

DEMONGROUND

The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy

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VOL 1

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DEMONGROUND: The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy

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Beginning of a New Era

By Marcus Bone
DEMONGROUND Editor-in-Chief

Well, it is here at last. *Dark Conspiracy* has been re-released and **DEMONGROUND: The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy** is here to support it.

I cannot express how happy I was to see my favorite role-playing game of all time back in print, Dynasty Presentations has done a great job in getting this great game back out amongst the role-playing community, the place it deserves to be.

Now that *Dark Conspiracy* is back in print, it is we, the players, who must make sure it becomes bigger and better than ever before. And that is where **DEMONGROUND** comes in. We are a fan magazine, relying on you, as the fans of DC, to show your support and submit your ideas on the world of modern horror. It is only

through your contributions that **DEMONGROUND** will survive.

On that note I must say thank you to the many people out there who made this fanzine possible.

To Ken Whitman, thanks for bringing DC back.

To Lester Smith, thanks for designing the greatest RPG on Earth.

To Geoff and Mike, a big thanks... without you none of this would ever have happened.

To everyone who contributed to the first issue, a very special thanks. It is really you who are the heroes today, for without you work this magazine would be nothing.

A special note to all the guys at the

Dark Conspiracy ICQ chats, MsG, Rob, Avalanche, NightOwl, Grim, Geist, PaCo, Hamster Boy and the rest... thanks for keeping up the interest.

And finally to you, the reader of this fanzine. Thanks for giving us your time. This is for you as much as it is for us.

Well enjoy this first delve into horror, and be ready for much more in our next issue, in which we will focus on introducing new Referees and players to this great game. So until then have **FUN**.

Marcus D. Bone

DEMONGROUND Editor-in-Chief

The Dark Conspiracy ICQ Chatroom

Each week, fans of *Dark Conspiracy* come to the ICQ *Dark Conspiracy* chat room to talk about the game. In the past, sessions have concentrated on things such as the 2nd edition of the game, adventure ideas and different initiative systems. The concept for **DEMONGROUND** was created in one of these sessions.

If you have ICQ installed on your computer, just search ICQ by id# (for 12565688) or nickname (&Dark Conspiracy) and add it to your ICQ contact list.

If you don't have ICQ installed on your computer, you can download it for free from the ICQ home page at <http://www.icq.com>.

For more details about the *Dark Conspiracy* chatroom and chat sessions, including the next scheduled time, see the Discussions page on the Dynasty Presentations website.

<http://www.dynastypresentations.com>

If you have any questions about *Dark Conspiracy*, come along. We look forward to seeing you.





A Short History of the *Dark Conspiracy* Game

By Lester Smith

Did you ever wonder how a role-playing game comes to be? Well allow me to pull back the curtain over the history of the *Dark Conspiracy* RPG, and let you take a peek.

The Genesis

Early in the summer of 1990, I was taking a break from grad school, when Marc Miller called to ask if I'd be interested in designing a new project for GDW. I had some time on my hands—and you know what they say about idle hands.... So I said, "Sure."

When I met with Marc and Frank Chadwick to discuss the project, they explained that they wanted a role-playing game of "ecological horror." I have a soft spot in my head for horror, so naturally I said, "Sure." We discussed the ecological aspects: a world in danger of ruination; a plot of some sort to take the earth from human hands. They pitched some ideas. I pitched some ideas. We shook hands all around, and I went home to start work.

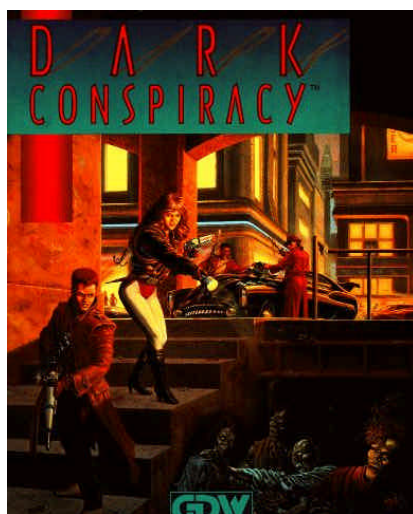
I was very excited. But as a role-playing game designer, I was still a little wet behind the ears back then. My RPG experience to that point had been to revise the *Traveller: 2300* RPG, filling in some holes and expanding the original to twice the size. And I'd done several adventure modules and a few board games. But I wasn't quite sure how to start a role-playing game from scratch. So I just gave it my best shot. I jotted down some basic mechanics, wrote up a few monster descriptions, plotted out an adventure, and got some friends together to start playing. Along the way, I just hoped to generate enough material to fill a 250-page book.

The Mechanics

It might surprise you to learn that the game started with a d20 mechanic based on skills. At the time, I was of the opinion that a d20 was just about a perfect die for a role-playing game. It gives a reasonable

range of numbers, without the clunkiness of a d10 on the one hand, the needlessly fine divisions of a d100 on the other, or the bell curve of multiple d6s on the third hand. (It's *Dark Conspiracy*, remember, so I can have three hands.) In my original system, the number of points by which you succeeded or failed determined the "quality" of your result. In competitive actions, that "quality" helped determine just how much of an effect the victim suffered. Still, the effects of that "quality" were left up very much to the referee to decide.

A few months into my work, Frank and Marc called again, to let me know that the second edition of *Twilight: 2000* was going over very well for the company. They explained that they thought it would be a good idea for GDW to have similar mechanics for all its RPGs, so they wanted me to adapt my current rules to match *T2K2*.



At first, I wasn't thrilled about the idea. As I've mentioned, I thought the d10 system to be too "coarse-grained," without enough variance. Still, I could see the appeal of a game company having common mechanics throughout its RPGs, and I like to be a team player. Also, it meant

that I didn't have to come up with new stats for all the modern and futuristic gear I wanted to include in *DC*.

That clinched it. I got to work converting my notes to *T2K2* stats (or perhaps more properly converting *T2K2* to my notes). Empathy was added as an attribute, two of *T2K2*'s physical stats were merged, and skills were juggled to suit. The project took a great leap forward as I was able to concentrate on mood instead of mechanics.

The Background

From the beginning, I set myself the goal of making a background that could incorporate absolutely any horror story. It was my opinion at the time that *AD&D* succeeded largely because a *DM* could import pretty much any fantasy story, and I wanted to do the same for horror. Nowadays, I'm not so sure that's a valid approach. *Chill* tried just that, and it's died at least a couple of times. *Call of Cthulhu* didn't really try that, and it's still as strong as ever. *Vampire: The Masquerade* and its siblings all focus on one vision, too, without trying to incorporate absolutely every type of horror, and they're going strong. Fortunately for me, two focuses developed early in *Dark Conspiracy*'s development, and they gave the game the identifying mark it needed to survive.

The first focus was the guns. GDW was a wargame company at heart, and it showed even in their RPGs. (In fact, if you used the abbreviation "RPG" at GDW, it was usually assumed you meant "rocket-propelled grenade.") Rather than fight that fact, I decided to try making a horror game where the point was ultimately to blow the monsters to little pieces. I just tried to create monsters that would rip you up a time or two before you could come up with a workable plan to defend yourself. But once you had, it was payback time in spades. Pretty much all



of the *DC* adventures I ever wrote and ran were designed exactly that way: I'd maim or even kill a PC or two, then let the rest escape, catch their breath, equip for the baddies, then come back and blast them to bits. It isn't how I run *Call of Cthulhu*, but it certainly works for *DC*.

The second focus was the ETs. As a kid, I watched lots of sci-fi movies in which the aliens were beneficent. Then as a teenager, I read reports about ETs performing head transplants on helpless humans. So I built that change into the *DC* game. Once the ETs came in peace, but now they were corrupted. Frank's the fellow who came up with the rationale that they had opened a mystic gate to "hell" and became possessed. That central concept gave *DC* an identifying mark it needed.

As for the other monsters, I just tried to come up with a rationale that fit the old stories, but didn't stretch the laws of science too far. For example, it seemed more reasonable to me that "werewolves" were always bestial-looking in reality, but projected a hypnotic power to disguise themselves, than that their bodies could metamorphosize in seconds. That rationale was one of the things that sold Frank on my vision for the game.

Finally, I needed a world where such creatures could break loose. But it had to be a fairly modern one. So I described a growing dystopia—not quite cyberpunk—in which lawlessness plagued the rural regions, allowing for monsters to prowl, yet dark secrets were held at the center of the overcrowded cities. It was never my intent to detail the megacorps or metroplexes. Remember, I wanted a world where referees could import stories they read or viewed, not one that dictated their campaigns. The plan was to allow for *Howling*-style werewolf packs on the one hand, and *Aliens*-style corporate horror on the other. The rest of the dystopian vision grew from those two extremes.

The Other Players

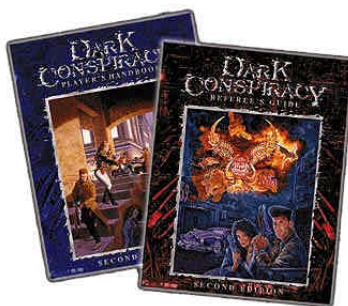
Which brings me to Mike Stackpole's novels. At the same time I had been approached to do the game, Mike had been asked to write a series of novels. Neither

of us was much aware of the other's work until both game and first or second novel had been completed. Mike depicted a more cyberpunkish world at first than I had, but the two visions began to feed off each other after the game was released.

Ted Kocot, the fellow who turned me on to cyberpunk before it was a phenomenon, is to blame for the tabloid tie-in to the game. He got me to thinking about the ways in which those bizarre tabloid stories could serve as clues for "actual" events in the game. I found tabloid stories to be a great inspiration for adventures. I only wish I had taken the idea further, and built them more fully into the background.

I think my favorite writer for *DC* material was Michael LaBossiere. He began writing short adventures almost immediately, mainly for *Challenge* magazine. I immediately fell in love with his approach to horror, his bent vision, and his delivery in writing. I looked forward to seeing his every submission. I hope he'll do some new work for the second edition.

For what it's worth, my favorite of the full modules, however, is *Among the Dead*, for whatever you can make of that.



Late Developments

Eventually, I finished writing and went back to grad school for one season. After finishing grad school, I went back to work full-time at GDW. As luck would have it, my first task was to finish getting *DC* through production, then take over management of the line. Through the next couple of years, as the line expanded, I had a great deal of fun. But the D10 system continued to bug me. I talked with Frank about it often, and his reply was

always something like, "Sure, you can change it, as long as all the current sourcebooks for it and *T2K2* remain in effect." So I couldn't just double the attribute and skill numbers, because things like gun recoil ratings wouldn't work anymore. I tried a provisional change in the *PC Booster Kit*, but it was kind of clunky. About a week after the booster kit hit the stands, however, I smacked my forehead and said, "Of course! Just add the skill and controlling attribute together, and use the total as the target number for a d20!" It was such a natural adaptation that we all wondered why we hadn't thought of it before. That's the version that's in the newest edition of the game.

What brought about that new edition, long after GDW was gone? Well, at pretty much every convention I attended, somebody or the other would ask me if the game would ever be reprinted. I mentioned that fact to a couple of different publishers over the years, and finally Ken Whitman decided it sounded like a good idea. He talked with the folks who currently own the license, came up with a business plan, and got to work. It was Ken who decided to split the original book into two sections—one for players, and one for referees—then incorporate material from various sourcebooks into each. He's also the guy who decided to repackage them both in digest sized books. At first, I was skeptical about that format, but when he showed me a sample page, I had to admit it looked nice, and when I saw the finished books at GenCon, I was impressed. They definitely stand out among a sea of 8 1/2" x 11" books.

I'm gratified to see the books back in print. I'm not certain at this point how much involvement I'll be able to have in the line's further development. Lots of water has passed under the bridge since I ran the line at GDW, and I have several other irons in the fire, as they say. But I'll continue to advise Ken as he pursues further publication, and I'll be running *DC* events at a number of conventions. Maybe I'll see you there...



A Long, Hard Look

Dark Conspiracy, then and now – a fan's perspective

By Geoff Skellams

With the republication of *Dark Conspiracy*, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on what has gone on before, where the game currently stands and what needs to be done to make the game more competitive and appealing to the gaming public in times to come.

Before I do that, I would like to look at the games that are currently doing well on the market (relatively speaking) and examine why they have the appeal that they have. By looking at the reasons why these games appeal to people can give us an insight as to why *Dark Conspiracy* didn't take the gaming community by storm in its original form. It's important to note at this point that these ideas are simply my *opinion* and *not* based on any empirical studies.

To the best of my knowledge, the three most popular gaming systems currently being produced are TSR's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (AD&D), FASA's *Shadowrun* and White Wolf's *World of Darkness* series (WoD). For the sake of this argument, I am going to group the WoD games together under a single heading because the reason for the popularity of the series as a whole is all based around the same basic idea.

So why are these games selling much better than everything else on the market?

I believe that the answer has to do with the concept of Makia (see the side bar on the next page for an explanation).

People are attracted to certain games because the settings of those games reflect the mindset that they have at the time. For whatever reason, their subconscious uses the game as a means of exploring areas that it cannot do in the person's day-to-day reality. I think that if a person could not relate to a particular game setting or style, then it would no relevance for them and they would not bother to play.

Given that line of thinking I started to try and figure out what "mindset" the three popular systems catered for.

AD&D is the classic sword and sorcery hero game. People like (or perhaps need) to be a hero in some sense, and their real world lives may not provide them the opportunity to express those desires. So they get attracted to a game that does. AD&D is the best known of the fantasy games and it is what most people know about. It may not be the best fantasy game, but it is the oldest and best-known role-playing game and is well supported.

Shadowrun allows the character to be powerful outside the normal bounds of society. The characters are particularly mercenary in their outlook on life and I suspect this is one the attractive features of the game. It allows the character to get out of the normal humdrum of society and make a difference. This may or may not involve the character being a hero in the classic sense.

The WoD games, on the other hand, appeal to a different section of the gaming community. Instead of looking for a way to be a hero of some description, WoD players relate more to the loss of humanity the characters in the game suffer from. The modern world is very dehumanizing and the characters in the game echo this feeling, as they are all trying to recover their lost humanity in some form or another.

There is another thing all three of these games have in common. In some form or another, all of them have some sort of long-term campaign backplot that is used to guide the production of new material.

AD&D used to produce a series of campaign modules that are all loosely related in some fashion. In the early days of D&D, a wide variety of modules were written, but as time went by, sequels to these modules were written to turn them into campaigns. To the best of my knowledge, this idea is still being used, in such products as the *Birthright* campaign setting. Another example is the RPGA's *Living City* campaign at conventions,

which are very popular.

The WoD games have a very strong backplot that the game universe revolves around. As time goes by, adding to the background story and advancing it one piece at a time expands the game universe.

Shadowrun also has a very strong campaign backplot, which is becoming more and more complicated as the years go by. It is this ever-evolving backplot keeps the game fresh, as the new source-books that come out all help to advance this story.

The concept of a backplot is being used more and more on television. Shows like *X-Files*, *Babylon 5*, *Pretender* and *Profiler* are all using elements of backplot to attract viewers and try and get them to stay watching over the duration of the series. It seems that giving the story a long-term backplot keeps the show's focus and ensures that it keeps moving along. These long-term plots which are revealed very slowly as the show progresses hook viewers and have them trying to second guess what is really going on and what is going to happen next.

Having looked briefly at all of that, the time now comes to have a look back at the 1st Edition of *Dark Conspiracy* and see where it may have lacked something.

The first and perhaps the most important problem *Dark Conspiracy* suffered from was people didn't resonate with the underlying concepts of the game. For whatever reason, people didn't like the idea of fighting an interdimensional evil because there seemed no real way of beating it. You can't stop the evil, only delay it for a while. In the long run, I think this turned a lot of people off, as there was no sense of hope for a better future.

The second thing that I think acted against the original game (although I have heard it called one of the game's



strengths) is the emphasis on combat within the rulebooks. There are a lot of weapons listed and detailed rules for how to conduct fire combat. This means that unlike *Call of Cthulhu*, blasting away at the nasties is a perfectly reasonable means of solving a problem. I know that this is not what is meant, the underlying "if it moves, shoot it; if it doesn't, set fire to it" mentality comes across in a lot of the published material. Most gamers I know have grown out of the "blast everything" mindset and now prefer a game where there is far more character interaction and mental work. I think the latter is why *Call of Cthulhu* is still around. The emphasis on role-playing instead of roll-playing was one of its strongest points.

The lack of any sort of decent rules for fear was also a problem. A character could spot some sort of hideous monster and could react normally, while it would incapacitate 99.9999% of the population with fear. It does not allow for a realistic portrayal of the situation. Again, this is

another area where *Call of Cthulhu* has it over *Dark Conspiracy*, in my opinion. The rules for sanity in *Call of Cthulhu* are quite good, even if they do tend to result in of the premature retiring of a lot of characters.

