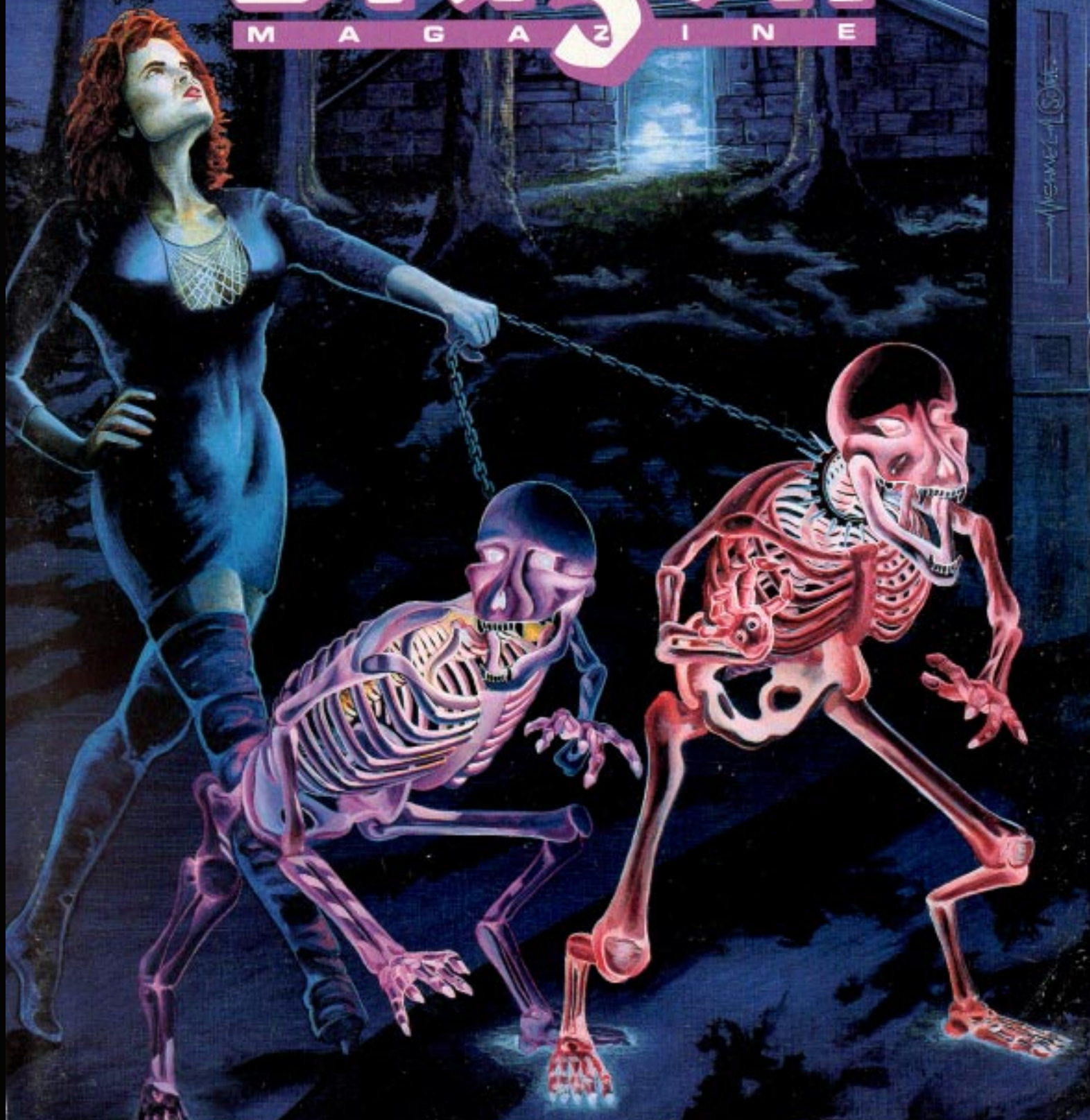
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WESLEY S. COLE

# D A R K C O N S P I R A C Y

Enter the darkness of the Darkwyrn  
in GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY\* game

©1993 by Lester W. Smith

## The Darkwyrn: DARK CONSPIRACY\* Game Statistics

<b>Strength:</b> 13	<b>Education:</b> 2	<b>Move:</b> 1/5/10/20
<b>Constitution:</b> 25	<b>Charisma:</b> 0	<b>Skill/Dam. * *:</b> 14/3D10
<b>Agility:</b> 4	<b>Empathy:</b> 9	<b>Hits:</b> 75/150
<b>Intelligence:</b> 7	<b>Initiative:</b> 4	<b># Appear:</b> 1

**Special:** Besides numerous unidentified Empathy powers, the Darkwyrn possesses two new skills—Energy Drain and Chaos Lightning—described in the text.

\*\* This skill rating is based on the D20 system. Halve for use with a D10. The damage rating is for melee combat only.

GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY\* game is set on an Earth of the very near future—an Earth where chaos reigns. Near-toal economic and political collapse have destroyed the superpowers and allowed the megacorporations to fill the vacuum of power.

Society's woes are not the only problem facing the world, they are but a symptom. An ancient evil, thought to exist only in humanity's deepest, darkest nightmares, has been unleashed. This unspeakable malevolence thrives on humanity's suffering. Parts of the world have fallen completely under the sway of this dark power, and are called *Demongrounds*.

Players take the roles of the exceptional men and women who know of the evil and fight to stop this global menace of unprecedented evil and stop the spread of the *Demongrounds*. An alien, malignant intelligence, imprisoned for millennia, is loose on Earth. It's up to your characters to uncover and destroy the menace.

Dragons appear in tales and legends from nearly every corner of the globe. Quite often, these mythological creatures

have symbolized royalty and power, such as on the prows of Norse ships, among the royal ensigns of England's Pendragon line, and on the Imperial Chinese flag. But in southeastern Europe and the Middle East, where the term *drakön* originated (meaning "serpent"), dragons have much more commonly represented evil. One marked example is the dark Egyptian god Apophis, a great, serpent-like being devoted to the forces of chaos and death.

### The mythology

In Egyptian mythology, Apophis had many variant names, including Apepi, Rerek, and a host of others. This dark god commonly took the form of a great lizard or serpent. Each night, when the sun god Ra journeyed through the dark underworld, Apophis lay in ambush, hoping to defeat Ra and swallow the sun. Ancient Egyptians prayed that the dark god would not succeed, lest the sun fail to rise, leaving the world to languish forever in darkness. They believed that their prayers aided the sun god in his nightly struggle with the evil Apophis.

### The reality

Of course, as modern minion hunters have learned since the onslaught of the darkling invasion of our planet, fables all too often contain a marked dose of truth. The legend of Apophis is certainly no exception. Among the *cognoscenti*, the mythology surrounding Apophis has lately come to be connected with an incredibly powerful creature christened the Darkwyrn by those who have encountered it and lived to tell the tale. How many of the creatures exist remains to be discovered, but given the scarcity of sightings and the awesome power evidenced, those minion hunters who are aware of the reports suggest (and hope) that there is only one—though that one could conceivably be a Dark Lord in its own right.

Survivors of Darkwyrn sightings describe the being as an enormous lizardlike creature, the size of a delivery truck, with a heavy body, short legs, leathery wings (incapable of lifting the beast in Earth's gravity), and five, long, wormlike heads. According to their tales, the creature is always accompanied by a horrendous stench and an aura of deep, cold darkness. It is very rarely encountered above ground, and then only in the deep of night. Generally, it has been encountered in subterranean passages such as subway or sewer tunnels.

The being's aura of dark and cold is a result of one of two primary powers possessed by the Darkwyrn. The creature leeches energy from its environment in much the same way that the Pale does (page 226 of the DARK CONSPIRACY\* rule book). It leeches heat from living beings. But whereas the Pale must establish physi-



cal contact in order to initiate an Empathic link, the Darkwyrms automatically draws in the energy empathically from living and nonliving objects, at a range of up-to several hundred meters. Because the creature drains energy at range, the very air in its vicinity grows dim, progressively more so the closer an observer is to the being.

The other primary power of the Darkwyrms is the ability to release this stolen energy from its heads in strikes of lightninglike force. Some observers suggest the term "chaos lightning" for this power, because when a target is hit by this force, the blasted spots crackle with miniature lightnings and grow in size, disintegrating the entire target within minutes. According to reports, the only way to halt this process of disintegration is to flee the Darkwyrms' vicinity. Once outside the being's Empathic range, the spread and the damage stop.

This is not to say that the Darkwyrms has no other Empathic powers. If it is a Dark Lord, as some suggest, then it is likely to have a full repertoire of Empathic abilities at its disposal. Dimension Walk would most likely be one of them, given that the being has appeared on Earth. Of course, it is possible that the Darkwyrms has servants or worshippers to open a portal instead. Some minion hunters speculate that the being is native to a protodimension of lower gravity than Earth's, where its wings would allow flight, and that it is uncomfortable here for extended periods of time. Others suggest that the Darkwyrms can manifest itself on Earth for only relatively short durations (perhaps a couple of days at a time, at most) before running out of energy. Either theory would explain why the creature is so seldom encountered. Further, some believe that the being dislikes direct sunlight, that this energy is too intense and its source too distant for the Darkwyrms' comfort. Keep in mind, however, that this is all only conjecture.

