

tHE bIG pICTURE

(sWOrDfiSh)

C O N T E N T S

Introduction - Blah, blah, blah.... yada, yada yada.

Sleeper Awake – Scenario, er, yeah, a scenario!

Eclipse – Prison Planetoid

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Surely not as much fun as sending it to us (and not getting a penny)?

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Unless specifically credited to an author, all material in The Big Picture is written by Max Bantleman.

B a c k C o v e r

Progress is truth.
The big picture is everything.
SLA Industries is the heart of Progress.
Mr. Slayer knows.
You are part of the big picture.
What more could you want.

2 0 0 1 – P D F C o n v e r s i o n

*The fifth issue of **tHE bIG pICTURE**, was produced at exactly the same time that WoTC announced their dropping of all rpg product, including SLA Industries.*

A very confusing time ensued, trying to figure out if it was worth keeping on keeping on. I was not on the SLA-I then, and did not have much contact with anyone to do with SLA, it seemed a very lonely time indeed.

A record for TBP was the three other contributors: Chris Cotgrove, Tony Maguire and Adam Beckett.

Perfect timing, as I was feeling a bit down about it all, thanks again to them.

Issue five could well have been the last issue, killing it off before it really got started. But I had an attack of mega-arrogance and decided that TBP could be important in keeping SLA alive in the interim of it finding a new publishing home. And, obviously being me, I ploughed on regardless....

Max Bantleman, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

Issue five. So much for bi-monthly deadlines. Never mind.

The Big Picture seems to have settled down nicely, though we still need more material, especially artwork. Hopefully Nightfall will be producing some more stuff soon, so we don't run out of illustrations. (feeble attempt at humour)

The Big Picture now costs £3.00 direct from us, and this includes p&p. Back issues cost the same (1, 2, 3, & 4).

There are no subscription rates and we would appreciate payment by Postal Order, or cheque if the amount is over £10.00.

Please make all cheques and PO's payable to Max Bantleman, and **not** Chocolate Frog Enterprises.

Well, that's all the technical stuff out the way. So what's to tell?

Although we are selling more of **The Big Picture** we are actually getting less feedback. Now Max says it's because you are all satisfied customers, but I say it is something much more sinister.

If you have bought **The Big Picture** you have gone out of your way to purchase something you think can be of some use to you. It is not produced by WOTC and you will not find it in their product list. So presumably you bought it from a shop or on the recommendation of a friend.

So, having gone to all this trouble, why haven't you taken the next logical step and actually written to us?

Tell us what you want, or share what you have on Progress and we can make **The Big Picture** even better.

Or have you bought it and then wished you hadn't? The same thing applies, tell us what you do not like and we can make some efforts to change it.

It has just occurred to me that I only get to write intro.'s when we need to have a bit of a moan. I really am quite a cheerful person, honest.

(Better be careful what I say here, she is obviously feeling fragile....)

Our own SLA campaign lurches forward, throwing up more questions than answers, especially about the style of the game. The

claustrophobic atmosphere of darkness and suspicion does produce it's lighter moments, but on the whole our games are becoming more and more 'serious' as the Operatives gain in SCL and insight.

Founding my campaign world has forced me to forge my own truths about SLA Industries, and these are suitably layered in deceit and horror. The core secrets are known by only me, and although the players have their suspicions, none of them has so far shown any inclination to dig too deeply. *(Can you blame us!)*

The old 'guns kill but so does the truth' line has worn a bit thin, the implication has become 'seeking the truth will get you killed', maybe not quite the same thing.

What is 'the truth' behind your world of Progress. I would love to know.

We feel that SLA Industries is here to stay, and that the environment, i.e.. the world of Progress, is well worth developing. The atmosphere of the games may be changed from session to session depending upon the BPN or the campaign. A few 'light weight' games of pure exploration and expansion of the 'trivial' help to break up the monotony of the oppression.

This issue we have written an article on the mechanics of running games, dangerous ground I know.

You will doubtless find the article stimulating, even if you do not agree with it. And wasn't the idea to encourage the growth of SLA Industries with **The Big Picture**?

So, get writing. Let us know what you think of our efforts, send us your ideas for BPN's, equipment, storylines, atmosphere, NPC's, off-world. If you have taken the time and trouble to run or play SLA Industries, why not take it further, spread the disease. Share your ideas.