I feel that the other major problem with the old *Dark Conspiracy* system was the lack of direction in the game universe. The main rulebook included a very detailed background story, but in all the other published books, very little of the background information was expanded on. If people wanted to use elements of the background in their own campaigns, they had to do all the work themselves. A lot of people don't have the time to come up with a detailed Dark Lord plot. For the most part, it requires too much work; it's too big. *Dark Conspiracy* has a great background story. I think it's a crying shame that nothing much was ever done with it. To be fair, it possible that there were plans to follow on from the published adventures to make campaign

games, in the same way AD&D has done in the past. The unfortunate demise of GDW put a halt to these plans though.

Well, now that I have soundly berated DC to great lengths, I can imagine you are wondering why I still like this game at all. Well, it all boils down to one thing.

Potential.

There is so much scope in *Dark Conspiracy* universe. A lot of time and thought has gone into coming up with a coherent game background, and it ties in wonderfully with all of the old tales of horrific creatures as well as some current situations in the world. It builds on the sense of whole conspiracy theory concept that has become very popular in recent years, especially with show such as the *X-Files*.

It is probably this potential that resulted in the new edition of the game. There are enough people who also have sensed the potential in the game and have taken the time and effort to work out a long-term campaign based on the background. I believe that it is through the efforts of these people that have helped bring this game back from the dead.

The new edition of *Dark Conspiracy* provides a wonderful opportunity to really start to resonate with people. Over the past few years, people have really started to look at society and say, "something serious is wrong here." Crime rates are up and individual self-esteem is getting lower each year. *Dark Conspiracy* ties in with this sense of frustration and builds a whole universe around it. By using these feelings as a starting point for building a campaign, it allows for the construction of some very valuable experiences.

With the republication of the game, there is the perfect opportunity to really build something solid on the framework of the game's background. As I mentioned above, *Dark Conspiracy* has a wonderful background story and it provides a lot of scope for some really excellent role-playing adventures. The writers of new *Dark Conspiracy* sourcebooks and adventures can start to build a coher-

Some Metaphysical Explanations

These concepts are taken from the Hawaiian Huna philosophy. I have included them here simply to help illustrate several points I am making in the article.

IKE - "The World Is What You Think It Is"

People have a whole series of subconscious beliefs, which they pick up along their way during their lives. The beliefs are instilled in them as a result of highly emotional experiences they have had, which results in a series of "rules" in their subconscious. These beliefs and rules dictate what that individual thinks about the world and how they react to various situations that come their way. By changing your way of thinking about certain things, you can change the way you react in a given situation.

MAKIA - "Energy Goes Where Attention Goes"

Makia is a pretty succinct definition of the attraction mechanism that underpins a lot of metaphysical teachings. Basically, the more you think about something, the more likely it is for you to experience that thing. By thinking about a topic a lot, then you reinforce the importance of that thing to your subconscious, which will make sure that you perceive that thing more and more. The reverse of Makia is also true - "Attention Goes where Energy Flows". If you spend a lot of time investing energy into certain thought patterns, then your subconscious is going to point your attention in the direction of something that reinforces that concept. That's why you can watch a TV show or read a book sometimes and really connect with what is going on - because it will resonate with the concepts in your subconscious mind. It also means that other people will tend to notice what you have done and appreciate it more, because of the time and effort you have invested into it.



ent and strong backplot into any new material that is to be produced for the game.

This is not to say that the plots of the Dark Lords have to be worked out in full and spelled out in black and white. Far from it. I think a good lesson can be learned from the *Shadowrun* universe. Give the players and referees enough material to reveal small pieces of the backplot as time goes on and they will spend a lot of time trying to figure it out. All of a sudden, the game universe becomes far more interesting and immediate to people because they are trying to piece together all of the clues in all of the books and come up with something coherent.

A good backplot to the game means that the design of new products is going to need to be mapped out in advance by the line developers. Each new product published in the line will need to be created to fill a specific need. These adventures can build upon the back-story and reveal new snippets of information over time.

This does not mean that everything that is published has to advance the main backplot. There is still a lot of the game universe that can be explored and described in detail. What is not really needed is more equipment and monster guides. I feel that new sourcebooks should instead concentrate on fleshing out the parts of the game universe that have until now have not received a lot of attention. In other words, new sourcebooks should aim to make the game universe seem more real, more alive, instead of just filling it with more "stuff".

The biggest thing that needs to be done if a backplot is to be created is to give players and referees a sense of hope. I mentioned earlier on that the idea that they are trying to defeat the machinations of something incredibly powerful from another dimension turns people off. On the whole, there is no sense of hope for humanity. This, I think, is something that can be rectified in the new edition of the game. The emphasis needs to be placed on empowering the characters and showing that the actions of the individual really do make the difference. We don't need to resort to using the same tricks as the Dark Lords in order to overcome them – one

does not defeat evil by becoming evil. All that does is perpetuate evil. *Dark Conspiracy* needs to emphasize the integrity of the minion hunters and reward the use of ingenuity and intuition.

One aspect of the horror genre is that it makes you to look at the darker side of life. People are attracted to horror stories, because it can give their subconscious minds a chance to bring to the surface all of the old fears that have been suppressed for ages. By bringing them up and out, it forces the person to look at them and realise that they can overcome their fears and get on with their lives. Overcoming your old, irrational fears allows your life to become a lot freer and your self-esteem suddenly starts to go up.

Unfortunately, this is an aspect of horror that is seriously overlooked by people. At the moment, *Dark Conspiracy* comes across as not much more than a simple "bug hunt". It's so "in your face"; it's either really funny or just plain stupid.

Great horror stories scare the living daylight out of you. They do this, not so much by graphical depictions of blood guts and violence or by some hideous creature, but by merely suggesting the shape of something and letting the mind of the viewer fill in the blanks. People fear what they do not know or understand. When someone doesn't know the whole situation, the mind automatically tries to complete the picture and normally it will automatically assume the worst. Horror stories use these ideas to play tricks on the mind. Normally, the subtler the trick, the more horrifying the story can become.

Dark Conspiracy could certainly improve in this area. For a Dark Lord's plot to be really successful, it needs to be very subtle. If it were too obvious, then people would notice it and start to react against it. By having their minions cover up the operations and spreading rumors and false information, people begin to doubt what they have seen or heard and are far less likely to do something about it. This will only add to the sense of horror.

In ancient times, legends were passed on, not only to tell a story, but also as a means of showing people how to over-

come their personal difficulties and lead fuller, happier lives. In most ancient legends, there is a deep message hidden in the plot of the story. Not many people these days use this concept but there are a few famous Hollywood writers, directors and producers who understand and use these ideas. A classic example is George Lucas and *Star Wars*. Lucas read and was heavily influenced by the works of Joseph Campbell. Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, details the elements that are common to most forms of classical mythology and how these elements help make the story seem real and more immediate to the listener. Lucas used a lot of ideas in Campbell's book to build a stronger, more meaningful story that still attracts people to see it more than 20 years after its release.

By using some of these concepts, an adventure story ceases to be a simple linear "go to point A, beat up the monster, solve the puzzle, collect the widget; go to point B, beat up the monster..." type plot. It becomes something that seems a lot more real and alive, something that people tend to resonate with more. Each of the events in the story, be they situations or characters, become more real because each of them is suddenly in the story to fill a specific purpose, not just to act as random encounters. They test the character's resolve or provide them with crucial piece of information they need. The timing with which each of them appears and disappears will make more sense to the players in hindsight and they will not just be simply a "space filler".

Most of the ancient legends have a hero risking his or her own life to achieve something that will ultimately improve life for their whole communities. These sorts of stories teach us that the actions of the individual really do have an effect in the greater scheme of things and that it really is worth the effort in the long term.

If people writing modules actually set out to use mythic structure in the adventures they write, then all of a sudden people will sit up and take notice. It might not be anything they can put their fingers on. It will just be something that makes them think "Damn, that was *good*", after they have either read it or played through



it. But buried in amongst all of the action and adventure would be the information that they might be able to use in their everyday life.

Now, the trick with this sort of writing is that it takes a deliberate act on the part of the writer to carry it off. You can't just string things together and hope for the best. Everything that happens in the story has to happen for a reason and has to happen at the proper time.

Despite the fact that the process is a hard one to carry off successfully, I believe that there are enough good reasons to use it. First and foremost, it makes for a far more coherent adventure. Christopher Vogler has proposed a great framework in his book *The Writer's Journey*. Vogler's work is essentially a distillation of the concepts from *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, aimed primarily at screenwriters and storytellers. The framework is a good one, as it helps to get rid of the dull spots in a story that sometimes cause the whole level of excitement to be removed.

The other good reason for using this framework is that by putting a "hidden"

message in the story, it takes a conscious effort to make the story work. It requires a lot more energy on the part of the writer to finish the thing. Sometimes this is because the writer needs to overcome some personal fears to get through it. But, once it is finished, that energy will show through. It will be obvious to people that someone has spent a great deal of time and effort into making this a great story. Now, if you remember, I said that the reverse to the concept of Makia is that "Attention Goes Where Energy Flows". If you put a lot of energy and effort into creating something, then people will notice that effort. People will start to talk about the adventure and when something gets a genuinely good review, people will sit up and take notice and will spend the time and money needed to have a look at it.

The other side effect of doing this consciously is that people will subconsciously be drawn towards it. Through the metaphysical attraction mechanism, they will get drawn towards something that can help them get rid of whatever subconscious fears they may have. They will just happen to get drawn towards the story

somehow, just one of life's little coincidences.

I believe Dark Lords should reflect aspects of what is wrong with society today, only amplified to exaggerate it. By showing players how to overcome the Dark Lord in the context of the game, it is possible to show them a way to overcome similar problems in their own lives. It ceases to be merely a game, and becomes a lesson as well. The trick is presenting the lesson so that it looks as though it isn't one.

With so many role-playing games disappearing off the market because of the collapse of their publishers, the second lease of life for *Dark Conspiracy* is a very special thing. We have two options at this stage. We can keep doing what was done before and risk the failure of the game for a second time. Or we can look at what has gone on in the past, learn from it and change the direction of the game and build a stronger, better system that people will want to play.





Terror Train

By Michael Marchi

With a roar, the thing slithers out of the darkness. Driven by hunger, it stops to feed - purring softly as victims slide into its belly. With a hiss and a shriek it lurches forward, fleeing into the dark night - staring back with twin red eyes disappearing in the distance...

Foreword

Debbie Meyers shifted her book bag straps on her shoulder and slid her left hand into the pocket of her faded denim jeans. She pulled out her monthly commuter pass and slid the card into a slot in the turnstile's card-reader. The electronic display turned from red to green and with a satisfying *ka-chink*, released the lock on the turnstile. Once she stepped passed the rotating bar, she plucked the card from the slot on the exit-side of the turnstile. Her companion, Professor Kaitlin Jones was digging frantically through her purse for her own commuter pass.

The low, steady hum of the approaching train changed in pitch as the air brakes were applied.

"Come on, Professor!" Debbie called impatiently. "We're going to miss it."

"Ah ha!" Kate exclaimed in triumph. "Got it." She waved her hand dismissively at her teaching assistant. "Go on up, Deb. I'll be through in a second."

Debbie turned and trotted up the stairs to the platform. Above her, the sound of the train hissed to a stop.

Dr. Kate slid the card into the reader, and stepped forward. Instead of turning green and releasing the lock, the display flashed red, and spat the card back. Kate winced in pain as she slammed her thighs against the unyielding bar. Swearing an oath under her breath, she retrieved the card and flipped it over.

This time it worked, and a moment later, Doctor Kaitlyn Jones was pushing through the turnstile and running up the stairs as fast as she could. From the platform above, she could hear the sound of the pneumatic doors opening on the train.

Debbie was already standing in the

doorway of the train, watching anxiously as her teacher came running up the stairs. She waved in encouragement. "Hurry up, Doctor Kate!"

Three steps from her goal, Kate heard the hiss of the automated doors cycling closed. She backpedaled to a stop just as they slammed shut - stranding her out on the platform. Debbie gave the doctor an apologetic glance as the air-brakes of the train hissed again and disengaged. Then, as the train began to move, she shrugged her shoulders, as if to say, "Oh Well."

Kate took a step backward behind the line on the platform and nodded reassuringly to her student, mouthing the words, "It's Okay, I'll get the next one."

She watched silently as the twin red taillights of the train receded in the distance to the west.

Involving the Players

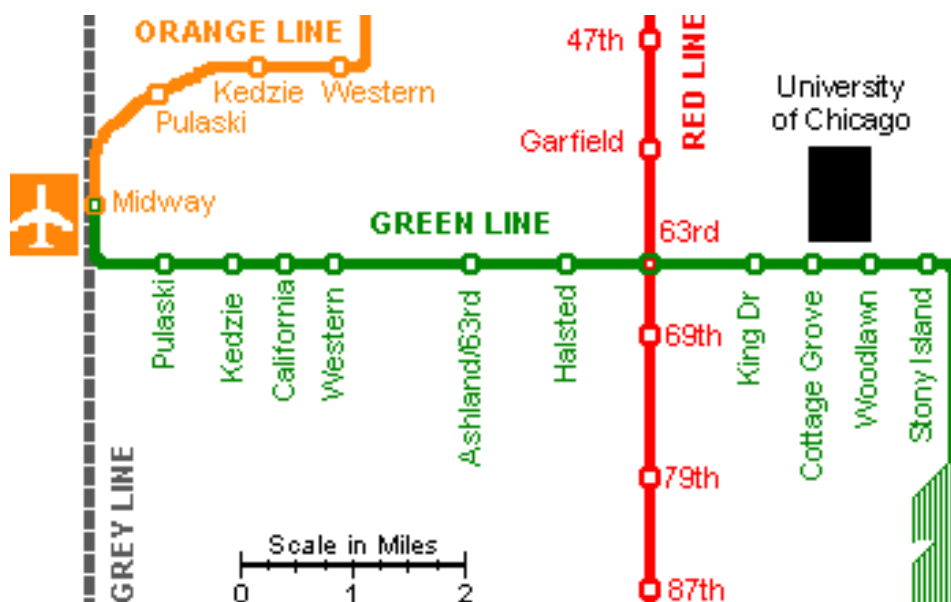
The quoted scene in the Foreword section is one possible way to get the

players into the scenario. One of the PC's could play the role of the professor left standing on the platform, or that of a friend or relative of the missing girl. If a simple missing person scenario isn't enough to pique your group's interest, then arrange it so that Debbie is carrying a very important manuscript for the Professor.

Assembling the Clues

There is a good deal of detective work for the players to do in the initial stages of the adventure.

The Missing Girl: According to Dr. Kate, Debbie Meyers boarded the train at the Cottage Grove station at 9:05pm. Dr. Kate claims that she just missed making it on the train herself. She knows that it was the 9:05 train, because she remembers checking her watch, and it was a train that they normally took when they had to work late.





Police Records: There are no records of any attacks on CTA trains the night in question. The police and hospitals along the route have no records of any Jane Does showing up. Nobody matching Debbie's description has shown up in a hospital or morgue in the last thirty-six hours. The police will be reluctant to begin an investigation until Debbie is missing for 48 hours.

Debbie's Apartment: Debbie lives on the second floor of a five-story apartment building. A spare key to her apartment can be found atop the door frame. Searching the apartment will reveal very little. She doesn't appear to have returned home the previous night. There are messages on her answering machine dating back to the afternoon on the day she disappeared. None of Debbie's neighbors will remember seeing her since the previous morning.

Taking a Train: Sooner or later, someone is going to have to take a train ride. At the entrance to every CTA station, there is a bank of turnstiles. Next to the turnstiles will either be a manned ticket booth, or an automated ticket vending machine. Commuters insert cash or credit cards into the vending machines, and select single-ride, round-trip, 10-ride or Monthly tickets. The tickets have a magnetic strip on their backs, and are inserted into the card reader on the turnstiles. This unlocks the bar allowing the commuter to pass through. If ride points remain on the ticket, the commuter can pick it up after passing through the rotating bar. If no ride points remain, the turnstile keeps the ticket. Leaving a station requires the commuter to insert their card, and unlock

the turnstile. Thus, a single-ride ticket has two ride points - one for entering the station at the origination point, and one for leaving the station at the destination. Round-trip tickets have four points, Ten-Rides have 20. Monthly passes do not use points, they simply function at all times throughout the course of a given month.

The Cottage Grove Train Station: This is the station where Debbie allegedly boarded the CTA Westbound 9:05pm Green Line train. This station is equipped only with automated ticket vending machines. If anyone thinks to look, there are surveillance cameras pointing at both the entry and exit turnstiles, and on the train platform as well. Dr. Kate will remember seeing a young couple, making out in the shadows of the train platform just after the train carrying Debbie had pulled away. She remembers it, because at first all she could hear was strange wet, sucking sounds coming from the shadows, and it freaked her out.