### Energy Drain

Through use of this skill, the Darkwyrms is able to leech energy out of its environment. The being has such practice with this skill that it automatically drains energy from inanimate objects within roughly a 300-meter radius of itself. Within this area, light steadily dims, items grow continually colder, electrical systems begin to lose power, the energy in batteries drains away, etc. The closer an object is to the Darkwyrms, the more pronounced the effect. Within 75 meters, vision is so obscured that attacks are made at one level of difficulty greater than normal, and electrical systems operate at about half efficiency. Within 20 meters, the vision penalty for attacks is two levels greater than normal, and electrical systems go completely dead.

The Darkwyrms can drain energy from living creatures nearly as easily. No skill roll is made to do so, but a Power Level is generated as if the Darkwyrms had rolled a normal success, rather than an outstand-

ing one, and ignoring for the moment the Willpower of target creatures. For each Power Point the Darkwyrms achieves, the radius of effect is five meters. (This assumes you are using the D20 system; under the original D10 system, it is 10 meters per Power Point.) For targets with a Willpower skill rating, subtract five meters per point of skill. (Again, make this 10 meters per point if using the D10 system.) Within this radius, creatures suffer a life force drain equal to 1D6 points of damage each five seconds. For PCs, apply this to the chest hit location. Besides the normal combat effects of such "wounding," victims suffer a penalty to all skill attempts. This penalty is equal to the Initiative penalty listed for the wound. (Halve the penalty if using the D10 system, rounding up.)

What this all means is that as a group of adventurers approach a Darkwyrms (usually without realizing it), they will begin to feel a chill to the air, and experience a dimness to their sight. (It is actually the air that is growing dim, but to the adventurers, it will seem a visual effect, as if from eye strain.) As they proceed, much of their equipment will begin failing: Flashlights will dim, communications gear will grow faint, electric watches will run slow, lasers will go dead as their power packs drain, etc. Soon, characters with little or no Willpower skill will begin to feel a vitality drain. Higher Willpower characters will feel the effects a bit later, as they grow ever closer to the Darkwyrms. If they do not leave the area, eventually everyone will be drained to death.

### Chaos Lightning

This power creates lightning-like streaks of energy that flash from the Darkwyrms' heads. The lightning not only causes damage upon contact, but also begins a progressive disintegration of its target. The Darkwyrms can release one of these blasts each five seconds, as long as it retains all of its heads. For each head seriously or critically damaged, the being loses one chaos-lightning attack.

Short range for chaos lightning attacks is 20 meters, and the being's skill rating for these attacks is 16 (half that for the D10 system). Initial damage from a strike is 3D6. Each five seconds thereafter, the location struck takes another 1D6 of damage from progressive disintegration, as long as the target remains within the Darkwyrms' life-draining range. (Note that the damage and disintegration also apply to clothing, equipment, etc., at the target hit location.)

### Hooks

**Enemy of my enemy:** A group of Nukid sorcerers are bent on venting their anger toward normal human society in your PCs' metropolis. Over the course of several weeks, they open portals to various protodimensions, freeing the denizens there to wreak havoc in the city. In defeat-

ing those otherworldly creatures, the PCs learn of the Nukids behind the plot. But upon confronting them, the PCs find that instead of fighting, the sorcerers are completely terrified of their latest summoning and beg the PCs for help to banish it. That summoning is, of course, the Darkwyrms. If the PCs succeed in banishing it, not only will they save the city much destruction, they will also have forged an alliance with the Nukids, which could prove quite helpful in the future.

**When the forest comes walking:** A rural demonground near whatever metropolis your PCs currently occupy has been expanding recently, but in one direction only—toward the city. If the PCs research the history of the area, they learn that the demonground was centered on a cave complex. When they go to investigate, they must first work their way through miles of surface demonground (an adventure in its own right). Upon entering the caves, they discover, to their horror, that the surface growth is actually a secondary effect of new tunneling which has nearly reached the city. Within those tunnels, the boundaries between Earth's dimension and the protodimensions is extremely thin. Hideous slug-behemoths are doing the tunneling, but they are merely mindless servants of a greater being—the Darkwyrms. That evil being found its way to Earth within the original caverns and now seeks to enter the metropolis to begin a reign of destruction. To resolve this adventure, the PCs will have to learn the Darkwyrms' aversion to sunlight, then open the new caverns to the sun, likely requiring the aid of a military demolitions team and an incredible amount of high explosives.

### Notes

DARK CONSPIRACY referees should keep in mind that this creature is extremely tough. It is not intended as a foe your PCs can likely destroy. Rather, it is something to throw a scare into them. Use it sparingly, but ruthlessly.

Besides the two main abilities above, you should allow the Darkwyrms to use whatever other Empathic powers seem fitting at the time your PCs encounter it. It will not likely use communication powers, however, other than in an attempt to dominate and immobilize targets so as to more easily destroy them.

The PCs' only obvious hope when encountering a Darkwyrms is to flee from it, at least at first. Later, you may wish to let them discover its aversion to sunlight. If they manage to expose it to direct, strong, sunlight, the being will be banished back to its native protodimension, which is a victory of sorts. Ω

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