

COURIER SERVICE

A SOLO ADVENTURE FOR RISUS: THE ANYTHING RPG BY S. JOHN ROSS

Courier Service is an example of what is sometimes known as “Solo Adventures” or “Solitaire Game Books.” It is a way of playing a role-playing game (rpg) by yourself, eliminating the need for a referee or “Game Master.” The ruleset of choice is *Risus: The Anything RPG* written by S. John Ross. It is available for free at www.cumberlandgames.com.

Characters in *Risus* are built by dividing 10 dice among various clichés. These clichés are broad descriptions of skills, abilities, motivations, philosophies and demeanors. An absolute beginner cliché will have one (1) die assigned to it, while a Supreme Master will rank no more than six (6) dice. On average, competency is around 3-4 dice.

Whenever a character attempts any action, the player will choose the appropriate cliché for the action. He will then roll the number of dice allocated to that cliché and try to beat a target number assigned to the task. A target number (TN) of 5 is considered child’s play, while TN’s of 30 are superhuman.

If a character enters into a combat situation, then each contestant will roll the dice assigned to their appropriate clichés. The loser deducts a dice from his cliché and then the process begins again. Combat is over when one combatant is reduced to zero dice in his cliché.

In *Courier Service*, you are controlling a 1930’s San Francisco Pulp Private Investigator by the name of Peter Clarkson:

Peter Clarkson, Private Investigator

Clichés:

Pulp Era Private Detective (3)

Leadfoot Driver (3)

Cool-Hand Gunman (2)

Smooth-Talking Rogue (2)

Your doors have been open a week. Your furniture is used, but serviceable, in keeping with the image you want to project of a detective for the common man. Your files are impeccably organized (they should be – they are virtually empty!), and you have made certain that all of your pencils have been sharpened. Twice. Your doors have been open a week..

Its times like this you wish you had listened to what your mother had said. You try to remember what she said, but can’t; you weren’t listening.

Suddenly, the phone rings. You are shocked motionless. Even though you opened your doors a week ago, *no one* has ever called, not even a wrong number! You try to regain your composure and reach for the ringing phone.

Roll either your Pulp Era Private Detective (3) or your Smooth-Talking Rogue (2) cliché. If you roll better than a 5, go to 13. If you roll less than a 5, go to 25

1

Their initial rush surprises you. You put up a valiant effort, but the three thugs are too much. You get in a few lucky punches, but in the end, the first one sinks his wicked-looking knife into your torso, followed by the others, bearing a knife and hatchet. In a few, bloody seconds, the fight is over. They dump your mutilated body over the railing of the ship to be food for the sharks. Your adventure is over.

THE END

2

You smile awkwardly at the two men. You ask them about places to go in Chinatown. They point you to places you are already familiar with, but of course, they don't know that.

Roll your "Smooth-Talking Rogue (2)" cliché. If you roll a 6 or better, go to 12. If you roll less than 6, go to 17.

3

The Scarlet Dragon fires a shot, but you anticipated that, and duck behind a piece of furniture. You pull your gun and the two of you trade shots. At last one of your shots misses wide, but at that moment, the lightship lurches, and the Scarlet Dragon falls into the bulkhead, knocking him cold.

Cautiously, you move over to the prone form in red Chinese silks. Kicking his gun out of the way, you examine the

figure after securing his arms and legs. Slowly, you remove the dragon mask that hid the figure's identity. You gasp, as all of a sudden you understand why the muffled voice sounded so familiar: for laying before you is none other than your employer, Mr. Douglas LeRoux!

Go to 40

4

At last, the van stops and the men get out of the van. You count to twenty and cautiously open the door and get out to get your bearings. You are standing in front of a Chinese restaurant, the Little China Grill. Suddenly, a hunch seizes you. You look at the scrap of paper you found in the back of the van with LeRoux's name. Turning the paper over, you notice that it was written on a piece torn from a menu of the same restaurant you stand in front of now.

Go to 41

5

"May I see the letters?" you ask.

"But of course." LeRoux walks to his desk, opens a drawer and pulls out a stack of carefully-folded papers, which he then hands to you. You glance through them and note that they do warn LeRoux against selling the item to anyone other than the author of the letters, someone calling himself "the Scarlet Dragon." You hand the letters back to LeRoux.