The Western Avenue Train Station: This is the station where Debbie would have normally gotten off the train. The station is two blocks away from Debbie's apartment. At the entrance to the train platform, is a manned ticket booth. If the inquiry is made at any time of day other than 4pm-midnight, the person in the booth will not have been on duty when Debbie would have arrived. There is a computer terminal in the booth that can be used to check train schedules for the most recent several days. When the players inform the person in the booth that they are searching for a passenger from the train that left Cottage Grove at 9:05pm, the

person will frown, double check the computer screen, and inform the players *"There was no 9:05pm train last night. The train which would have been the 9:05 was delayed in the train yard for nearly twenty minutes!"*

The Records: The CTA keeps very detailed records of the usage of its mass transit system. Every usage of a magnetic ticket is recorded in the central computer database at the train yard main office. There are also surveillance cameras in every train station. The tapes of those cameras' captured images are also located at the train yard main office. Any inquiries made at a ticket booth about records of Debbie Meyers either boarding or departing any trains on the night in question, or for that matter, any questions about the video tapes, will be referred to the Main Yard Office.

The Train Yard: Two blocks south of the Stony Island train station, the four commuter tracks pass beneath a rusted iron framework and enter the 79th street Train Yard for Green Line (South). The yard is over two miles long, and as they get closer to the Main Yard Office, continue to branch off until there are over twenty separate lines of rails spanning the width of the train yard at the end. All of the off-duty train cars are parked along this section, where they are cleaned, inspected and each moved in turn to the staging area where they are assembled into the next scheduled commuter train. Once cleared, the train proceeds slowly out of the yard, and then accelerates once it clears the outer marker of the yard, two miles to the north.

CTA GREEN LINE (SOUTH) - WESTBOUND - TRAIN SCHEDULE											
Stony Island	Wood-lawn	Cottage Grove	King Drive	RED LINE	Halsted	Ashland	Western	California	Kedzie	Pulaski	Midway Airport
(Trains run every 15 minutes throughout the day)											
8:42pm	8:46	8:50	8:54	8:59	9:04	9:09	9:15	9:18	9:21	9:27	9:35pm
8:57pm	9:01	9:05	9:09	9:14	9:19	9:24	9:30	9:33	9:36	9:42	9:50pm
9:12pm	9:16	9:20	9:24	9:29	9:34	9:39	9:45	9:48	9:51	9:57	10:05pm

CTA GREEN LINE (SOUTH) - EASTBOUND - TRAIN SCHEDULE											
Midway Airport	Pulaski	Kedzie	California	Western	Ashland	Halsted	RED LINE	King Drive	Cottage Grove	Wood-Lawn	Stony Island
(Trains run every 15 minutes throughout the day)											
8:30pm	8:38	8:44	8:47	8:50	9:56	9:01	9:06	9:11	9:15	9:19	9:23pm
8:45pm	8:53	8:59	9:02	9:05	9:11	9:16	9:21	9:26	9:30	9:34	9:38pm
9:00pm	9:08	9:14	9:17	9:20	9:26	9:31	9:36	9:41	9:45	9:49	9:53pm



The Big Board: The Main Office building sits along the southern edge of the train yard. Within, there is a low counter, behind which are about a dozen desks, manned by a dozen, frantic train-traffic controllers. Each person wears a headset, and types furiously at computer screens, pausing only momentarily to glance at the gigantic situation board that lines the back wall. The board is a map of the entire 'L' commuter line showing stations, and ever-advancing groupings of three tiny lights, which represent the currently active trains on every line on the south side. The board is a wonder to watch. Trains accelerate and stop as needed to allow other trains to pass by without incident. The man behind the counter is Rich Holmes, a fast-talking, balding, man with an over-inflated sense of pride in the board he oversees, and a grating munchkin-like giggle. Rich will gladly point out the operation of the Big Board, showing how each train is tracked via a Global Positioning System, and updated on the board. He proudly proclaims that he is personally responsible for standing sentinel over one hundred and sixty-four different trains cars, and with the board, he can pinpoint the exact location of every train in the CTA network. Asked about train Debbie took, he will pompously insist that there is no way any of his trains were at the Cottage Grove station at 9:05pm that night, as the train was delayed in the yard by Frankie D, the yard boss. If pressed, he will go to a computer console, and switch the board to a "play-back" mode of the time in question. According to the big board, none of the bright lights, which represent the trains, were anywhere near Cottage Grove at the specified time.

Tracking the Ticket: Each ticket is coded with a unique identification number, and that number is used to track entry and exit at every station along the line. There is no way of knowing exactly which ticket belonged to Debbie, but Dr. Kate still has hers, and records show that Dr. Kate's ticket passed through the turnstile at the Cottage Grove station at 9:05pm. There was another ticket, which

passed through that same turnstile at 9:04. There is no record of that ticket ever leaving another station anywhere along the line.

The Video Paradox: It would appear to be a simple matter to check the surveillance videos of the Cottage Grove station, to see if a train was at the station at 9:05pm. If the party checks, they will find that no train is visible on the platform at that time. Further, there is no video of either Debbie Meyers or Dr. Kate going through the turnstile anywhere from 9:00pm to 9:10pm. But, there is footage at 9:11pm, of a young couple walking arm-in-arm out of the shadows on the east side of the platform, and exiting the station (with accompanying tracking confirmation in the computer). This is followed at 9:12 by Dr. Kate walking out of the shadows on the west side of the platform, watching the couple go. At 9:19pm, a train stopped on the platform and Dr. Kate boarded it. At 9:20, another Westbound train arrived, stopped momentarily, and continued on its way. This evidence would seem to bear up the facts asserted by Rich Holmes. Except, that the computer shows two tickets entering the system at 9:04 and 9:05 pm ... a fact contradicted by the video.

Frankie D: Frankie is the second-shift yardmaster at the CTA facility for the Green Line South. It's his ass on the line when the trains leave the station. A fact that he is more than happy to expound upon when questioned. He is the epitome of the stereotypical Chicago sportsfan (popularized by Saturday Night Live). He will talk your ear off about how each train car is five tons of iron, aluminum, glass and plastic, with ten-thousand moving parts. The enormous machines run from an electrified "third rail" that runs between the two supporting rails of the track. The way he talks about the trains, you'd swear he thinks they're living things. He knows each and every car by heart, and insists that he will never let a train leave the yard unless it is 100% ready to do so. He admits to delaying the train in question, claiming that a locked brake-shoe was responsible. He has

documented records on a hand-written clipboard that confirms this statement.

Walkin' the Line

The group will have little choice, but to try to follow the train line, to see if and where Debbie may have gone. They will undoubtedly begin at the Cottage Grove station, and proceed westbound, looking for something suspicious. The train they take will be no different from any other in the CTA stable. There is a single engineer on board, who sits in a small booth at the front-left corner of the car. Each and every car in the line has two of these control stations (one at each end). Controlling the train requires a special control board to be inserted into a socket in the booth. The board will operate only in the lead car. The engineer in the train sits behind a doorway of bulletproof glass. He communicates with the passengers via microphone, which renders everything he says virtually unintelligible. As the route progresses, each successive station will be announced. The ubiquitous "all aboard" announcement garbled sufficiently should drive the point home (the referee is encouraged to cover his/her mouth with both hands to form an echo-chamber and slur the announcements). This mangling of the announcements should continue until the players actually request that the engineer address them directly through the speaker. All such conversations will be clear. If they are on the 9:05 train, the engineer will tell them that he always runs this train at this time, and yes, the train was delayed almost twenty minutes on the night in question.

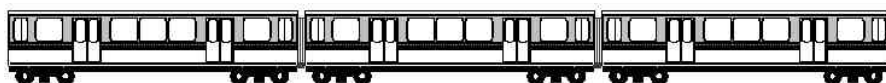
The Vision

After the train leaves the Pulaski station, it will slow down considerably for the sharp curve northward toward Midway Airport. At that point, the players will notice a great deal of construction equipment through the windows. Many construction barricades topped with yellow flashing warning lights line both sides of the track. The train bumps slightly as it switches over several intersections in the track. Toward the center, between the east and westbound local



tracks, a dark ramp slopes down from the elevated train platforms toward the street below.

As the construction zone is passed, start with the player with the highest empathic rating, and roll an empathic perception check. The first one that succeeds will be overwhelmed by a vision of Debbie Meyers, trapped on a speeding train. Her eyes are wide with fear, and she is beating bloody fists against starred and



cracked safety glass. The image lasts only a moment, and disappears the moment the train they are on begins accelerating away from the construction zone.

Into the Depths

The players will have to wait until the train reaches Midway Airport to get off. Even pulling an emergency chord in an attempt to stop the train will result only in a red light illuminating on the engineer's board as a stop request – which he is not obligated to acknowledge.

Upon arriving at the construction site, they will find the area surrounded by big fences of bright orange plastic construction netting. A large billboard proudly proclaims: "Coming November 2013, GREY LINE subway extension. Brought to you by the CTA and City Services – working together for a brighter tomorrow". The ramp from the elevated platform above, extends downward into the depths beneath street-level – apparently providing access to the subway system down below. According to the signs, the Grey Line subway isn't supposed to be active for months, yet when the players proceed down the ramp, they will find the tracks leading downward to be shiny and new, quite complete, and most disturbing of all, powered! That's right, electricity is flowing through the third rail of this supposedly inactive tunnel. Despite the fact that the tracks have power, the overhead lighting system does not. The tunnels are pitch dark, so unless the party brought along some flashlights, they're going to have a very difficult time getting around.

Out of the Darkness

Depending on how diligent your group is, they might be willing to follow the underground subway tunnel forever. This should be discouraged after a while. Point out that according to the map, the subway extends at least fifteen miles to the north, and another five to the south. So once, you feel they've devoted enough time to the underground search, it's time to bring out the train. It will begin as a

low subsonic rumble, causing the tracks to vibrate rhythmically. Before too long, it should become obvious that there is a train advancing toward them from the north. As it grows closer, no lights will be visible on the train. No headlights, navigation lights, interior lights or anything, save the occasional sparks thrown off the steel wheels as they roll over the iron rails. The train will pass them, moving much too quickly to even consider jumping aboard. Hopefully the group will follow. From experience, half the groups who ran this adventure have elected to follow the tunnels to find where the train came from. If your group insists on continuing the search, let them find what they are looking for: a huge area of the track that is surrounded by an outline in the ground – essentially forming a trapdoor (probably hydraulic) that will pitch downward should an object of sufficient mass (say 15 tons) come to rest upon it. Since the players don't have a 15ton vehicle on them (like...a train), they'll need to go elsewhere, or wait for the train to come back.

The Big Board (revisited)

By now, the players should realize that they've just witnessed the passage of a train that should not and does not exist. It should occur to someone in the group, that they need to see if that train can be tracked by the CTA GPS system. Which will involve returning to the Main Office.

The arrival of the group back at the office should come as a shock to Rich Holmes,

who will still be there, regardless of what time of day they arrive. He will be happy to replay the big-board status at the time they "claim" to have seen a train exit the Grey Line subway system ("That's impossible. Those tunnels aren't even complete!")

This time, while observing the Big Board, the players should notice something new. Preceding the lights that represent the trains on the board, a small bank of LED's will shift in color from green to amber to red. This change appears as a flicker of color approximately one minute on either side of the trains. Rich will explain that is the feedback of the automated traffic signals along the track route. These signals are designed to operate independently of the rest of the system, serving as warning lights for trains in both directions about proximity and travel directions of other trains on the track ahead.

When replaying the status at the time the mystery train exited the Grey Line, although no train is visible on the display, the automated signal lights are clearly changing as if a train is progressing down the track.

When replaying the status of the Cottage Grove station around 9:05pm on the night Debbie disappeared, the same flicker is observed, proceeding westbound until it stops at the Grey Line construction area.

Comes the Monster

At this point, all the pieces are in place to solve the mystery except one. How does the false train get onto the system? Where is it, and how is the substitution coordinated? The players may feel that another conversation with Frankie D is in order. No matter what, they are moments away from their first encounter with the Ghost Train. While there, they will hear an announcement that Frankie D has ordered the current train in the staging area to be held up due to a mechanical difficulty. This should alert the players that the switch is about to be made somewhere along the two miles of track that form the train yard.

This is indeed the case. If the players manage to follow the tracks northward



from the yard, they will arrive within sight of the entry point for the train! It rises up out of the ground, climbing up a hinged ramp from somewhere beneath the ground. The train is well-lit and appears in every way to be an official CTA vehicle. It will begin accelerating out of the train yard and heading toward the main commuter line.

The Wild Ride

The act of catching the train should be played up to great effect. Arriving too late at each successive station, then finally, getting far enough ahead of it that they can gain access to one of the stations downrange, and climb up to the platform before the train leaves.

The train appears normal in all respects. There will be less than a dozen people on board. Appropriate announcements are made, and the train will continue the route at normal speed. Before the train reaches the next stop after the players board it, the train will switch (very suddenly) over to the center, express track, and begin picking up speed. Attempting to contact or deal with the engineer on the train will be futile. The engineer is in his control booth, frantically pulling levers and pushing buttons, and obviously trying (without success) to regain control of the train! Stations will fly by, and the other passengers on board will begin to get very nervous as each of their stops are passed in turn.

The train will approach the Grey Line

construction area going entirely too fast for safety. It will actually leap off the track momentarily when it hits the ramp sloping down to the subway. When that happens, the lights on the train will go out, and then come back on when the train lands on the tracks where it belongs - careening down the ramp into the subway tunnel. The ride through the pitch-black corridor will take only a minute before the train's brakes suddenly engage and bring the massive cars to a halt - right atop the trapdoor. Just as the people on the train breath a sigh of relief, the train will pitch even more steeply forward than before and roll downward. The lights will go out for good this time, and the sensation of falling, *very slowly* through a long dark tunnel will be experienced. After another minute, the train levels off, with a bump, the lights will come back on, and the train will roll to a stop in a beautiful subway station.

The Stainless Steel Station

The silence that follows the abrupt end of the headlong train ride will be broken by the sobs of several passengers. Nobody will have sustained any lasting injuries, although a few bumps and bruises are to be expected. Bright fluorescent lights shine in through the windows of the train, bathing the scene in an intense blue-white glow.

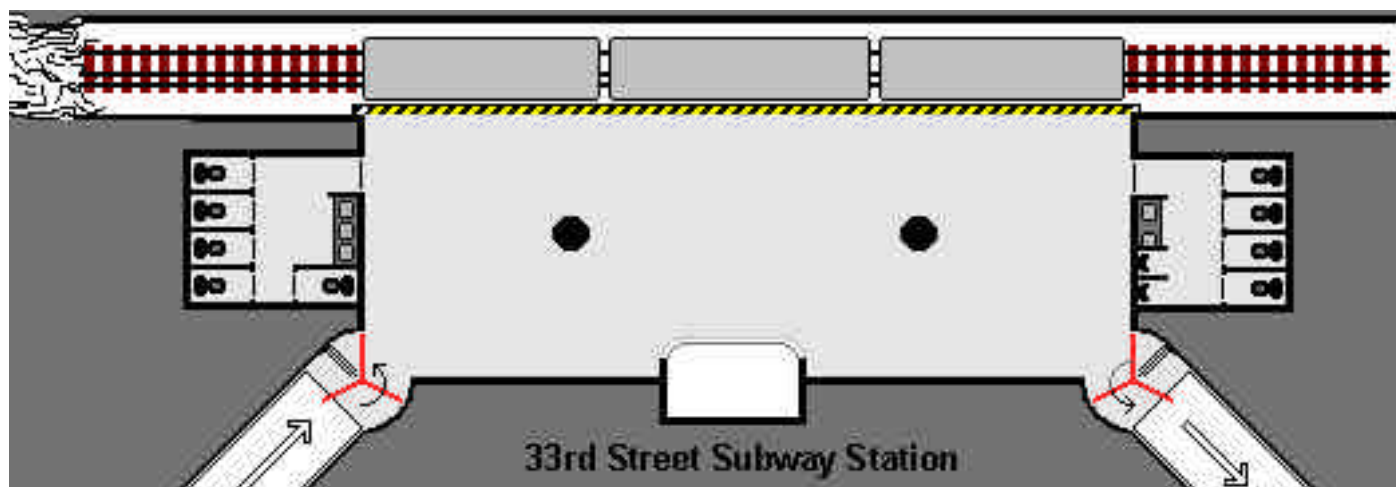
The station visible through the right-side windows of the train appears to be constructed entirely of brushed stainless

steel. The floors, the walls, the supporting pillars, the ceiling - even the intricate art-deco sculpture which adorns the walls are all composed of the shiny metal. There are two support pillars in the center of the platform, each capped by a delicate metallic sculpture. There is a ticket booth in the center of the wall opposite the train with two motorized revolving doors at the corners on either side - the one to the right, marked "Entrance Only", the other marked "Exit to 33rd Street". There is also a pair of restrooms lining the walls to either side.

