

protodimension magazine



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As a fan-based publication, **Protodimension Magazine** is always looking for contributions by the fan community. Please see the **Protodimension Magazine** website at <http://www.protodimension.org/zine>. Submissions can be sent via email to submissions@protodimension.com

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SHUFFLING IN THE SHADOWS

“So much of what we do in the magazine-making business is about escape, offering windows to worlds that are not our own.”

Editors Note from Dwell Magazine, the May 2013 issue on **Global Style** by Amanda Dameron, Editor-in-Chief

I read that last week standing in the big box grocery/discount store that I cannot stand and I had to write it down for use in multiple editorial columns I have going on right now. It is so applicable to Protodimension Magazine, 3 Hombres Games, and all of us that write and create fiction or gaming products of all sorts. It really sums up what we are all about. Creating glimpses into other worlds, and in the case of roleplaying games exploring them in more depth as well.

So, welcome and greetings to our humble abode. Inside you will find, once again, things to assist and enliven your gaming experience. So much is happening in our hobby these days. For the 3rd year in a row RPGs have experienced a rise in sales according to reports, as of today (03/31/2013). The first International Tabletop Day was yesterday and it was a success from what I have garnered (at least it was fun at the shop I went to where I played *Zombie Fluxx* for the first time), new stores are opening, Kickstarter is all over the map, and things are looking pretty good for the gaming community as a whole. New systems, new settings, new editions of old favorites (*Dark Conspiracy* being one of those), all making for a sense of light and good for this niche industry.

There are down sides of course. In the city I live in, in the last 10 years there have been 3 bookstores that

closed along with the main game shop. There is still a comic shop left with some RPG items (*Pathfinder* mostly), and a Hobby Town with a touch of WH and WH40K miniatures in it. Otherwise for this city of 75k there is only a used bookstore and a Books A Million (with a few shelves of gaming material and nothing non-mainstream) left here. Good thing there are a good half a dozen stores within 2 hours driving that I know of personally. So all is not lost, but still it could be better in that respect.

That brings us to gaming magazines. *Kobold Quarterly* just passed away between the previous PDM issue and this one. *Gygax Magazine* has launched, but it does not cover our portion of the hobby. The revived *Unspeakable Oath* is still holding ground, and some other smaller more fantasy oriented mags are around. No others besides *UO* that I know of cover the Horror Gaming Genre, and none really covering the modern-surreal-post apocalyptic styles that we have under our writ as well.

(Note from Lee: I hear that *The Black Seal* is staging a comeback! If you don't know *TBS* it's a fine publication specializing in modern-era *Cthulhu & Delta Green*, and run by friends of mine)

So that takes us to our own selves. Where are we and where are we going.

Where we are: In great shape. We have the same staff since PDM started up, the same supportive contributors along with a slew of new ones since Issue 1. Articles, fiction, poetry, artwork and adventures still arrive, with quality that is humbling to this editor. The dedication that our fans and supporters give to us is

heartening and reminds me why I stay with roleplaying games as my primary hobby.

All of my gaming life I have known how wonderful the gaming community as a whole, in general and specific, can be. Regardless of our favorite game, we are all friends when we meet and that is the real strength of this passion, this adventure known as gaming. It is the support we give to each other that is the true gift of gaming.

So here we are, the 15th issue of *Protodimension Magazine*. As usual there is an assortment of articles, fiction, useful ideas, art, and support for game systems that we here at PDM enjoy playing as well as creating for.

Sit back, relax, enjoy the show and make sure to keep coming back and supporting all gaming, either here, in person, online, or at your local favorite gaming store. Our hobby is alive and well.

Remember to take time to enjoy your gaming, fiction, imagination, taking time to reach out and make your game a little more imaginative and enjoyable for everyone.

*Respectfully,
Tad Kelson
Lead Editor*



UNTITLED (CHATEAU) BY JIM KAZANJIAN

www.kazanjian.net

[Jim K. at Breeze Block Gallery](#)

[Jim K. at 23 Sandy Gallery](#)

A CREATIVITY CONTEST

We at PDM were recently introduced to the work of artist Jim Kazanjian at <http://www.kazanjian.net/>. He makes excellent and somewhat off-kilter pictures by cutting, copying and pasting parts of found photographs into strange new montages...sounds easy, but close examination of this image offers no clue that this wasn't the original. It's almost as though Jim is taking holiday snaps of another dimension!

Anyway, we had an idea for a competition (to be exact, regular contributor Captain Obvious did) so here it is: take a good look at this image which is entitled "Chateau", let your imagination wander around there for a while, and then write down a short description or explanation of what exactly the place is or what goes on there. Aim for about 500 words if possible. The winning entry will be chosen by the editors with input from Jim.

The winner will receive a prize consisting of a full bundle of 3Hombres Games products in PDF. If you happen to be a good and loyal 3HG customer and you already have it all, you could gift it to someone else, or maybe we could strike a deal of some sort instead :-)

Closing date for entries will be July 14th 2013 and the winning entry will be published in the next issue of PDM. Go on, give it a try!

FORTY-FOUR DAYS AGO

A tale from the Badlands

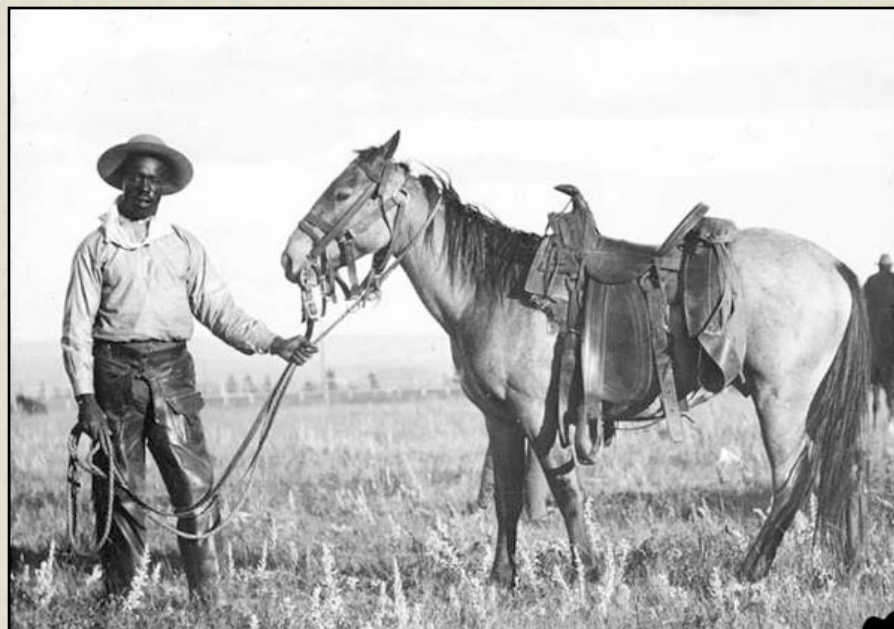
by Captain Obvious

FORTY FOUR DAYS ago, I didn't know the first thing about riding a horse. Now I could keep up with anyone else in our posse and even beat most of the others in flat-out terrain. I don't mind the desert now and truth be told, I kind of enjoy the unpredictability of life here.

When we started, there were a dozen of us following the boss. We were the Lucky 13. It was supposed to be just another intruder response, fairly intense but also fairly common in these days of rampant corporate espionage and theft.

We thought we'd cornered the intruders in the basement parking lot and then... we just were somewhere else. I'd like to think it was Chicago, but not any Chicago you'd know. It felt like the bowels of Grand Central Station, but more like something out of a museum. Steam engines. Gas lights. Horses.

Well, the boss has never been one to be distracted from the task at hand. We just followed the people we'd set out to get and since then, eight of the team died – most from gunshot wounds, one from a burst appendix, two just plain





disappeared and one.. I still couldn't tell you what happened to him, even though I watched it with my own eyes. Gone, that's all.

Forty four days ago, I had a tight afro. Now I kept my skull clean, mostly so that the bugs won't have any place to hide. You adapt, you improvise and you overcome. I wear wool, leathers and silk now and I make it look good. When we started running out of ammunition, we took what we could find. I picked up a carbine that looks like a

prop from Wild, Wild West but it works just as well as my M4 ever did.

Some things never changed. People are the same scared, treacherous animals everywhere. They also bleed the same. Women never change. The food's passable. The weather sucks, generally. But it is Primitive, truly the best single word to describe wherever we are now. There are other differences, most which don't bear too much scrutiny if one wants to stay grounded. I mentioned learning to ride a horse, but the creatures are quite unlike any horses one would find back home. So, it's best not to look or think too hard about the whys or hows.

Forty four days ago, I wasn't what you would describe as a person having an introspective nature. Now, I believe I am more philosophical. We passed a stone Celtic cross that was up on a hill over the trail a week ago and I pondered the implications of that for a whole day, never saying a word to the rest of the team the entire time. My comrades even tell me my speech pattern has changed, that I'm more 'high fallutin' than before. I smile and acknowledge inwardly that they're all dolts.

I know it's been forty four days because I was wearing an antique wind-up wristwatch the night we went into the garage. It'd been a gift from a lady friend and now... it keeps me grounded, after a fashion. I will regret not seeing her again.

Our quarry have been like rabbits, appearing and disappearing with irritating regularity but the Boss follows their trail like the proverbial bloodhound. We've run into a handful of strange characters and the fireside consensus is that we're being lured into a showdown, which suits all of us just fine. The games of hide-and-seek became trite long ago and we are all passed ready to exact punishment.

Which brings us to this fine morning, as I sit high in the saddle and just to the left of my employer, staring at the collection of hovels pretending to be civilization. I can see a few figures gathering in the street and think that all we need now is an epic soundtrack. The boss slaps his reins, his steed begins a slow walk and the rest of ours follow. Horse shoes on stones, tackle creaking, and the jangle of metal.

I laugh to myself, having found my soundtrack.

If there is a Hell, it might as well be this place.

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EXTREME SPORTS SPLINTERLANDS

Radical Proto-Dimensions

by Mitchell K. Schwartz

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY, 2ND EDITION

“Best thing about Downhill? No lift lines, man!”

– Quentin Jones, Protodimensional,
Explorer and avid snowboarder

DOWNHILL IS A skier’s dream – everywhere is downhill, varying from a shallow slope to steep one, flat or bumpy. It is covered in snow. Skis or snowboards provide the best means of moving around in Downhill, though certainly one can walk if not otherwise equipped. The terrain includes trails and open slopes of various widths, bordered by scrubby evergreen brush and trees.

Your vision is generally limited by walls of vegetation or the curve of a slope off to the side, or by a steepening of the slope below you, cutting off your vision of what is below; when you get to that point, you can see the edge of the drop, and then somewhere below where it next levels out, seeing as far as the next drop beyond. If that drop is far enough, and the cloud is thick enough, the edge of vision may be obscured in fog or mist. At best, the view in a given direction is seldom more than a kilometer – the slope will curve off to the left or right, cutting off vision.

The sky is almost always overcast enough to not show a definite light source – there is no direction to where the sun is. Downhill is not about direction, particularly in the horizontal plane. Worse, it is not consistent in the vertical plane either. If you stop for a moment and then try to look back up

Proto-Dimension: Downhill
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

the slope toward where you have come, you find that you are on the top of a ridge with slopes going downhill in both directions – where you were looking, and where you looked back. This would be extremely disorienting, but the other elements of natural surroundings help fool the mind to avoid thinking about the lack of a consistent topography. As it is, it can certainly be disconcerting.

The temperature is always between slightly above freezing and 5-10 Co degrees below. The wind speed (and its accompanying wind chill factor) varies between widely. When the temperature is above freezing, the overcast drops lower toward ground level, eventually becoming a fog or mist. Very infrequently, it rains. When the temperature drops below freezing, the mist will generally disperse, and the surface snow may become crusty. It may also snow, usually lightly; blizzards are infrequent.

The snow conditions vary from crusty to several inches of fresh powder. Most disturbing is when visitors come upon other ski or snowboard tracks.

The tracks may appear to start at any point, run for a few hundred meters, and then stop.

In *Dark Conspiracy* (2nd Ed), skiing and snowboarding fall under the Acrobatics skill. Walking downhill only requires a skill roll on Formidable slopes. Driving snowmobiles requires an Easy motorcycle skill roll most of the time. See the Slope Difficulty Table below.

When the slope varies, the difficulty level of the required skill roll can vary too. Roll 1D100 on the Downhill: Slope Difficulty Table, below.

Dimensional travel to Downhill is not difficult, but due to the lack of direction and the inability to backtrack in Downhill to your point of origin, returning to a gate is tricky. Remember that there is no vertical distance - there is only down. If viewed from above (which you cannot do), a portal will remain in place. If you can maneuver back in the direction of the portal in the x and y plane, you can find the portal again along the slope. But don't tell your players that - it won't look the same. All other terrain features - level of slope, rocks, bushes, trees - will have changed. If your players try to backtrack, remember that the slope can down in a slightly different direction.

There are naturally occurring temporary gateways in various high alpine regions, including the Himalayas, the Swiss Alps, the Rocky Mountains, and the Andes Mountains. Other possibilities include Antarctica.

Downhill is irregularly shaped, though generally circular, and about a dozen kilometers across. Since each section in a visitor's immediate vicinity is irregularly shaped, and the perception of the vertical dimension is utterly warped, it is difficult to tell the protodimension's actual size and shape. The changeable perception of any given location within the protodimension makes moving to a precise location or skewing nearly impossible. However, Dimension walkers



can pop into Downhill, glide, walk or fall down a slope and return home having moved the appropriate distance (1 to 1 correspondence) in all three dimensions. Downhill is one level easier to enter from somewhere hilly or mountainous with a wintry climate.

Critters: There are not many critters to encounter, although any critter than can live in a mountainous, wintry climate may be found - snow-shoe rabbits, mountain goats, deer, foxes, and rarely, wolves. The wolves and Yeti from *Ice Daemon* are rare; though they are not native, Downhill is easy to reach from their native protodimension.

Hook: While visiting Downhill, the PCs encounter either a Yeti or Yeti spoor. Did these naturally slip in or were they sent by the *Ice Daemon* seeking a way station from his home protodimension to Earth?

Downhill: Slope Difficulty Table

D100	Skiing / Snowboarding (Acrobatics)	Walking	Snowmobile (Vehicle: Motorcycle)
01-30	Easy (skill x2)	none	Easy Motorcycle
31-75	Average	none	Easy Motorcycle
81-95	Difficult (skill/2)	none	Average Motorcycle
96-00	Formidable (skill/4)	Climbing (Average) or Acrobatics (Average)	Formidable Motorcycle

Proto-Dimension: Slope (Derivative of Downhill)

Type: Halfland

Discontinuity: 4 (Magnetic from Downhill)

Assimilation Effect Value: 0

“What is this place? It’s like Downhill on speed!”

– Quentin Jones, Protodimensional,
Explorer and avid snowboarder

SLOPE

Slope is an abstract or derivative version of Downhill. It has a similar downhill slope aspect (every direction is downhill) – but the surfaces are all solid and curved. The surface feels like hard plastic. It is of a similar size and shape to Downhill – irregularly shaped, roughly circular, about a dozen kilometers across. There is no distracting flora or fauna – just solid, curving surfaces in off-white to dark grey, with an iron gray sky. Like a sloping skateboard park that goes on forever, without the neat forms, raised bars, or any sharp angles.

Without the distracting flora or fauna, there is nothing to hide the changes in slope when you turn your head. These instantaneous changes in vertical direction are hell on the mind’s perception of reality, and Slope quickly begins to gnaw at character’s sanity – human and darkling alike. Use the Mental Breakdown mechanic used for the interstices – but check hourly.

MOVING THROUGH SLOPE

Since the surfaces of Slope are solid and smooth, and have the same friction coefficients found in our native dimension, any maneuverable vehicle can be used on slope. As it is not flat, vehicles more used to roads may not last long (picturing taking a family sedan off-roading), but off-road capable vehicles with independent suspension should be fine. Non-powered vehicles, like bikes, roller blades, scooters or skateboards work well, as gravity keeps pulling them down the slope. Speed builds up quickly. Losing control can be extremely dangerous. Of course, there is no “up hill” direction to turn to stop; some form of friction must be produced in order to stop. Such non-powered transport would be controlled through Acrobatics skill rolls.

Slope can be used to drop a vertical distance more rapidly than in Downhill. The corresponding vertical distance to our dimension varies by the coefficient of the steepness of the current point of Slope. The steeper the immediate area, the higher the coefficient of vertical correspondence. This can be difficult to figure out precisely.

Slope is magnetic (1 level easier to enter) from Downhill.

Proto-Dimension: Wall

Type: Halfland

Discontinuity: 1

Assimilation Effect Value: 0

“Biggest damn climbing wall I ever did see!”

– Quentin Jones, Protodimensional,
Explorer and avid snowboarder

WALL

Wall is another proto-dimension well-suited to sports enthusiasts – rock climbers, in this case. The dimension appears to be a near vertical rock face, extending up and down as far as can be seen, and curving off to either side. Gravity definitely works and pulls down along the face of the wall, defining direction (up, down, left, right).

If this proto-dimension is entered using a device, travellers had best enter carefully, as the portal may be:

- ☠ Facing the wall from a slight distance away; more than a meter away can be a problem
- ☠ At an angle to the wall
- ☠ Facing away from the wall (with the wall ‘behind’ the portal exit)

Running through a portal without ensuring a grip on the wall may be hazardous to your health.

Using dimension walk skill usually allows the walker to arrive on a ledge of some sort.

Visibility varies between 100 and 2000 yards in any direction before disappearing into the overcast. Looking away from the wall, off in the distance, all that can be seen is light grey, as if a fog. The air pressure seems consistent with about 3000 m above sea level on Earth, and has not noticeably varied, regardless of how far up or down one climbs.

There is a wind that varies in strength and direction, blowing across the face in one direction or another. There is occasional rain that will gust along in a shower with the wind, varying from heavy to light. As there is no sunshine, once wet, it will take a while for the face to dry off. The temperature varies between a little below freezing to about 25°C. The worst weather is when it rains near freezing and the temperature then drops – Wall can become quite



perilous. The weather is usually consistent over the course of a visit, but bears no correlation with any particular location or season on Earth.

The rock face appears composed of various layers of different types of rocks; moving off to the sides, one can find seams, as if sections of layers had been pushed vertical. While most of the individual layers can be recognized by a geologist, (there are the occasional “other” types of rock that do not appear on Earth), the order that the layers appear in do not necessarily make geologic sense. There are occasional ledges and extremely rare shallow caves.

The face varies as one climbs, sometimes rough, sometimes nearly smooth (and very difficult to climb). Each pitch is more or less a “normal” size (10-60 m high, 15-200 m wide) before it changes in some fashion. There are occasional overhangs (more difficult) and chimneys (easier to climb).

When the slope varies, the difficulty level of the required skill roll can vary too. Roll 1D100 on the Wall: Slope Difficulty Table, below.

If a party travels roped, then only the lead climber needs to make a roll directly against the difficulty of the rock slope; subsequent climbers make a roll against a task one step easier (Formidable becomes Difficult, Average becomes Easy, Easy becomes None).

If travelling roped, and a character fails a roll, the person tied above (below for lead climber) them makes a belay roll (Easy Climbing skill or Strength roll; Average for lead climber) to see if they stop them from falling. A successful belay roll means no harm to the climber. If a belay roll fails, apply the effect of a failed roll of one level less steep (i.e., failed climbing roll and failed belay roll on a Difficult pitch causes a minor injury). Or course, the GM can always add a roll to see if the rope fails, but unless previously damaged, that would be rather unlikely.

If not climbing roped, there is no way for fellow travellers to help the falling climber.

The occasional bird nests will be encountered, and sometimes birds can be seen flying along the wall. There are lichens, sedges, and small plants in notches or nooks where enough dust has accumulated to support a seed blown in by the wind. There seems to be just enough light and rain to support hardy plants.

Wall is a shaped like a cylinder. The central core is roughly five clicks around. No one is sure how far the diameter of atmosphere continues. There does not appear to be a “top” or “bottom.” Attempts to see if the bottom of the (visible) cylinder wraps with the top by

dropping things and waiting to see if they appear above have not been successful.

Vertical distance in Wall is almost exactly correlated with our home dimension. Climb 32 meters up in Wall and dimension walk back to Earth will find you 32 meters higher than you were on Earth when you left.

Visitors can find the occasional remnant of rope – 3-30 meters worth of a climbing rope – natural fiber rope, nylons, plastics, and some metalloid ropes, attached using metal pitons, wood wedges, various metal and plastic wedges, unrecognized adhesive materials, and loops or hooks embedded in the rock. The ends of any of these types of rope are frayed, though if by weathering, breakage or something else – bitten through, perhaps - cannot be determined.

Other than the birds or plants described above, this proto-dimension appears to be uninhabited.

There are naturally occurring temporary gateways in various high alpine regions, including on El Capitan in California's Yosemite National Park, the Jungfrau, and near the peaks of Mt Everest or K2.