“Have you reported this to the police?”

LeRoux sighs and replies, “I’m afraid not. As I said, I really would like this to stay out of the local papers. I’d prefer this to remain between myself, the museum, and you, if you are interested.”

Go to 15

6

You pull up in front of what looks like a typical Chinese laundry in the heart of Chinatown. There is a door that leads into the busy laundry directly in front of you, and off to the side, an alley that apparently leads to an area behind the building.

If you enter the laundry, go to 46. If you go behind the laundry via the alley, go to 8

7

The voice on the other end of the line is smoothly cultured. “Mr. Clarkson, my employer, Mr. Douglas LeRoux, would like to hire you on a matter of great delicacy. Could you come to his house near Berkley tomorrow morning at 10:00?”

You don’t have anything scheduled, but *he* doesn’t know that. “Let me see...I do have an appointment, but I can cancel that easily enough. Tell Mr. LeRoux that I will be there at 10:00 sharp.”

“Excellent! Mr. LeRoux will be most pleased.”

Go to 24

8

You slip into the alley and around to the back of the laundry. As you round the corner you see a sight that cause you to draw your breath quickly. A black delivery van with a dent in the exact

place it should be if it had hit your car! Opening the back of the van, you look to see if there might be any sign of the stolen figure. Inside, you see a number of laundry bags. Just noticeable, however, you see a small scrap of paper. Picking it up, you read the name and address of your employer, Mr. Douglas LeRoux.

Roll your Pulp Era Private Detective cliché. If you roll a 9 or less, go to 35. If you roll a 10 or better, go to 19.

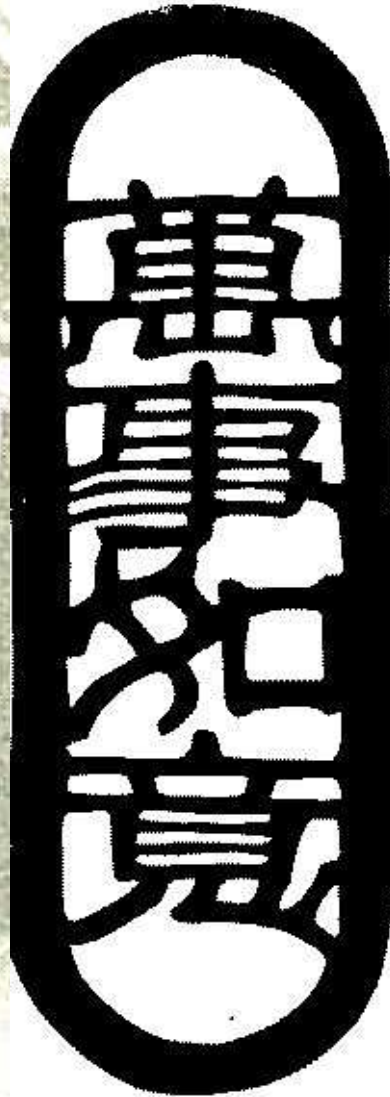
9

You get out of your car and carefully walk along the area where the delivery van was. At first, you don’t notice anything, but then, in the brush, near a fresh tire mark, you see a small slip of paper.

Picking it up, you realize that it is a laundry ticket from “Quong Wing Chong Laundry, 866 Sacramento St.”

If you report the theft and turn over the clue to the police, go to 16.

If you decide to go to the Laundry and look for clues there, go to 6.



10

You watch dumbfounded as they drive off.

If you want to drive return to the LeRoux house and report the theft, go to 16.

If you want to search the scene to see if there is a clue as to who the thieves are, go to 9

11

You struggle to make yourself understood for another few minutes. At last, you realize that you are not making any headway, and you decide to leave the laundry.

If you decide to examine the alley behind the laundry, go to 8. If you decide to give up the case, go to 16.

12

The two men smile knowingly as you fumble with your chopsticks. You seem to have convinced them that you are a tourist. Eventually, you carefully guide the conversation around to the Chinese laundry van, and the three men. You pull it off by casually mentioning that you are in need of some laundry services, and that you noticed a van out front when you entered the restaurant. Would they recommend the laundry? They emphatically nod yes. What about their route? They drive from the hotel areas, through Chinatown, and then end up at the docks. You thank

them for helping out an ignorant tourist. You pay your bill, and leave the restaurant and your two new friends.