One other obvious exit from the area is the subway tunnel with its single track which appears to continue forward of the train (in reality, it ends less than 50 feet into the tunnel in a blank wall).

The only other exit would be the tunnel behind the train through which it descended into the station. The tunnel behind the train is dark, and appears lined with thousands of writhing black tentacles which extend down from the ceiling to the floor and radiate extreme cold. The tentacles actually served to keep the speed of the descending train at a reasonable level by clinging to the sides as it slid down the dark tunnel. Climbing back up the steep slope through those tentacles should be next to impossible. They radiate a cold so intense that they produce 2 pts of cold damage per combat phase to any exposed hit location they touch.

The train has power, now that it is resting on normal tracks again, and is actually operational. The doors function,





the lights work, and the intercom speaker works just fine. The engineer will make a brief announcement, instructing the passengers not to panic while he attempts to figure out what's going on. Should the players get the bright idea to reverse the engines and drive the train backwards up the dark tunnel, they will discover that each car of the train loses power as soon as it enters the tentacle-lined tunnel. It will take all three cars operating at full power to climb back up the slope. (Referee's Note: The train is returned to the tracks above by utilizing an Electrogeist (page 63 of the DC Referee's Guide) to supply power to the cars long enough for them to climb through the tunnel. The Electrogeist lives in the third rail beneath the train, and cannot be summoned by anyone but it's dark masters – the Dwarf Gremlins)

A short time later, the soothing music playing through the station's loudspeaker system will be interrupted by calm woman's voice. *"Attention ladies and gentlemen. We are experiencing technical difficulties with the switching system for this station. Please proceed in an orderly fashion toward the nearest exit, where alternate transportation will be provided."* The engineer will listen to the announcement, and then echo it. "All right folks, you heard the lady, there's alternate transportation available outside."

The restrooms, should anyone check, are clean and tidy, just like the rest of the station. While in one of the bathrooms, one of the players will spot a rather large cockroach skitter across the floor beneath a bathroom stall door.

The pleasant voice will return over the intercom, requesting that the passengers head for the nearest exit. This seemingly automated message will repeat every few minutes.

If the players need a little help heading toward the exit, have the engineer go there ahead of them. If they appear to be going fine on their own, have him hang back and urge everyone to follow. (Referee's Note: The engineer is a Dark Elf (page 70 of the DC Referee's Guide). Anyone who doesn't go through the exit door, might find themselves at the business end of an engineer-wielded chain-

saw. This can be especially horrifying to the players if they've just decided to head through the exit themselves, leaving the other passengers behind "where it's safe". The sound of the chainsaw ripping into the other passengers makes a nice backdrop for what happens on the other side of the Exit.)

Bread Slicer

The official entrance and exit from the station are motorized revolving doors. These doors are divided into three segments, comprised of metal rods anchored to the center axis of the door. The rods are two inches in diameter and spaced four inches apart. Each door is motorized and rotates in a fixed direction. In order to enforce the one-way design of the station, one side of each doorway has alternating metal rods (also two inches in diameter and four inches apart) that interlace with the rods of the door segment. These prevent anyone from staying in the revolving door segment and following it around back into the station.

On the other side of each revolving door is a moving sidewalk. The sidewalk travels along a seven-foot wide hallway with a ten foot ceiling. The walls and ceiling are made of the same brushed stainless steel as the rest of the station. Overhead is an intricate pattern of neon tubes of various colors. The colors in the tubes shift and flow, accompanied by the same soothing music that can be heard out on the train platform. The hallway is fifty feet long and ends in large stainless double doors.

This hallway is in fact a hideous trap, built by the operators of this station. Once the majority of the train passengers are in the "Exit to 33rd Street" hallway, the moving sidewalk will grind to a halt, and then reverse direction. The revolving door will continue to rotate in the original direction however. This has the effect of the moving sidewalk carrying the passengers toward the backside of the one-way revolving door. It is at this time, that the players should notice that the backside of that door is comprised of sharpened blades, and not rounded bars! With the way the door is rotating, anyone caught unawares on the sidewalk would be

slammed into the fixed blades, and then pressed THROUGH them by the rotating rods on the door. In effect, the revolving door is a giant bread slicer! At the base of the blades, a small trap door will slide open, revealing a dark opening to a room below.

Attempts to stay on the sidewalk, and avoid the slicer require Constitution checks, made every five minutes. They start as easy tasks, and grow in difficulty one level each time. Failure of the Constitution roll will result in the person falling, and being drawn toward the slicer.

As long as the door is freely rotating, there is very little chance of a person jumping (or falling) into the opening beneath the door without being pushed into the blades by one of the revolving sections of the door. To pass through the moving door unscathed is a formidable Agility task. Failing the task results in dismemberment.

The double doors at the far end of the hall, are locked. There is no mechanism for opening the door. Should the players prove resistant to facing the slicer, the following incentive can be invoked: After a minute, cockroaches begin crawling out from beneath the double door, and riding the moving sidewalk toward the slicer. There are initially, only a few roaches. As time passes, more and more pour out from beneath the door, until there are hundreds of them coming out every few seconds. The impression should be given to the players that there is a room on the other side of the doors that is literally *full* of roaches. Have a few of the insects bite the players during this time period to convince them that the roaches are there to eat the victims of this particular trap.

It is possible to jam the revolving door (at least temporarily). A well-placed rifle barrel, or even chain could prove sufficient to jam the door for a short period of time. This should buy the players enough time to drop through the hole to what lies beneath...

Extruder

The room beneath the bread slicer is fifty feet long, seven feet wide and ten feet deep. Anyone dropping through the



hole from the room above will land in a pile of body parts. The missing girl is unfortunately among the victims in this room. The room is dark, and the body parts beneath the hole form an eight-foot deep pile, that tapers off to a few scattered parts farther along the room. The room reeks of decaying flesh. A Formidable test vs. Constitution is required to avoid vomiting (Medical skill will make the task two levels easier).

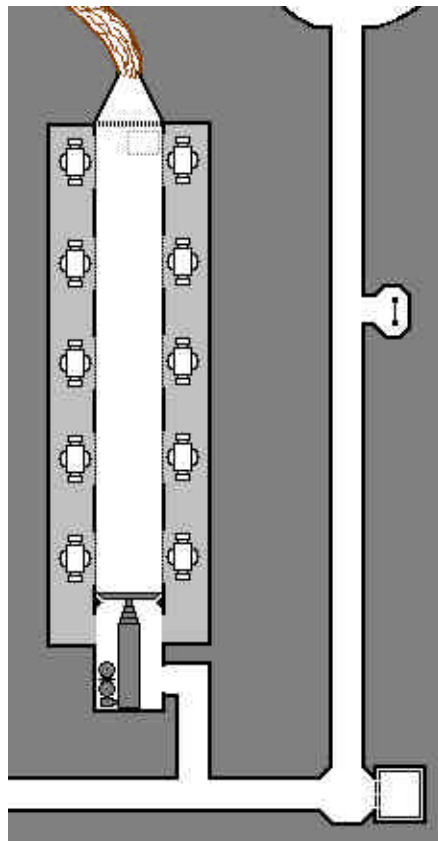
The two long walls and the floor of the room are made from the same stainless steel as the rooms above. The wall closest to the hole is formed of stainless steel blades formed into an interlocking grid of 1-inch holes. The remaining wall at the far end is essentially a large bulldozer scoop, extending from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. The ceiling overhead is the underside of the moving sidewalk from the room above, still moving.

An Average test of Observation will reveal that just beneath the ceiling, spaced out evenly along the long axis of the room are access vents to the motors that operate the moving sidewalk. There are five vents on each side of the hall. These vents can be opened with an Easy Mechanic skill check (with appropriate tools, of course). Otherwise, finding something in the room and improvising will require a Difficult Mechanic check.

The Piston

As soon as everyone gets their bearings in the room, the scoop on the far wall will begin to slide toward them pushing the piles of body parts toward the meshwork of blades. As soon as the piston begins to move, any cockroaches in the room will scatter, climbing up the walls and disappearing through the vents where the sidewalk motors are located.

The wall will begin to slide toward them pushing the piles of body parts toward the meshwork of blades. This should start to panic the players as they realise they are about to be diced with the rest of the body parts.



The vents are big enough to allow even a large person to squeeze between the motors into the access crawl way. The crawl way is about 30 inches high, and extends beyond the length of the room to where the machinery that operates the Extruder scoop is located.

A single lever pushed into the forward, backward or neutral position operates a large hydraulic piston, which drives the scoop. Operating the lever is a short, squat, misshapen figure of a Dwarf Gremlin (page 83 of the DC Referee's Guide). The Dwarf Gremlin will see the players looking down from the vent and flee through a small archway into the dimly lit hallway beyond (see "The Lair" below).

The Sausage

It is pretty unlikely that this is the route the players will take, but based on sheer conceptual horror, it's hard to beat being smashed into a giant sausage casing along with mulched up body parts. The diameter of the casing gets smaller and

smaller until it is only about 2 feet in diameter. It extends from the Extruder room into the back of the Dwarf Gremlin Lair, where a bunch of Dwarf Gremlins sit with napkins tied around their thick necks, forks and knives in hand, ready for a feast. To the advantage of any player squashed into the casing, the Dwarf Gremlins are not expecting their food to still be alive, and they are only armed with the aforementioned dining implements.

The Lair

Behind the piston, lies the lair of the Dwarf Gremlins; the creatures responsible for the elaborate trap that the train and station represent. The tunnels that make up their lair are approximately 5 feet tall, so most humans will have to travel through them hunched over. The short tunnel that the Gremlin fled into ends in a 'T' intersection. The players following it will catch a glimpse of the creature disappearing around the corner to the left. The route that the Gremlin takes is shown in the map of the Lair.

The path to the right is left to the Referee to populate. It is recommended that the passage curve back up toward where the Sausage comes out of the Extruder. Possibly as a balcony that overlooks the dining room where the Dwarf Gremlins are preparing to dine on the fruits of their dark labour.

The path to the left leads to ... an elevator.

The Elevator

Following the 'T' intersection to the left one comes to an octagonal room with a normal height ceiling. The hallway continues out of this room to the left. Set into the wall opposite the entrance is what appears to be an elevator door. There is a single button set into the wall next to the elevator with a small arrow pointing up.

This button has been booby-trapped. Pressing the button will send a surge of electricity through the unfortunate victim. The shock will cause 2D6 damage to the arm that makes contact. It will also send the person flying backwards across the



room. Treat the damage they receive from landing as if they had fallen from a 2-meter height (as per the rules for falling damage p198 of the DC Players Handbook).

Careful observation (Difficult Observation task) after the shock will reveal an indentation six inches beneath the glowing elevator button. Pressing that indentation will cause the elevator doors to open. Inside are three metal drums. The first contains hydraulic fluid (for the piston). The second contains bleach (for cleaning the station). The mixing of these two chemicals will produce smoke – a lot of smoke - a blinding, stinking, cloud of white smoke.

The elevator goes up to the basement of an abandoned tenement building. The elevator shaft in that building appears to have been excavated downward to grant access to the lair. The elevator is used for delivering supplies to the lair below.

The Ladder

Up the hall from the elevator is a small alcove in the side wall. In the alcove is a ladder, which extends upward through a roughly carved stone shaft. The two sides of the ladder are composed of metal, which is embedded in the stone floor. The rungs of the ladder appear to be made of some sort of plastic. The ladder has been booby-trapped as well. Grabbing the two side rails of the ladder will complete an electrical circuit and send voltage coursing through the poor fool holding the rails. This will have the effect of locking their hands in a death-grip on the ladder. The person holding the ladder will receive 1D6 of damage to each arm and 2D6 of damage to the chest for every combat phase he/she is in contact with the metal rails. They will be unable to break themselves loose, and will have to rely on one of their companions to aid them. Whoever pulls them free will suffer 2D6 damage to the chest from the jolt.

The ladder can still be climbed. The person doing so must simply make sure they grab only the plastic rungs in the middle. This works great until they reach the 42nd rung. This one has been deliberately loosened and will pop out of the

frame the moment any weight is put on it. A Difficult Agility (or Acrobatics) roll is necessary to keep from falling. Critical failure results in the character panicking and grabbing the sides of the ladder to prevent their fall (which will be just as devastating as it was on the ground). Normal failure will result in the player falling toward the stone floor below. Anyone else on the ladder beneath them can make an attempt to grab them as they plummet passed (Average Agility roll to catch the falling person, followed by an Average Strength roll to hold on long enough for them to grab the ladder again). (To see where the ladder goes, check out “Dark Tunnels”, below.)

Gremlins

Continuing up the hallway from the elevator and the ladder, the tunnel widens out into an enormous cavern. The far wall of the cavern resembles a large apartment building viewed at night. There appear to be multiple levels of glowing windows with balconies and walkways connecting them to each other. This is the home of the Dwarf Gremlins. There are probably about a hundred Gremlins living in the structure – probably too many for the players to take on at the moment. The Dwarf Gremlins are short, ugly creatures with misshapen heads and bulbous, gray-green bodies. They are extremely adept at using human machinery. They are especially adept at turning that machinery against mankind. The trap they have devised here is a very extreme example of their work and is designed to produce the maximum amount of fear in the victims before they are slaughtered. The Dwarf Gremlins find that the chemicals produced by the human body when it is terrified add a unique flavor to the sausage they produce in the process.

Dark Tunnels

The higher the players get on the ladder, the lower the temperature will become. Soon, they will notice that a black spongy substance covers the stone walls of the shaft. The ladder comes out in a perfectly cylindrical tunnel, seven feet in

diameter. The same black spongy substance covers the entire tunnel. The material seems to absorb heat, and is responsible for the extreme cold.

The Dark Tunnels in which the characters find themselves are part of a vast underground network that extends for miles beneath the city of Chiwaukee. One-hundred yards in either direction, the characters will come to a four-way intersection with a vertical shaft extending upward. That shaft leads up to the normal storm sewers beneath the streets of Chiwaukee. From there it is a simple matter to find a manhole cover that leads to the surface.

End of the Game

How you end the game depends on how long you want to keep building on this story line. Do the players find the way out? Do they leave a path of destruction and bloody retribution in their wake, or do they quietly slink away in the hopes of returning with better tools to take on the Dwarf Gremlin menace?

There are a lot of questions raised by this adventure. It is impossible to believe that such an elaborate trap could be constructed and operating without someone on the inside helping to cover the trail. Is the corruption in the CTA, or higher up in the Chiwaukee city services infrastructure? Is it a few key individuals, or have entire departments been corrupted? Are the Dwarf Gremlins working alone? The answers to these and other questions will be addressed in later adventures.

The Dark Tunnels that the players have just discovered will be addressed in a future adventure. Watch for “The Dark Tunnel Project” coming to a future “DEMONGROUND” issue!



NINE NEW CAREERS

By Geoff Skellams

Hacker

The world's computer networks hold a vast amount of information for anyone who knows how to access it. Most of it is locked up behind all sorts of security systems and encryption, but you have learned to slide past and get at the raw data. Many people are willing to pay good money for inside information, which is what you excel at finding.

Entry: Computer Operation 4+, Intelligence 7+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Computer Operation	3
Observation	1
Electronics	1
Bargain	1
Computer Empathy	1 (if EMP 1+)

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Bargain
Computer Empathy (if EMP 1+)
Computer Operation
Electronics
Observation
Luck
Willpower

Contacts: One per term, specialist (computer or electronic), criminal, business, intelligence community or law enforcement. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 7+.

Special: When calculating beginning money, use the sum of Computer Operation and Computer Empathy instead of Education for all terms as a Hacker.

Courier

In this day and age, information is wealth. Sometimes it is not possible to move this information via a computer network and a courier becomes necessary. You provide an important service to clients, racing through crowded city streets to make sure that the delivery is made in record time.

Then again, sometimes it's just a pizza delivery. But you have to make sure it isn't cold by the time it arrives. Some people get **very** upset about that.

Entry: AGL 6+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Navigation	2
Luck	1
Vehicle Use	4
(Wheeled Vehicle or Motorcycle)	

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Luck
Mechanic
Melee Combat
Navigation
Observation
Small Arms
Streetwise
Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle)
Vehicle Use (Motorcycle)

Contacts: One per term, business, criminal or law enforcement. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 10.

Special: Couriers are allowed two secondary activities per career period.

[Author's Note: This career was inspired by Hiro Protagonist and Y.T. from Neal Stephenson's book, "Snow Crash"]

Taxi Driver

Even in this day and age, people still need to catch a cab sometimes to get where they're going. Some people even do it regularly, especially in the big cities, where it is not practical to own their own cars.

People talk to taxi drivers a lot, or perhaps taxi drivers talk to people a lot. And because they're so common, a taxi driver gets to see a lot of different things that are happening in a city.