Wall: Slope Difficulty Table

D100	Climbing Skill/Steepness of pitch	Effects of Failed Climbing Roll (w/o belay)
01-20	None needed – more of a walk	None
21-45	Easy (skill x2)	Average CON roll to avoid minor injury
46-75	Average	Minor injury
76-95	Difficult (skill/2)	2 minor injuries, 7+ on a D10 = major injury/broken limb
96-00	Formidable (skill/4)	Roll D10: 1 No effect 2-4 3 Minor injuries 5-8 Major injury/Broken limb 9-10 Death

QUENTIN JONES (NPC)

Quentin Jones is in his late 20s, with a lanky athletic body and dark curly hair. He may or may not have a scruffy bit of beard. He is a native of California (of course). His high EMP potential was discovered at a young age and his parents were persuaded to send him to a school for gifted children, funded by an organization of Minion Hunting groups. In addition to normal education, his other abilities were developed.



His training in Dimension Walking was particularly successful. However, just as the minion hunting organizations were gearing up to campaign against each other to recruit him, he left the school and struck out on his own. An avid extreme sports enthusiast, Jones began wandering protodimensions, looking for fun. He generally depends on his athletic abilities and sense of foreboding to avoid problems.

Not all of his explorations are successful (in his mind). He discovered a protodimension he called Wave, a place of water and wind, and of course, high, humped waves. But, as there was no shore, the waves never broke (so no surfing) and windsurfing in one direction was only amusing for a short while.

He has contacts in a variety of minion hunting organizations, and passes observations and reports of the places he has been. He has been known to bring friends along on some of his expeditions – a day's skiing or a bit of climbing.

He could be contacted either to brief a team about one of the protodimensions he has discovered or perhaps be induced to go along as a guide. While not a coward, he is not driven to confront minions or monsters from other protodimensions. He has no weapons training.

Notable Skills: Dimension Walk, Acrobatics, Foreboding, Climbing

TOO MUCH COFFEE

A real-life story

by Mike Minihan via Captain Obvious

BACK IN THE winter of 2001 my youngest son and I were on our way from Boise, Idaho to Medford, Oregon. We had taken a car trailer to his old place in Boise in order to haul his non-running Jeep to his new place in Medford. We hit an area of heavy snow in the southern Cascades around 2:00 a.m. It took 45 minutes or so to get down the mountain. We had of course been drinking coffee to stay alert.

About 25 miles west of the pass it became obvious that the last few quarts of coffee had to be drained. We stopped at a wide spot in the road near a summer tourist haunt, deserted in winter. There is a gas station and ice cream joint on the west side of the road, closed this time of year, and no town or settlement within 30 miles. This is tall timber country, and unsettled. Across the road is a small parking area for the ice cream joint. It is paved and about 200ft wide and 80ft deep. I pulled in and as I stepped out with .45 on hip, it occurred to me in a flash that grabbing the 590 Mossberg would be good.

As we walked to the far end of the area to be well off the road, the hair on my arms and the back of my neck stood on end. The area directly to our front was open ground with a depth of 50 yards and a width of 100 yards. The night was clear and cold, 8-10 inches of snow on the ground, and with a moon almost full. So we could see quite well. While standing and taking a leak, with son about 15ft to my right, I saw as if

springing from the earth in front of us across the open area 10 or 12 creatures moving RAPIDLY back and forth in sort of a Thatch weave pattern. These things, not human, were close to 7ft tall: thin, bipedal with long arms, medium length gray fur, and damned fast on their feet. I brought the shotgun up and slid the safety off, as son was drawing his .45.

I don't know if I can adequately explain the overwhelming feeling of menace, but here goes. I had been operating on pure instinct since I had stepped from the pickup, the rotten feeling hit me a split second before the things arrived, the feeling (instinct?) was that we were prey, and subject to a very bad death, to be slaughtered and eaten. Not a logical thought process, just gut feeling and massively overwhelming.

As they were moving about in front of us, more appeared and mixed among them, all the while running about fast in front of us. Son and I were backing toward the truck: I WOULD NOT present my back to them, and some of them peeled off right and left in an encirclement movement. They were rolling in fast from the sides now; I could smell and feel their presence. We got to the truck loaded on adrenaline and ready to kill, as we both knew we were in grave danger. We piled into the truck and locked the doors. I had keys out and ready and as my butt hit the seat, I had the engine lit and transmission in gear and gas pedal mashed in one motion.

Adrenaline is great stuff!

As we fled, yes fled, something VERY close by let out a ululating scream of rage and pain. I believe one or more of the group had gotten really close to us in their pursuit and I ran over the foot of one of them, Yeah they were that close. We rolled onto the highway and I told son to watch the bed of the pickup as well as the trailer, he already was indexed to the rear with the shotgun. We hauled ass for at least 20 miles before the feeling of grave danger started to abate. The feeling that nailed both of us, as we discussed soon afterward, was one of being prey and soon to be slaughtered and eaten. I am not easily led, and neither believe or disbelieve all the Bigfoot, ghost and werewolf stuff. In fact I am skeptical. Son was speaking with a co-worker named Jake about 6 months later who had grown up in Prospect, Oregon, about 30 miles south of Union Creek where the incident took place. He asked Jake if he had ever heard of any strange goings-on in the area. Jake went ashy white and pretty much retold the above tale. He says to avoid the place at night. A family friend, a 25 year retired cop not given to flights of fancy and an excellent observer, had a tale very similar from a year before. I told my wife of this event of course; she looked at me at the beginning as though I had developed a 3rd eyeball in the center of my forehead. That was from shock, she did believe me but did not wish to hear any details. She said the tale gave her chills.

Me too, as I write this the hair on back of my neck and forearms is sticking up.

I have NOT gone back to explore, and would not without a large group of shotgun and flamethrower equipped men with me.

Son and I are both sane, sober persons, and not taken to hysteria. We were wide, VERY wide awake as things transpired. We saw and smelled what was there. As an aside neither of us heard footfalls from the creatures. They were silent until I hurt one as we were getting the Hell out of there.

To my knowledge, and I have researched, there is nothing Earthly that matches these creatures, unless one considers old legends and folk tales of weird creatures.

To conclude, I have to fall back on Elmer Keith's famous line: "Hell, I was there"

Best regards, Mike.

Editor's Note: this is a genuine forum post originally made by Mike Minihan. Regular contributor Captain Obvious happened across it and obtained Mike's permission for us to use it here as inspiration. It has been slightly edited for clarity. Truth it seems is once again stranger than fiction - Lee.

ALLEY ENCOUNTERS

An Encounter Set

by Norm Fenlason

FOR CONSPIRACY RULES AND DC3

SALLY DOES NOT like the dark spots between the lights, especially on this street.

“Too dark,” she thought as her anger mounted. “I thought this was a Controlled Zone. Well screw Trask Security Regents; they are doing a terrible job in this ‘Controlled’ Zone.”

Her steps quickened as she moved deeper into the shadows. The cross street and bright lights were just up ahead. A shuffle in the darkness to her right brought Sally to an abrupt halt.

“What the...” she mumbled staring wide-eyed into the darkness. Something was in there and it was moving towards her. Her fear took her then and turning she dashed towards the cross street. She did not even make it out of the shadows when she was grabbed from behind.

The [cold | passionate | stony | rubbery] hands held her fast as she was stopped dead in her tracks. To her horror her struggles could not keep her from being drawn into the deeper dark. A cry slipped her lips as she was pulled into the alley.

A pair of headlights turned onto the street, briefly illuminating her struggle as a hand was wrapped around her mouth. Maybe they saw her. Maybe help was on its way...oh God...

This article contains a turn-key encounter for **Dark Conspiracy** using **Conspiracy Rules**. The encounter is a brief and unexpected one discovered by happenstance on a side street, corridor, or other isolated location. You could run the encounter on the streets of a miktown, anthill, or in the burbs, and with some crafting, run it in the hidden passages or underground labyrinth supporting a dreamland.

As the GM you can use any of the encounters that follow from the same hook. It is called “messing with your players” that one encounter is very dangerous and another is purely innocent—well maybe not so pure. The others are somewhere in between.

HOOK

Your party is moving on a public street, isolated and dark. They may or may not be familiar with their surroundings, but the feeling of menace is thick as smoke and burns the throat just as badly. The character with the highest Foreboding skill asset has some definite feelings of discomfort, the kind they get when imminent death is nearby. Remember that time that *thing* took Jayme? Same thing.

A successful Average [Foreboding] test will reveal the nature of the

encounter in very vague terms. Anything less than a Level 5 on the Power Roll will not reveal more than that.

If on foot with ragged light from the streetlamps, the party hears a noise coming from the alley up ahead—maybe it is an alley, in the lighting it appears as a darker shadow in a myriad of shadows. There it is again, some kid of scuffle ending with a grunt definitely coming from that alley.

If the party is in a car, there is a flicker of movement just barely caught in the headlamps of the vehicle, or in the blood-red glow of the taillights. A mostly human looking figure—hard to tell in the dim light—moved into the alley, or maybe was dragged, who can tell. Stopping the car, the party may hear a cry suddenly cut short, a scuffle, maybe something clanging, and then silence.

SETTING

This encounter can be placed on the streets of any urban, semi-urban, or suburban light commercial block with multistory buildings. The area should be fairly dilapidated consistent with the general decline of the Greater Depression. A map of the alley is presented on page 16.

The entrance to the alley is nestled in the shadows between two still-working streetlights. The streetlights that would have illuminated the entrance were burned out or shot out long ago. The lack of city maintenance in this area is pronounced, as most of the block's streetlights are also out. Cars and other vehicles line both sides of the street with several showing signs of being abandoned. One abandoned wreck (see 1) has a complete homeless domicile set up inside it, but shows no signs of current occupation. Traces of dried and caked blood in the interior, the car's exterior, and on the sidewalk pavement may cause questions if the PCs investigate. Should the PCs care to observe—Difficult [Observation] due to the poor lighting—they may notice that there are no homeless camped out anywhere on this street even though the rubbish appears to be bountiful.

The entrance to the alley is nearly choked with trash in cardboard boxes, plastic bags, and just piled-up in a heap—placed there in apparent hopes of someone with a truck will notice it and haul it off. While the entrance is narrowed by the trash (see 2), there is still ample room for two people to enter walking side-by-side. The alley is enclosed by two multi-story buildings, both made of brick. The building on the corner (to the left when facing into the alley) has

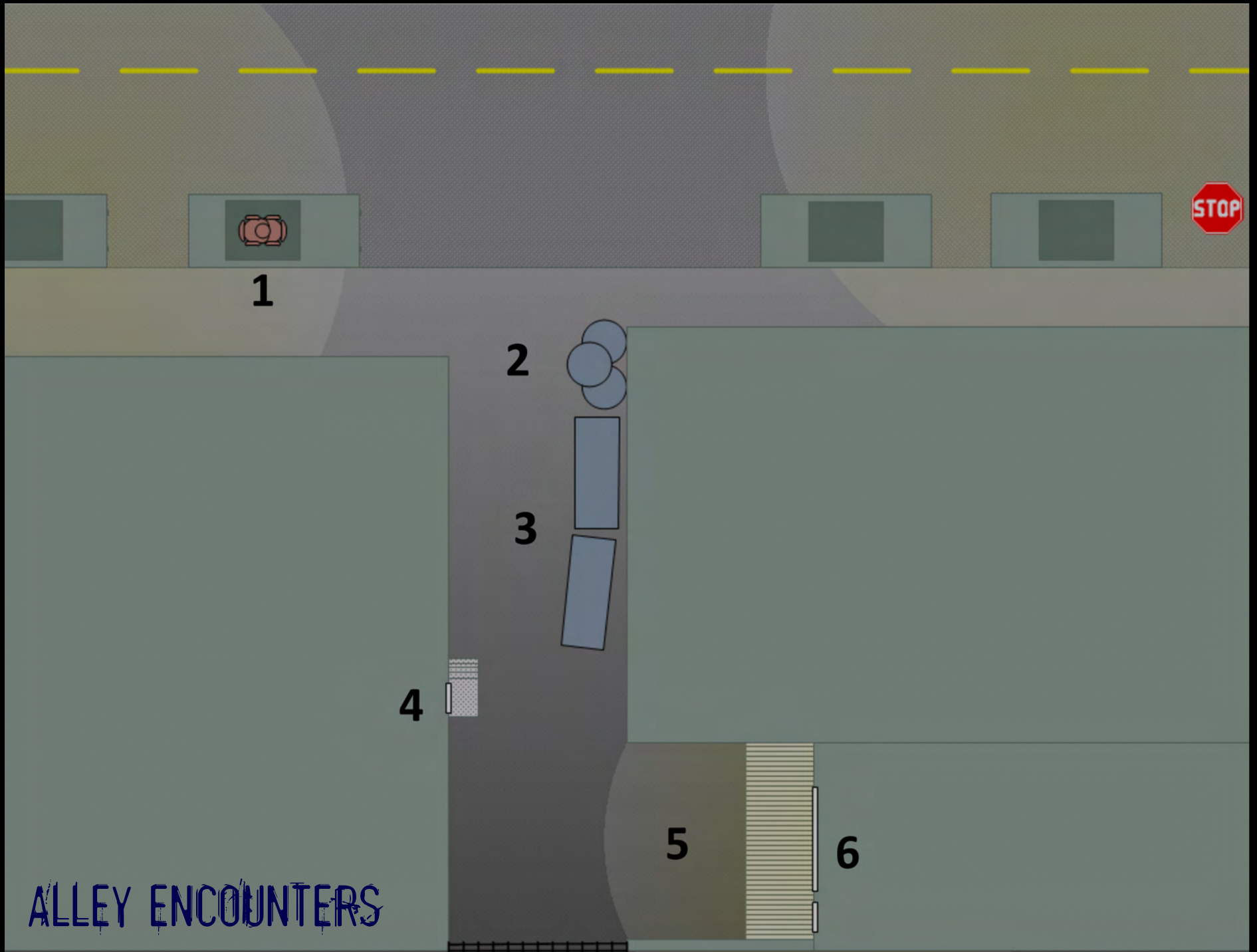
four stories and was once a storefront. While the storefront glass is mostly intact, it has been painted black from the inside. The building on the right (while facing into the alley) is at least ten stories with no windows on the ground floor. The entrance to this office building has been boarded up with large sheets of plywood. No lights emanate from the interior of either building. The building across from the alley is only three stories tall and has sheets of plywood reinforced by lumber to cover the broad formerly glass storefront. The plywood has been painted a green that long ago turned to a sooty gray. Bills, posters, and graffiti chaotically adorn this former storefront. Careful observation—Average [Observation]—will reveal that the playbills and posters promote events from several weeks ago, nothing lately.

The alley is a dead-end and one formerly used for access by trash removal trucks. The back of the alley is blocked by a 10 meter tall chain-link fence topped with single strand of barbed wire. The ground was once pavement, but has been punished by time. Stains, spills, pot holes, and loose trash cover the accessible path, with rubbish accumulated in the corners and creases where the ground meets the buildings. Two fairly large dumpsters have been pushed against the wall (see 3). Trash removal workers used to pull them out for the truck to get access, so they are in disarray from not-too-careful attention. The dumpsters are overflowing in obvious need of a pick-up. Boxes, cartons, bags and other trash has spilled out from the dumpsters, signs that the dumpsters have been raided by the local homeless.

Just past the dumpsters on the right is a small landing with stairs (see 4). At the top of the landing (about 1.5 m above the ground) is a set of double doors. A rusted light fixture above the doors has been broken out; shards of the lamp litter the landing. A security camera that appears to be very weathered is mounted above and to the left side of the door.

Off of the rear of the alley is a small recess where a narrow loading dock once served the former occupants (see 5). The loading dock shows signs of supporting smokers on their break. A small chair, a couple of crates, loose cigarette butts, and overflowing butt canister tell the tale of a smoke break area. There is a yellowed light mounted above the double-sized roll-up door casting a wan light over the recessed area. The light barely reaches the alley.

The regular door next to the roll-up is locked from the inside, as is the roll up (see 6). There is no way to roll up the door from the outside. While the dock shows signs of use, none are recent.



THE ALLEY

The following is a detailed description of the alley and its contents that is the same for each of the encounters. The numbers refer to the map on page 16.

1. The wrecked out Chrysler 350C has been picked over by various thugs, the wheels are gone, the seats are missing, and the dashboard is gone. The crème colored finish has rusted to a burnt orange-brown, but the original color pokes through here and there. Although the doors are missing, someone has moved large sheets of cardboard to block the openings. Similar worn boxing materials block the gaps where the wind screens once were mounted. The jam to the rear passenger-side seat is caked with dried blood. Now-dried blood has pooled in the gutter below the car's door.

Upon poking past the cardboard, the PCs will find a mess of clothing, a smelly sleeping bag, and a couple of worn-out and badly stained comforter-bed spreads. The smell of unwashed bodies is very strong as is the pungent coppery smell of the blood. Large black plastic bags contain clothing and other textiles in soft bundles. Plastic shopping bags strain with various collected road junk. The interior is missing its occupant. If the PCs search through the bedding, they will find a sock stuffed with a \$20 bill and \$5 in change. Also in the sock is an identification card from a young Asian-looking man. Should the PCs pursue that line, they will find that he was posting bills and advertisements in the area two weeks ago, but has since completely vanished.

Under the car there is a man-hole cover that is slightly ajar. With sufficient light, the PCs will see traces of blood as if something bloody were dragged into the hole with bloody handprints on the cover itself.

2. The entrance to the alley is very dark in between the light from the two remaining street lights on this end of the street. It will be very hard to make out anything definite. Approaching the entrance, the dark form of a large pile of rubbish can be made out. The smell coming from the rubbish is one of rotten food and stale excrement. The local homeless have been using the pile to screen their daily elimination activities from the street. There is a putrid stream of

vile liquid running from the pile to the gutter. This stream is enough to keep the pavement wet and will cause gagging if the PCs get too close.

Careful observation—Difficult [Observation] due to darkness—will reveal the stock of an M-4 sticking out from between two bags. The M-4 Carbine is a little corroded, but the action still works. It has no magazine, strap, or optics. Removing the M-4 from the pile will cause the rubbish's inhabitants to stir.

The pile is the lair of 1D6+1 very large rats. They are aggressive and hungry, competing with the local homeless for scraps. If the M-4 is removed or if the pile is otherwise disturbed, the rats will take it as a sign that their lair is being attacked and will defend it. (See *Mutant Rats* on page 22.) One of the rats will be female and pregnant, a source of possible income from the sale of the future little ones. However, the rats will have a 100% chance of attacking to protect the female.

3. Two large dumpsters filled to overflowing stand to the left side (facing into the alley). The ground around the dumpsters is cluttered with cardboard boxes and trash bags containing more refuse. Each dumpster has two lids hinged on the edge near the wall. One dumpster has both lids closed. Trash and other refuse have been piled on top of the closed lids. The other has its lids propped open with overflowing refuse. The odor of putrid rubbish is very strong. But there is something else, a sweet cloying scent of decaying flesh underlying the rubbish smell.

If the PCs search, they will find a dead human male in the closed dumpster. This body shows no signs of decay and no visible indications for a cause of death. The body is lying among an indeterminate number of decaying human limbs—arms and legs. The flesh has decayed to a near liquid state and is the source of the smell of death.

Under the bodies are some medical waste bags with a disposal facility logo and address.

Another one of the things found through searching is a serviceable stainless-steel Smith and Wesson Model 629, .44 Magnum revolver (8 $\frac{3}{8}$ in barrel) with two of the six rounds having been fired. The barrel is in need of cleaning from being in the refuse and the pistol's action could use

some lubrication. Another is one of those drugstore anonymous cell phones (a burner phone) with a phone number taped onto its back. The phone number is for the burner phone. There is a small amount of charge left on the phone, but it has a generic recharge port. No information other than minutes remaining is stored in the phone itself, not even its own calling history. The phone has an amazing 400 minutes left on it.

4. The building to the right (facing into the alley back to the entrance) has a double door set a little over halfway down the alley. A concrete landing with a half dozen steps leads up to the double doors, which are made of steel and very sturdy. Broken glass from the overhead light litters the landing, crunching under foot. Several dents in the doors look suspiciously like someone fired a gun at it. The doors do not have a handle nor any signs of a lock, but both of the steel doors are locked. A single peep hole is centered in the door on the right. However, both of the steel doors are locked.

To the right of the doors there is a sign pointing to a pushbutton that reads "Ring the buzzer for entrance." No one will respond to the buzzer, any knocking, or pounding. With another successful observation—Formidable [Observation]—the PCs will notice the weak red glow from the camera, indicating it may still be operative.

5. A 10-m tall chain-link fence blocks the back of the alley. Trash cans, boxes, and other bulky leftovers block the lower half of the fence. To the left (facing into the alley) is a recessed area once used as a loading dock to an older building that was absorbed in the newer corner retail building. Barrels and drums marked with faded chemical signs have been pushed to the sides. At the far end of the recessed area is a concrete loading dock standing 1.5-m tall with a small set of carved-out concrete steps on the right side. On the landing there are two doors: one a wide rolling steel door, the other a regular office door to its right. The rolling door is generally down and locked when not in use. The regular office door is also locked (unless the biker crew is outside). The landing platform is covered and currently being used to store various chemicals. The cartons containing the chemicals are new with cryptic shipping labels written in a

proprietary two-dimensional bar code, but have some basic chemical hazard symbols.