As you walk out the door, you think you catch a glimpse of the delivery van rounding a corner and disappearing from view.

If you choose to go to the docks and wait for the van to show up, go to 48. If you arrived at the restaurant in your own car, go to 44. If you arrived hiding in the delivery van, go to 21.

B

You assume an air of professionalism. "Clarkson Investigations, Peter Clarkson speaking. How may I help you?" Your mother would be proud of you now...
Go to 7

14

When your eyes open, you realize that you are face to face with the pavement. You scramble to your

feet, shaking your head in an attempt to clear the cobwebs.

You look around the alley, and with a sick feeling, the awareness that the van is gone slowly creeps into your pounding skull.



As you stagger around in the alley, trying to figure out what to do, you remember the scrap of paper you found in the van. You look at your hand, which still holds the paper.

Turning it over, you see that the note was written on a piece torn from a menu from the Little China Grill on Stockton Street.

If you decide that the case has just gotten too dangerous, go to 16. If you decide to check out the Chinese restaurant, go to 34.

15

“So what is this artifact?” you ask, carefully masking your enthusiasm. *This will be a piece of cake!*

“I am in possession of a carving of a Chinese Warlord that dates from the Tang Dynasty.” LeRoux strides over to an ornately decorated box on his desk. With the flip of a latch, he lifts the lid and slowly raises an eighteen inch figurine into view. It looks as if it had been carved out of ivory, and inlaid with mahogany and gold. He notices you staring at the statue.

“Exquisite, isn’t it? Now you understand why I want a professional to deliver it. Upon a successful delivery you will receive a check drawn in the

amount of \$1,000.00. Are you interested?”

If you take the job, go to 37. If you want more information on the job, go to 47

16

You decide to give up and call the police. They take over, and the press gets a hold of the story, two things that Mr. LeRoux did not want to happen. But you felt that you were just in way over your head. You have managed to score other cases, but even still, its going to take a long time to pay off the insurance policy you agreed to.

THE END.

17

Gradually, you try to steer the conversation around to the three laundry workers. But the two men don’t seem interested in continuing the conversation any longer. You finish your lunch in a brutal silence. Then you

leave and return to your office, at a complete dead-end.

Go to 16.

18

You feel a little silly. But you decide to give it another shot. After all, you are a professional, and you are determined to get the figure back.

Go to 12



19

Although you are still intent on finding any other clue in the van, you hear soft footsteps padding their way into the alley.

If you decide to hide amongst some boxes and other debris in the alley, go to 30. If take a chance and hide in the van itself, go to 33.

20

You open the door to one cabin and come face to face with the three laundry workers. But it seems they have been expecting you. They have some form of bladed weapons drawn and rush you with murder in their eyes.

The three laundry workers will fight as a Grunt Squad (for details see the Risus Rules, p.3 PDF). Treat them as "Chinatown Thugs (2)." You may use either your "Pulp Era Private Detective (3)" or your "Cool Hand Gunman (2)" cliché. If you reduce the thugs to zero dice, go to 29. If you are reduced in either of your cliché dice to zero, go to 1.

21

You hail the nearest taxi cab. After describing the van you are looking for and telling him the general direction that the van was heading, you begin patrolling the streets and alleyways of Chinatown. As you pass intersections, you crane your neck trying to catch sight of the van. Occasionally, you think you see it, but as you get closer, you discover it is the wrong van. After some time, the driver looks back at you sympathetically and tells you that your fare is getting pretty steep. Reluctantly you agree with him.



If you tell the cabbie to take you to the docks, go to 48. If you have decided that this case just isn't worth the effort and request to be taken back to your office, go to 16.

22

Looking around, you see a small dinghy tied up at the same pier. Quickly, you loose the lines and push away from the docks. Rowing silently, you approach the lightship. Looking around the outside of the ship, you become aware that the only way to get aboard this boat is by climbing up the anchor cable.

Roll against your "Pulp Era Private Detective (3)" cliché. If you roll an 8 or better, go to 38. If you roll less than an 8, then go to 36.