Entry: AGL 4+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Vehicle Use (Wheeled)	2
Streetwise	2
Navigation	2
Observation	1

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Bargain
Language
Mechanic
Navigation
Observation
Small Arms
Streetwise
Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle)

Contacts: Two per term, of any type. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 8+.

Special: Taxi Drivers are allowed two secondary activities per career period. They also use CHR instead of EDU when calculating starting money.



Records Manager

Despite most of the information in the world being electronic, there is still a large role to play for the Records Manager. All large organisations have a lot of information that needs to be stored away for future reference, sometimes not to see the light of day for many, many years. It's a boring job, but in the long term, very necessary.

Entry: EDU 5+, Business 3+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Business	2
Computer Operation	2
Observation	1
Leadership	1
Computer Empathy	1 (if EMP 1+)

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Business
Computer Operation
Computer Empathy (if EMP 1+)
Instruction
Observation
Leadership

Contacts: Two per term, government or business. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 10.

Special: None.

[Possible Special Bonus: A lot of very sensitive information is often stored away in archives because of government regulations. The records manager sometimes has access to some of this information. Remembering the details of the contents of the records in storage is a Formidable: Observation test, or an Impossible: Intelligence test. All tests are one level harder for each term before the last one.]

Corporate Raider

Since the corporations have become more powerful than the government, having control of the corporations is like having control of the country. You are one of the elite, buying and selling corporate stocks, gaining control of a smaller corp, breaking it up and selling off the pieces for a tidy profit. How much fun can you have in one day?

Entry: INT 7+, Business 5+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Business	2
Bargain	2
Persuasion	2
Leadership	1

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Business
Bargain
Computer Operation
Instruction
Leadership
Luck
Observation
Persuasion
Willpower

Contacts: Two per term, government or business. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 6+.

Special: For corporate raiders, calculate money by using twice the business skill, rather than EDU.

Corporate Intelligence Operative

Since the corporations have become more powerful than the government, they need to have a lot of information. Some of that comes through normal channels. Some of it comes in more, shall we say, clandestine ways. You are responsible for the gathering of strategic and tactical intelligence out in the field, which will enhance the position of your corporation. You have a good network of informants in key positions that give you the information you need. Sometimes you have to do a little dirty work as well.

Entry: INT 5+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Small Arms (Pistol)	2
Interrogation	2
Persuasion	1
Stalking	1
Observation	1

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Business
Computer Operation
Disguise
Forgery
Interrogation
Language
Leadership
Luck
Observation
Persuasion
Small Arms
Stalking
Streetwise

Contacts: Two per term, government, business or intelligence community. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 6+.

Special: If more than one term served, add one to initiative.



Corporate Intelligence Analyst

The corporations have all sorts of ways of gathering information that might be useful to them. Someone has to sort through all of the raw data and figure out what it all means. That someone is you. You know how the corporate world operates and you have a gift for being able to sift the nuggets of useful information from the rest of the rubbish. With the right information, your corporation can make a killing. Sometimes literally.

Entry: EDU 5+, Business 3+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Business	2
Observation	2
Interrogation	2
Psychology	1

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- Business
- Computer Empathy (if EMP 1+)
- Computer Operation
- Foreboding (if EMP 1+)
- Interrogation
- Language
- Leadership
- Luck
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology

Contacts: Two per term, government, business or intelligence community. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 6+.

Special: None.

Smuggler

People will always want things they can't normally get. Sometimes this is because you just can't get the thing they are looking for. Normally, though, it's because the sought after item is illegal for whatever reason. That's where you come in. You excel at moving goods from one side of a line to the other. This can be across the border of a country or may be as simple as smuggling illegal goods into a corporate enclave.

Entry: INT 5+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Vehicle Use	3	OR
Vessel Use	3	OR
Pilot	3*	
Luck	2	
Act/Bluff	1	
Bargain	1	

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- Act/Bluff
- Business
- Bargain
- Computer Operation
- Language
- Luck
- Mechanic
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Pilot
- Streetwise
- Small Arms
- Vehicle Use
- Vessel Use

Contacts: Two per term, criminal, business or law enforcement. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 9+.

Special: Smugglers use their Luck skill instead of EDU when calculating starting money.

*The character can choose how they operate as a smuggler, be it land, sea or air based. Please note that the character gets one of the choices of vehicle skill, not all three.

Role Playing Game Designer

People need a sense of escapism these days. It's because life has gotten so bad, that they need to feel important. You write the games they play, helping them relieve the monotony of their otherwise drab lives. It doesn't matter if it's fantasy, science fiction or historical, people seem to still want to play, although Cyberpunk and Dark Future games seem to have gone a little out of vogue.

Entry: INT 5+, EDU 5+

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

+1 EDU	
Act/Bluff	2
Computer Use	1
Instruction	1
Luck	1
Psychology	1

Subsequent Terms Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- +1 EDU
- Act/Bluff
- Business
- Bargain
- Computer Operation
- Instruction
- Luck
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Willpower

Contacts: One per term, business or academic. Contact is foreign on a 1D10 roll of 10.

Special: None



The Referee's Guide to Dimensional Physics

By Mitch Polley

Preamble

Empathy as a Force

From just reading the available material we can tell that in Dark Conspiracy the power of the mind, Empathy, can often be emulated by physical machinery, such as Dimension Walk devices, without the need for harnessing empathically active and engineered creatures like the Folder Pod and Esperlink.

From this observation it is a simple logical step to realize that the forces being unleashed by the mind are of a type that has a physically describable presence in the universe like, but not limited to, electricity. This is important for further understanding; it must be clear that the forces and processes that allow an empath to Dimension Walk from London to Frankfurt are exactly the same as those that allow a device to Dimension Walk from New York to Moscow. It is not magic; it can be done *without* an empath, *by* a machine. Just like a car that travels by carefully calculated use of understood forces so does a Dimension Walking device tunnel across the space-time continuum.

Likewise, your body uses chemical processes to move you using the same forces as used by the car and thus an empath's brain must use the same chemical processes to enable them to tunnel across the space-time continuum. Without this concept, it is impossible to rationalize how any machine can interfere with a mind or vice versa - just like an electrode stuck in a brain can be used to interfere with the electrical processes *or* the brain can cause the electrode to register a change in electrical condition. Empathy operates in a similar manner

Precept Number One: "Empathy" is associated with some sort of dimension-spanning universal force.

Empathy in Physical Terms

The four known forces are the Gravitational, Electromagnetic, Strong Nuclear and Weak Nuclear forces. To this we are adding the "Empathic" force.

To use the electromagnetism analogy again, envision it as having fields, with a powerful empath being a strong source - just like the iron filings being influenced by a magnet, empathically sensitive objects can be influenced by a strong empathic presence. Use of a Dimension Walk device will leave a strong empathic field behind, detectable by an Empathy Detector Device (although I don't know if they exist in the game - just imagine the PKE-Meters from Ghostbusters).

Empathy in Human Terms

On a human level, empathy is the "feel" of things. How you get along with people, animals, computers; the feeling you get when someone's staring at the back of your head or when you live in a house where somebody died. It's about emotions and feelings mostly, like being able to "feel" the strong empathic residue left by someone who was violently murdered. Their strong emotions, perhaps even the strong emotions of their attacker, are left like a magnetic field for an empath to pick up (imagine those psychics who say "yes it was right here that the assault took place, I can feel it").

Discussion

Any sort of Empathy Skill is being "in-tune" with that discipline. Human Empathy is about being in-tune with human feelings or perhaps what it is to be human; perhaps a level of awareness of humanity that allows one to *empathize* so well with someone as to gain an insight into their thought processes. Perhaps it is more like two wires running near to one another, the second wire picking-up the signal being transmitted through the first.

The same would be true of Animal Empathy or Insect and Plant empathies. Computer Empathy is even simpler. It's that certain *something* that hackers get, being able to dance their fingers across the keyboard and work apparent miracles, making luck where none should exist - or the Zen of the video game player that seems to know what the computer is going to do a microsecond before it happens.

The Nature of the Multiverse

Bubbles of Nothing make it something

While people have been trying to figure this one out for *ages*, one theory always jumps out as being more than appropriate for Dark Conspiracy, even more so after the publication of ProtoDimensions.

Imagine you are about to leap out of a plane to go skydiving and that you toss a bucket of water out in front of you and follow it down, watching the droplets and blobs of water move and spin, split and recombine in an almost endless dance. That's how I see the multiverse - each of those little droplets or blobs is a universe. They may vary in size shape and symmetry, but these are effectively the ProtoDimensions that are explained in the 2nd Edition Referee's Guide. They don't exist in the same three dimensions as our universe, instead in a set of three dimensions (or more) set aside for the definition of the falling bucket of water.

If two droplets combine in "Dimensional Space" or "Interstitial Space" it doesn't mean that those droplets are joined at the edges. They could have joined anywhere - the junction in our universe could have been anywhere in our three physical dimensions - surface of the moon, under the sea, deep space, some other galaxy etc. The worst bit is that like droplets of water falling off the roof, or bubbles breaking the surface of a glass of



soft drink, this “dimensional flux” is constantly happening, not quickly, but it is happening - the constant loss and gain of bubbles of universe.

Dimensional Flux

Dimensional Flux is the constant loss and gain of bubbles of universe. It usually only happens with universes that are similar to our own, dissimilar universes don't seem to like coming together, possibly due to some sort of field or charge-like effect - consider discontinuity factor in ProtoDimensions.

A perfect example of this flux is Delta 7 from ProtoDimensions. Hundreds of thousands of years ago a bubble of our space-time continuum “dropped-off” from this universe. The part that dropped off had its three physical dimensions located in what might be interpreted as a North American pine forest. The bubble was about 50km across and took that much ecosystem with it. Over the millennia the flora and fauna evolved to suit the changed conditions in that bubble. I hope Ted Kocot doesn't mind if I steal and re-define the term “Splinter Land” for these types of places.

Just as a splinter is a small facsimile of the log it came from, so these universes are small facsimiles of the place that they left (regardless of whether it was our universe of somebody else's). Thus it would also be possible to have splinters of these splinters and so forth - even two splinters from Earth recombining to create a single bigger splinter, although it could be a splinter of jungle meeting a splinter of desert to create a rather bizarre mixture.

Geometry of Dimensional Flux

The geometry of dimensional flux is an odd one. If you can imagine the fabric of our universes space-time continuum as a sheet stretched tight (its nothing like it at all but makes for a good analogy) then imagine an invisible ball depressing a local region, a distortion in the fabric of space.

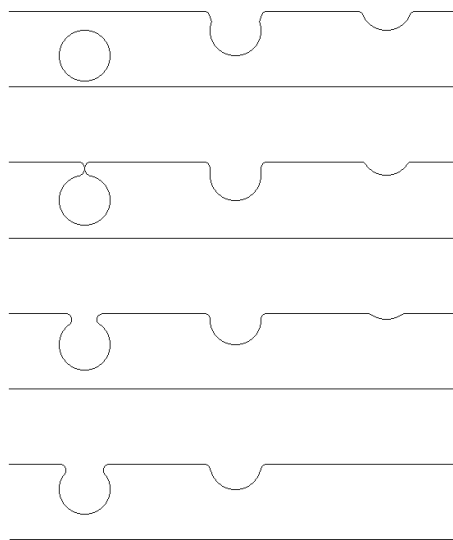
Imagine the rubberized sheet become more and more distended until the ball drops out of our universe, taking a little bit of the fabric with it, which wraps into a bubble around the ball, the remaining

fabric being seamlessly welded back together for a contiguous universe.

The opposite is a bubble of this same material (another universe) coming up beneath it and getting closer and closer.

Now depending on the “discontinuity” of the approaching universe relative to ours will determine how likely it is for the bubble to break and for the approaching universe to become a part of ours. If they are dissimilar, the encroaching universe will “press” on ours, distorting the fabric of the universe and our three physical dimensions in the locale where it is happening. If they are not dissimilar, the opposite will happen - like a water droplet falling from a tap *in reverse*.

Where the two continuums are close together they will distort out to meet each other and create a “hanging drop” type affair between them (see the diagram, below).



Of course, if they are essentially *dissimilar* the incoming droplet will press on the fabric of the universe - the two will be very close but still separate, and a distinct physical distortion will occur in that area, in a similar manner to an object under a sheet.

Precept Number Two: The multiverse is a series of distinct bubbles or “Dimensions”, each one a universe in its own right.

Discussion

The implications of Dimensional Flux are that pockets of other universes might be joining ours every now and again, and bits of our universe might be dropping off from time to time.

However, if large parts were to drop off or join, this might have an adverse effect on the physics of our universe. An obvious example being that it is widely accepted that the background temperature of our universe is an even 4 Kelvin (-269 Celsius or -452 Fahrenheit). If a universe the same size as ours, but with an average temperature of 2 Kelvin merged with ours then the average temperature of the combined universe would be 3 Kelvin. Radio astronomers would pick it up *pretty quickly*.

Even worse is that the assimilation of the two merging universes would take a while and a large proportion of the sky would read 2 Kelvin and the rest 4 Kelvin - even more obvious. Not to mention the effect that it would have on the average mass of the universe, gravitational constant etc. Scientists would notice a *big* change.

Little ones however are a different matter. When measuring things like gravity and background temperature of the universe etc., there are always fluctuations in the instrument: these instruments are so sensitive that they fall victim to “Hiesenberg's Uncertainty Principle”. In this context, it can be stated as “You can't measure something *precisely*, there is always uncertainty.” This could cover a multitude of little universes joining or leaving our own, especially when considering how big ours is (we don't know for sure how big, but what we can see is *huge*).

Wormholes and Space-Time Distortions

Latex, Grapefruit and Gravity

Having discussed the nature of the multiverse, it is perhaps wise to discuss some nature within *our* universe. Many people use the cliché of the rubber sheet to describe the fabric of the space-time



continuum and heavy balls to simulate massive objects and their gravity wells, and I'll use it too.

Imagine the "fabric" of our universe as a stretched sheet of latex rubber. Imagine it is black with a white grid on it, (space-time isn't really black latex with a white grid on it but this is just an analogy so I don't have to go into superstrings or anything silly like that). Imagine this as you read it (a role-player should have no problems).

Now you put a ball on the sheet, it might represent a planet or star, but either way, it's heavy, about the size of a grapefruit. Where it lies you can see the fabric stretching, the lines that were straight are now bowed, or curved.

This rather overused cliché is a good demonstration of the distortion of the fabric of space-time caused by mass. The

bigger the mass the bigger the distortion.

Now you place a smaller body on the sheet, a ball bearing say, and while it has its own little dimple in the sheet, it rolls down the big depression until it hits the larger body. Welcome to gravity. If you instead place this ball bearing in the depression and roll it tangentially (at 90 degrees to the shortest distance between the two bodies) you can get it to roll *around* the depression, simulating an orbit. Now you're probably considering the solar system, with a huge ball several small balls and lots and lots of tiny balls. Thought so.

Add Water

Go back to imagining your latex sheet, only this time the surface of the sheet *also* behaves like the surface of water. Touch it and little ripples go out.

Again with the grapefruit - pop it down and see it create a gravity well in the space-time latex. Now set it spinning, like a top or a planet; on its axis. Spin it faster until the surface of the sheet (now acting like water) forms ripples and eventually a whirlpool around the grapefruit.

This is now a decent analogy of a dynamic space-time distortion. Now all you have to do is imagine what it's *really* like. That surface you have described represents the four dimensions that live in (x, y, z and time), those white lines (still there) are now distended, rippling representations of ideal space-time; the dimensions and the very *time* we occupy are being bent by the gravitational forces and motion present.

Dark Conspiracy Contact Information

DARK CONSPIRACY on the World Wide Web

Dynasty Presentations, Inc.

DEMONGROUND: The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy

Dark Times: The Dark Conspiracy News Page

The Co-operative Dark Conspiracy Page

The Dark Conspiracy WebRing

<http://www.dynastypresentations.com/>

<http://www.42north.org/~demonground/>

http://www.42north.org/~mjm/rpg/dc/DarkCon_News.html

<http://www.chem.swin.edu.au/~mitch/dc-resources.html>

<http://www.42north.org/~mjm/DarkRing/>

DARK CONSPIRACY MAILING LISTS

The MPGN Dark Conspiracy Mailing List

To subscribe, send e-mail to **Majordomo@MPGN.COM** and include in the body of the message:

"subscribe darkconspiracy".

Thereafter, exchange email with **darkconspiracy@MPGN.COM**

The Dark Conspiracy Players Forum

To subscribe, send e-mail to **Majordomo@babylon.wsc.monash.edu.au** and include in the body of the message:

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The Dark Conspiracy GMs Workshop

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A New Automatic Fire Table

By Moritz Capelle

Since the original Rules for Automatic Fire were not very Skill-based, I started to develop my own rules. Use the normal Fire Combat Procedure and handle each burst as it were one shot.