Should the PCs search the area, they will find the following:

- ☠ 2 x plastic 55-gallon drums of high molar content boric acid.
- ☠ 1 x 55-gallon drum of nitroethane
- ☠ 1 x crate containing a centrifugal separator
- ☠ 1 x small box 10-kg of an indeterminate powder (It is used in the manufacture of Glow, see page 26)

6. The area behind the rolling steel door was once a warehouse add-on that supported the large-scale retailer who operated on the corner. The space is approximately square with 30 meters on a side. The ceiling is open to the third story, and while there are no working lights—except for those supporting the occupants—feeble light from gaps in the painted windows of the third story filters down in the gloom. The walls are dreary and one corner is dedicated to a conglomeration of no-longer-used steam pipes. The floor is a dismal concrete covered in most places with a dusty mold giving the place a wet concrete smell (occupant activities excepting). Stains here and there have been built up with considerable overlap.

Based on the Encounter:

The air is musty from the lack of circulation—in spite of occupant activities.

This area contains an illegal laboratory that manufactures narcotics for a biker gang operating in the area. The laboratory is completely enclosed with one double door leading the street at the back. The other access is through the loading dock doors to area 5. There will be a strong chemical odor in this area that will cause watering eyes. Tasks requiring acute vision, including shooting weapons, suffer a shift of one difficulty harder.

Or.

This area contains a rather large hole in the ground. The hole leads to a tunnel system leading into the bowels of the earth. There are human bones littered occasionally and seemingly for no reason. At the end of several miles of winding tunnels (with branching and so forth) in a broad natural grotto stands a Subterranean Gargoyle fortress, the destination of any breeding stock that the gargoyles capture from the world above.

Or.

Similarly to the gargoyle passage, above, the hole can be the exit route for the Slither. The caves lead nowhere since the Slither just used it to get into the ground unseen. In this case the rolling steel door will be drawn closed, but not locked. The slither can open and close it, but not lock it. Branches off this tunnel complex lead into a nearby subway, if present, or sewers or storm drains. The sides of the tunnels have been smoothed from the slither's acid and the passage of its body through the earth.

SIT-REP

The following encounters are based on the same initial conditions. The referee can select any of the following based on the evolving story. The encounter should appear to be a very cut-and-dried battle against evils minions, but that is not always guaranteed.

ENCOUNTER 1: THE TRYST

Or Sally and Roy Make Out.

The PCs will hear screams (not too loud) and the harsh sounds of someone assaulting a hapless lady of the evening coming from the alley as they approach. Shining a light down the alley will show them a largish humanoid figure in dark clothing with a hat or hood obscuring his face sexually assaulting an obvious female about half way down the alley (area 3). The female will be crying and screaming. The attacker will be shouting harsh language at her during the assault.

Sally (see Sally's description, below) is a lady of the evening; Roy, her attacker (see below), is a high-profile *john* that wants to keep his identity secret. Sally play-acts to Roy's fantasies by acting like he is assaulting her. Roy likes it that way and plays his role very well. Roy and Sally have met here before and are well into their act when the PCs arrive. Their routine ends *in flagrante delicto* with the two of them caught coupling by the PCs.

Should the PCs intrude, Roy will try to hide his face by turning away, while Sally will escalate her vocal protestations, i.e. scream at them for ruining her business. She will be very vocal. So vocal that the biker crew, who are taking a smoke break at the loading platform (see 5), will come around to see what all the noise is about. Her screams may even draw a couple of thugs from around the corner. Emil and his bodyguard, the thugs, were expecting Sally once she was finished.

The crew is actually taking a break from their manufacture of illegal narcotics in the warehouse (see 6) when the PCs intrude on the good hooker's business. The crew all know Sally and are used to her, but they do not know the PCs and are suspicious as to who they are and why they are here. The workers are all armed one way or another (see *Bikers* on page 26).

Note that the number of thugs and bikers can be modified for the capabilities of the PCs.

ENCOUNTER 2: BREEDER STOCK

Or the Gargoyle King Gets a Date

Roy and Sally were on their way to their favorite alley for their regular tryst. Unbeknownst to them, a pair of subterranean gargoyles (see *Subterranean Gargoyles* on page 20) had chosen that spot as their hunting blind. The pair is from a brood that is seeking human female breeder stock. The gargoyles reached out and snatched both members of the trick before they really knew what was going on. Roy drew his pistol, but the gargoyle, having surprised Roy, snapped his neck like a broomstick. The two are wrestling with Sally when the PCs arrive.

Note that this encounter does not include the biker crew, unless the referee wants them in it. Area 6 normally contains the hidden tunnel back to their underground fortress. If the referee wants the bikers in this encounter, the gargoyles can merely attempt to fly away with their captive. The bikers can respond to Sally's noise, but they

will suffer a stunned round or two from the suspension of disbelief required of seeing the gargoyles.

The referee also has the option of allowing a pair of law enforcement officers moving to investigate the noise, in which case they will discover their boss brutally murdered and the PCs just hanging around. Alternately Emil's thugs can show up in response to the screaming, looking for Sally...or both in a Last Man Standing scenario.

ENCOUNTER 3: COLD NIGHT

Human Popsicles

In an encounter similar to that with the gargoyles, a Pale will have snatched Sally and possibly Roy off the street. The referee can include Roy or not, but when the PCs enter the alley, they see the Pale assaulting Sally with Roy on the ground. If the referee desires, the Pale can be killing Roy through cold attack while struggling to subdue Sally. He intends to freeze Sally too, but first things first. The referee can also include the bikers, thugs, or police showing up to cause the PCs a bit more trouble.

The Pale will attempt to engage the PCs in melee combat so that it has time to use its heat stealing abilities to take out the PCs and strengthen itself. If the numbers are against the Pale or it is significantly wounded (referee judgment), it will attempt to run, leaping to climb over the chain link fence at the rear of the alley—one combat round to get there, one to get over the fence, and another to vanish around the corner. (See *The Pale*, on page 25.)

The referee can toss in the bikers, thugs, or even the police to cause the PCs a bit of trouble.

ENCOUNTER 4: LUSCA

Deadly Puppet Show

A deadly and very successful predator has been plucking people off the streets for quite a while. This deadly creature is an advanced form of Slither and maybe the first true one. It has been alive a long time and has many offspring. The creature calls herself Lusca (see *Lusca—Slitherus Giganticus* on page 21). Lusca will be situated in the recessed area at the rear of the alley (see 5).

However, Lusca is using her mutable tentacles along with her psionic talents to play out a scene to lure humans into reach of her other arms. These arms reach into the area near the dumpsters (see 3). The scene is one of a woman being assaulted by a man. Lusca has

read the minds of many humans in the area and know that this will bring someone to help one or the other in this faux assault. Lusca's empathic augmentation provides the correct details, including sounds to any mind within range. In other words, the assault looks very real.

Once her victims are close enough she grabs them with her other arms and dragging them to her beak, consumes them. In the process of consuming them, while their minds are struggling with desperation and fear, she also absorbs their thoughts and memories. This is the source of her knowledge on the local area, which she has already used.

The real Roy and Sally have already been consumed the previous evening. It is their likenesses that she uses to lure more victims. Lusca has found that replaying locals in action has been very effective. Like a true fly fisherman, her lures change for the fish she seeks.

Of course, Sally's and Roy's associates (thugs and police) may come looking into the alley at some point, causing the PCs a bit of trouble.

The bikers are not in this encounter; their laboratory is replaced by the slither's escape route. The warehouse (see 6) will contain the super-slither's exit hole. The steel roll-up door will be open and the warehouse itself will be dark. The slither uses psionics to perceive its environment.

ADVERSARIES

A variety of adversaries are available to the referee to plug into this encounter.

SUBTERRANEAN GARGOYLES

Genetic Scavengers

A member of a gargoyle court and his squire are hunting for women.

Landroo the Marquis of Slandreck

The lead gargoyle is named Landroo and he is looking for some breeder stock to add to his flock. The other gargoyle does not rate a name and since he is beholden to the Marquis, he serves as Landroo's squire and shield. Few gargoyles have ranged into this area of the surface and Landroo is hoping to establish a steady supply of breeders. His hopes are to increase his brood to surpass that of the King. Landroo's dreams are of his own kingdom, which he feels is



LANDROO: SUBTERRANEAN GARGOYLE

<i>Strength:</i>	13	<i>Education:</i>	6	<i>Move:</i>	3/9/18/54
<i>Constitution:</i>	11	<i>Charisma:</i>	5	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	4 / 1D6 + 1
<i>Agility:</i>	6	<i>Empathy:</i>	3	<i>Hits:</i>	28/56
<i>Intelligence:</i>	8	<i>Initiative:</i>	5	<i># Appearing:</i>	1D6

Special: Tough skin, AV1.

Flight, the last number represents the gargoyle's movement while flying.

Armed with crude melee weapons: short sword (damage: 1D6 + ½ STR) and knife (damage: 1D6).

SQUIRE: SUBTERRANEAN GARGOYLE

<i>Strength:</i>	10	<i>Education:</i>	2	<i>Move:</i>	3/9/18/54
<i>Constitution:</i>	15	<i>Charisma:</i>	54	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	4 / 1D6 + 1
<i>Agility:</i>	5	<i>Empathy:</i>	3	<i>Hits:</i>	28/56
<i>Intelligence:</i>	4	<i>Initiative:</i>	5	<i># Appearing:</i>	1D6

Special: Tough skin, AV1.

Flight, the last number represents the gargoyle's movement while flying.

Armed with crude melee weapons: short sword (damage: 1D6 + ½ STR) and knife (damage: 1D6).

imminent. Just a few more surface breeders and his flock will be large enough to take his family tree and build a new castle.

Landroo's squire does not think of anything else but capturing surface breeders and defending his lord from attackers. The squire will fight to the death if Landroo is threatened. Both are armed with their natural weapons, claws and strength, but the two of them also wield crudely-manufactured bronze short swords. Although the manufacture is crude, the swords are quite serviceable and can give the PCs a bit of trouble.

If Landroo suffers ½ hit points of more in damage or if his squire is killed, he will attempt to fly away. His squire will not leave unless Landroo does, fighting to the death if necessary.

LUSCA, SLITHERUS GIGANTICUS

A Dark Lord

Lusca is not the name it calls herself, it is the name that it read from one of the minds it consumed, and the name seemed appropriate. The Lusca has existed for centuries, although only recently coming out from its subterranean lair. Lusca was called out, but does not know by whom or why. When she came up in response to the call no one answered. At least the eating here is good.

Spawned off the coast of Yemen near the island of Socotra, Lusca was a lost cuttlefish. An encounter with the static portal floating in the seas left Lusca changed forever. At first Lusca thought she was dead after she touched the drifting thing; the little glowing ball did not seem to be dangerous. Lusca sank to the sea floor and she thought she would be food for the crabs. But once she touched the earth, the desire to tunnel, to dig into the earth overwhelmed her. Off she went "swimming" in the earth and rock as she used to in the sea. Off she went and the eating was good.

Now here she was, but where this was, she did not know, nor care. All she knew was that she had to adjust her lures for the new prey and that she could understand their chaotic thoughts. Again, the eating is good.

As always, at the discretion of the referee, if Lusca loses ½ her hit points, she will attempt to move back to her escape tunnel (see 6). Failing that, she will tunnel into the ground right where she is (see 5). Lusca will take three combat rounds to burrow out of sight and will drop whomever she is holding.



LUSCA, SLITHERUS GIGANTICUS

Strength:	35	Education:	3	Move:	2/4/8
Constitution:	40	Charisma:	2	Skill/Dam.:	4 / 3D10
Agility:	4	Empathy:	16	Hits:	170 / 340
Intelligence:	9	Initiative:	4	# Appearing:	1

Special: Project Thought 4, Project Emotion 3.
The last movement rate (8) is the slither's rate through the earth.

Tentacle Attacks: Lusca attacks by enveloping her prey with her tentacles. Each round 1D6 tentacles will attempt to grapple with her intended target. As a slither, each tentacle that hits causes the victim damage from a combination of acid burns and crushing. Once grabbed, the victim takes no further damage. The damage is also applied as Grapple control points. Once two tentacles have taken the victim, she will start to pull the victim to within attack range of her beak. If the Grapple fully controls the victim, no resistance is allowed. If the victim can resist, pulling the victim to her beak will be a Difficult [STR] opposed task (page 101 of Conspiracy Rules), i.e. both the victim and Lusca roll for the task. If Lusca wins this opposed task, the next round the victim will be swallowed whole with instant death within 1D6 turns (see Slithers on page 161 of Conspiracy Rules for more information).

Angling: Lusca does not hunt by stalking her prey, instead she lures her prey to within striking range using one or more of her tentacles. She has morphed these tentacles into representations of human beings. She has also learned to mimic sounds augmented with her empathic illusions. She presents these human-looking tentacles to prospective prey along with some sounds, like cries, laughs, or even a few words. She will draw these lures back into her hunting blind where once close enough, she will attack with her other tentacles.

Camouflage: In a fashion similar to here water-borne relatives, Lusca has the ability to change her skin color. But in addition to simple color changes, Lusca can change patterns to match those of her surroundings. This provides Lusca a rudimentary camouflage capability. This she accomplishes at a Stage 2 Power Level. (Observation attempts take a -2 difficulty penalty when attempting to see her.)

MUTANT RATS

For these rats, use *Seekers* as presented in issue #1 of **Protodimension Magazine**. This creature was first presented in **Challenge Magazine** issue #52. Issues #25-77 are available from here: <http://rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product/87334/Challenge-Magazine-25-to-77--%5BBUNDLE%5D>

EMIL AND BODYGUARD

Emil's parents stepped off the boat from Haiti before Emil was born, but he has never left the United States. Working from the bottom up, Emil has graduated to his current position due to his firm determination and his ruthless methods. Emil's working girls make the most profit among his rival pimps keeping him in high regard among the mob bosses, the *Seven Yen*. The Seven Yen are a yakuza outfit that values Emil's efficiency—and his cash flow—as well as his violent methods. Knowing this and valuing the cash himself, Emil keeps close track of his best girl, Sally. Other pimps have tried to recruit Sally and one even tried to kidnap her. But they are all “swimming with the fishes,” and Sally still works for him. Emil is pretty sure that Sally understands her position and will not change voluntarily. Tonight he had a bad feeling, so Emil stayed close to Sally's tricks.

But relations with his higher-ups are not as secure as Emil thinks. One of the concerns that the Seven Yen have about Emil is his presumably secret addiction to the Glow. Emil has been using Glow for about 5 months and the addiction is believed to be incurable. (Note that the Glow boost to his PSI and his latent Foreboding skill is the reason for his concern about Sally.) The Seven Yen is further concerned about Emil's addiction, since they do not make Glow, which makes Emil vulnerable to another gang's influence. Emil has not complained and has kept the cash flowing, but the Seven Yen feel they have to keep an eye on him.

EMIL

Level: Experienced
Motivation: *10 of Diamonds* (Very Greedy): It is all about the flow of cash, his and the skim. Anyone or anything threatens that flow will get it.
Queen of Spades (Ruthless): Emil is about as sociopathic as you can get and not actually be in prison. He has no problem torturing and killing; and is, in fact, infamous for it.

Initiative: 2
Attributes: 5
Skill: 4
UCDR: 2
Armament: Emil is flashy and carries two stainless steel .50 caliber Desert Eagles custom carved teak handles. He has a spare magazine for each pistol.

BODYGUARD

The thug that Emil keeps around is loyal to him—or so the thug would have him believe. The thug is actually reporting on Emil to the Seven Yen as directed, and is well trained in martial arts. The thug would not hesitate to take Emil out if he thought Emil would betray Seven Yen.

Level: Veteran
Motivation: *King of Spades* (Deceitful) The thug keeps his secret, the mission to monitor Emil.

Initiative: 4
Attributes: 6 (AGL: 8)
Skill: 5 (Unarmed Combat 7)
UCDR: 3
Armament: Beretta M-92 9-mmP automatic pistol with four 15-round magazines.



Desert Eagle .50 Action Express

Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Range
.50AE	SA	4	1-2-Nil	2	7	4	15

Weight 1.9kg, Price \$1500 (S/S)

BIKERS

The biker gang that runs the laboratory is called the *Frat*—a shortening of the Fraternity of the Motorcycle. The Frat is a brutally violent gang that uses fear and intimidation as the source of their income. Most of the Frat's cash comes from insurance and enforcement—mostly as part of their loan sharking. A new leader of the Frat has started diversifying into other illegal ventures, such as exotic narcotics. This new leader even brought them a wicked-cool drug to get them started.

The Frat gang is in a direct rival to the Seven Yen. A brief turf war settled the current boundaries, but tensions remain. This encounter is set on the edges of Seven Yen territory. The Frat placed the laboratory here to disguise it, since all the locations in their own territory are under surveillance by Seven Yen, who knows nothing about this lab.

If Seven Yen discovered this lab, it would likely rekindle the turf war, and given the stakes of controlling the supply of Glow, the war would be brutal. Heck's job is to keep the Glow flowing and keep it secret from the Seven Yen. The biker crew will keep the source of the materials used in processing the Glow a secret. See the description of the 10-kg of white powder from area 5.

HECK

The biker crew's leader is called Heck—not his real name—and he was once a professor at Columbia University. A difference of political opinion and the Greater Depression lead to his ouster by his Dean, a fact about which he will harbor a grudge until his own death or the Dean's. Heck has been given responsibility to run the laboratory that makes that filthy drug. Heck denies to himself the nature of the drug (possible ET larval life forms), but he takes his position very seriously. If he fails to deliver the agreed-to amount of product, his boss will kill him. The crew he has been given is too small to provide the right security, but this operation relies on secrecy. Besides his crew is pretty sharp regarding the processing and none of them use the product they are cooking.

Level: Veteran
Motivation: *A of Hearts* (Just): Heck takes his job in the gang very seriously, feeling that it is the right thing to do since they helped him.
Queen of Clubs (Stubborn): Heck will not let anything come between him and his

mission completion. He stubbornly sticks to the plan to produce the required amounts, regardless of any events swirling around him. Heck will reluctantly come to Sally's aid. But once committed, Heck will fight to save her.

Initiative: 4
Attributes: 7
Skill: 6
UCDR: 3
Armament: A Boot knife, a .38 Detective Special revolver in an ankle holster, and an AKR sub machinegun without a stock with one extra 30-round magazine.



CREW

Heck's crew are the crème of the gang's crop when it comes to intelligence and chemistry knowledge. They are not from the local area and are completely unfamiliar with the locality. They were driven here and will be picked up when they are done. To the post-military types, this is just another tour of duty that they have to wade through to get home. The crew is mostly tired, frustrated, and ready to go home.

The bikers wear yellow or dark gray rubber suits and boots, with the tops open or set aside. Some will have facemasks around their neck; others have cigarettes hanging from their mouths. All will be armed with a pistol or knife or improvised club.

Level: Veteran
Motivation: 8 Clubs (Very Violent)
Initiative: 3 (would be 4, but the crew suffers from fatigue)
Attributes: 6
Skill: 5
UCDR: 2
Armament: Pistol (20%) or knife (30%) or improvised club (50%).

SALLY

Sally is a prostitute working for Emil, the pimp controlling most of the street walkers in this area. She is fairly attractive and intelligent. She is also a latent empath who has discovered how to both convince a *john* into a transaction and actually cause them to feel an experience far more intensely than they normally do. For these reasons she is popular with her pimp, but especially so with her repeat customers. Emil will not take it lightly if Sally's operations are curtailed in any way and he has plenty of muscle to help him out. If caught in a difficult position with the PC she will attempt to use her powers of empathic persuasion.

Level: Novice
Motivation: *Ace of Spades* (Charismatic): Sally uses her empathic talents to inspire acceptance and loyalty among the people around her.
9 of Hearts (Very Sociable): Sally has to be sociable with her clients, something that the confidence from her empathic talents has reinforced.

Initiative: 1
Attributes: 5
Skill: 2
UCDR: 1
Armament: Ruger .380 ACP Light Compact Pistol (LCP) with full magazine and no spare.

ROY

Roy is the name by which Sally knows him, but his real name would be recognized if it were heard—the same goes for his face. If the PCs are locals, they may know him by his pictures in the media. Roy is the Chief for Law Enforcement for the local sub-district. In this role, he can open an investigation or close any investigation that is currently being run. In a word, he is 'connected.'

Roy is all but addicted to his trysts with Sally and even though he has an identity to protect, he cannot say no to Sally. He has no idea that Sally is projecting thoughts of fulfilling-ecstasy into his wide open mind, a fact that would horrify him if he knew about it. Roy may or may not know about any secret labs operating in the area. If he knows about it, he knows the thugs that run it and is most likely on good terms with them. No one operates in his territory without his permission. Roy will have no clue about what is behind the steel double doors or who is operating there.