23

Roll your Leadfoot Driver (2) cliché. If you roll a 10 or higher, go to 43. If you roll less than a 10, go to 27

24

The next day, you drive out to the country estate of Douglas LeRoux. After your telephone call, you did a little checking. It seems that Douglas LeRoux is one of the leading financiers in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has dealings in the stock market, banking, industry and the import-export business.

You pull up to the front door, and it seems that LeRoux has done pretty well for himself from the looks of the estate. Even the front door is impressive beyond belief. You ring the bell and you wait. But you don't wait long. The door opens, and you are faced with a distinguished middle aged man dressed in a dark suit.

"Mr. Clarkson, I presume? Mr. Douglas will be pleased you have arrived so promptly. Please follow me." The voice was as cultured as the figure. It is apparent to you that this is the person who called yesterday. You follow him to a room richly decorated with wood paneling, heavy velvet curtains, leather-upholstered furniture and more books than you have ever seen in your life.

In front of a large window, stands a figure. His back is to you, hands clasped behind him. He stares out the window, until the butler leaves.

Go to 39



25

You try to mask your excitement as you pick up the receiver. As soon as you open your mouth, it all tumbles out. "Clarkson Investigations," you squeak.

There is a noticeable pause on the other end. "Is Mr. Clarkson available?"

You recover quickly. "Just a moment," you reply with an affected squeak. Covering the mouthpiece of the phone with your hand you clear your throat. "This is Peter Clarkson, how may I help you?"

Go to 7

26

You open a cabin and you are shocked at what you see. Standing before you is a tall man, dressed in red Chinese robes wearing a dragon mask. On a table near the man you are coming to recognize as the Scarlet Dragon, is the figurine you have been charged with delivering to the museum!

"Mr. Clarkson, it seems I have grossly underestimated your persistence." The voice is muffled but something about it seems strangely familiar. "That is a mistake I won't make again." Looking at your adversary, it occurs to you that he is holding a gun pointed directly at you!

Roll against either your "Pulp Era Private Detective (3)" cliché or your "Cool Hand Gunman (2)" cliché. Treat the Scarlet Dragon as a "Criminal Mastermind (3)."

If you are reduced to zero cliché dice in either cliché, go to 42. If the Scarlet Dragon is reduced to zero, then go to 3.

27

You turn the key repeatedly, but only get a grinding noise from the engine. By the time you get the motor started, the van is long gone.

If you choose to contact the police and report the crime, go to 16.

If you decide to search the scene for clues, go to 9.

28

You take a deep breath and say, "Mr. LeRoux, it looks like you have got yourself a deal." You sign quickly and stand up.

By this time, he has already returned the figure to its box and is standing before you. "Johnson will see you to the door." As he hands you the box, the butler appears.

You follow him to the front door in silence. You begin the drive back to the city wrapped in your own thoughts.

About a mile from the LeRoux house, your reverie is interrupted by a black flash and sickening metallic crack, followed by a hard jar to the right.

A delivery truck has rushed up around you while you weren't paying attention, forcing you off the side of the road. The car careens into a stand of trees and abruptly ends its path at the trunk of one in particular.

Stunned, you are barely aware of three men dressed in Chinese silk garb pile out of the delivery van and rush up to your car. One of them reaches in and grabs the box containing the figurine and all three run back to the van and speed off

while you are still shaking the cobwebs out of your head.

Do you try to restart your car and follow? If yes, go to 23. If no, go to 10

29

One of the thugs lunges at you with a wicked-looking knife. You trap the blade against your body with your arm and swing him around to collide with the second thug. The impact makes him drop his hatchet. You twist the knife from the grip of the first and with two quick punches drop the first two in a crumpled heap on the floor. The third watches in wonder, then drops his blade and runs for the railing of the ship, jumping into the bay to escape. *Go to 26.*

30

Quickly, you move to the boxes in the alley and take a position where you can see the van and the entrance to the alley. You watch intently to see who is coming. Unfortunately, you did not see the person who stole up behind you. All you know is something crashes into your head, and then nothing. *Go to 14.*

31

Addressing the two Chinese men, you ask them what they know about the three laundry workers and the stolen figurine. Almost immediately, they avert their gaze and respond only in Chinese. Any further attempts prove fruitless. Frustrated, you sit back at your table and await your lunch order.



Roll your “Smooth-Talking Rogue (2)” cliché. If you roll 10 or better, go to 18. If you roll less than 10, go to 17.