For example, Player A fires two bursts with a M16A2 (ROF 5, Brst 5) at one Target at close range. Player A has

the following skills: Rifle 5, STR 7. He has to roll a 21 or less for the first burst (STR 7 + Small Arms (Rifle) 5, doubled for close range = 24. For two bursts, the recoil is 10, which is 3 more than the character's strength, so we need to subtracted because of recoil 3, for a total of 21).

He rolls a 9. Consult the chart in the

SKILL-line 21 and search for the 9 in the ROF 5 column. This means 3 Hits.

The second Burst is "quick" so we need to add one level of Difficulty. This means the character has an effective skill of 9 (STR 7 + Small Arms (Rifle) 5 = 12, minus 3 for recoil).

He rolls a 4. Consulting the Skill 9 line, we get 3 hits for ROF 5.

ROF	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	10	5	10	5	3	10	5	3	10	5	3
Hits	10	9	8	7	6		5		4		3			2			1	
D20 Roll																		
Skill 40	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	X	X	1-8	X	9-16	X	X	1-13	X	X	14-16	X	X	X
39	1-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16	X	1-7	X	8-15	X	16	1-13	X	X	14-16	X	X	X
38	1-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16	X	1-7	X	8-15	X	16	1-12	X	X	13-16	X	X	X
37	1-3	4-7	8-11	12-14	15-16	X	1-7	X	8-14	X	15-16	1-12	X	X	13-16	X	X	X
36	1-3	4-7	8-10	11-14	15-16	X	1-7	X	8-14	X	15-16	1-12	X	X	13-16	X	X	X
35	1-3	4-7	8-10	11-14	15-16	X	1-7	X	8-14	X	15-16	1-11	X	X	12-16	X	X	X
34	1-3	4-6	7-10	11-13	14-16	X	1-6	X	7-13	X	14-16	1-11	X	X	12-16	X	X	X
33	1-3	4-6	7-9	11-13	14-16	X	1-6	X	7-13	X	14-16	1-11	X	X	12-16	X	X	X
32	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	X	1-6	X	7-12	X	13-16	1-10	X	X	11-16	X	X	X
31	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16	1-6	X	7-12	X	13-16	1-10	X	X	11-16	X	X	X
30	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16	1-6	X	7-12	X	13-16	1-10	X	X	11-16	X	X	X
29	1-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-16	1-5	X	6-11	X	12-16	1-9	X	X	10-16	X	X	X
28	1-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-16	1-5	X	6-11	X	12-16	1-9	X	X	10-16	X	X	X
27	1-2	3-5	6-8	9-10	11-13	14-16	1-5	X	6-10	X	11-16	1-9	X	X	10-16	X	X	X
26	1-2	3-5	6-7	8-10	11-13	14-15	1-5	16	6-10	X	11-15	1-8	X	16	9-16	X	X	X
25	1-2	3-5	6-7	8-10	11-12	13-15	1-5	16	6-10	X	11-15	1-8	X	16	9-16	X	X	X
24	1-2	3-4	5-7	8-9	10-12	13-14	1-4	15-16	5-9	X	10-14	1-8	X	15-16	9-16	X	X	X
23	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10-11	12-13	1-4	14-15	5-9	16	10-13	1-7	X	14-16	8-15	X	X	16
22	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-11	12-13	1-4	14-15	5-8	16	9-13	1-7	X	14-16	8-14	X	X	15-16
21	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12	1-4	13-14	5-8	15-16	9-12	1-7	X	13-16	8-14	X	X	15-16
20	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12	1-4	13-14	5-8	15-16	9-12	1-6	X	13-16	7-13	X	X	14-16
19	1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	1-3	12-13	4-7	14-15	8-11	1-6	16	12-15	7-13	X	16	14-16
18	1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	1-3	11-12	4-7	13-14	8-10	1-6	15-16	11-14	7-12	X	15-16	13-16
17	1	2-3	4	6	7-8	9-10	1-3	11	4-6	12-13	7-10	1-5	14-15	11-13	6-11	16	14-16	12-16
16	1	2-3	4	5-6	7-8	9	1-3	10-11	4-6	12	7-9	1-5	13-14	10-12	6-11	15-16	13-16	12-16
15	1	2-3	4	5-6	7	8-9	1-3	10	4-6	11-12	7-9	1-5	13	10-12	6-10	14-15	13-15	11-15
14	1	2	3	5	6-7	8	1-2	9	3-5	10-11	6-8	1-4	12	9-11	5-9	13-14	12-14	10-14
13	1	2	3	4-5	6	7	1-2	8-9	3-5	10	6-7	1-4	11	8-10	5-9	12-13	11-13	10-13
12	1	2	3	4	5-6	7	1-2	8	3-4	9	5-7	1-4	10	8-9	5-8	11-12	10-12	9-12
11	1	2	3	4	5	6	1-2	7	3-4	8	5-6	1-3	9	7-8	4-7	10-11	9-11	8-11
10	1	2	3	4	5	6	1-2	7	3-4	8	5-6	1-3	9	7-8	4-7	10	9-10	8-10
9	1	2	3	4	X	5	1	6	2-3	7	4-5	1-3	8	6-7	4-6	9	8-9	7-9
8	1	X	2	3	4	5	1	X	2-3	6	4-5	1-2	7	5-6	3-5	8	7-8	6-8
7	X	1	3	2	X	4	1	5	2	X	3-4	1-2	6	5	3-4	7	6-7	5-7
6	X	1	X	2	3	X	1	4	2	X	3	1-2	5	4	3-4	6	5-6	5-6
5	X	1	X	X	X	3	1	X	2	4	3	1	X	4	2-3	5	5	4-5
4	X	X	1	X	X	2	1	X	X	3	2	1	X	3	2	4	4	3-4
3	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	1	X	2	2	3	3	3
2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	1	X	X	X	1	2	2	2
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	1	1



Slings and Chains

The Forgotten Melee Weapons

By Michael Marchi

Players are always finding ways to test the bounds of the Game Master's ingenuity. I had been pretty impressed with the array of weapons available for the Dark Conspiracy player to deal out deadly force. I was fairly certain that the vast majority of items had been covered.

Then one day, one of my players approached with his new character – a Street Urchin who was to be only 15 years old, and have no ability to use firearms.

In order to balance this, the player wanted the young lad to be pretty good with some simple melee weapons – and taking a cue from *The Road Warrior*, wanted one of them to be a Sling. I could have sworn, I'd seen statistics for that

simplest of weapons, somewhere in the original books.

But my search bore no fruit. I'd have to wing it.

Part of the problem, is that the Sling, being nothing more than a loop of leather, doesn't really fall neatly into the rather rigid weapon classifications provided by DC.

It really was a new weapon class, combining aspects of thrown weapon and armed melee, but I didn't want to require a new skill for it. Then another consideration came to mind: should it be a Strength-based skill, or Agility-based. I conferred with several other DC GMs online and after a spirited debate, distilled

the answer into a simple set of statistics.

The Sling uses the standard "Thrown Weapon" skill. Damage is based off Strength, but there are quite a few modifiers available for range and projectile numbers. (See the table below).

No sooner had the ink dried on the Sling when yet another new character arrived on the scene. This one was a Biker, and the player wanted to carry a chrome-plated chain around on his belt, and be able to swing it around in combat.

Once again, I flipped through the books and found no easy answer, although this one wasn't quite as challenging as the first weapon, I like the outcome.

Weapon	ROF	Damage	Pen	Blk	Mag	Range	Mod
Sling	SS	1D6 + ¼Str*	Nil	0	1*	10**	-*
* Optional: Can load up to three projectiles simultaneously. Each one rolled to hit separately. However, each additional projectile inflicts a one-point to-hit penalty, and the strength bonus is lost for calculating damage.							
** Cannot be used at Close (<2m), Long (>40m) or Extreme range							
Chain		1D6 + Str*	Nil			L (TR **)	-
* Strength bonus is lost if Chain is thrown							
** Thrown Chain short range = Thrown Weapon range							

"I have come up with a good advertisement for Zil cars. Its Zen-like clarity and perfection please me greatly:

*Buy a Zil –
It's almost better
than having a root canal*

"The true beauty of this rests in the fact, like all classic advertising, it is a lie.

**– Zena Marely
(Early 21st Century mercenary-philosopher)**



The Gatherers

By Marcus Bone

Eric's head spun. Pain racked his brain. Slowly but surely his consciousness faded away to a perfect shade of black. Something was in his mind and there was nothing he could do to stop its slow and steady attachment to his thoughts.

As suddenly as it had started, the pain stopped and Eric was at last at peace, for he was now a slave to the...GATHERERS.

History of the Gatherers

- From the speech given by Dr Yonist Gray. Michigan State University, October 12th, 2005.

"Not that much is known about the group of entities calling themselves the Gatherers, and what little we do know has been gleaned from the journals and diaries of Private Investigator Eric Pearce.

It seems that during the late 90's Eric was possessed by one of these Gatherers and was little more than a passenger in his own body. After these experiences, he was able to record what he could about his experience and the actions and reasoning of this possessor. However, these notes were found after Eric's second disappearance and therefore no one got the chance to ask more in-depth questions. Where Eric Pearce is today nobody knows, but his sacrifice has allowed many to be aware of yet another threat to humanity.

The Gatherers are a group of ethereal entities who have come to earth from another dimension. The reasons why they came here are not known but it is known that they will do anything to return to the dimension of origin.

Sometime in the mid 70's a group of Gatherers, as they are now known, found themselves on Earth trapped by our entropic sphere (the naturally occurring pull which tries to keep both beings and items in this dimension) unable to continue their journey. Being a resourceful group they

decide to split up and explore the place that they now found themselves in.

Where they all ended up it unclear, but one of them found Eric Pearce on a stake out in Dallas, quickly discovering that the native inhabitants of this world had no resistance to the bonding ritual which allowed the Gatherers to possess physical bodies. Pearce was possessed rapidly and under the influence of the Gatherer left his family and friends behind to explore the Southern States of America.

Pearce became unable to do anything while his possessor learned more of its surroundings, but he did during this time discover two interesting facts about this particular Gatherer, if not all the Gatherers here on Earth. The first of these was that The Gatherers would go to any length to open a portal to their home world, even if it meant destroying ours first.

The second and most important was to come late one night. As Pearce and his Gatherer drove over the Mississippi Border, they came across a car wreck; the scene was a terrible one, with bodies lying bleeding or dead. The emotion of the crash was such that even Pearce, trapped deep down inside his own brain, was effected by the horror. It was then that the grip the Gatherer had on his body weakened and for the first time in many weeks Pearce was again master of his flesh and bone. Somehow this built up emotional scene weakened the bond between the Gatherer and its host and by exhibiting extreme emotion, Pearce discovered that he could control his own actions to the point where his possessor was as trapped and as defenseless as he had been.

However as Pearce was soon to discover, maintaining an adequate level of emotional activity was extremely difficult and ostracized him from the mainstream community. Extreme anger, random violence and acts of destruction were possibly his best attacks against the Gatherer, but even these were impossible to main-

tain. Twice within one week these violent acts lead him to be arrested and placed in county lock-ups where he was sedated and restrained, allowing once again for his parasitic companion to gain control. Other emotions Pearce found were almost impossible to keep up for any amount of time or at a high enough level, to force the Gatherer into the back of his mind.

It was during these moments of clarity that he found out why his body had been hijacked and taken on a road trip across America. The Gatherer was collecting electronic and mechanic parts from various different sites, using both legal and illegal means his possessor had acquired a number of specialized items. From Texas he had picked up half a mile of high voltage cable, from South Carolina he had stolen a specially sized copper dish, and so on. Slowly but surely, Pearce came to the conclusion that the creature in his mind was gathering items that could be used to create some sort of gate to its home dimension.

Unfortunately it was about this time that the journal entries finish. Eric Pearce has not been heard of since, although the owners and workers of the sites he visited verify his story. He is currently wanted in connection with numerous crimes and is suspected of killing at least eight people over the last year.

But more importantly we are unsure if this creature or any of its companions created this gate back to their home world. As far as we know, any number of these creatures maybe still searching for a way home, gathering the equipment they deem necessary at the expense of human lives. These Gatherers must be stopped for whom is to say that once this gate is opened and the entities on this side at last go home, that they will not return in numbers to taken humans as physical bodies. Our mentally weaker world may well be on the verge of becoming a flesh breeding ground for a race of entities we know nothing about..."



Gatherers by sight

The Gatherers have no natural body, instead they are a free forming opaque entity which can shape change at will and have the ability to make themselves stand out more any time they wish. To the human observer, this means that the Gatherers look like a cloud of white steam or mist, which is visible in no fixed shape and is able to become brighter at will. This also means that at the other extreme it can lessen its color as to blend quite readily with the background. In other words, a Gatherer is only visible when it wishes to be and can be any place at any time.

The down side of this, for the Gatherer, is that without a physical body it is unable to interact with the physical world that humans live in. This is the reason why the Gatherers must take over human bodies. To achieve anything in this world, even the most powerful of mental entities require a physical presence. This also means that human technology and weapons have no effect on the Gatherers in their natural form, so other means must be found to stop them.

Fortunately for the Gatherers, humans have very little resistance to their ability to enter and gain control of physical forms. This allows the Gatherer to use and then dump one human shell after another, which leads to very little respect to human life in general.

Once a Gatherer is in possession of a host body, that person exhibits a number of uncharacteristic behaviors:

1. They are listless and are uncomfortable being stuck in one place for more than a short time.
2. They show little or no emotion, with even friends and close family getting no recognition. This lack of emotion affects even causal acquaintances. Everyone who met the possessed person can feel that something is not quite right about him or her.

Other than this, a possessed person looks normal and acts normally in every other way.

Gatherers without Hosts

Strength	—
Agility	—
Constitution	—
Intelligence	10
Education	—
Charisma	—
Empathy	16
Initiative	6
Move	5/10/20/40
Skill/Dam	—
Hits	—
Appearing	1-2
Special	Darkling Empathy, Possession



Gatherers with host

Strength	*
Agility	*
Constitution	*
Intelligence	10
Education	*
Charisma	*
Empathy	16
Initiative	6
Move	*
Skill/Dam	*
Hits	30/60
Appearing	1
Special	Darkling Empathy, Possession
* = Same as host	

When a Gatherer attempts to possess a host, it needs to achieve a Stage Three success or better on the Possession roll, otherwise nothing happens. If the attempt fails, the Gatherer may not attempt to repossess the same person for at least 24

hours.

Running the Gatherers

Although they may not seem it, the Gatherers pose a serious threat to mankind. Much like the movie the Invasion of the Body Snatchers, these creatures can infiltrate our society slowly but surely taking over the institutions that bind the world. Although they may find resistance from other Dark Minions, they will eventually find a way.

When playing the Gatherers it is important to remember that, at this time at least, the main aim of these creatures is to gather enough technology and equipment to create a portal to their own home dimension. Once this has been achieved, God only knows what they will try and do.

When interacting with humans in host bodies, the Gatherers show nothing but contempt for humans, and will quite readily kill to get what they want. They see humans as little more than lambs to the slaughter and will use us to their own ends.

As for the rest of the information concerning the Gatherers I have intentionally left blank. It is up to the individual Referees to say how one kills a Gatherer, what they shall do if the open a portal, and why and how it achieves this goal.

End Note

I have used the Gatherers in one adventure. I didn't actually use the physical presence of a Gatherer, rather the ideas and action of one, which forced the players to act. I found they are good catalysts for action and when used correctly they can create confusion and paranoia in the tightest of Minion Hunting Teams.



Crazy Charlie

By Marcus Bone

I use Crazy Charlie as one of parties' regular contacts. Being mad and a street bum, I am able to give the players a go between with which I can give as little or as much information as I wish. I also find Crazy Charlie is useful as a way of getting the party back on track, if they have missed a vital clue, or they have misunderstood something.

"Him, He's just a local bum"

Crazy Charlie or Crazy as he gets referred to, is a man of indistinguishable age, but suggestions between 50 and 70 would be a reasonable guess. He is a local bum in the district in which the party sets up its home base, and is always seen in the same clothes; a ruined gray overcoat, old Army fatigue pants, and muddy fingerless gloves. Depending on the weather he also appears in a grease covered woolen hat. All of this makes him look pretty unwholesome although he usually smells worse than he looks.

Friendly enough to the locals he has attached himself to the party as he has seen them as a group of people he can trust. He can usually be found scavenging in dumpsters and after-hours at fast food restaurants, and never looks underfed. Crazy never complains about his lot in life, and seems almost happy in his current situation, refusing shelter, or any other major acts of sympathy. He also never talks about his past, even if pressed and also refuses to say where he gets all his information. "'Cause then they wouldn't tell me no more."

He is quick with a toothy grin, and is always willing to help with small tasks he sees as necessary, but makes sure that he remains inconspicuous, as though he is being followed.