THE PALE

<i>Strength:</i>	8	<i>Education:</i>	4	<i>Move:</i>	3/10/20/40
<i>Constitution:</i>	5	<i>Charisma:</i>	7	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	5/1D6*
<i>Agility:</i>	8	<i>Empathy:</i>	8	<i>Hits:</i>	26/52
<i>Intelligence:</i>	6	<i>Initiative:</i>	4	<i># Appearing</i>	1D6÷2

* Leech heat from victims, see **Conspiracy Rules** core rulebook.

Special: Dimension Walk. Heat Leech

Pales can drain a body down to almost 0 centigrade—32 Fahrenheit—just short of the freezing point, but to do this, they must create an empathic link with the victim while in physically in contact, skin-to-skin. In order to establish the link, a pale must have a few rounds to concentrate. It normally grapples a victim to immobility, then simply holds the victim while the link is created. Without this link, they cannot absorb heat effectively, which is why nonliving heat sources will not serve them.

Roy is likely armed with the standard police issue Glock 19, with two magazines. He will also have a smart phone and a dedicated police radio in addition to his badge and police identification. He will not be instigating violence, and he will attempt to get away without anyone recognizing him. Although he is ensnared by Sally, he is not stupid. He will give her up to get away. If the biker crew attacks, Roy will only defend himself while trying to get away.

Level:	Experienced
Motivation:	<i>Queen of Diamonds</i> (Lustful): Trapped by the empathic entanglement woven by Sally, Roy is a victim of his glands. <i>Jack of Spades</i> (Pompous): Roy has a very inflated self-image. He does not believe that anything bad can happen to him that he cannot fix. He has mostly been correct in this, but Sally is rocking his world.
Initiative:	2
Attributes:	5
Skill:	4
UCDR:	2
Armament:	Glock 19 9-mmP automatic pistol.

THE POLICE

If the referee needs to turn up the heat, Roy can have a signal device or use his smart phone to signal a couple of nearby uniformed cops. They should show up two turns after being signaled (or to maximize the dramatic effect). For plot points, these cops could be on the take of one or the other gangs, loyal to Roy, or even friends of the PCs. These come in pairs, but if more are needed their back-up can show up a little later. Use the Beat Cop generic stock non-player character:

Level:	Veteran
Motivation:	These NPCs follow the lead of whoever gets them.
Initiative:	4
Attributes:	6
Skill:	5
UCDR:	2
Armament:	All carry the standard issue Glock 19 9-mmP automatic pistol with a Mossberg M-590 shotgun (20%).

BOOTY

The follow are what is left over after the PCs resolve the encounter. Use results that apply to the encounter the referee selected.

ROY AND SALLY

Should the PCs kill Roy or Sally, all they get is to be a person of interest in a high profile murder investigation. Roy's backers will fully fund a Level 1 Police Investigation that will most likely cause the PCs a bit of trouble. Roy has around \$500 on him, some plastic credit cards, an *identocard* for the City Hall complex, a watch, Smartphone, and platinum wedding band. Sally will have \$150 tucked away in her garter belt, no ID, and a telescoping baton.

BIKERS

Killing or driving off the bikers will net a different kind of booty. Searching the warehouse will reveal 1-kg of a white, sparkling powder, \$25,000 in cash, and two Mossberg shotguns with 20 rounds of buckshot. Succeeding on an Average [Streetwise] test reveals that the powder is a drug called Glow (see Glow on page 26). A Stage 2 or higher Power Test using Streetwise will estimate the drugs at about \$500,000. The location contains a significant amount of chemical laboratory equipment, which if disposed on the black market would bring \$25,000.

EMIL AND HIS DATE

Emil is not the top of his food chain, just the next layer above Sally. Killing Emil will be viewed as an attempt to move into the territory that will be met with overwhelming response. If Emil's death is tied to the PCs they will be marked for death by the Seven Yen yakuza family that runs organized crime in this part of town. Emil will have 3 knives, a pair of .50 caliber Desert Eagles, 4 magazines for them, four burner cell phones, a credit card, \$1,650 cash. He will also have three grams of a sparkly white powder (see Glow on page 26). Emil's bodyguard will be carrying \$100 cash, no identification, and two 1911 45 ACP pistols with four magazines. He will also have body armor (AV1) covering his chest, but this may be damaged and bloody...

THE PALE

As a creature of the night, the Pale does not carry the usual human stuff. He has no phone or other electronics, a Ruger LCP in .380 caliber, a well-worn sword cane, and that is about it. If the PCs kill

the Pale and have a good minion hunter contact, they could probably sell its body off for \$2,000. However, Pale's tend to decompose quickly and rather completely. If not refrigerated within 4 hours, the body will begin to decompose to a mass of organic goo. This process take about 20 minutes.

LUSCA

If Lusca does not withdraw and is killed, her body will be valuable to minion hunter scientists. However, the only part that is different than any other cephalopod is her brain. Her body will decompose due to the acid like a fish out of water—smelling just as badly. It requires some skill to vivisect her carcass, locate the brain, and excise it—to preserve an intact brain requires a successful Formidable [Medical (Surgery)] test.

GARGOYLES

The gargoyles will crumble to stone upon their death and will look like a pile of masonry rubble. Tracking back through the warehouse tunnel will lead to a Subterranean Gargoyle Fortress. That is a whole campaign in itself. The gargoyles will leave behind crude but sharp bronze short-swords and knives, but nothing else.

GLOW

The drug confiscated by the PCs (assuming that is what they do) is a darkling product that causes a major boost in the charisma attribute and all charisma skills. However, it is instantly addictive from the first use. The drug causes excruciating pain if its use is not continued with a dose taken every 16 hours. This pain is caused by the growth of the little slugs that pervade the victim's body. By continuously taking the drug, the little critter's growth is inhibited. It is a product of the worms whose excretions into the bloodstream enhance the victim's CHR attribute.

The standard dose is one gram. As stated before it is instantly addictive, but its effects are instant as well. Glow provides these two benefits to the new addict:

- ☠ CHR boost of 2D3
- ☠ Possible PSI boost of 1D6 (15% chance, i.e., a 1, 2, or 3 on 1D20)

The effect lasts for 10 + 1D6 hours, however the addict suffers negative effects after that. For the time from the effects wear off until the 16 hour limit, the addict suffers a -1 per hour to the unmodified CHR attribute. After 16 hours—the time since the last dose was taken—the addict no longer suffers CHR loss, but rather the Glow acts as poison, inflicting 1D6 damage to the chest per hour. Once the chest damage exceeds the Critical level, the worms are considered to explode from the victim's body in a mass of eating frenzy. However, outside of the body the worms do not last long. Within 10 minutes, they die leaving a mass of micro-eggs in their bloated carcasses. The eggs will die if not preserved through chemical means. Glow is made from these eggs. Note that if the addict dies for any other reason, the worms will explode from the body within 5 minutes of death, effectively destroying the addict's body.

Taking another dose (1 gram) suppresses worm growth, instantly returns the addict's lost CHR, and boosts it for the duration—another 2D3 roll. Any damage suffered as a result of the poison must be healed normally, that is, the damage does not go away by taking a new dose.

CONCLUSION

Resolving the encounter is entirely dependent upon what the PCs do. But in the end, they will have had to deal with a group of characters or beasts either way—unless they just do not go down the alley...

EXPANSIONS AND FOLLOW-ONS

1. Roy's backers or even Roy himself will be out to get the PCs if they have seen and recognize him (or if he has been killed). Roy has considerable contacts and resources through his government connections. He or they will only be interested in closing down the PCs as a source of information on his indiscretions. Law enforcement, personal troops, and Roy's informal intelligence network will have it in for the PCs, which could cause them a bit of trouble.
2. If the encounter goes wrong and Sally does not get paid for her trick, she will have to tell her pimp, Emil, that it was the PCs that ruined it. She will also point out that the lucrative

blackmail case her pimp was making against Roy was also ruined by the PCs. This could cause the PCs a bit of trouble.

3. Of course, the owners of the drug factory will be a little upset at the loss of their cash and product. They will be most upset at the loss of their talented laboratory workers and their equipment if the PCs dispose of them. But the real problem is the drug itself.
4. The PCs could resolve this encounter and leave it all, but clues to the source of Glow can be had at the scene, shipping labels, manifests, etc. The stuff is very dangerous because it is odorless and tasteless and instantly addicting.
5. The new leader of the Frat is really a Dark Elf or some other minion that is attempting to spread the pain by using the Frat's violence and the new drug, Glow.
6. The medical waste company identified from the bags in the dumpster can vector the PCs to track the source of the arms and legs; and to determine the reason that the corpse in the dumpster will not decompose.
7. Following the homeless blood trail into the sewers could lead to just about anything:

- Were-alligator
- Morlocks
- Dwarf Gremlins
- Tentacled horrors, etc.

◆ ◆ ◆

New small arms from Russia

by Lee Williams

FOR DARK
CONSPIRACY/COC

ASH-12.7

The ASH-12.7 (“Automatic assault rifle, 12.7mm”) is a dedicated close-quarters battle & urban operations weapon, developed by the Russian KBP design bureau on request from the FSB (Federal Security service). This weapon was originally intended for special units of the FSB which operate in urban environments against heavily armed and organized gangsters and terrorists. The first production batch of these weapons was delivered to FSB late in 2011.

ASH-12.7 is a dedicated urban combat weapon for high-risk law enforcement operations, which must combine high stopping power with a limited lethal range to avoid collateral damage to innocent bystanders or hostages. The ammunition was specially designed for this weapon, with the standard load being a lightweight, supersonic bullet with an aluminium core.

Stats are given for this round, though other types are rumoured to exist (a heavier subsonic round, armour-piercing, and duplex ammo).

The weapon itself is of bullpup layout, with stamped steel receiver and polymer furniture. It has an ambidextrous safety and a separate fire selector (semi-auto/three burst). It is available with a carry handle or as a flat-top with Picatinny rail to suit a wide variety of optics. A range of accessories and additions have been seen: sound suppressors, muzzle brake, underbarrel grenade launchers and so forth. The weapon’s empty weight is estimated at 4 kilos.

the user could expect from a modern design. The weapon has polymer furniture, Picatinny rails and almost every optional accessory one could expect. The safety/fire selector and magazine release are ambidextrous and the ejection port has been placed to accommodate right and left-handed users. Even the cocking handle can be switched from side to side. The adjustable stock slides back and forth, rather than pivoting as on the older AK weapons.

The AK-12 is available in several calibres. It can even be rebarreled and rechambered to another calibre relatively easily. The usual magazine capacity for any calibre is 30 rounds, though there are quad-column 60-round “casket” magazines, and even a 100-round drum for the standard Russian 5.45x39mm ammo.

◆ ◆ ◆

KALASHNIKOV AK-12 (AK-200)

The latest weapon in a line descending from Mikhail Kalashnikov’s original, the AK-12 has all the features and options



ASh-12.7 for Dark Conspiracy

Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Range
12.7x55	3	5	1-2-Nil	4	15	3	8	30

Weight 6kg, Price \$4500 (-/R)

Ash-12.7 for Call of Cthulhu

Ammo	Base %	Damage	Range	Attacks	Rounds	HP	Mal
Ash-12.7	25	2d10	70	2	15	10	97



AK-12 for Dark Conspiracy

Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Range
5.45B	3	3	1-Nil	4/5	30	2	4	45

Weight 3.3kg, Price \$3500 (R/C)

AK-12 for Call of Cthulhu

Ammo	Base %	Damage	Range	Attacks	Rounds	HP	Mal
AK-12	25	2d8	120	2 or auto	30	12	97

Author’s note: some information for this article was taken from Wikipedia so apologies for any errors—there again we play other people in made-up worlds for entertainment, so that much detail may not actually matter to you!

AR

A short story of the near future

by Michael Lanzinger

HE WAS SITTING in the subway, shut off from the world and yet deeply immersed in it. In his mind the newest music was playing, streaming right into his brain from the web. He himself was linked, without the need or means to undo the connection. Everything was in his mind, as it would have been in the real world. But what was the real world anyway, if not the sum of the inputs the senses were telling the mind, constantly filtering every aspect of reality of make it bearable and understandable for feeble humans.



At last the future had arrived, if not in the way the sci-fi-nerds had wished for. No cities on the moon, no hurling spaceships faster-than-light away into the endless abyss of the cosmos and surely no big-breasted alien females coming to earth to learn the human ways of intercourse. No, the future had come digitally. Slowly at first, crawling into homes via TV and radio, becoming faster and more agile with every passing decade until it had become something more, immersing everybody and drowning everything. There had been all kinds of trends and steps, ranging from connection via stationary telephones and computers with big gray cubic

screens, giving way to mobile phones, their 'smart' descendants, tablets, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, just to name a few of the more important innovations.

Alongside AR, Augmented Reality, had been developed, clumsy at first, mainly used on TV back then, but with time there had been the first glasses that had allowed the user to make the every-day life much more interesting. Nowadays AR had become standard, the peak of perception better known as the perfect and sole means to finally shape reality, slaving it to one's will.



Of course the credit to this technology that had massively transformed society and the world as a whole had to be given to GateKey Incorporated. After years of being a small and unnoticed company always on the brink of closing down, the firm had finally left its mark in the history books, when one of the founders had come up with the 'T'. Only casually named the T, the device called the 'Tillinghast Omni Device' - or 'TOD' for short - had changed it all and GateKey was now the leading developer only steps away from worldwide monopoly in the area of computer and communication technologies.

Attached to the forehead the T was in a way like its namesake, a rather ordinary-looking but very thin and T-shaped device, with which the permanent access to the virtual world was granted. Sound was transported via a new method of gently applied vibration by device to the skull, while any optical input was directly projected on the lenses of the wearer's eye. But maybe the best thing about the T was the way to control it. Unlike any other portable device it



featured no clumsy buttons or a touchscreen. One could interact with it vocally of course, but even this was not really necessary, for the T measured the individual brain waves and carried out any commands thought. In addition and due to the direct contact with the skin, the whole body too could act as a controller and if a user wanted to make a quick change of the volume, a quick touch on the forehead was all it took.

The most used feature of it all was, without a doubt, the possibility of personalizing not only the device itself, but the whole view of the world via AR, that now was used by virtually every person on the planet ranging from newborn as a way of learning to old people as a way of aiding in the daily life.

There was even talk these days that the next generation of the T could be implanted into the brain and thereby nullifying the need to apply it to the skin. Rumors had it that there already were some beta-testers and very-early adopters running around with a T inside them.



The T had changed his way of life too, moreover his workflow and he was far from being the only one. Nowadays twenty-four/seven meant twenty-four/seven, always online, always connected, that was the mantra of the world now. But, again thanks to AR, even when he was 'on duty' the whole time, he could at least make this situation as pleasant as possible. Since he preferred to live alone and let only short-lived romantic relationships come in the way of his career, he was used to have a dashing virtual secretary, who popped up in his field of vision when he entered his apartment or his office. As for the rest of the day, when there was no work to do, either stationary or on-the-go, he was used to consume media, receiving news-feeds and playing every app-game he could find, always keeping his immediate surroundings to his whims and wishes.

Currently the real life afforded him to ride the subway, for going by car was never a good idea during rush-hours. He did not really dislike the public transportation system, but it was a distraction, keeping him away from more important stuff. But since every problem came with an opportunity, he had been getting used to take a look of the persons around him while on the go, accessing their virtual profile when possible and logging it away for a possible

contact-exchange later. This way he had met his last one-night-stand and the one before.



But today, no such interesting profile could be seen, all of the bystanders being neither socially interesting nor good-looking and so he cast a glance at the numerous QR- and NFC-Points visible on the walls of the carriage, only waiting to be accessed. If one was not cautious, they would simply start popping up in the personal field of vision and attacking the wearer of the T with a multitude of acoustic and optical input, blocking everything else. At least there he hoped something interesting, a new and unique RSS-feed maybe, could be discovered, but again he was disappointed.

Nearly unnoticed to him the train had arrived in another station and passengers exited and entered the carriage he was in. Again there were new people, again possible new friends in one of the countless social networks that spanned the web. A blonde and rather attractive woman caught his attention, which he quickly shifted again, after discovering her profile status as both 'married' and 'currently unavailable for affairs'. He decided to let his T watch her profile and alarm him if the latter part should change. The man behind her on the other hand provided him with a short burst of interest, since he was a 'Smarter', one of the few backward persons declining to wear a T and instead sticking to their outdated smartphones. If at least these persons had the dignity to get themselves some AR-glasses! He let his T take a picture of the Smarter, quickly sharing it via his social network account and texting some half-funny jokes. The community would do the rest of the work, branding the man as odd, as an irregularity in the web not to be tolerated.



He was so concentrated, that it took him a second to notice the change or rather the absence of change. It appeared as if his T had shut down, the AR-input gone. Before he could panic, the virtual display lit up again, slightly distorted, telling him to stand by. Of course! Today was one of these days, the one he dreaded in a way. GateKey had again announced an update for the T; it had been all over the web. Once again there would be new features, making the device better and more outstanding than ever before. And yet, so used was

everyone to the constant flow of information, that the lack of them instilled an uneasiness in the majority of the users. Experts already had a name for this: 'T-minus.

He was of this group, dependent on the T and fearing that an upgrade-gone-wrong would leave him with a shut-down device in an analogue world he had never really cared to spend much thought on. So he closed his eyes, wishing the update to be over quickly, the T to function again. As if sensing his fear the T gave a signal telling him that the update was done, that it was again ready to be used.



He opened his eyes and let out a short and silent sigh that everything was in order, the AR still up and running and his personal profile unharmed. Deciding to let off some steam by playing a shooter-game, he instructed the T to start the latest one acquired and readied himself to finally break the high-score set by one of his too many friends in the social networks.

The surroundings did not change as much as he would have wished, instead staying virtually the same, a drab interior of a subway. He would surly leave a negative review on this game! Suddenly and to add to his growing bad mood there was a fly in his field of vision. He had not noticed it before and the sighting of an insect was rather unusual these days, especially on public transport. He did not even recognize the species of it and thought about looking it up for a moment, then deciding to have far too less interest in the small yet annoying creature. He waved at the fly to get it away from him, when he noticed that it was not even real, but displayed by the T. The insect, hideous-looking as it was, surely was no part of the game; it had to be some kind of bug instead. He tried to will it away, just as other creatures started to pop up at the AR. Few at first and little ones, but with every second passing there seemed to come bigger ones into existence, every one glowing in an unearthly color. Then he noticed that he was not the only one to start seeing the creatures, as other people too started waving away things visible only to them. Somewhere in the carriage someone started to scream, while the ugly things kept coming.

He tried to shut down every app currently running on his T, maybe even restart it, but nothing would work. The game he had wanted to try before had not even been active and still the virtual world was changing right before his eyes with no way to undo it.

Next to him a woman fell to her knees, bloody tears running from her eyes as she tried in vain to fight of the ghastly creatures that somehow had begun to inflict real wounds. The web too was on alert, countless posts and status-updates indicating that the situation was far from local, as users all over the globe had started seeing things that were clearly not meant to be seen by humanity. And things got worse with every moment. While trying to fend off a creature, he looked around and saw via AR that some virtual profiles had changed, marking their user as 'dead' and therefore 'unavailable for further interaction.'

Again in fear he closed his eyes, wishing the situation to change, to get things back to normal again. Once more he tried to master his T, to impose only his view on reality.



Around him there was chaos, terror and utter destruction. His skull exploding with pain, he tried again and again to deactivate, to even disconnect the T but the forces now raging over the world would not allow this to happen. Finally he saw and with him billions of feeble-minded experienced - suffered - the same, for the Great Old Ones were about to return to claim this little rock in the cold and dark void that was the universe as their own again. Only this time no one would be there to stop them, no enlightened mind would be able to postpone the oncoming storm of ecstasy and madness once more and let humanity exist for yet another blink of a cosmic eye in eternity.

Countless fragments and bits of knowledge and sensory inputs flooded his mind, too fast to keep track, let alone understand at least a fraction of the eldritch lore.

The members of the cults that worshiped these alien being had waited long enough and had bided their time. It had taken them countless fruitless attempts to reawaken what was dead yet dreaming, before they stumbled over the missing pieces of the puzzle. If the dreamers were unwilling to awake, wanted to remain in their dream, reality had to be taken to them and not the other way round, fusing both realms into a twisted new one. And so the cults had learned and finally - via the T - granted humanity its greatest wish and in the end its own doom, the means to turn the subjective view of the world in a personal dream and share it with everyone who

was likewise connected to the digital cage, men had pleaded to be imprisoned of.



One last time he tried to gain some form of control over his senses and his whole body, but ultimately failing to do so. Besides the unspeakable optical input he started hearing THEM rising, before his brain decided to disconnect itself from the unbearable, casting his being into eternal darkness.

THE END



ELSEWHERE FOR INSPIRATION

Adventure Creation Advice

by Tad Kelson

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU

IN THE GAME known as Call of Cthulhu there lurks cosmic horror, the unknown, and madness. All the mysteries of Reality pale before the hideous truths: of strange entities and unfathomable phenomena, of eldritch powers that are akin to magic, and distant lands accessible only in dreams.

All of these and more are Call of Cthulhu, the seminal horror gaming setting and system. CoC is in many ways the starting point for all other horror oriented RPGs. All of the ones since it came into existence owe some sense of homage to the primogenitor, at least in spirit.