32

As you struggle to make yourself understood, out of the corner of your eye you notice a worker fidgeting nervously. He attempts to slip out of the back of the laundry unnoticed. But you notice. You follow the worker into the back, carefully dodging other workers and laundry carts and jets of steam. Your quarry slips through a door at the very end of the work area. Close at his heels, you open the door. It leads out to the alley. The nervous worker is nowhere in sight, but what is in sight draws you up short: A black delivery van with a dent in the exact place it should be if it had hit your car! Opening the back of the van, you look to see if there might be any sign of the stolen figure. Inside, you see a number of laundry bags. Just noticeable, however, you see a small scrap of paper. Picking it up, you read the name and address of your employer, Mr. Douglas LeRoux.

Roll your *Pulp Era Private Detective* cliché. If you roll a 9 or less, go to 35. If you roll a 10 or better, go to 19.

33

As stealthily as possible, you climb into the back of the van and hide amongst the bags of laundry loaded into the van. While you practice your impersonation of a statue, three Chinese men dressed in silk climb into the cab of the van. They start the engine, and as you hold your breath, they drive away.

It is impossible to know which way you are being driven, but you are reasonably sure you are still in the Chinatown district.

Go to 4.

34

Figuring you have nothing else to lose, you make your way to Stockton Street. So far, that is the only lead you have to go on. You park your car in front of the Little China Grill and get out.

Go to 41

35

You continue to rummage around in the back of the van, hopeful that you can find anything else. You are completely lost in your search when suddenly, your head explodes in a mass of pain and then darkness.

Go to 14.

36

Slowly, you begin to make your way up the cable, hand over hand. About halfway up, your hand slips, and trying to grab the cable, you lose your grip and fall with a very loud *splash* into the bay. You hold your breath for what seems like an eternity, then swim to an area close to the hull cloaked in shadow. You wait for another twenty heartbeats, and then try to make the climb again.

Go to 38.

37

“I sure am!” You blurt out, and then instantly regret it. You didn’t want to seem too eager.

LeRoux smiles and then speaks.

“Excellent! I do have a contract here...” He produces the document, which he has already signed. You quickly scan it and notice that there is an insurance clause that requires you to pay LeRoux the value of the figurine if it does not arrive at the museum. The contract identifies the figure at \$10,000.00.

This stops you cold. A thousand for delivery, but a ten thousand dollar penalty if you fail. Is it worth it? *If you say yes, go to 28. If no, then go to 45.*

38

You make it up the line without incident. Carefully, you begin searching the cabins of the lightship to find the workers, the figure, or all of the above.

If you fell into the water on your first attempt up the line, go to 20.

If you made it up the cable without falling into the bay, roll against your "Pulp Era Private Detective (3)" cliché. If you roll a 10 or better, go to 26. If you roll less than a 10, then go to 20.

39

The gentleman turns and speaks. "Mr. Clarkson, I'm certain you are wondering why I asked you here today." You say nothing, but the reality is, you *were* wondering. After all, you are a new and as yet unproven gumshoe. With the resources at his disposal, why would LeRoux hire you?

"Let me share with you my thinking. I have decided to sell an old Chinese artifact to the San Francisco Museum. However, I do not wish to deliver it in person. I would like for you to deliver it for me. You are a relative newcomer, and have not had the opportunity to make a name for yourself. You are the perfect individual to maintain a low profile."

"I wish to maintain a low profile because I have received several threatening letters regarding my sale."

Would you like to view the letters? If yes, go to 5. If not, go to 15

40

With LeRoux safely in police custody, you take stock of your first day on the job. Your employer turns out to be a crook, but you successfully delivered the Tang figurine to the museum. You didn't get the promised fee from LeRoux, but the museum did agree to shell out \$500 as a reward for securing the item. More than enough to cover your expenses and make a nice little profit. Not bad for a whole day's work.

THE END.

41

Determined to find out where the figure is so that you can deliver it to the Museum, and looking at the restaurant as the next piece to the puzzle, you walk in. As your eyes adjust to the dim light, you see that the restaurant is empty except for two Chinese men sitting at a table and the waiter who seats you.

You notice that as you look over the menu, the two men are eyeing you closely.