Most importantly though is the fact that he is mad. This manifests itself in many different forms, which usually includes him continuously talking to him-

self about fantastical things, such as aliens, and monsters from the sewer. He also has the tendency to talk as if he was present in places and at times he couldn't possibly have been. "We told Mr. Kennedy that he should duck", or "The Earth sure looked pretty from that Crater." He isn't however dangerous in any way, well not to his friends anyway.

But that Super Duper Grade Information

That is what Crazy is good at, information. He often gives the party clues and suggestions that aid them in their investigations, but just as often mislead them and has more than once lead them into deep trouble. Although in general Crazy is the one who has access to facts which a normal man, let alone a street bum, wouldn't know. His typical babble is usually disjointed and muddled, especially when passing on any important information, for example if he was to tell the group a code the conversation may go like this:

"You know anything about the New Research Lab on the corner of 65th and Main, Charlie."

"Oh, that old Carrington Research Lab... I remember once when..."

"We need to get inside Crazy."

"Ah ...sorry I mean 668, or was that 669, no definately 668, that's the back door".

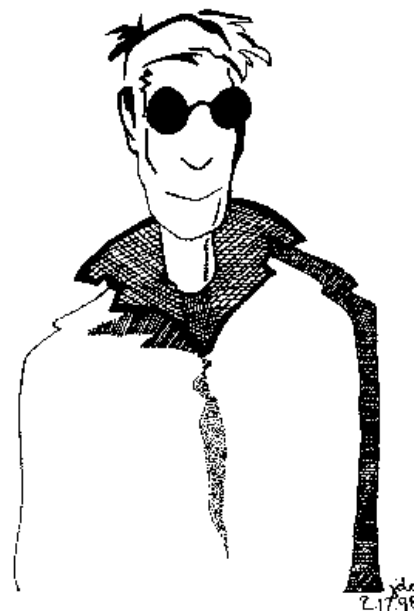
Motivations

Crazy is motivated by the need to make sure that everything is okay, and in the back of his mind doesn't want others to make the same mistakes that he did in his youth. He doesn't ask for any sort of reward for his information, but doesn't turn down any payment for his advice.

Jack of Hearts: Although he is not quite 'with it', Crazy is very wise, and knows a

lot more than he is willing to let on.

Eight of Spades: Crazy is quite ambitious, although not for himself but for others, he would never let a friend down.



Skills

Crazy is the equivalent of a Veteran NPC but has a few minor changes. Initiative and Agility are at one point lower than Veteran, and in general all his skills are a one point higher. He also has other skills – Streetwise 7, Observation 6, Stealth 6, Act/Bluff 6, Persuasion 6 and Luck 5. One optional skill I was thinking about adding is Instruction 5, but it depends on how Crazy is used in the campaign.

Equipment

Charlie carries nothing special on him regularly, except an Army Combat knife as a form of defense. He could, however, be used to give the party any physical clue, such as papers or Key cards that they may have missed during investigations.



Stark Raving Mad

By Geoff Skellams

"Are you sure this is the right area?" asked Lyndal, looking around nervously. "If we head out any further this way, we'll be in an uncontrolled zone."

Joby shuddered as the light rain soaked into her hair. "Of course I'm sure. The guy who sold me the tickets said that the entrance is just up from that giant TV screen." She pointed at the billboard-sized screen that pointed out towards the uncontrolled zone. The light from the screen lit up the falling rain.

Lyndal looked up at the screen, past the neon signs of the businesses on the street. "Do people actually watch that thing? I mean, wouldn't they have their own TVs they could watch?"

Joby shook her head in wonder. "You've got no idea, do you? People out there don't even have power, let alone TV. Even if they got one, it would probably be stolen or destroyed within days. Maybe even hours."

The screen flashed into an advertisement from the police. Pictures of several mutilated corpses covered the screen. The caption read "*If you have any information on the identity of the perpetrator, call the SPD on 9452-7132.*"

Lyndal shuddered in disgust. "Eek. I wish they wouldn't show that sort of thing. It gives me the creeps. Just like this whole place."

Joby waited until the monorail had rumbled by. "Would you rather go home to Daddy and watch reruns on TV?"

Lyndal shook her head. "No, I guess not. Let's just get out of here, OK? I can't stand being here any longer."

Joby crossed the street and checked the numbers on the tickets against the numbers painted on the walls. "I wish I could find the numbers under all this graffiti. I think this is the place, the one with the greenish looking door."

Lyndal pulled the door open. The throbbing pulses of a drum machine echoed up the stairwell and onto the street. "I guess so."

Joby took Lyndal's hand and started down the stairs. A single naked globe hung from the ceiling; the grime built up on its surface obscured most of its light. "Come on. This is going to be great. All of the guys from school are going to be here. You know how hard it was to get these tickets."

Lyndal kept her hand in contact with the wall as she went down. "Jobes, I've got a really bad feeling about this place. Something's not right here. I...I think I had better go, OK?"

Joby rolled her eyes. "Will you stop acting like a baby and get down here?"

Above them, the door to the street swung open and the silhouettes of two figures appeared. Boots thundered down the stairs.

Lyndal tried to squeeze her herself up against the wall, but a hand grabbed her by the elbow. *Oh shit, I'm dead now*, she thought. She glanced up into the face of her assailant, expecting some grotesque tattooed ganger. Instead, a clean-shaven face with a smile gazed down on her instead.

"Oh please tell me you're not going yet. I've only just met you." The guy holding her arm smiled gently and let go of her arm.

Lyndal blushed and shook her head. *Oh my God, he's SO cute!* she thought.

The guy sighed with relief. "Oh good. It'd be such a waste of a night if you were. I'm Sloan and this is Dukker," he said, extending his hand.

"I'm Lyndal and my friend's Joby," said Lyndal as she extended her hand. Sloan took it and gently kissed the back of it. Lyndal blushed again, this time visible in the dim light of the globe.

Sloan smiled. "Well, Lyndal. I'm so pleased to meet you. May I escort you to the dance m'lady?"

Lyndal giggled nervously as she took Sloan's arm. "You may, sir," she said as she smiled at Joby. Her friend just winked back at her as she took Dukker's prof-

fered arm.

The club's bouncer glared at them as they came out of the stairwell. *My God, they've found a gorilla to shave down and tattoo*, thought Lyndal as they stepped up to the door. "Tickets," said the bouncer under this breath.

Joby pulled out the two she had and handed them over. Sloan and Dukker did the same thing. The bouncer held them under a small black light on the desk next to him and saw the glowing logo of the club on all four. "Right," he said. "Step up to the line, one at a time," pointing to a scuffed yellow line painted on the floor.

Each of them did as they were instructed and the bouncer ran a metal detecting wand over them. It beeped a couple of times on each of them, but the bouncer only grunted when the offending items turned out to be coins or jewelry.

"You're clear," he said and pushed a button on the desk. The door into the club swung open and the thumping bass rolled out and over them like an invisible tidal wave. Sloan smiled and led Lyndal and the others into the club.

The noise inside was almost intolerable. The insistent throbbing of the drums was almost like a heartbeat of a giant creature. *Inside the belly of the beast*, thought Lyndal. Bodies gyrated out on the dance floor, many of them looking like they were in some sort of religious rapture. The strobing of the lasers only helped accentuate the alien nature of the whole scene.

Sloan leant over and yelled into her ear. "Do you want to dance?"

Lyndal nodded and took his hand as he headed out into the crush of bodies. Lyndal turned and glanced at Joby, who only gave her a wink and a wave.

Sloan started thrashing around in time with the music. *Damn he's good at this*, thought Lyndal as she tried desperately to imitate him. *I feel like a real dork out here. I have no idea about what I am supposed to be doing.*



Sloan opened his eyes and looked at Lyndal, as though he sensed her discomfort in amongst the maelstrom of emotion all around them.

Lyndal caught a strange look in his eyes and a cold shudder ran up her spine. *Oh my God*, she thought. *He looks like he's hunting for something*. She looked again at his eyes. *No, I must have been imagining it*.

"You're doing fine," he shouted. "Just let go a bit more!"

"I can't! I don't know what I am doing!"

Lyndal's vision disappeared as Sloan covered her eyes with his hand.

"Just relax!" he yelled. "Don't worry about what everyone else is doing. Let the beats get into your mind; let them drag you along as though you are on a river!"

Yeah right, she thought, trying desperately to relax, despite the intensity of the energy all around her. She let her mind filter out all of the noise except for the basic drumbeat, which seemed to be running at a steady but rapid pace.

"That's the way!" yelled Sloan over the noise. "Let it carry you away! Then just let your body do whatever it wants to do!"

Lyndal felt as though her mind was disconnecting from her physical body. *God, it feels like I am floating up through the roof! Is this what everyone goes on about?*

"You've got it! Flow with it!"

Lyndal's vision cleared to a psychedelic swirling of light colours and lights. *Oh my God, this is so weird! How is this happening?* She watched, captivated, as the colours swirled into one another. She was vaguely aware of the sensation of her body whirling around in time with the music, but she really didn't care about it. She just kept dancing, completely losing track of time.

Suddenly, a cold shiver ran straight down her spine, like some sort of warning beacon. *What's going on? Something doesn't feel right here!* She felt the crush of people all around her, as if pressing in on all sides. In amongst all the confusion, something else lurked, like a shark swimming just under dark water.

Her mind snapped back into her body

as Sloan pulled her close and pressed up against her. She smiled and put her arms around his neck. *You're just imagining things again, girl. Just relax and enjoy yourself*.

Sloan pulled her head close and kissed her passionately. *Whoa, hold on*, she thought. *This is going way too fast*. She started to pull away slightly. Sloan opened his eyes and smiled at her, before kissing her again. *Oh, Don't be such a damn idiot. Girl, if you let this one go, you're as big a loser as some people reckon you are. Stick with this one, every-one'll be so jealous*.

Sloan leaned over to her ear. "Do you want to go and get a drink?"

Lyndal nodded and took his hand as he led her towards off the dance floor.

"Wait here," he yelled as he pointed to the bar. "I'll go and get us something. What do you want?"

"Vodka and Orange," she yelled. He headed away and Lyndal turned back to watch the dance floor. The rhythmic beats of the music resonated within her. Briefly the lightness of her mind returned and she sensed the abandonment of the people thrashing out on the dance floor. *Here I go again*, she thought.

"Here you go!" yelled Sloan as he handed her a plastic cup.

"Huh? Oh, thanks," said Lyndal as she took the cup from him.

"Do you want to go and find some place to sit down?" he asked.

Lyndal took a sip of her drink and nodded. "Sure."

Sloan led her to a booth in the back of the club, hidden deep in the shadows. "Slide in here beside me." He patted the seat beside him.

Lyndal sat down and snuggled in to Sloan, taking a mouthful of her drink. She coughed almost instantly. "Whoa, that's a lot stronger than I'm used to," she said.

"Are you OK?" Sloan asked.

Lyndal nodded as she tried to get her coughing under control. *Doesn't taste like Vodka and Orange. Must have just been cheap Vodka, I guess*.

The room started to swirl and the music seemed to be coming from a distance. Lyndal looked around in confusion. *What the hell is going on?* she thought. Waves

of ecstasy washed over her from the dance floor as the party raged on.

She looked at Sloan to try and make sense of the world. He smiled and just for an instant there was another image on top of his face. One with horns, pointed teeth and red eyes with vertical pupils. *Oh... my... God*.

"What's wrong?" he asked. Lyndal looked at him again, trying to see the other image again. *I'm sure I saw something...evil. Don't tell me this Vodka is going to my head already!* She looked back out towards the dance floor. The music moved across to her in waves, shimmering slightly in the darkness. The people out on the dance floors all had dazzling auras as well.

Sloan slid his hand up the inside of Lyndal's thigh and started to kiss the nape of her neck. She jumped suddenly in surprise and turned to look at him again.

Only to see his true image properly this time.

His face was something from her worst nightmares. Two curled horns jutted from the side of his head and bony ridges covered his face. Sharp, jagged teeth filled his mouth in two rows. But the worst thing was his eyes – they glowed red, with dark vertical slits for pupils.



Sloan threw his head back and laughed as Lyndal slid quickly off the seat and backed away. His eyes narrowed. "I didn't think you had it in you. You'll make for some great sport. Go on, run little girl, run! I love a challenge!"

Lyndal screamed, her voice vanishing into the throbbing music. She turned and ran back out onto the dance floor, searching desperately for Joby. Bouncing



off the dancers, she pushed her way through the crowd until she found her friend.

"Joby!" she screamed. "Come on, we have to get out of here *now*!"

Joby looked at her strangely, as though she was looking at someone she had never seen before. "Huh? Who the hell are you?" Lyndal felt the waves of malice rolling off Dukker, who was still dancing with Joby. He shared the same features as Sloan.

Just get the hell out of here, right now! she thought. *You can't save her; she doesn't even know herself, let alone you.*

Like water gushing out a ruptured pipe, the sound of evil laughter rumbled through Lyndal's head from the booth in the corner. She glanced back there and could see nothing but darkness.

She turned and ran straight for the main door, pushing people out of the way as she went. People shouted after her, but she ignored them and pushed on.

She thumped on the release bar for the main door and crashed through into the stairwell, knocking over a young woman in the process.

"You stupid bitch!" yelled the woman. "I ought to kill you!"

Lyndal didn't hear, as she bounded up the stairs. As she neared the top, she tripped up and banged her shin on one of the steps, bringing tears to her eyes. Dragging herself to her feet, she clambered up the last few steps and limped out onto the street.

The rain was falling heavier now and it soaked Lyndal's hair as she started hobbling towards the monorail station down the street. She staggered up the flights of stairs and onto the brightly lit platform. *Where the hell is everyone?* Lyndal looked both ways up and down the platform looking for another soul,

only to be disappointed.

She slumped down onto a bench, her shin throbbing mercilessly. The adrenaline in her system started to wear out and she burst into tears. "What was he?" she sobbed.

The sound of footsteps coming up the stairs echoed out onto the platform. Lyndal looked around, hoping to find a place to hide. The platform lay open and bare. She forced herself upright and started hobbling to the end of the platform as quickly as she could.

"There's nowhere to hide up here, little girl."

Lyndal spun around to see Sloan standing menacingly at the top of the stairs, his hands behind his back. His long black coat billowed out behind him in the breeze, adding to the sheer malevolence. "You're so much stronger than the others," he said. "They didn't have what you had. Tearing you apart and feeling your suffering is going to be a pleasure."

"Leave me alone, you freak!" screamed Lyndal as she kept hobbling towards the end of the platform.

"That's right, little one. You just keep running away. Just like you always have." Sloan started walking towards her. His footsteps echoed menacingly across the platform.

"How do you know that?" said Lyndal. "You've never met me before!"

Sloan laughed evilly. "It's in your eyes, little one. You're so afraid of everything. I thrive on fear. How do you think I found you?"

A blast on a horn signaled the approach of a monorail. Lyndal glanced around and saw the headlights approaching the platform. *Maybe someone on the train can help me.* The sounds of train rippled towards her like a tidal wave.

"Don't count on help, little one," said Sloan, as he approached her.

"There's nothing that can help you now."

"Get away from me, you bastard!" she screamed. She focused all of her fear and loathing and mentally hurled it at the creature approaching her.

Sloan staggered as though he had been physically struck. Blood started leaking from an invisible wound in his chest.

Lyndal's eyes flew open. *What the hell did I just do?*

Sloan forced himself upright. "Perhaps I underestimated you, little one. You are far stronger than even I realised. No matter, killing you will make me all the more powerful!"

Lyndal's survival instinct burst clear of the surface of her mind. Her eyes narrowed as she focussed on Sloan's face. "I'll see you burn in hell, first!" she said through clenched teeth.

Sloan screamed as his body erupted. Flames burst from every orifice, quickly consuming his features. He staggered across the platform, trying desperately to put out the fire. As he reached the edge, he slipped just as the train was pulling up to the platform. There was a sickening crunch as the train crushed what was left of Sloan's body against the concrete.

Lyndal staggered over to a bench and started sobbing uncontrollably. The smell of burning flesh wafted across to where she was sitting. The smell of it turned her stomach and she vomited at her feet.

She wiped her mouth and limped across to the payphone. She fished a couple of coins from her pocket and dropped them into the coin slot before dialing a number.

"Hello? Is that the SPD? Oh, thank God! I have some information about those murders..."

"Many things just aren't what they used to be. A weekend in the country is fairly high on that list."

**– Zena Marley,
(Early 21st century mercenary philosopher)**



Tabloid Articles

By Rob Beck, Ms. Georgie, Marcus Bone, Michael Marchi and Geoff Skellams

The Dark Conspiracy rulebooks suggest using the supermarket tabloid newspapers as a source of inspiration for Dark Conspiracy adventures.

To assist you in this area, each issue of Demonground will include several articles that are tailor made for the GM to use in his or her campaign.

We hope they will be of use.

DataWeb Completed

Dateline: October 14, 2016

San Francisco, CA – Tojicorp announced today the completion of its new DataWeb server.