But when it comes to making an adventure, the effort that comes with plotting out what is happening, Keepers (the Game Masters), especially new ones, might find themselves at loss for a starting point. So besides pulling in newspaper articles, published scenarios, cribbing from stories, there are a wealth of other sources of inspiration. Other game systems and settings, modules and adventure published for other settings/systems, books and movies, music, are all potential resources. Lots of great places to look for ideas. So here is one more.

The rest of this short piece however is concerned with a different source material: Collectible/Trading Card Games. For Call of Cthulhu there have been two major CCG/TCGs made over the years.

***Mythos* from Chaosium**

***Call of Cthulhu: The Card Game* from Fantasy Flight Press**

These are the main ones and while the rest of this piece is concerned with Mythos, the concepts apply equally well to the other game as well as to the *New Aeon* edition of Mythos.

So the whole idea is to use the cards to randomly determine plot or game elements. The reason to do that is to make life just a little easier for The Keeper (the person that sets up and gamemasters a Call of Cthulhu game session). This allows for a reduced preparation time, increasing the potential for an enjoyable game, with some of the burden of creation being taken directly off the hands of the Keeper. Of course not everyone likes a random generation setup, but for those that do not mind or have inadequate preparation time, these game aids can be invaluable.

Firstly, a little information about the source materials. So in the example of the Mythos CCG the cards are divided into the following named types:

- Investigator Card*
- Adventure*
- Location*
- Events*
- Ally*
- Monster*
- Spell*
- Artifact*
- Tome*

These are the basic building blocks for the card game, and function admirably well in adventure creation as well. As might be evident just looking at the types of cards, it does look like the essential elements of a role-playing game are distilled into 9 different card types. Seeing the similarities instead of the differences aids in conceptualizing how to use the little cardstock rectangles to help make a role-playing game session.

A *Mythos* CCG Card Deck in Charts

# of Cards	Card Type
1	Investigator Card (double-sided)
4	Adventure Cards
12	Location cards
13	Event Cards
9	Ally cards
12	Monster Cards
3	Artifact cards
3	Tome Cards
5	Spell Cards

This is a complete Limited Edition Starter Deck that was unopened until this article was written.

Converting these into RPG elements, the Investigator Card becomes the player characters, Ally becomes NPCs, Location are places to investigate, Events are what are happening, the rest fill out the landscape. So then it comes down to allocating the different elements in such a fashion as to facilitate a game session. This is the essence of this entire article. This is where the charts that follow come into play. For those Keepers that are at a loss for their next game session help is here.

So now the idea is a series of charts to facilitate use of the cards, as well as encourage Keepers to make their own charts using cards they purchase themselves so they can expand out beyond the scope of this article.

In the charts below are the names of the cards for use in some examples and to give The Keepers reading this article something to start with, making for the incentive for them to pick up Starter Decks or Booster Cards for their own use.

So now it comes to adventure crafting.

Here are 4 different Methods (in this article) as to how to look at using these cards

1. The Adventure Cards
2. 3 Acts in 1, 2, 3, format
3. 3 Acts in 3, 3, 3, format
4. Purely Random Card Drawing

METHOD 1: THE ADVENTURE CARDS.

In the CCG the Adventure Cards play a pivotal role in the game. The text on the card shows what actions, events, or other requirements are needed to complete that adventure and score adventure points (important in the campaign play version of Mythos). For the purpose here instead that can be used whole sale as the tasks needed for the entire adventure.

In Example: The Haunted House (Mythos Experience Adventure) Without repeating the entire card text here are the salient elements

- ☠ Old Abandoned House (Visit a House or Site Location Card)
- ☠ Discover a Tome
- ☠ Escape the attacking Monster
- ☠ Flee to a different Location
- ☠ And the safety of a Steadfast Ally



So breaking that down into an actual game session could result in the following.

The Characters receive a summons or discover the existence of an old abandoned mansion reputed to be haunted or otherwise cursed. Being the adventurers they are they travel to that locale, far from vibrant civilization and begin to snoop around. Inside in a hidden spot or perhaps just in a nicely equipped library they find a Mythos Tome. Disturbing the resting place also rouses a Mythos Being that comes to investigate. With it most likely being too powerful for the characters, they flee from the site taking the tome while being pursued for a distance. Eventually they find more aid and speak of their discoveries with another NPC contact of theirs.

So from a single CCG card comes an entire night's adventure. Of course it can be tailored to the actual group specifics, changing the house to perhaps an abandoned sanatorium or even a deserted hospital for a larger scale location. With the outline there it is simpler to expand and flesh it out more from the humble beginnings.



METHOD 2: THE 3 ACT, 1, 2, 3

This is intended for a longer adventure, being 3 Acts or series of encounters.

The first act is 1 event, the second 2, the third having 3 total leading up to the climatic ending.

Method 3 is an expanded version of Method 2, with three things happening in each act, for a total of 9 separate elements to account for. The charts that follow are derived from the cards in the Started Deck being used for this article.

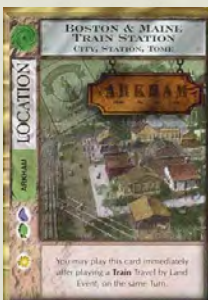
Method 4: The simplest and literally the most random.

Just draw cards until inspiration hits or you see something that fits (or perhaps does not fit.) In this method shuffle all the cards and then The Keeper draws the top card and keeps drawing until something that will work for them comes up, or something that inspires them shows up. This is the least optimal way, but the most visceral and arguably the most tactile use of cards that real currency has been spent on.



CHARTS AND THEIR USAGE

So for either Method 2 or 3 the idea is to roll on the Events and or Locations Charts to determine the Where and What of the High School Formula of Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Note



that there are some real overlaps in what the Mythos Game feels is an Event or a Location.

Taking those individual parts and applying them to scenario design leads to the need to figure out Who and What, along with Where and Why aspects. When is the campaign timeframe of course, Who are the Player and Non-Player Characters, with Why being the starting point, the hook, to pull the PCs into the adventure and How being what the players actually have their characters do.

So to figure up the variables to get started, Who, What, and Where, pick up the dice and get ready to roll.

In the Chart for this article a single d20 will work for the chart sizes. Other and future charts will reflect more options. The chart also has some of the cards removed to streamline this chart.

So the first example presumes Method 2, with 1 element for Act 1, 2 for 2 and 3 for the last act in the adventure.

So for the First Act 1 Roll which is a 7.

Second Act of 2 die rolls comes up a 9 and a 6.

Third Act of 3 die rolls come up with 5, 11, 8.

So here are the results:

1. The Arkham Advertiser
2. Brown University John Hay Library
3. The Lowell Street Cafe
4. Potter's Field
5. Marsh Refining Company
6. First Baptist Church

So that lays out the significant locations that are necessary for the adventure.

Starting off at the local newspaper, moving to the library and a meeting/rendezvous at a local eatery. Then a trip to the local cemetery, a manufacturing plant, and then ending up at a church.

None of the events on the chart came up. The Keeper could roll a few more times to pull up the event that sets this all in motion or just pick one that looks like it could be run with.

Keep in mind the Ally Cards can be used to assist in making new NPCs. The cards all have an illustration, name, what their occupation is as well as languages they speak. Taking that as the basis, create an Education Stat and Skills by inference of the card name and use that as a starting point also.

LOCATION AND EVENT CHART

Location

1. Assembly Hall
2. Innsmouth Courier
3. South Woods memorial Cemetery
4. Ammi Pierce's Tottering Cottage
5. Potter's Field
6. The Lowell Street Cafe
7. The Arkham Advertiser
8. First Baptist Church
9. Brown University John Hay Library
10. Sefton Asylum
11. Marsh Refining Co.
12. Hangman's Hill
13. Powerful Storms
14. Waning Moon
15. Instability in the Mythos
16. Police Investigation
17. Thieves in Your Attic
18. Direct Sunlight
19. An Unexpected Calamity
20. Children have Nightmares

There you have it. A chart that is suitable to assist in generating a session or three for *Call of Cthulhu* games. Hopefully this article will inspire you to pick up some cards for your own use, or just take this as a starting point and make your own specific charts to assist you. Good Gaming to All.

The list of actual cards in the Starter Deck referenced in the article follows:

Location

Assembly Hall
 Innsmouth Courier
 South Woods memorial Cemetery
 Ammi Pierce's Tottering Cottage
 Potter's Field
 The Lowell Street Cafe

The Arkham Advertiser
 First Baptist Church
 Brown University John Hay Library
 Sefton Asylum
 Marsh Refining Co.
 Hangman's Hill

Event

Dawn of a New Day
 Powerful Storms
 Waning Moon
 Instability in the Mythos
 Police Investigation
 Thieves in Your Attic
 Bacteriophobia
 Claustrophobia
 Demophobia
 Direct Sunlight
 An Unexpected Calamity
 Children have Nightmares
 Iatrophobia

Ally

Jeremiah Brewster
 Zador Allen
 K.J. Hooper
 Narum Gardner
 Ann White
 Howard Lovecraft
 Mercy Dexter
 Robert Marsh
 Rhody Harris

Monster

Formless Spawn
 Fire Vampires
 Rhan Tegoth
 Shantaks
 Deep One
 Serpent People
 Skeletons

Pack of Rat Things
 Nightgaunts

Ithaqua

Mother Hydra
 Gnoph Keh

Artifact

Shining Trapezohedron
 Dynamite
 Seal of Isis

Tome

Seven Critical Books of H'San
 Cultes Des Goules
 Ponape Scripture Hoag Ms.

Spell

Keenes of Tow Alike
 Pipes of Madness
 Barrier of Naach-Tith
 Circles of Thaol
 Hands of Colubra

BONUS LISTING

Note:

The *New Aeon* version of *Mythos* is Modern oriented, making it more suitable for *Dark Conspiracy*, *Delta Green*, *Call of Cthulhu d20*, *Alternity*, *Spycraft*, and other similar Games and Settings. The two Booster Packs listed below come from the New Aeon Edition of *Mythos*. This will show some of the difference between the two editions of the *Mythos* Collectible Card Game. These could be added into the above chart or into their own to easily expand the options right here:

Adventure

Look to The Future
 Today's Tabloid headings

Location

Yuggoth
Colosseum
Eiffel Tower
Smithsonian Institution
Dr MacDonald's House

Artifact

Time Machine
Cloning Chamber

Event

Mugging
Acid Rain
Hydrophilia
Nuclear Winter
Thaasophobia
Nemesis
UFO
Serial Killer
Acid rain

Monster

Hound of Tindalos
Larva of the Other Gods, First Stage
Shuggoth Lord

Spell

Song of the Stellar Larva

Ally

Robert Bloch
Dr Carlos MacDonald
Napoleon Whately
Johnny Booger

For some other CCGs that fit into this general genre look at the following:

Heresy: Kingdom Come from Last Unicorn Games
Kult: Reality is a Lie from Target Game AB/Heartbreaker Hobbies
On the Edge from Atlas Games
Shadowfist CCG from Daedalus Entertainment

There are other, more, modern oriented CCGs not mentioned here that would apply to *CoC* games in a more modern timeframe, or perhaps other games such as **Dark Conspiracy**, **Unknown Armies**, etc.

For an extensive list of Collectible/Trading Card Games that are or have been created, the following link will spur your imagination. This link is not complete of course, but it is very broad in scope.

[List of Collectible Card Games on Wikipedia](#)

Further information about both *Mythos* from Chaosium and *Call of Cthulhu: The Card Game* from Fantasy Flight Press head over to their websites for information, ordering online (if your FLGS does not have stock), and other pertinent details.

◆ ◆ ◆



YOU'RE NICKED!

A British 70's setting

by Linden Dunham

FOR MINI-SIX

“It’s war, it’s bloody war now!”

—DI Jack Regan, *The Sweeney*

LONDON IN THE 70s: Armed robbers, gangsters, muggers and terrorists stalk the streets intent on murder, mayhem and plunder. Ranged against them are the elite squads of the Metropolitan Police: Hard driving, hard living coppers who drink like fish and smoke like chimneys. They may be rough but so is the world they live in. Car chases, punch ups and shoot outs are all part of a day’s work when you’re trying to keep the public safe from violent criminals. Not that you ever get any thanks for it. The papers call you fascist and leftie liberal defence lawyers are always trying to stitch you up on a technicality. As if that wasn’t bad enough there’s the enemy within: The fifth floor, superannuated top brass with no idea what it’s like out on the streets, and their henchmen in A10 - the complaints investigation department who’ll hang a good copper out to dry for the smallest mistake or procedural short cut. At the end of the day the only recognition you get, or that really matters, is from your mates as you celebrate another collar in the pub or with a few crafty scotches back at the station.



Like Precinct 77 “You’re Nicked!” is a tribute to fictional 1970s policing, but with the action transferred to the other side of the Atlantic. The new breed of British cop shows that first appeared in the mid-1970s took much of their inspiration from US

films like Dirty Harry and The French Connection. Thus many of the concepts in Precinct 77 translate directly to “You’re Nicked!” especially the principle that it’s justice that counts, not the letter of the law. If justice is done in a flurry of squealing car tires and/or flailing fists then that’s even better. Remember it’s a hard world out there though, and the good guys don’t always win...

CHARACTER CREATION GUIDELINES

Attribute dice and skill allotment are the same as in Precinct 77. Some skills, perks and disadvantages have different names to reflect the British setting. To avoid confusion the original terms are set out below along with their “You’re Nicked!” counterparts:

PERKS

Ethnic Background (1): This functions in the same way as its Precinct 77 equivalent, but is modified to reflect the often poor relations between the British police and immigrant communities. Any skill roll which turns up a 1 on the Wild Die is an automatic failure. You are immediately accused of being a sell out, traitor to your own kind, working for Babylon etc.

<i>Precinct 77/Mini Six</i>	<i>Skill List</i> <i>You're Nicked!</i>	<i>Description</i>
Brawl (Might)	Punch Ups	Unarmed Fighting
Melee (Might)	Aggro	Bats, knives, sticks, bike chains etc
Drive (Agility)	Motors	2 wheels or 4, it doesn't matter
Guns (Agility)	Shooters	Pistols, rifles, shotguns, anything short of heavy weapons
Courage (Charm)	Bottle	Dealing with stressful situations e.g. shoot outs
BS Detector (Charm)	Porkies (as in Porky Pies, cockney rhyming slang for lies)	Sensing lies
Seduction (Charm)	Pull (as in "I pulled a bird down the pub last night.")	Using your magnetism on the opposite sex
Snitches (Charm)	Snouts	Underworld informers

I Would (1): You are physically attractive. Once per session you can double any *Charm* skill roll except *Bad Cop* and *Porkies* when dealing with a person of the opposite sex. This perk replaces *Heaving and Breathless* and *Ladies Love the 'Stache* .

Nice Motor (1): This perk functions in the same way as *Sweet Ride*. Qualifying vehicles are referred to by the generic term of sports car and include the likes of the Ford Capri, Jensen Interceptor and Jaguar E-Type

Own Gun (1) or (2): Rather than be saddled with the standard issue .38 you are allowed to carry the weapon of your choice when out on armed operations. Cost is (1) for pistols and (2) for rifles and shotguns. Typical weapons for the era would be Browning automatic pistol, Magnum revolver, bolt action scoped rifle, or pump action shotgun.

You Bastard (1): The villains don't play by the Queensbury Rules and neither do you. Everybody on the manor knows that you'll stop at nothing to put the villains away and you're not bothered about hurting a few lowlives in the process. Once per session you can double any *Bad Cop* or *Snouts* roll.

COMPLICATIONS

Bent for the Job: The system's biased in favour of the villains, everybody knows that. Sometimes you need to give justice a helping hand. Gain one bonus CP each session where you plant evidence, fabricate a confession, commit perjury or tear up the rulebook to make a case.

Bent for Oneself: You just can't keep your sticky fingers to yourself, and being a copper is like having a licence to steal. Earn one bonus CP every session in which you take a bribe, shake down a villain, or otherwise grab some loot for yourself.

No Bottle: Maybe you've seen too many fights, or you've spent your whole career avoiding them. Either way you haven't really got the stomach for violence. At the start of any combat you will need to make a *Bottle* roll to avoid freezing or running away. The relevant target number depends on the type of violence you're facing:

<i>Punch Up/Fist Fight</i>	5
<i>Aggro with knives, bottles, clubs etc</i>	10
<i>Shooters</i>	15

You gain one bonus CP per session that you overcome your natural cowardice.

Country Boy: You were one of the high fliers in your regional force but you're in the capital now, and as your colleagues never tire of reminding you, "This is London!" They do things differently here. Your accent, mannerisms and possibly even your clothes mark you out as a "Swede" and a potential object of ridicule to both villains and your fellow cops.

Write the word SWEDE on your character sheet. The first time per session a 1 is rolled on the Wild Die for any of the following skills it is considered an automatic failure: *Bad Cop*, *Porkies*, *Good Cop*, *Investigation*, *Legalese*, *Pull*, *Snouts*, and *Undercover*

Each time you gain a CP in this manner cross out one of the letters in SWEDE. Once all letters are crossed out this complication is lost as you have become a naturalised Londoner.



ADVICE FOR THE GM

The popular image of UK cop shows of the 1970s is of the exploits of two politically incorrect detectives who tear up the rule book to ensure that justice is done. Such justice is often of the instant variety and administered in the course of brutal fights or gun battles in downbeat locations like derelict docklands, abandoned factories or railway shunting yards. Meanwhile back at the station their boss is either tearing his hair out over their antics or trying to justify their behaviour to his superiors. This standard template tends to ignore the fact that many series featured a semi-regular cast of supporting characters: Drivers, squad detectives, and technical specialists all of whom can be co-opted to form an ensemble team in "You're Nicked!" It's also worth remembering that some shows, such as *Strangers*, were ensemble in nature anyway. There's no reason for one or two characters to hog all the limelight.

MONEY AND GEAR

British police in the 1970s weren't particularly well paid. Characters are assumed to earn enough to be able to afford a flat or small house in one of London's less affluent suburbs and to run a modest car.

Standard issue police gear comprises of a warrant card, handcuffs and when the situation requires it a truncheon (treat as club) and/or a .38 calibre revolver. The characters also have a single Ford Granada at their disposal, together with a police driver (see Sample Characters section) if their *Motors* skill isn't up to it.

Purist play would have the characters as members of the Flying Squad or one of the major crime squads, dealing with robberies and trying to make cases against serious villains. This narrows the scope of games though and ignores the genre's preference for specialist units with wide jurisdictions and terse names capable of being reduced to an enigmatic collection of initials and numbers e.g. CI5, DI6, or Unit 23. The characters can be assigned to one of these specialist teams with members drawn from various police divisions, and possibly further afield such as the armed forces, intelligence services and the home office. Their brief is to deal with major crime throughout London and beyond e.g. high value robberies, murders, kidnappings, terrorist threats, and espionage. In cases involving national security they invariably bump up against the likes of Special Branch and MI5

who often prove to be more hindrance than help and have their own agenda. Characters can also find themselves involved in the weirder side of 70s sub-cultures. The decade certainly wasn't short of self appointed gurus and messiahs whose activities at the very least bordered on criminal. Some of these spiritual leaders may have designs that go beyond fleecing gullible cult members.

It has to be acknowledged that there was a darker side to policing in the 1970s. In London corruption was a particular problem with senior officers in the Flying Squad and Obscene Publications Squad being in the pay of professional crooks. When Sir Robert Mark became Metropolitan Police Commissioner in 1972 he drily noted that "a good police force is one that catches more crooks than it employs" and started rooting out the corruption that had taken hold in plain clothes units. Mark increased the influence and authority of the uniform branch and set up A10, a specialist unit to investigate complaints against police officers. These events filtered through into the cop shows of the time. Corruption was touched upon a number of times in *The Sweeney*, most notably in the episode "Bad Apple" and in the second spin off film. By the time of GF Newman's *Law and Order* in 1978 it was possible to show police corruption as entirely routine. Shot in documentary style it depicted Flying Squad officers helping themselves to insurance rewards and taking bribes from villains in exchange for dropping charges. Conversely criminals felt to be "overdue" were fair game to be arrested on trumped up charges and a case manufactured against them to ensure they received a lengthy jail sentence. These tactics were justified by the belief that while a villain may not have committed the offenses they were sent down for they'd undoubtedly got away with similar crimes in the past. The police were just resetting the balance. Such attitudes also meant that confessions could be extracted through browbeating suspects or outright physical violence. Access to lawyers could be blocked by creative interpretation of the notoriously vague Judge's Rules that were supposed to govern treatment of suspects. In real life corrupt police practices led to several miscarriages of justice.

If the GM and players want to explore this darker side of the genre then "You're Nicked!" allows them to do so with the inclusion of some suitably dubious Complications. It is suggested that the atmosphere of such games should become progressively darker. Initial euphoria at easy success and riches gives way to paranoia. Characters find themselves always looking over their shoulders in case their misdeeds come back to haunt them in the shape of disgruntled villains, greedy colleagues, nosy reporters or an A10 investigation.