If you speak to them directly, go to 31. If you take your time, and try to win their confidence, go to 2.

42

The Scarlet Dragon fires a shot before you can react. The bullet slams into your body. You topple over and the room becomes fuzzy as you begin to lose focus. Eventually, as your life ebbs from you, the whole world becomes still and black. Your game is over.

THE END

43

The car roars to life, quickly, you back out onto the road. You see the trail of dust fast disappearing ahead of you. You manage to keep them in sight all the way back to the City, and then down the streets into the Chinatown district.

You manage to pull up close enough to them to read the name on the side of the van. It advertises a Chinese laundry called "Quong Wing Chong Laundry," located at 866 Sacramento St.

At that moment, the van takes a sudden right turn. You can't stop in time to follow them. So you drive on down to the next block and turn back. By the time you reach the cross street, there is no sign of the van.

If you give up and call the police, go to 16.

If you decide to go to Laundry and look for clues, go to 6

44

You jump in your car and start the engine. Quickly you pull away from the curb and turn down the street where you last saw the van. As you pass intersections, you look down the streets and alleyways trying to catch sight of the van. Occasionally, you think you see it, but as you get closer, you discover it is the wrong van. For some time, you patrol the area, but you have lost the trail.

If you decide to try the docks, go to 48.

If you have decided that this case just isn't worth the effort, go to 16.

45

You stare down at the contract carefully. Then swallowing hard, you push it back

toward your host. "I'm sorry Mr. LeRoux. I just don't think I'm the right guy for the job."

LeRoux looks at you for what seems an eternity. Then he speaks slowly. "Well, I'm sorry, too. I guess I overestimated your ability. Johnson will see you out." At that, the butler reenters the room. You follow him to the door in silence. You are wrapped up in your thoughts as you make the drive back to the city.

Over the next week you take other jobs, but nothing with the potential impact of LeRoux's offer. But then, one day you happen to be scanning the paper, and this headline catches your eye:

Chinese Treasure Stolen; Police Stumped

Reading the following article quickly, you realize that LeRoux had hired another gumshoe to do the job you wouldn't do, and this guy had botched the job. You can't help but wonder if you could've done a better job.

THE END.

46

You enter the laundry, and look around. There are several people here, both customers and workers, Chinese and White. You begin to question some of the workers concerning the delivery van that ran you off the road, but quickly realize that these workers either do not speak English, or have suddenly forgotten how.

Roll your Pulp Era Private Detective cliché. If you roll a 9 or less, go to 11. If you roll a 10 or better, go to 32.

47

You say carefully, “Well, Mr. LeRoux, that’s a mighty generous offer, but what happens if I don’t make it?”

LeRoux smiles broadly. “I knew you would be the right man for the job. You don’t leave anything to chance.” He walks over to his desk, opens a drawer and pulls out a piece of paper. I have a contract here. It stipulates that if the figurine fails to arrive at the museum, and I don’t receive my payment, then you will be responsible for the value of the piece, which is set by the museum at \$10,000.00.” He pauses while you absorb the full impact of his words. “Think of it as an insurance policy.” He smiles again. “But I’m confident it won’t come to that. I am certain I’ll be paying you instead of the other way around. So, what do you say?”

If you say yes, go to 28. If no, then go to 45

48

The docks have always been a trial on your nerves. They are full of shadows and blind spots where any number of ambushes could occur. Fortunately, there is only one way to arrive. You find what looks to you to be a safe place where you can observe the entrance and take note of anyone coming and going.

You begin to lose track of the time you have been there. You know it has been several hours, but you’re not quite sure just how long. At last, about dusk, you see what your eyes have been looking for: A black Chinese laundry delivery van, with a damaged front fender! Your heart skips a beat as three men get out carrying a small package.

Your gaze follows them as they descend a ladder over the pier. Shortly, you hear the noise of a motorboat engine.

Stepping away from your place of concealment to get a better view, you watch the boat pull away from the pier and head out to a boat anchored out in the bay. You recognize the boat as a lightship, used to warn other boats of rocks near the shore. It has been out of service for several years, but no one had ever removed it from the bay. But now, you notice that it isn’t abandoned anymore. There are lights burning in the portholes!

If you feel like it is time to call the police, go to 16.

If you decide to look for a way to get on board that lightship, go to 22.