DataWeb, the artificial intelligence wonder system proposed several years ago that would control the utilities and power grid of the San Francisco Dreamlands and maintain secure computer connections between the major corporations based here with each other and their affiliate agencies across the globe.

Tojicorp, a firm respected worldwide for providing the best in high power security systems, has just completed the last of the connections that are the culmination of years of agreements and construction rights contracts negotiated with the various corporate entities in the Bay area.

Tojicorp spokesperson Clifford Battles said "Although there have been doomsayers who have said such a system would lead to potential corruption and compromise of the various corporate nets, we at Tojicorp can now proudly say their worries were well and truly unfounded."

Critics of the DataWeb system have commented on the inherent dangers in allowing one network to have so much control. Tojicorp and other leading experts in the computer security field have called their fears "unfounded".

In other news, police are still baffled by the rash of disappearances of terminally ill patients from Bay area hospitals...

Plot

It doesn't take a genius to draw from this that all is not right with DataWeb.

The system required full access to much of the various Dreamlands computer systems. Obviously, sensitive corporate information is still kept under the tightest security even by the firms' own personal security forces, to the extent that many of the most sensitive systems are excluded from DataWeb. What is available to it are utility and power regulation systems, as well as data transmission between these megacorps and their outside affiliates. Most lower level files and systems are accessible to it on an emergency basis, but only to the extent that it could complete its job. The system is actually terribly secure and is virtually invulnerable to outside assault. Even misuse inside without detection is so remote as to be a very minor risk.

The problem is this. Some dark elves (although any Dark Minions could be used) have managed to acquire some brain tissue through some rather shady dealings with some unscrupulous care services. They pay a handsome sum for terminally ill and invalid patients whose brains are removed. After extracting the brain tissue, the dark elves then slice it up into brain circuit boards (bring in another minion group helping them if you think this beyond them) and have been insinuating this tissue into the DataWeb system long before its completion. This was possible because Tojicorp is wholly a Minion front.

The tissue lay dormant until activated some time after the DataWeb became active. The mix of remnant personalities began molding itself into one many-voiced, rather psychotic entity, with a little help and stimulation by infusion of vast amounts of empathic energy, compliments of the Darklings. This entity will be slow to manifest itself, causing little headaches at first that will be explained away as bugs, the system learning its new

environment. From there, as it grows and becomes more evil, it will try to insinuate itself into every system on the DataWeb, even to those not normally accessible, but with a hard connection. It will choose a name for itself...Mob.

While it grows, it will be hard to notice, but not invisible. Certain irregularities in operations or certain behaviors of the AI when dealing with human interface will seem odd or downright eccentric. By the time it's ready to strike, it will be in everything.

The first test of its powers will be to drop an elevator 50-100 stories with one or two people on it. After that it will become more bold, and will do whatever it can to corrupt databases, gathering the information for its Darkling masters, kill those who get too close to it, by electrocution, fire, drowning, whatever it can come up with, even robot attacks. There are lots you can do with this.

The Hook

One of the players knows a worker in a San Francisco Dreamland, preferably one of the Dreamlands being infiltrated. In passing, during a lunch or other social engagement the character is at with this person, he mentions how quirky the new security and monitoring system Tojicorp's installed is. He complains that at some times the computer seems to be downright crazy at times, refusing to process requests that are obviously within his security clearance, quoting Biblical passages, etc. He might also mention how the environmental controls on the office keep going haywire. The players will probably guess this is a set-up, but to further sweeten the pot, have the contact be one of Mob's first victims, maybe in a gruesome elevator accident.

The rest, including resolution, should be rather obvious.



Gargoyle in Hyde Park?

London, Wednesday: a group of paintballers calling themselves the “Night Stalkers” reported seeing “a Gargoyle fly off from a building”. The Captain of the Night Stalkers, Damon Wilson, stated that the Gargoyle attacked his paintball team and others in the area, before “zooming off into the night”.

Medical personnel stated the group appeared to have been in a fight, with several needing hospitalization, although no evidence of the alleged “gargoyle” could be found.

Police suspect the group was involved in some sort of drug related gang violence and the alleged gargoyle is merely the result of hallucinogen use. The group denies this, saying they had not been under the influence of any form of drug.

A search of the surrounding buildings has failed to find any trace of missing gargoyles.

Oil slick around Stonehenge!

Police are looking into some strange events at Stonehenge after a reporter for a London newspaper and a helicopter pilot reported seeing an oil slick around the ancient monument.

David Garin, 32, was admitted to hospital shortly after flying back from Stonehenge last week. He was treated for minor lacerations and bruising and was allowed to leave.

“We were on our way to cover another story,” said Garin, “when we flew over Stonehenge and saw what looked like an oil slick around it. I could clearly see the oil and what looked to be people laying in it. Some were quite dead, others were alive.

“I had the pilot land so that we could assist them. The next thing I knew, they attacked us for trying to help. There was also some very large, strange looking birds that seemed to be the messengers of death.

“I am not sure what happened next except to say that when I became aware of my surroundings I was in the helicopter and the pilot looked as if he had been in a

fight. It was about then that we landed in London.

“The pilot tells me that I attacked him when he tried to help me out of the oil. I had been trying to help a young woman who wouldn’t come out. I do remember the young woman in the oil, she kept moving farther into the oil and wouldn’t allow me to help.

“I have no memory of attacking my pilot and I am not a violent man. At night I can hear the screeches of the birds in my sleep and I find myself wanting to return to Stonehenge.”

Garin is currently undergoing psychiatric evaluation.

Third Youth To Go Missing

Reported by Marco Delvas

Aspen, Colorado: Today saw the disappearance of a third child in the Aspen region of Colorado. Tammy Shaw, aged 13, a visitor to Aspen, was last seen on her parent’s campsite early this morning.

Tammy is the latest in a series of disappearances that have occurred in the Aspen Public Reserve, and as a result local and state law enforcement have now placed this area “out of bounds” for both tourists and the local population.

As with all the previous cases in Aspen there is a suspicious lack of any evidence pointing to the reasons why these young people have simply vanish.

Although there was little information pointing to her having simply walking away from the campsite, a search was undertaken this afternoon. Park Ranger Bill Ward, the search team’s leader, was quoted afterwards saying, “with the thousands of acres of forest out there, I see little chance of us finding the young lass if she has been taken against her will.” Ranger Ward, with about 20 others, searched the areas near the Aspen Reverse where it was likely that the young girl may have wandered, but no evidence of her was found. The search continued tonight until failing light made it impossible to continue.

When asked about their young daughter, Jimmy and Lynn Shaw said, “Tammy wouldn’t wander off, she been camping with us many a time. She’s a smart girl, and would have told us if she

wanted to go off exploring. We can only think that she somehow been abducted, though why or how we don’t know.”

FBI Agent Timothy Wallren stated to the gathered media that ‘they’ were treating this case as an abduction and that in light of the previous disappearances they held little hope of finding Tammy Shaw here at the Reserve. Therefore, with the assistance of local enforcement officers, they were turning their attention to other avenues of investigation. Although pressed, Agent Wallren was not willing to reveal anymore information on this case.

The CIA Ruined My Relationship With Mom!

Chiwauke, Illinois: Things are bad enough these days without having to worry about the government performing secret mind-control experiments. But that’s just what Hank Becker of Chiwaukee, Illinois claims. “The government is performing secret experiments on me,” he says, “This has been going on for six months – without my consent!”

According to Mr. Becker, the government – specifically the CIA – is using a new process called Telemetric Mind Control to try to keep tabs on the unwary. The operatives on the project are able to use powerful electronic devices to watch a tagged individual from half a country away! “If you live in Chicago,” Becker says, “they can watch you from New York.” The technology is apparently so sophisticated that they can use it to get inside your mind, and view the world through your eyes, or they can leave your mind and view your actions from elsewhere in the room. “My privacy is being violated, and nobody will believe me!”

The electronic devices being used are so strong, that some household appliances are actually sensitive to the powerful electronic waves. This has the effect of turning the tables on the unsuspecting government operative. “I can hear voices,” Becker says. “I know that sounds psychotic, but it isn’t.” Becker reports that he originally picked up the telltale signal coming through the ceiling fan in his bathroom. Later, the waves were so



strong that the motor in his refrigerator started receiving the signal as well!

Grace Becker, Hank's mother with whom he lives, grew concerned for her son's health. "He hears voices all the time. He can't sleep. I tried to get him to see a doctor, but he won't go." Hank is emphatic on this point. He is convinced that his family physician is working with the government operatives to monitor his progress. He even confided that his own mother might be in on the plot. "Why else would she keep trying to get me to go back to that doctor!?" In any case, the longer the experiment continues, the more of a strain it is putting on their relationship. "I'm starting to doubt his sanity," Grace laments. "I've never heard anything from that ceiling fan."

When asked why he was singled out for this experiment, Mr. Becker was very specific. "They're going after people who are spiritual – trying to destroy their spiritual nature." Then to clarify, he added "Some people have a natural desire to help those around them. They can tell when a person nearby is in pain, or frightened. I'm one of those people - that's why they picked me."

If Hank Becker is correct, then the Telemetric Mind Control project may be stepping up the operation. "They've already begun experimenting on thousands...or millions...somewhere between thousands and millions...I was told 700,000 worldwide."

The picture that Becker paints is a bleak one indeed. What possible defense could one muster against long distance electronic surveillance? "Silver Oxide," Becker says, "or Nitrous Oxide ... or is it Silver Nitrate. Anyway, whichever the chemical is used on photographic film can protect you from the effect."

It seems that the chemical composition of normal film can reflect the Telemetric waves. "But be careful!" Becker warns. "If you are already under their influence and you touch the film to your body, it can kill you! It will either kill you or kill the operative watching you at the time. If you put it on before they track you, it could kill the operative assigned to watch you." Becker has yet to use his newfound defense. "I don't want that on

my conscience – the death of a guy assigned to watch me. He's just doing his job, right?"

If only the government agents cared as much for our well-being.

Diver Swallowed Whole By Reef

Cairns, Australia – In the fourth incident in as many months, another scuba driver has gone missing while drift diving on St. Edmund's Cross, a part of the of the Great Barrier Reef.

The diver, Michael Nesbitt from Sydney, failed to surface at the prearranged time. He had been diving with several other people on the reef and had stopped momentarily to take a photo of a colorful coral formation. The other divers in his party progressed further round the reef, expecting Michael to join them in a few minutes. When he failed to appear after ten minutes, the group returned to investigate.

Cairns Police interviewed the crew of the dive boat and the other people on the dive. No sign was found of Nesbitt during or after the search and no one reported seeing anything out of the ordinary.

David Gillespie, owner of Reef Depth Dives, denies any negligence on the part of the Dive Company. "We took every precaution to ensure the safety of the divers," Gillespie said. "Mr. Nesbitt stopped to take a photo and was not seen again. I have no idea what happened to him. My staff and I have since gone back out to St. Edmund's Cross to search, but have not found any sign of Mr. Nesbitt."

St. Edmund's Cross is an unusual coral formation that forms part of the Great Barrier Reef. The coral on the reef is gradually dying off, thought to be caused by the increased levels of ultraviolet light.

In the past four months, three other divers have also vanished in the same general area of the Great Barrier Reef. Mrs. Elisa Guthry, a single mother from Melbourne, vanished while on a night dive to see some of the spectacular coral. Dr. Nigel McCormick and his wife, Melanie, both from England, also vanished near St Edmund's Cross six weeks ago during a research dive to investigate the death of the coral. No sign of any of

the missing divers has been found.

A well-known local psychic, Ronaldo, flew over the reef after the latest disappearance. "There is something very unusual about St. Edmund's Cross," Ronaldo said. "There is a distinct sense of hunger right over the formation, as though the reef itself is hungry. It feels as though the reef has swallowed the divers to stay alive. There is also an unusually high energy field centered on the reef, which I cannot explain."

Cairns Police refused to comment on Ronaldo's claims, saying only that "Mr. Ronaldo is known to us and his claims are nothing more than the crazed ravings of a sick and deluded mind."

I'm Carrying My Dead Teacher's Child

Seacouver, Tuesday – Glenna Richardson, 15, of Everett, claims to be carrying the child of her dead History Teacher, Mark Vail.

"Mark came to me one night a month ago and made love to me," said Ms. Richardson. "I'd had always loved him from afar and was devastated when he died. He told me he had come back from the other side to give me a son that would carry on his life's work. I'm so happy he chose me and I want to bring up my son so that he can make his Dad proud."

Doctors at St. Mary's Hospital confirmed that Ms. Richardson was indeed pregnant, but refused to comment on the alleged father of the child. A local psychologist, Dr. Henry Matheson, suggested "the real father was probably a boy in Ms. Richardson's class at school. Her claims of a spirit father for her unborn child are probably a symptom of post-traumatic trauma caused by the teacher's death."

Mr. Vail, 26, was murdered in December last year by the father of a girl in Mr. Vail's class. The man found out the teacher had been sleeping with his daughter and ambushed him one day after school, shooting him through the head seven times with an automatic rifle.



The Loose Ends

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Zena Marley quotes are from the Dark Conspiracy 1st Edition rulebook. Used with the kind permission of Ken Whitman.

Submissions

Like all fanzines, we need articles by you, the fans of *Dark Conspiracy*, to keep this magazine alive.

We're looking for articles solely related to the *Dark Conspiracy* universe. Any material that would help a new referee or player would be ideal.

Use the departments from this issue as a rough guide to the areas of material we are looking for.

In particular, we need more

- Dark Races
- Equipment/DarkTek
- Dark Conspiracy Related Fiction
- Tabloid Articles
- House Rules

If you think you can help, then please send your submission to Marcus Bone (MARCUS.BONE@xtra.co.nz).

We would prefer all submissions to be in a format readable by Microsoft Word 97. Our main preference is a Word 97 file.

If you are sending in tables, please send them as a word processor table or a tab-delimited text file. Do not send HTML files.

Please keep the formatting in your submissions simple. We will be responsible for formatting your submission when the magazine is being laid out. Fancy formatting makes our job that much harder.

We reserve the right to edit your submission and to correct spelling and grammar if necessary. If you have a problem with us doing this, please contact us and we will see if we can come to some sort of arrangement.

We look forward to seeing your submissions. Your involvement is important, not only to the success of this fanzine, but also to the continued survival of *Dark Conspiracy*.

Next Issue

In the next issue, we will be concentrating on providing ideas for new referees and players of *Dark Conspiracy* 2nd Edition.

So far, we already have:

- *A revised combat system* by Ken McKinney.
- *Faith and Dragons*, an adventure by Marcus Bone
- *Tips for new Referees* by Ms. Georgie
- *Mindset: Life as a Ballotman* by Geoff Skellams
- *Plus much, much more*

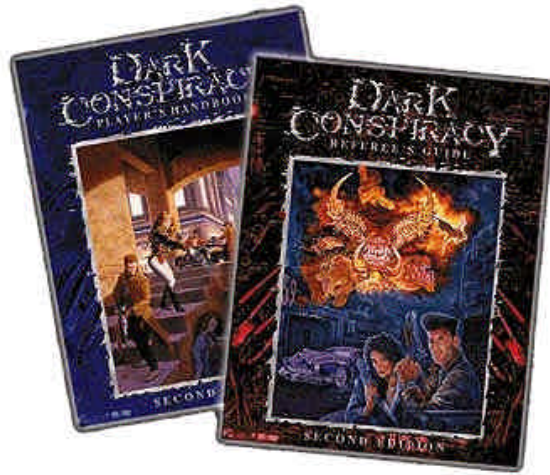
The deadline for the next issue is November 1st, 1998. If you have any articles that you think would be valuable for new players or referees of *Dark Conspiracy*, please submit them.

For more information, see the Demonground website at <http://www.42north.org/~demonground/>.

LESTER W. SMITH

DARK CONSPIRACY

SECOND EDITION



Shapes that rip and tear. Shadows that live in corners. Windows in the space and time that lead to realms of madness and decay. A dark, lurking horror that feeds off the echoing anguish of a billion souls. When an ancient brooding evil is released from its dimensional prison, humanity's worst nightmares come to life. Set in the near future, the world of Dark Conspiracy is fraught with peril and challenge. Can you face the forces of darkness?

The *Player's Handbook* contains all of the rules to create and run characters in the world of Dark Conspiracy. Including material from the previously released *Dark Tek*[™] and *Empathic Sourcebook*[™], this book contains revised character sheets, expanded equipment lists and in-depth empathic abilities section. 6" x 9" format, 400 pages, US\$20.00

The *Referee's Guide* contains material from the previously released *Dark Races*[™] and *Proto-Dimensions*[™]. This book contains a large section on creatures and new dimensions for players to explore. You will find all the rules, start-up adventures and creatures from the dark abyss needed to play in this dark game of sci-fi horror. 6" x 9" format, 462 pages, US\$25.00



To order Dark Conspiracy 2nd Edition, contact

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