CASE FILES

The Boys With the Black Stuff: London is playing host to a meeting of OPEC countries. The Emir of Kutar, the newest state to join the organisation, is attending in person. He has requested that the Metropolitan Police provide him with security for the duration of his visit. Given that the Emir only recently succeeded to the kingdom after his father's assassination by Marxist elements within Kutar's own security forces his enthusiasm for using a neutral third party to supply protection is perhaps understandable. HM Govt. is happy to oblige as the Emir is willing to use his good offices at the conference to try and mitigate the effect of the recent oil shock on the United Kingdom.

Unfortunately for the characters the Emir is finding it difficult to leave the playboy ways of his youth behind. In the evenings he and his entourage insist on being accompanied "Up West" where they present an easy target to muggers and other rip off artists as they live it up in the casinos and night clubs. To add to the Character's problems their team includes a taciturn Special Branch Officer, Detective Inspector Rowland. The Special Branch man has a knack of disappearing at inopportune moments and is sometimes spotted talking with various shady looking foreigners. Has Rowland been bought by the Kutari opposition?

Old Print: A new bookshop has opened up in Soho, specialising in "esoteric erotica". Much of the stock seems comprise of dusty old leather bound books stacked in haphazard piles. Despite being open only a few days the whole place is covered in thick layer of dust. The local porn firm decided that the place lowers the tone of the area and sent round a couple of heavies to persuade the owner, a rather obese neurotic looking man, to take his business elsewhere. Said heavies subsequently turned up on a nearby building site minus their heads which appear to have been bitten off by...something. Now there's talk of a gang war. Can the characters keep a lid on the situation while they get to the bottom of the murders?

The Long Bank Holiday: It's the Queen's Silver Jubilee weekend and despite the rainy weather fires are breaking out all over West

London. Properties belonging to gangster turned developer Harry Brand are going up in smoke. Harry's big deal with a US consortium is threatened and he's tearing up the manor trying to find the culprits before everything goes pear shaped and the Yanks get on a plane back to New York. Harry has let it be known that whoever finds the arsonists is in line for a very large drink. Nobody seems to know anything though. Then a snout remembers seeing some of Brand's heavies wading into some hippy types while clearing a squat in Ladbroke Grove a few days back. Enquiries reveal that Harry recently bought a large house in the area. The former occupiers were some sort of pagan commune called the Temple of Elemental Fire. Could the hippies be wreaking revenge on Harry for their eviction?

Down Among the Swedes: A10 are short handed and co-opt the team to assist in an enquiry into corruption allegations against a neighbouring force. Detective Inspector Ryall of the local CID is definitely in the frame but who else is involved? How far has the corruption spread, and how far will Inspector Ryall and his cronies go to keep their ill gotten gains?

Oliver's Army: A snout gets in touch about a recent spate of armed robberies in the capital. Major-General Bernard Oliver is a decorated war veteran and retired career soldier. Since his return to civilian life he's given several outspoken interviews in which he rails at state of modern Britain, bemoans the pernicious influence of liberalism and urges a return to traditional religious values. Oliver has founded an organisation called National Assistance and has been recruiting like minded individuals to provide "specialist help" in the event of a major emergency such as a general strike or leftist coup.

The advent of National Assistance coincides with a series of armed robberies all carried out with military precision. The latest ends in a shoot out with the characters in which two of the robbers are killed. The men are subsequently identified as a former officer on General Oliver's staff, and a professional blagger. Has the general formed an alliance with "the chaps" to finance his private army? Is National Assistance more than just a disgruntled fringe group? Does Oliver's enthusiasm for "our traditional religion" refer to Christianity or something much older?

SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Note: Purely for consistency I've retained setting specific skill names, even when it strikes me as slightly incongruous e.g. a criminal character with Good or Bad Cop skills.



COPS

A10 Detective

Our very own Gestapo

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	2D+2
Wit:	3D	Charm:	2D
<i>Investigation:</i>	3D+2	<i>Bad Cop:</i>	3D+2
<i>Legalese:</i>	3D+1	<i>Porkies:</i>	3D+1
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 8	<i>Block:</i> 8	<i>Parry:</i> 8 <i>Soak:</i> 8

Perks and Comps: By the book, sidekick (A10 Sergeant, with same stats except Bad Cop is replaced with Good Cop at 3D+2)

Gear: Notebook, tape recorder, trumped up warrant

Ambitious WPC

She's a bright kid, you should listen to her.

Might:	2D	Agility:	2D+2
Brawl	2D+2		
Melee	2D+2		
Wit:	3D	Charm:	3D
<i>Investigation:</i>	3D+1	<i>Good Cop:</i>	3D+1
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 8	<i>Block:</i> 8	<i>Parry:</i> 8 <i>Soak:</i> 6

Perks and Comps: I would, Perceptive

Gear: Handcuffs, notebook, police radio, truncheon, camera (when off duty)

Police Driver

Who taught you to drive, Evel Knievel?

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	3D
		<i>Motors:</i>	4D
Wit:	2D	Charm:	2D
<i>Mechanic:</i>	3D		
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 9	<i>Block:</i> 8	<i>Parry:</i> 8 <i>Soak:</i> 8

Perks and Comps: None.

Gear: Unmarked police car

Man From the Ministry

You're off the case, it's a matter of national security

Might:	2D	Agility:	3D
Wit:	3D	Charm:	2D+2
<i>Legalese:</i>	3D+2	<i>Bad Cop:</i>	3D
		<i>Good Cop:</i>	3D
		<i>Contacts:</i>	3D
		<i>Undercover:</i>	3D
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 9	<i>Block:</i> 6	<i>Parry:</i> 6 <i>Soak:</i> 6

Perks and Comps: By the book, important friend (the home secretary)

Gear: Ministerial car with driver (stats as Police Driver below)

The Skipper

Oi, Guvnor!

Might:	3D+1	Agility:	3D
<i>Punch-ups</i>	4D	<i>Shooters:</i>	4D
Wit:	2D+2	Charm:	2D+2
<i>Investigation:</i>	3D	<i>Bad Cop:</i>	3D
		<i>Porkies:</i>	3D
		<i>Command:</i>	3D
		<i>Good Cop:</i>	3D+1
		<i>Snouts:</i>	3D
		<i>Undercover:</i>	3D
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 9	<i>Block:</i> 12	<i>Parry:</i> 10 <i>Soak:</i> 10

Perks and Comps: I would

Gear: .38 revolver

The Super

You two aren't helping my ulcers

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	2D
Wit:	3D	Charm:	2D+1
<i>Investigation:</i>	3D+2	<i>Bad Cop:</i>	3D
<i>Legalese:</i>	3D+2	<i>Porkies:</i>	3D
		<i>Command:</i>	2D+2
		<i>Good Cop:</i>	3D
		<i>Contacts:</i>	3D
Static:	<i>Dodge:</i> 6	<i>Block:</i> 8	<i>Parry:</i> 8 <i>Soak:</i> 8

Perks and Comps: By the book

Gear: .38 revolver (when out of the office), unmarked police car with driver

The Guvnor

Get your trousers on, you're nicked.

Might:	3D	Agility:	2D+2
Punch-ups:	3D+2	Shooters:	3D
Wit:	3D	Charm:	2D+2
Investigation:	4D	Bad Cop:	4D
		Porkies:	3D+2
		Command:	3D+2
		Good Cop:	3D
		Snouts:	3D
		Undercover:	3D
Static:	Dodge: 8	Block: 9	Parry: 11 Soak: 9
Perks and Comps:	You Bastard		
Gear:	.38 revolver, leather jacket, bottle of blended scotch (in desk drawer)		

Uniformed Officer

Woodentop

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	2D+1
Punch-ups:	3D		
Melee:	3D		
Wit:	2D	Charm:	2D
Investigation:	3D		
Static:	Dodge: 7	Block: 9	Parry: 9 Soak: 8
Perks and Comps:	None.		
Gear:	Handcuffs, notebook, police radio, truncheon		

CRIMINALS



Bent Brief

Inspector Ryall might be persuaded to drop the charges for the right incentive

Might:	2D	Agility:	2D+1
Wit:	3D+1	Charm:	2D+2
Legalese:	4D	Porkies:	3D
		Contacts:	3D
		Good Cop:	3D
Static:	Dodge: 7	Block: 6	Parry: 6 Soak: 6
Perks and Comps:	By the book		
Gear:	Notepad and pens, tape recorder		

Blogger

Hand it over china

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	2D+1
Punch-ups:	3D	Shooters:	3D
Melee:	3D		
Wit:	1D+2	Charm:	1D+1
		Bad Cop:	3D
Static:	Dodge: 7	Block: 9	Parry: 9 Soak: 8
Perks and Comps:	None.		
Gear:	Stocking mask, army surplus combat jacket, club or light pistol or shotgun		

Corrupt Detective

PROTODIMENSION MAGAZINE

It'll cost you, the whole squad are going to want a taste

Might:	3D	Agility:	2D+2
Punch-ups	3D+1	Sneak:	3D
		Jimmy Locks:	3D
		Pickpocket:	3D
Wit:	3D	Charm:	2D+2
Investigation:	4D	Bad Cop:	4D
		Porkies:	3D+2
		Contacts:	3D
		Good Cop:	3D
		Snouts:	3D
Static:	Dodge: 8	Block: 9	Parry: 10 Soak: 10

Perks and Comps: Bent for the job, Bent for oneself

Gear: .38 revolver, brown envelope full of cash

Foreign Terrorist

Freedom for Kutar!

Might:	2D	Agility:	2D
Punch-ups	3D	Shooters:	3D
		Sneak:	2D+2
Wit:	2D+1	Charm:	1D+2
Investigation:	4D	Undercover:	2D+2
Language, English:	2D+2	Contacts:	2D+2
Static:	Dodge: 6	Block: 9	Parry: 6 Soak: 6

Perks and Comps: None.

Gear: Pistol or sub-machine-gun, explosives

Mr Big

I'm a legitimate businessman

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	2D
Wit:	3D	Charm:	3D
Investigation:	4D	Bad Cop:	4D
		Contacts:	4D
		Good Cop:	3D+2
		Command:	4D

Static: Dodge: 6 Block: 8 Parry: 9 Soak: 9

Perks and Comps: Favours, Important friend (bent cop, local councillor etc)

Gear: Jaguar XJ12 with driver (stats as Stoppo Driver), cashmere overcoat

Snout

Whispering grass

Might:	1D+1	Agility:	3D
Punch-ups	3D	Sneak:	3D+1
Wit:	2D+2	Charm:	1D+1
Investigation:	3D	Undercover:	2D
Static:	Dodge: 9	Block: 4	Parry: 4 Soak: 4

Perks and Comps: None.

Gear: Pistol or sub-machine-gun, explosives

Stoppo Driver

Step on it

Might:	2D+2	Agility:	3D
		Motors:	4D
Wit:	2D	Charm:	1D+1
Investigation:	3D		
Hot Wire:	3D		
Static:	Dodge: 9	Block: 8	Parry: 8 Soak: 8

Perks and Comps: None.

Gear: Jaguar XJ12

PROTODIMENSION MAGAZINE

FOR MINI-SIX

VEHICLES

A selection of era specific vehicles listed below. I've dispensed with the cargo stat due to a lack of reliable data and its being unlikely to be important in play.

Austin Allegro 1300 (1973) \$\$ Scale +2D

The All Aggro - square steering wheel anyone?

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D

Body: 1D+1

Move: 2D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4

Austin Mini Clubman (1969) \$\$ Scale +2D

Perfect for an Italian Job?

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D+2

Body: 1D

Move: 2D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4

Ford Granada 3.0 (1973) \$\$ Scale +2D

Motor of choice for the heavy mob

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D

Body: 2D

Move: 3D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4

Ford Capri 3000S (1975) \$\$\$ Scale +2D

What professionals drive

Skill: Driving

MNV: 2D

Body: 2D

Move: 3D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 3

Ford Escort 1100 Popular (1975) \$\$\$ Scale +2D

Saloon used by police and civilians alike

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D

Body: 1D+2

Move: 2D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4

Ford Transit Van (1966) \$\$ Scale +2D

Every robbery needs one of these

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D

Body: 3D

Move: 2D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 2 (additional passengers can be accommodated in the back although won't have a particularly comfortable ride)

Jaguar E-Type V12 \$\$\$ Scale +2D

The best of British

Skill: Driving

MNV: 2D

Body: 3D

Move: 4D

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 1

Jaguar XJ12 5.3 (1972) \$\$\$ Scale +2D

Quality motor for the discerning villain

Skill: Driving

MNV: 1D

Body: 3D

Move: 3D+2

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4

Jensen Interceptor III S4 (1975) \$\$\$ Scale +2D

Coming for a spin in the Jensen? Champion!

Skill: Driving

MNV: 2D

Body: 3D+1

Move: 3D+1

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 3

Morris Marina 1.8 HL (1975) \$\$ Scale +2D

Heroic levels of under steer

Skill: Driving

MNV: 0D

Body: 1D+2

Move: 2D+1

Crew: 1 **Psg:** 4



YOU'RE NICKED!

GLOSSARY

<i>Aggro</i>	Aggravation, trouble, violence
<i>Bird</i>	Attractive woman
<i>Blag</i>	(v) to steal, often with violence (n) a robbery
<i>Blagger</i>	armed robber
<i>Boozer</i>	public house
<i>Bottle</i>	Nerve, guts, courage
<i>Brass</i>	Prostitute
<i>Bung</i>	Payment for a favour, a bribe
<i>Chaps, the</i>	Top ranking professional villains, a kind of self styled criminal elite
<i>Dabs</i>	Fingerprints
<i>Diddlo</i>	(a) mad, crazy (n) mad person
<i>Drink</i>	Cash payment, often having the same connotations as "bung" (qv)
<i>Factory</i>	Police Station
<i>Fifth Floor, the</i>	Metropolitan Police top brass
<i>Filth, the</i>	Police (derogatory)
<i>Firm</i>	A group of criminals, often well established in organised crime
<i>Fit Up</i>	To manufacture a case against someone, as per the prisoner's lament "I was fitted up by the filth"
<i>Funnies</i>	Intelligence services e.g. MI5
<i>Grass</i>	Informer
<i>Guvnor</i>	Informal term of respect used by police officers, but also in wider currency amongst civilians. Often abbreviated to "Guv"
<i>Heavy</i>	Bodyguard/enforcer, equivalent to the Criminal(thug) stock character in the Mini Six Bare Bones edition
<i>Job, the</i>	The police, expression generally used by police officers to describe their profession e.g. "he needs the job like an alcoholic needs booze."
<i>Manor</i>	Neighbourhood, district

<i>Motor</i>	Vehicle, usually a car
<i>Nick</i>	(v)(1) To steal (v)(2) To arrest, as in "You're nicked!" (n)(1) Prison (n)(2) Police station
<i>Not many</i>	Yes, quite a lot. e.g. "Did we nick all of the blaggers?" "Not many Guv!"
<i>Peter</i>	(1) Prison cell (2) A safe
<i>Ponce</i>	Pimp
<i>Skipper</i>	Police sergeant, often abbreviated to "Skip"
<i>Slag</i>	(1) Promiscuous woman (2) Contemptible person, possibly derived from a collective term used to describe those at the bottom of the criminal hierarchy i.e. "the slag"
<i>Smudge</i>	A photograph, hence "Smudger" - a photographer
<i>Snout</i>	Informer
<i>Stoppo</i>	A rapid get away
<i>Swedes</i>	Derogatory term for provincial police forces, especially those of a rustic character e.g. Dorset. In its singular form, an officer of such a force.
<i>Team</i>	Group of criminals, usually quite small in number, often together for a specific purpose e.g. to do a blag
<i>Tooled Up</i>	To be armed, usually with a gun
<i>Trumpet</i>	Telephone
<i>Verbal</i>	(n) A false confession (v) to produce same, hence "to verbal someone up"
<i>Villain</i>	A criminal
<i>Woodentop</i>	Uniformed officer

SUGGESTED VIEWING

Special Branch (series 3 & 4 only) (1973-74)
The Sweeney (1974-78)
The XYY Man (1976-78)
Gangsters (1976-78)
Target (1977-78)
Law and Order (1978)
Out (1978)
Strangers (1978-82)
The Professionals (1978-83)
Life on Mars (2006-07)
Red Riding:1974 (2009)

Inclusion on this list is no guarantor of quality. Personal recommendations would be *The Sweeney* (essential), together with *Law and Order* (in many ways the antithesis of *The Sweeney*, it repays repeated viewing). The *Professionals* and *Life on Mars* I've always found risible. The latter compounds its offence with an assumption that some nice motors and a hefty dose of modern iron are acceptable substitutes for a decent script. *Red Riding* is a far better recreation of the era, but is not for the faint hearted. *The XYY Man*, *Out* and *Gangsters* aren't strictly speaking cop shows but instead concentrate on showing life on the other side of the law. The police feature prominently in all three, usually as antagonists and often shown in an unflattering light. *Gangsters* is perhaps the most interesting of the three for its gradual transition from straight crime drama into a surrealistic romp with kung-fu assassins, characters breaking the fourth wall and appearances by screenwriter Phillip Martin in two separate guises. It's also notable for one of its main characters being an ethnic minority cop, something of a rarity on British TV at the time.

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COURIER EYES

New fiction

by Tad Kelson

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Protodimension Magazine

THE END OF Night is a time to celebrate, when all the freaks make way for the geeks and the darkness treasures go back once more into hiding. Night after night after night. The cycle continues on after the next sunset comes about. So then daylight comes to visit for the few hours it is allowed to, with the visitors and personages that roam under the light, instead of within the dark. This is that in-between space where the flesh is king and delight is queen. A land filled with strangeness and ultimately, frustration at the falseness.

Domed heads, covered with knit caps, chrome gleaming under the constant polishing of the head wear. Stick figure females draped in gauze and faux silk prance their ways along broken concrete sidewalks, wending and bending towards each flicker of potential attention. Everyone is holding hands or holding their phones, constant connection in one fashion or another. Día de Muertos masked families and La Calavera Catrina players move in endless parades about each other.

Wide jawed skeletons walk in ornate processions, moving from one flatscreen festooned wall to another. Their movements following unknown algorithms. Ads precede each figure, swirling about the heads and through the open rib cages, making for a confetti or snow effect that becomes most pronounced after about a minute of steady eye contact.

Dolls with mismatched Chipboard Button eyes take in all the sights. Such as they rarely make it this deep into the city safely and the novelty of the landscape, along with their existence, makes the whole place shine a little less gritty. Still their little fingers find one and another as they sightsee and nibble on whatever it is that Dolls like to nibble on. At least in packs of ten to fifteen their short legs and little arms, with large porcelain white faces and oversize hands, are easy to move out of the way of.

A random collection of clothing items, jeans, suit coat, tie made of collaged images, and a mask straight out of mime land sits in a corner spot, a set of pipes in hand playing. Just hearing the atonal sounds hurts the mind and tears at the heart. Dubstepped reverbed classics run through a mixer set up seemingly by a tone deaf blind person, all of which only makes it worse. Welcome to the modern music sensibilities,

made all the worse for the utter lack of originality. All set to jar the nerves and tangle thought processes. Remember there is no trash allowed on the streets, only refuse or refuge.

HKD (Hacked to his friends) stepped out of the little cafe place, white paper cup in hand, chintzy plastic lid left behind on the countertop to be swept into the trash like so many other things, lives and people, get swept away into. Out onto the oddly illuminated street.

Outside in the waxing daylight overshadowed with scattered cloud cover HKD headed downtown, into the press of people moving in circles dictated by their wants and alleged desires. Still HKD was not immune to the power of the media frenzy that spun across the multimedia channels that had infiltrated as surely a virus making its way through the walls and membranes of the victim cell. Shades pulled down a little farther, tint increased to the darkest quality that still allowed him to see where he was going cut down much of the visual distraction. Buds in place removed the aural component which left only the physical, and that was not even a concern anymore in the world.

Most of the traffic moving on foot in the same direction was in matching suit and tie outfits, or business appropriate dresses and accessorized heels and purses. On occasion he could see other singulars or freeloaders, the rare dedicated, while there was a noticeable lack of the younger crowd moving along in this fashion. Most of those should be locked up in their classrooms and studies this time of day, limited access if he was lucky.

Down a few more blocks, past the McChainFoodPlaces, past all of the shops filled with the overflow of Free Trade and Open Markets, past the rare independent retailer sticking out like a sore thumb carrying DIY or handcrafted goods lies a little place almost no one notices and practically no one ever patronizes. The odd boutique clothing store, sticking out of place as knickknacks on a space station would be. Down past where commerce was practiced and into the realm of office and efficiency. Where HKD is currently headed towards.

Finally at the intersection of Life and Despair HKD took a left and then the first downward sloping stairs under the shops, the few that are left up above, and over to the door

painted fire engine red with the closed sign sitting crooked to the left, instead of to the right. The handle was an old glass doorknob more suited for a flea market than a modern cityscape.

Inside it was full of dust and Hecho En China. Past all of that was another door, and the key that HKD was given, fit into the door just as he had been promised. The backroom sat there, a hole cut in the floor and a section of the water main modified with a single person accessible airlock entry. The clumsy looking diving suit with SCUBA capacity was there as well. Spare tanks ready to be screwed into the makeshift valves to extend the endurance of the suit. Heavy canvas, thick waterproofed work boots, contractor grade leather gloves, also treated against water exposure, all sat there adjacent to the fishbowl helmet with the locking ring, a relic for a much more modern age, and still it has a sense of weight and heft that life does not give to one and another. The top half zippers into the bottom half with an industrial sense of finality.

It takes a while to struggle into the thick leather pants, strap on the boots and then pull on the leather top half, the zipper running all the way around his waist, leaving only the chest harness and helmet, besides the gloves. They are last to go on, too bulky for more than the simplest grabbing tasks. Still the thickness of the garb is necessary in the rush of water he is about to descend into. The water main being one of the very few unmonitored ways into the underside of the city.

The underside being where all the cool cats hang out, far from the prying eyes of authorities and less than savory societal bits, all the ones with the real skinny on the ups and comings that are getting more important with every passing day/night cycle.

HKD finally gets it all on and together, the little lift put into place just for times like this, getting him up to where he can get into the claustrophobic airlock and once the air cycles out he drops into the heavy water flow, the weight of the suit and air bottles holding him steady for the several mile journey. The water flow carries him faster than he could have walked still it is

almost an hour and a half before he is getting close to the exit. The faint strobe lights, pus green in color, that are permanently affixed on the sides of the tube are the only warning he has. The first trip he had made along this path was almost the last one. He had barely caught sight of the lights the first time and so this time he knows the handholds are coming up and he has at best two tries before passing the exit point. Miss those and he will suffocate from the lack of oxygen long before he comes to any place that he could hope would lead to another pipe to exit from. This is do or die, and with gloved hands outstretched the metal rod, the handhold, is right there and the shock of his weight and the suit on his muscles, still with the water current force behind it, about pulls it out of the socket.

The only good thing is, once the handhold is grabbed, the rod retracts up and into the sibling airlock, just have to twist a bit to make it up in there. Then the floor closes, the water is pumped out and the door opens in front of him all on its own. The Circle a friendly reminder of the true forces in play where he has arrived at.

The lights slowly coming up to full as the companion lift raises then takes him down to the cold, damp, steel floor where he takes off the diving suit and puts it back up on the provided for rack assembly. No one seems to know how many suits there are, how they get from one site to another, who services them, etc Someday one or more of them might fail, still who would know. There are no logbooks on the activity that traces the route to this place, only a physical transfer to get there.

Still it worked this time so no sense worrying about the past, only time to move out and continue heading downward. Once out of the equivalent building, along long unused corridors of damp steel walls, up rusting stairs and down interior hallways of drywall and black mold HKD emerged into the other main thoroughfare of The City. This was the one hidden from most. Far from prying eyes, away from reconnaissance, and nestled among all of the dark, deep places, that the timid masses never even wanted to know about.

This is where the real fun, the real action took place, in some perspectives. Deals and shady connections that are on the up and up when viewed from some perspectives, and totally subversive in the eyes of about 1% of the population of the waking world. Of course not everyone ends up where they intended to go, while others just never get anywhere and end up lost until they just give up the ghost and try to find their way back home. Still HKD has been in these parts once or twice, on different occasions, and this is just one more facet of the job.

The streets are narrow here; paper lanterns shed a wan illumination leading to deeper shadows in the many doorways and locked storage rooms that predominate in this outer section. Electronic Theremins intermingle with recorders and bass loops drone from speakers crudely spliced onto the walls and roof eaves lending a sense of discordant disharmony to the entire locale. The curbs and gutters are oddly clean, freshly swept it might be surmised. Paper lanterns swaying in unfelt breezes, casting flickering shadows that almost seemed to roam on their own. On occasion it looked like a shadow would dart away into the greater darkness.

The farther in that HKD moves, the dingier and dirtier the places become. More often discarded ads and advertisements, interspersed with other dropped literature that more often than not missed the waste receptacles provided by civic minded citizens along with the rare corporate sponsors, line and serve as primary decoration. Eventually the roads and streets begin to widen until they are a good four lanes wide, with a steady flow of traffic that would overrun any other space besides where this is at.

This was one of the lesser known spaces and it was late at night in the most connected parts of the world. The distinct sense of being alone is welcome. Fewer observers, fewer explanations along with being out from under the constant surveillance of the Real World as it is. Alone in a flood of strangers is where HKD is at.

After an indeterminate length of voyage, HKD came into the main center of this segment. As he had moved his way inward, following the almost wagon wheel like configuration, a fog had settled, lending a sense of static to the entire area. As the fog grew deeper, the background noise increased until it was more heard than felt. Echoes of forgotten television stations running snow, back when they actually stopped broadcasting create a mood of neglect and discard.

Motes of light and information danced like swallows might in the open skies, carrying what esoteric data they could potentially hold. Still the traffic here was nonexistent up until this point. No other people or entities seen so far. Between the two phenomena HKD was all alone.

Looking over the addresses, for the one he was given, to keep moving towards the final destination on this fact finding mission. The data purported to reside at the end of the trail could prove invaluable, even in a resell environment. He had made a promise, a contract, and he meant to keep it. That way he would get paid as well as get a little positive gris-gris in the metaphorical account.

It takes a while but eventually door number 614HST is found. It was nestled among a bunch of other doors splashed with a fire engine red diagonal slash obscuring their addresses. Marked out by some malicious child or someone trying to hide something from anyone else. This deep though, all it takes is the right key or series of keys and even forgotten locks could be potentially opened up. Of course there are perils to such actions, but that comes with the territory.

The key he was loaned for this fit in and with several clockwise and counterclockwise turns in a particular pattern the stubborn lock opened and he went in. The hallway on the other side went out in a straight line, painted in a fluorescent green reminiscent of shallow water kelp or seaweed. The farther down the darker the more the green darkened, like

diving underwater and the sense of moisture and weight increased.

Once the green is almost black in hue the tunnel opens up into an underground square. A marketplace, small stands both attended and closed dot the outer elements, while the farther into this goblin market the stands turn into tents and finally into small plaster-board and pallet shacks, with tin roofs and almost walk ways between them all. Somewhere in this mess, slowly coming to life with a bevy of different people and things, somewhere in this mess is the one with the information that is sought.

Not an impossible task, simply an unlikely one to succeed at. Pretty routine to this point, no real opposition, so fingers cross for a continued run like this. Still one little stand out of unknown hundreds makes it more interesting. There are a few clues that were given along with the keys and the route. Landmarks to trace the pattern to reach the purveyor of oddities that holds the other half of the puzzle pieces. Not much to go on, still it is enough for those skilled in solving puzzles and quests in the online worlds.

The farther HKD moves into the market the more congested it becomes. Wanderers, travelers, nomads, tinkers, as well as a scant few posers along with too many wannabees. Pretty normal for an open area, still too much activity to have any real sense of security. Get enough traffic, even the functionaries can figure out something is happening and decide to play party crashers.

All sorts of looks, every form of complexion imagined and a few most likely not ever considered, until now, with all manner of look and dress as well. Tons of gauze, insane amounts of cogs and top hats, along with a plethora of just plain outlandish. Few overt dolls or kachinas, mostly peeps like HKD as far as he could tell. Has to be more than one wired one here, just has to be. Still there have been no indicators that anything like that has been in play since he got down here.

Dead center of the place, had to have been at least an hour of jostling and maneuvering to get there.

Some serious competition for space a few times. Almost a spot or two to wish for some armament to be legal in these sorts of parts. Still that would accomplish nothing except bring out the haters in those involved and make for some really uncomfortable times. The noise is a bit much; have to get it dialed down a notch, plugs in to mute the babble in all the languages and more than a few new ones as well. Lots of krewes and groups come up with their own pidgin, down here the aural landscape is awash with such patois, never mind the myriad tongues of man all interchangeably used in commerce and other sorts of dealings.

Rufo, occasional architect for hire and part time data exchanger, took a few moments out from tending his wares to look around. The small store he has, shelves lined with knickknacks and other alleged treasures, all for resale, sits almost in the center of the maze that is this underground marketplace. It never had a name, evolving over the years out of more legitimate mercantile pursuits into something less savory, and now into something more covert than illicit.

These days, well nights, he spends just puttering. There is too much competition, such that unless he has something for a designated client, it can be hours between a single browser who will stop in to look around. With all the good stuff stashed away out of view the casual passerby almost never gets anything. Having all old, obsolete, out of use items makes it easier to keep a low profile, even as one of the oldest and in some ways, most successful, one here.

Today was just like the last several years, a few innocents showing up, looking at what is there, and just leaving without a single glance or a word at the owner. None of the good stuff he had put feelers out about had netted a single response and maybe, just maybe, it was time to consider going back to working full time, at least a steady paycheck was better than the money sink the shop had become, not that it really cost a whole lot where he had it at. Still basic costs were starting to become a sense of frustration.

Ding, ding, the door opens, simple alerts letting him know that another browser had entered the store, No ID so far, so another false alarm most likely.

"I am looking for something," the fellow that walked in said out loud, almost to no one in particular. "I am looking for something a bit more singular for a friend of mine who asked me if I could swing by and take possession."

Ohh fick, bait taken and a live one. Time to check him out, let the diagnostics do their work and see if stalling will buy enough time to check the safeties and securities in case. If the panic button is needed then a ton of investments will be gone, but he is asking for the real deal and nothing can potentially queer the deal or else all hell breaks loose.

"I would be glad to let you take a look around, take your time, let me know what you might like."

"Ahh thanks, yes only one thing that I know of here that is of interest to my friend. He asked me to come on down here and see if the Charming Eyes were still for sale." the customer had made sure the door he had come in had closed and locked behind him. Diagnostics running indicate that he also has other defenses running, misdirection, tunnels, blockers, wipers, cleaners, all sorts of helping hands running around, so very plausible.

Sweating buckets in all places and spaces Rufo takes a few moments to consider what to say next. The eyes are a recent acquisition, and one that came with multiple warnings about what, not who, might be interested in getting a hold of them. Rufo had not even considered trying to crack the likely secrets in the eyes, content to look for buyers in the farthest corners of society, with the most cautious of feelers. Now the best case, worst case, scenario is playing out. There is actually someone in his shop asking about the Gleaming Eyes, and he had no warning at all that anyone was interested.

"Well did your friend inform you what it will cost you to get them, if I had them at all?"

"Yes, he gave me this to give you in exchange for them."

A simple drive is proffered, and with a smooth motion, born of decades of practice, Rufo accepted it and took a few moments to check out the contents. On it were access codes for secured bonds worth a decade of employment along with dozens of files loaded with obtained personal data, also worth a small or large fortune depending on his greed factor.

"Is that sufficient?" The stranger, dressed in motley leathers and old school long coat, shades over his eyes like some would be tough guy.

"Give me a few more moments to check something and then we can talk a little more." Rufo thinks long and hard. With what he has right now, he can retire, move out of the city, out of the country and onto a small deserted island and never hear his native language for the rest of his days, just sunning himself and getting skin cancer treatments for the rest of his natural days.

"It will take me a few moments to secure them in their shipping arrangement, do you mind waiting?"

"No not at all, take your time."

It is only about five minutes later and the small package is readied. Rufo hands it over and with a nod, not even checking it out, the stranger leaves his shop and the doorbell goes ding ding again.

"Time to close up, give it all away, and move out."

Rufo hangs the closed sign on the door and closes the storefront. After locking it up he heads towards his home, with not a look back. Half way there a short msg to an old friend of his with the directions to the store and well wishes for the future. Rufo then heads for the exits, with not a single glance backwards at over thirty years of his life and efforts.

HKD secured the package within the carryall he had brought along for it. No inclination to examine it, no sense risking what might be unleashed if he did poke around. Let the end destination deal with any consequences of meddling in things perhaps left better alone.

With it safe he can head back home, then to arrange a transfer of the package in exchange for the remainder

of his retainer fee. Then it will be time for a little vacation, this errand netting enough to head out of country for a good couple of years. Time to exit stage right and lay low for a while. Enjoy the fruits of illicit labor and avoid potential fallout.

Soon enough, the files are secured and with the transfer done, time to head back homeward and then to make the secondary stop to deliver the goods. There should be enough time to burn a copy to a disposable flash drive, or worst case dump to hardcopy to check out later. No one said anything about not doing that, if the inclination were to come about.

So time to motor back home. Slightly different tack to take heading out. More the longer way, more tunnels and sewers like instead of letting the flow bring him as far as it did. Instead of fighting The Flow, time to go around it and walk. Will be more than a few hours, but time is one thing he has on his side.

It will be a few hours before he is close to familiar territories, at which point he might call out for some backup, company to pass the time while moving the rest of the way. A long road ahead, longer than the trip in, and no idea what might be lurking about to pounce and take what he has.

A Txt pops in, from an old flame, Janilla. She has something she needs to share outside when he has time to meet up. Pop a quick note back saying pretty busy for the night, will catch up tomorrow night, give or take. Answer right back, not good enough, has some skinny on something going down that she needs to share ASAP. Well have to just disappoint, second txt saying he is in the MIDDLE of something and is unavoidably unable to meet any time in less than say six hours, at the minimum.

Janilla shares a location with a tag marked URGENT, all in caps, random and rude which is totally not how she is. Must be something big after all. When HKD does not come right back, a chilling text comes in from her as well, saying that Poet is OOC, and not in a good way and to check the corners everywhere he goes till they find out what went wrong. Now he knows it is

for real. Janilla cannot stand Poet but knows that HKD and he are longtime gamer friends in different guises, so this means she is worried about him for real. Time to pick up the pace and see just how fast he can get back to civilization and get this over with, hopefully before the night is over.

Change of plans now. HKD alters the route, starting to head back along a different way. Instead of a straight shot to get some distance in, time to move for the outer portions instead, sticking to the shadows as best he is able to, working to camo in where appropriate. Only a bit longer till he is out of the Goblin Market area, then he can start to run more, in here that only draws attention, and attention is the last thing he needs right about now.

The stands are again thinning out, crowds almost non-existent, meaning it is easier to spot the tail with the lack of others to throw HKD off the existence of someone, or something, following him. Looks normal enough, might be human, might not be especially down here.

With a long heavy coat, stereotypical heavy vibe coming from it, moving without a sound, running some stealth of some kind, still not enough to be completely hidden and too obvious with the lack. A noob at this, or something that does not know any better. Either option presents a different set of concerns. Whatever happens, it should not be too difficult to evade and escape from.

A couple more turns, slight ones to see if it is still following. Catch the reflection in a window, sight it out of the corner of the eye, duck past some hanging items and when they move a second time know that pursuit is still there. All these little tricks HKD employs to see if it can be thrown off easily. When it is more than positive that he is still being followed it is time to take more drastic measures. On the very limits of the market area, essentially no one around he picks up his pace a bit, shifting into 4th gear, and moves a bit faster, nothing overt, all subtle like, but widening the gap and with a left hand turn and out of sight he drops the hammer and takes off.

All it should take is the almost minute lead at this pace and he will be outside of the market entirely and off into another area and really inaccessible to whatever is behind him. It takes less than that minute and he is away and down multiple flights of stairs, endless stairs moving up and down, to the horizon are the ascenders and descenders. A serious highway of movement.

Looking backwards for the first time openly HKD sees he has lost that pursuer. Not as good as maybe he or it thought it was. Then again speed and some changes in direction and terrain can make all the difference in the world. But time is against him. Fatigue setting in just bringing a slump to the shoulders and weariness to his step. At least 7 hours non-stop and several more before he is free and clear.

Bottom of the stairs, the land of doors and elevators appears. Traffic here is picking up and ducking into a corner gives enough time for a quick change in outfit and then onward. It is miles of distance to get to the right one to end up back on home turf. Still he sees the occasional friendly face and with a nod and occasional banter it helps to pass the monotony of travel away.

Past the industrial bank of lifts there is Ican. Nice to see a familiar mug once in a while, even in the middle of business. Time to see what news he has for him.

“Dude”

“Hey Hacked how goes it tonight?”

“Fine, heading home did some shopping.”

“Whatcha get this time, new game or video?”

“Nahh, collectible piece, going to have it delivered to the apartment later this week.”

“Oh real stuff, sweet. So what is it?”

“Framed artwork, Freas piece from back in the 60s, real vintage, the owner’s kid let it go for a steal, no clue what it is really worth. Idiot child.”

“Nice, very nice. Yeah heading home right now, see you later, play a few matches maybe?”

“Yeah most likely, double XP this week right?”

“Damn forgot about that, yeah for sure. Good talking, drop me an invite when you get in, later dude.”

“Later.”

Ican waves and jinks away into and through the crowd heading to his place and HKD continues on his way as well. Only about an hour at this point till he is at the drop point then over to home.

Half way home Rufo feels a brush on his cheek and looks down to see something long and wet looking protruding from his chest. Damn it is just like a cockroach leg, with barbs pointing backwards and center mast in his chest. No pain at least. Breath shortens and with a sad smile he drops over. Somewhere a heart stops beating and no one is ever the wiser.

Shapes move in the shadows, multiple eyes looking over and at everything at once. Intelligence gathering at the center of the moving mass of orbs. Out of context for where it is at, it is an anomaly in a place used to constant shifting and inconsistent appearance. Flickers of fire and echoes of cephalopod lie at the outskirts while the inner portions are shadowed from above and below. Expanding out where there is free or unguarded space, contracting where the light shines on it, it is a searcher, a seeker, with a target in mind.

Scant traces have been uncovered so far. Still who it seeks has something precious to its creator and a singular purpose fills its essence. Find the courier, report back, guide in the hunter/s for the kill. It has already eliminated two loose ends, only two more remain to be closed off, turned into unmarked victims. Mule and stable master.

Sliding in open doors, checking for clues, backing out again, testing each one as it goes along. With the patience of the spider it was born from the watcher keeps up the hunt. So long as a single part of it remains, it shall not stop. There is a near infinite amount of distance to cover in an effectively immortal lifetime to do so. Patience in the created is a thing to be admired, even if it is a programmed trait of something made, not born of flesh and fluids.

In, out, in, out, on and on, snippets of conversations slide past securities and loot the unguarded for clues, a morsel here, a bite sized piece there. All are bringing

it closer and closer to the target. Pulse a command to the hunter contingent to prep for a second kill and it feels the others stir, multiple claws waking from the ball lying at the center of their collective intelligence. The watcher remains coherent even if it splits apart, always in contact with the rest of its self. The hunters are a single ball of many limbs, each one aware and still subsumed into the overall grouping. Different and yet similar, and nothing human about it.

Codes ripple out, solid contact on a feed has the target moving down and now heading upward. Activate the kill shot and have it move into place. Nothing will deter the will of the master.

HKD reaches the marked series of doors, pulling out another key that was concealed on his person, he looks about, no one is looking at him, pulls the rug over his head and inside it opens the door and slips through, closing it immediately frustrates something that had been behind him, avoiding fate by the width of a keystroke.

The hallway is cold, damp, clammy, poorly lit and badly painted. It is old, too old to have a place in the modern world. He sprints down the hallway, almost done and glad of it. Suddenly something says immediately is not soon enough to make the delivery. Might have to change his life after this, just a gut feeling, instincts saying to lay very low for a long time, a very long time. Maybe do a disappearing act. Dozens of doors down, number 99 is there.

Knock Knock.

“Slide it under the door, case and all. Your payment is coming out the mail slot.” Gravelly voice, wannabe evil overlord like. Oh please already.

The fat envelope drops out and into his hand just as the small pouch is pulled under the doorframe along the ugly brown carpet. Flickering lights like a bad zombie piece just makes it seem more surreal. All done, never working for this one again. Nod to the door in appreciation and HKD keeps going till he reaches the end of the hallway and into an elevator heading straight to the other side of world and back again.

Step out onto a rooftop and there above him are the stars. The city lies out in front of him, full of flickering neon and omnipresent advertising that dominates society. Almost home at this point, just a few more stops and he is free and clear.

Out of his perception the watcher catches sight with one of its many feelers and alerts the hunter to move in for the final kill. It will be there sooner than not.

HKD walks over to a metal door and turns the knob to the left, instead of the right.

Blackout all around him, the sky above fills with the infinity of space. Stars exploding, nebulae forming and rotating, white and black holes exchanging matter with energy like lovers exchanging a kiss. All of it filled with clouds of cosmic dust.

The night sky arches overhead in a cascade of stars and cosmic clouds and supernovas, slowly seeming to pinwheel in a sinister direction.

Pulling the rig from off of his head, stretching sore muscles, bladder aching to the point of movement threatens dignity. The flash drive winks with an evil red eye while data writes to the quarantine folder secured on it. After the bathroom he grabs up his few books and the spare clothing in the duffle bag. Popping the drive out he walks out the door and it closes behind him.

FINIS

For those interested in such things

**Some Inspirations [To One Degree or Another]:
RPGs**

- Call of Cthulhu
- Etherscope
- Cthulhupunk
- Back to the Old House Fiasco Playset
- Cyberpunk 2020
- Malifaux / Through the Breach

Music

- Venetian Squares
- Dead Can Dance
- Siouxsie and the Banshees
- Tori Amos: The Beekeeper
- The Motels
- Poe: Hello
- Toto: Hydra and St George
- tUnE-yArDs

Comics:

- The Umbrella Academy

Other:

- Daily Meditations with Deepak Chopra
- Modern Society

MY SO-CALLED LIFE... SORT OF

Life in the Greater Depression

by Norm Fenlason

FOR CONSPIRACY RULES AND DC3

SHANNON AND MY sister ganged up on me and asked me to write few words. I am not very good at this, but here goes...

My name is Jason Taggert and I am a fireman, oops, first-responder, in the greater Trenton area. I live in the lower mid-level of the Jamison Towers arcology, 47th floor to be exact. I did my National Service out west serving with the Brigadier stomping on *comancheros* in west Texas. (Boy that sounds corny, but we did fight them.) Those boys were halting the flow of oil and needed someone to kick their butts. With the Brigadier, we did just that. But that is another story.

Sorry, Shannon wanted me to tell you about my life and how I got started busting minions.

My mom and dad were professors at Rutgers University when I was born. She taught languages—a lot of them. Pop taught history—I think he specialized in the geopolitics of fossil fuels. But that life stopped a long time ago. Before my memory started, they were both laid off, some of the first casualties of the Greater Depression, I guess. So, we moved around a lot when I was little. We were in the Levittown miketown on Long Island when my sister was born. I remember that, both my parents had jobs and we stayed in a daycare most of the time.

But that ended too. Pop lost that job, I think he was a janitor, because a robot cleaned the floors and took out the trash better and faster than he did. He did not take that very well and sat at home complaining all the time. So Mom left him. She took my sister and I stayed with pop in an anthill in Jersey where he was a delegate.

Life was pretty bad for me and pop, except for the time I got to spend with my mom. I remember the few times Mom and my sister came to see us, she would tell me about things she could “see.” It used to sound wondrous, but her stories got stranger and stranger. I got scared most of the time when she would tell them, but I don’t know if it was my fear or hers. Mom started writing about what she “saw” for some rag publication—photocopied and distributed by hand. Pop actually started liking the delegate position he had. As bad as it was, things were the best I can remember, until Mom died.

I never could find the details of her death. All I know is that she died in an accident. Later when I did some research, I could find nothing. She was killed while passing out her flyers. Crushed by a heavy vehicle passing by was the cause, but reports never said which vehicle or how. I started thinking that it was all kind of suspicious. She

was always talking about how this organization or that organization was responsible for bad things. Now she died under questionable circumstances, and no one knows what happened. Maybe that Dark she was always talking about finally got her.

Pop really lost it then; he started drinking. My sister moved in and we sat listening to him swear and rant at the vid all day until he passed out. Pop left us to take care of ourselves. He stopped doing his “delegate-work” and we lost the apartment. So, Pop sold his vote, his special form of suicide.

After Pop drank himself to death, we lost our ballothouse too. I didn't want to sell my vote yet, neither did my sister, so we signed up to get our National Service over with. Maybe learn a skill so we can get a job. My National Service was in West Texas where I built and policed the interstate highways. I saw my share of action there protecting convoys from bandito bikers up from Mexico. My



commander, the Brigadier, responded better to the needs of the local government than he did to the feds out in Washington, D.C.

We were headquartered in Odessa, Texas. The city and county governments had just disbanded because there was no more cash. Folks were loading up their trucks and moving to Dallas or LA. Local small companies tried to continue police, fire, water, and sanitation services, but when the locals lost their main employer, Commonwealth Petrol, even those services stopped. Our National Guard unit stepped in to provide basic medical services to Odessa and I guess they still do.

While I was serving in Texas, my sister was a load master for an Air Force contract commercial route. Conscripts like us are required to serve 6 years, with 2 years' active duty and 4 years inactive Ready Reserve. But I didn't want to spend my whole life in the service...at least not in the Guard. Serving for some part-time platoon leader and full-time jerk doesn't work for me.

Almost everyone I know has military training of some sort. My buddy Robert—we served in Texas together—found his way into the Regulars, the professional force. He is in Special Ops now, and those guys can put some steel on the target. Unlike the Guard, the Regulars have their own relationships to government contractors and are equipped with state-of-the-art warfighting technology, MilTek. They even have their own R&D. I always thought it would be cool to test some of that MilTek stuff. I lost track of Robert for a while, a couple of years. I think he was overseas. When I last saw him, he was a different man. I could tell by his eyes, he has seen things....

After I got out of the army, I came back home, but I couldn't find a job anywhere. So I just sort of drifted for a while. Then this guy gave me a job recovering and rebuilding heavy equipment and trucks. While with him, I trained on how to fight fires. That was good work, but dangerous and sometimes it got a little strange. I never went out into the Out Law with the boys to get a truck or anything, but they told me stories, wild ones too. I thought they were yanking my chain, but I am glad I didn't go out if those stories were true. Zombies... right...

I did not want to go into the Out Law, chicken I guess, so I found a job as a firefighter. Now I get to see the city—all of it, even the Dreamlands. I even fought a fire or two over at the Sky Chateau. It is eye-opening, I tell you.

The difference between the *haves* and the *nave-nots* in this country has never been greater. It is plain sickening how the *haves* live like

that, while we, the *have-nots*, have to work our butts off. The “nomes” are the *haves*, and these days everyone else are the *have nots*. When Mom first described the nomes to me, I thought she was talking about Gnomes, with a “G,” you know, little people that live in the ground. She laughed and told me these nomes were named after the *Nomenklatura*, some super-privileged silver-spoons in the old Soviet Russia, whatever that is.

Our silver spoons, our nomes, are incomprehensible to most of us living in the harsh squalor of the Greater Depression. I don't understand them and they don't understand me. They seem so surprised when a mike or prole loses it and let's his anger and frustration erupt into violence. They just don't get it.

The static relatively peaceful veneer of current society barely hides a level of violence born of desperation. People would have rioted in the past. Now they turn to guerilla fights and large scale, brutal violence. I heard the tale that one whole apartment building in Boston was massacred while they slept in their beds. They blamed it on rioters. My spec ops buddy told me about that one. He was in on the bust when they found the perps. Robert won't talk about it much. He gets all weird when the subject comes up...classified I guess.

Lots of secrets...I would say that the average American does not know how bad the rest of the world is. Heck, they don't know how bad it is across the US. Thinking that the US is still on top, they only guess that the rest of the world is really bad off. I don't know about that. One thing is certain, life has changed and not for the better. For one thing, no one lives out *there* anymore. I mean outside of city limits, there's nothing—just lone communities circling the wagons.

Those lone enclaves sometimes support industries, like mining. These are sometimes in the Out Lands where you have to go around armed. They're open towns with no law and terrible sanitary conditions. Odessa, Texas was like that, a modern-day Dodge City before the Brigadier cleaned it up. Sometimes a warlord and his bikers will move in on an unsponsored miketown, and offer protection in return for amenities. Sometimes those guys are cool, but sometimes, it's better to take your chances.

If you are lucky you might live in a town that still provides protection. It's that or join the gangs. It's only a little better in a Controlled Zone unless you are a nome living in a Dreamland. Mostly you work and suffer...go hungry once in a while. But there's always sport and the beer is cheap. It's not free for me...yet, but I can afford it right now. I'm a fireman now.

There was this one time when my fire unit got called into a big one over in the Sky Chateau, our sister arcology. We got to ride on the *clouds* that time—those elevated nome-only highways. It irritated a bunch of nomes in their Deusenburgs and Astins, but it was the fastest way, and strangely, we were approved to use it.

Roads between the Dreamland arcologies are elevated above mike-town and anthill low-lifes so the nomes won't smell us. The ones that bother to drive themselves get special corporate licenses to use these highways. The roads are not the same as what us mikes drive on—so smooth, no potholes, no trucks either.

Once security cleared us through the gates, I got my first taste of the Dreamlands...From what I saw, it's better than the movies. The technology is very advanced, and it's everywhere. While I got a cell phone shaped like a brick, the nomes get one that fits completely in their ear. That trend extends to their security technology, too—surveillance everywhere, and those are the cameras I can see. It is almost eerie to be under a camera's unblinking stare all the time. The nomes take it for granted, but it freaks me out.

There is no cash in the Dreamlands either. I put out a fire in this guy's townhouse and he tried to give me a tip. He wanted to use his credit transfer card. I just looked at him. Like I had one of those, right. I got stiffed on that one.

Putting out the fire was fast. The fire system did most of the hard work. The nomes just didn't like getting pulled from the fire by a robot—go figure. It was a hot job that day, so afterwards I popped into a convenience store to buy a bottle of water. I watched a nome come in, fill a bag full of stuff and walk out. I asked the clerk if that guy was going to pay for his goods. The clerk told me that he had a credit transfer card that was read when he left the store. So that nome didn't even know how much he spent. Probably didn't care either. I grabbed a cold water out of the case. There was no price listed on it, but I was really thirsty, so I whipped out a twenty knowing that should cover it. The clerk just looked at me. I insisted that it was legal tender and had to be accepted. He just called his security goon over to ask me to leave.

All that paradise just has to draw out the criminal element, you know? In miketowns we are lucky to get a uniform to show up when someone is beaten and robbed. I bet every case of shoplifting is investigated in the Dreamlands, if you even CAN shoplift. All that security with integrated sensor networks, HiTek identification machines, and all manner of databases. I knew I was being watched, cataloged, and

tracked all over the Dreamland, and I was just doing my job. When I left, a security goon I had never met called me by name. I must be in somebody's database.

Mom once told me globalization heralded a new age in prosperity. She also told me stories about magic beans and giant beanstalks. What globalization means is that the corps get bigger every day. They get fat on the flow of war capital and by squeezing it out of us. Even my underwear is sold by the corp that owns my flat. Mom also told me about the ecology and how we were destroying it with shortsightedness. The environment always was a problem, only now there is no one regulating or enforcing us to keep it clean. I saw it first hand in West Texas where they squeezed the last of the oil out of the ground. It's a bad scene out there and no one is doing anything to keep things livable, not even the military. The whole of West Texas, once a thriving desert ecosystem, has become an environmental wasteland. The quality of life and the health of the last of the residents have deteriorated and things are happening out there, and it's not Disneyland.

"These dark times are the result of our own ineptitude." Boy, if I had a dollar for every time pop spewed that line...I used to agree. But so much suffering, so much misery, so much incompetence, heh, so much greed—just has to be a cause for it all, right? I see this old guy every day on my walk to work. He spends his day passing out this home-printed news rag, "The Watch." He claims the stuff in it is from the Lester Archive. I didn't know what that was like I do now. Every day he tells me "it's from the Archive," hoping I will buy a copy. It always has a story about the real reason for our dark times. Ag is his name; he calls it the Darkness, with a capital "D."

I don't know if the old guy writes that stuff or if it is really from the Archive, but it reports on every conceivable kind of monster and boogeyman; sorcerous empaths, you know, guys with "powers;" evil minions doing ungodly things in service to some dark lord; hell, the very existence of dark lords, themselves, each seeking their own freedom of evil right here on Earth. Kind of over the top. But still, things do seem getting worse in spite of what we do, so his rag may have something there.

There are a lot of these rags too, so people are seeing things. My spec ops buddy, Robert, has a twin sister, Dottie or just Dot, who has earned a name for herself as an eco-militant. Dot sends me email once in a while, and has been since we stopped dating. I get one of her daily rags on my doorstep now, quite anonymous. She talks about weird stuff going on "out there." You would think she was crazy,

except I know she isn't. Some Nakatomi thugs came around asking about her one day, so she must be doing something right.

But what gets me the most is that these so-called prophets, the guys writing those stories, have produced firm evidence, a small amount, sure, but concrete. This time I know they have some proof. I know because I gave them some.

Did I ever tell you I carry a "hog leg," what I call my 45 colt revolver? It's because of Vampires. Yep, vampires. At least they looked like vampires and they were hard to kill too, but their blood ran red enough. I was manning the hose on a warehouse fire down in the *first decade*, the anthill lower levels, 3rd floor to be exact. Out of the smoke came these dudes and dudettes all dripping from the water we were throwing. They had long teeth like vampires and they chewed up the hose-chief before anyone reacted. I used my axe on a couple, but it was close. In the end six of them killed or wounded 14 of us. I still got the scars. Now I carry a 45. Just let them vampires come. I told that whole story to Ag and gave him the teeth from I pulled from one of them creatures. Someone wrote it up, I guess, because sure enough the story was in his rag—names changed, but it was clearly my story.

But that is not the weirdest. There are stories in "The Watch" about a rise in empathic abilities among the general population. You know, people with powers. And what about them powers. I think I got some. I know Mom did. I mean, sometimes I just know what somebody is thinking. I am not as good as my Mom was, but good enough to weird myself out. This rag calls them *empaths*. The writer claims that empaths are the cause AND the cure of what is going on. I don't know what that means. She, I think the writer was a she, calls empaths "humanity's warriors." Beats me. But hearing voices sure can be useful sometimes—sometimes it can be scary. All I know is that there are really bad things out there, really bad. And no one seems to care.

You ever been outside the city? I mean really outside, past the burbs? There is no one out there. No one.

With the evacuation of the rural areas, opportunists and criminal elements have flourished. In the Out Lands anyone can do what they will. For the ganger or the biker, it is a kingdom. For the corporation, it is an illegal research center or toxic dumping site. For the average joe, it is a place to be avoided...it is the "Out Lands." The Out Lands have no single authority, not the government, not the corporations, not even the bikers. The Out Lands are mostly deserted, but you always hear rumors of secret military facilities, hidden corporate

research centers, and lost rural communities suffering strange maladies due to toxic waste contamination. That daily rag, “The Watch,” goes on and on about it. Makes you wonder. But no one corroborates these rumors because no one goes into the Out Lands. But I did.

I crossed through a big stretch when I served with the Brigadier in west Texas. We convoyed through a part of the country just west of the Mississippi where that rebel, what’s his name, Emmet Lowry, set up his little enclave. It was a rolling fight the whole way and we were just passing through. Those robots of his were tough little bastards. Lucky for us, we were the side show; the Regulars had to come out of their garrisons to beat him. I bet its tough on those convoy operators in the Out Law with guys like him running around.

Warlords like him have seized control of some regions and wage continual war against all comers, including the military. Indeed, there are known walled towns in various places in the Out Lands holding off these warlords and maintaining some semblance of order. These towns contain the new breed held-over from the old frontier. Like Fort Apache, citizens man the walls against the encroaching chaos that is the Out Lands.

But even the Out Lands isn’t the worst of it. Some areas of the Out Lands have suffered too much at the hands of mankind. The destruction is too much for nature to compensate, too heinous to absorb, and too dark to tolerate. These areas are the strangest environments ever known. These are the demongrounds. I haven’t seen one myself, but that lady writer devoted four pages to a description of one once. I would call the whole thing bunk, but she wrote about my vampire encounter—Ag says she was the writer. She changed my name, but it was me in the story. Is she right about the other stuff too?

I wonder if we would be able to “see” the Darkness if empaths like my Mom weren’t there to spot things for us. Maybe empathy is a survival trait





driven by a Darwinian mechanism. I don't see many empaths, even though word is that the numbers are growing. They must be keeping a low profile. Maybe the Darkness knows about them, like my Mom, and is out to get them like it did her. That kind of pisses me off too that the Dark may have killed her. I think this whole Darkness thing is enough. Time for a change...

I got this friend Shannon, who keeps dragging me to a meeting of this group. She keeps saying that there are non-human beings out there trying to kill every powerful empath they find. She calls them "minions." But whose minions? When pressed, Shannon told me about intelligent alien beings harboring immense ill will against mankind. These creatures work among us at a dark design that only they can know. These monsters mask their appearance and work through intermediaries—their minions, their *Igors*. I told her she should write for "The Watch." She laughed and I swear she was keeping some inner secret from me. But Shannon went on to tell me about people that have been baptized by exposure to the machinations of these "darklings." Darklings hunt down and kill anyone who knows of their

existence. Exposed humans only have two choices: be consumed by the evil that patiently waits...or fight.

If there is a darkness invading this planet, and people know about it, there has to be a resistance movement, that's how it works on the vids. Here Shannon had a few words...as if she could only ever say a few. She called it the "empathic underground." I laughed at this thinking that she had gone too far. But, I broke down and went to one of Shannon's group meetings. It's real, how weird. There is a whole sub-culture that claims to fight against the Darkness. Groups have formed around individuals with empathic abilities—people with powers. The groups have specific purposes, but above all, value their secrecy. They widely believe that open demonstration of empathic abilities results in disappearance or worse. Whether government, military, corporate, or whatever strong empaths just plain vanish without a trace.

What does all this mean, you might ask? I don't know. But I do know that there is a rising tide of Darkness with a capital "D." The rising Dark must be stemmed if humanity is to survive. The Greater Depression makes this task extremely difficult, but someone has to step up. Once exposed to the menace stepping up is a lot easier, because hiding doesn't work. Minions seem to know who knows them and they will hunt you down. That is why we need a new breed of hero—a new breed that will turn the tables on the darklings and their minions. These heroes are called Minion Hunters. I am one and we are taking the fight to Them...

Shannon is knocking on the door. She's here with Tigger and Xiang. I'm taking extra bullets this time, but I got my running shoes on just in case...

◆ ◆ ◆



Only the good die young.

– Billy Joel



In Memoriam: Todd A. Breitenstein

Todd Breitenstein, co-founder of game publisher **Twilight Creations**, passed away on March 24th after a battle with cancer. Todd and his wife Kerry Breitenstein co-founded Twilight in 2002, after Todd left **U.S. Playing Cards** which had just released the first version of **Zombies!!!**. Twilight's most notable releases are all part of the **Zombies!!!** family, and is a personal favourite of mine along with their **When Darkness Comes** line. I never met Todd but I was treated to a couple of demo games by Kerry at Gen Con UK in 2001.

Apart from wife Kerry, Todd leaves three children.

A project set up on Indiegogo to help Todd's family with his medical bills raised almost four times the target amount. Makes me proud to be a gamer. On a happier note, **Twilight Creations** is to continue at his request, so his work will live on.



In Memoriam: Nick Polotta

Writer Nick Pollotta, 58, died on April 13, 2013 in Chicago of cancer.

Born in New Jersey on August 26, 1954, Pollotta was a prolific author of science fiction, fantasy, and action/adventure novels, including **Illegal Aliens** (1989, with Phil Foglio), **That Darn Squid God** (2004, with James Clay) and many others, a lot of which were written under various pen names including "Don Pendleton" of the long-running "**Executioner**" series. Some of his short fiction was collected in **Tequila Mockingbird** (2004).

In the gaming world, Nick co-created the **Bureau 13 RPG** from **Tri-Tac Games**. On a personal note I recall a couple of pieces of his work were run way back in **DEMONGROUND**, and since the rise of social media I was able to communicate with him directly as a fan. He was always polite, funny, and usually upbeat even towards the end.

Before moving to Philadelphia and discovering the world of science fiction, Pollotta was a stand-up comedian in Manhattan. He is survived by his wife, Melissa Hutchings, and three sons.

UNCLE SILAS:

A Tale of Bartram Haugh.

BY
J. S. LE FANU,

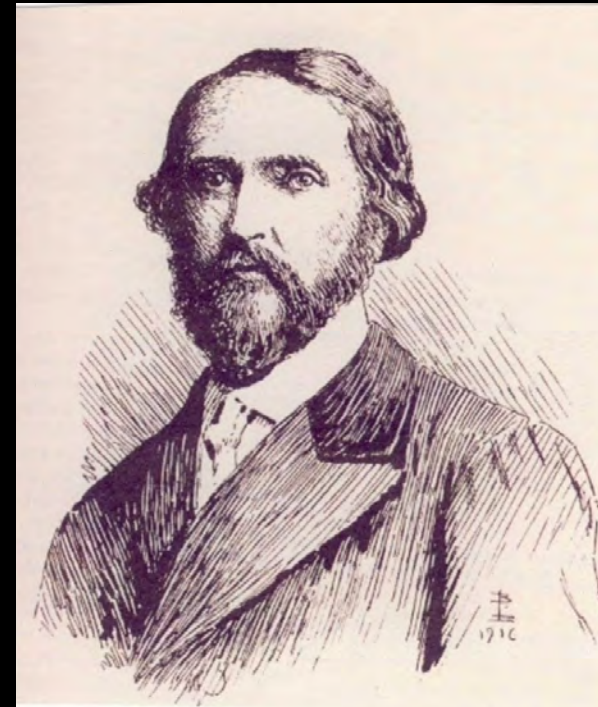
AUTHOR OF
"WYLDER'S HAND," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1864.



<i>Born</i>	Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu 28 August 1814 Dublin, Ireland
<i>Died</i>	7 February 1873 (aged 58)
<i>Occupation</i>	Novelist
<i>Genres</i>	Gothic horror, mystery
<i>Literary Movement</i>	Dark Romanticism
<i>Influences</i>	Walter Scott, Ann Radcliffe, Samuel Warren, Emanuel Swedenborg, Samuel Taylor Coleridge
<i>Influenced</i>	James Joyce, Charles Dickens, Bram Stoker, Henry James, Charlotte Brontë