If you send us stuff and we use it, we send you three issues of the issue it appears in, not a lot I know, but the best we can do.

Special thanks to; Carnage : The Role Playing Society for helping us demo and test the stuff we use in **The Big Picture**, they know who they are, and yes, we don't give you enough credit.

Contact has been made with a few of our friends over seas, namely the U.S. of A.

and this got us thinking about how SLA Industries is perceived by gamers from different cultures.

Then we actually spoke to these people and discovered that the old cliché that people are basically the same, is true.

A mention must be made of Max's most recent obsession; Wraith Raiders.

He has produced a supplement, basically a sourcebook, detailing Wraith Raider culture and Homeworlds, as well as developing a new sub-species, skills and equipment (I'm not sure exactly what a Whyte Raider is, but the last one we met kicked our butts big time).

The sourcebook is called Fire and Ice, and costs a fiver (£5.00). It may be worth mentioning that it violates none of the 'official' Wraith Raider background or development.

(Then again, it may not....)

If you are reading this and thinking "should I give them a bucket load of money and better production facilities so they can do it properly?", let me assure you your money and trust would not be wasted.

Honest.

What about the Internet? How's it going on that old subversive superhighway? Anyone care to let us know what's being used, and where, and are we getting the volumes of free advertising we deserve? Tell me, not Max, as he still has his head in the fourteenth century....

(oh yeah, there was something about the net, but I've forgotten exactly what, and I'm a bit of a technophobe anyway, so sorry, maybe next time. :))

This issue of **The Big Picture** has been brought to you by the letter "3" and by the number "5".

(sWOrDfiSh)

A CUNNING PLAN

Unbelievable But True or
The Entropy And The Irony

I wrote the introduction. Max sat down, read it, added his bits, then we left it. I went back to it, re-read it, changed it and Max re-read it. We put it down and forgot about it. Then I tinkered with it a bit before it was finally tucked up all snug in it's bed, story read and last drink had.

Then the phone rang.

Max speaks to 'a-nony-mouse' from Nightfall and a little piece of our world falls apart.

WOTC have decided to shelve all of their role playing products, including SLA Industries.

Max sits down, I sit down. I feel a headache coming on. How could they do this! I begin to get very angry and need someone to take it out on. Max laughs, he seems to be able to see the funny side, to exactly what, I'm not quite sure, but by now there is no stopping him.

Well, tomorrow is another day, and here it is.

I've thought long and hard about the situation with WOTC and Nightfall and have decided to go with my first instinct, which was to get thoroughly confused and angry.

Bastards!

How could they *do* this!

Anyway. If anyone out there knows what the hell is actually *really* going on, please drop us a line and let me know. I have to go now, time to bash Max around the head with something blunt. It's all his fault of course, if he wasn't such an idiot we would have access to the Internet, and we might have some consolation through contact with people who are obviously as stunned and annoyed as us.

Sarah is really pissed off, but somehow, to me, it all makes sense.

Along comes a game I can really get my head around, and some smug business bozos come along and screw it up. Yep, all sounds a bit too familiar.

We all know how great Magic is doing. We all know WOTC are raking in pots of cash

from it, and we all know what money (power) does don't we? Them in *this* business have proven themselves to be no different from them in *any* business. Why make 50,000,000 when you can make 50,100,000.

Unfortunately, by the time you read this it will probably all be over. Nightfall will or will not have been bought out by the people who care about it, and SLA will or will not be a viable games system.

I have decided to carry on producing The Big Picture, as well as various supplements (Wraith Raider ready and waiting for the orders to flood in).

I hope it doesn't sound too pretentious or stupid to say that SLA Industries is bigger than all of this. Mr. Slayer will take it all in his stride, his is the vision of The Big Picture, and who am I, a lowly SCL 6 Operative, to try and stop him.

I know it doesn't need saying, but please try to support SLA in an *active* sense whenever you can. I would like to think there are enough people who care about Progress to ensure it's success.

Don't listen to rumours, dig for the truth, don't live a lie. SLA Industries is Progress, don't be a loser, be part of Mr. Slayer's Big Picture.

I'm off to get me crash helmet (and modem) before Sarah beats me up (again).

THE SLEEPER AWAKES

The Sleeper Awakes is a scenario designed for play with four to six beginning or moderately (SCL 10 - 8) experienced Operatives, it is written and laid out to allow ease of use by a Gamesmaster, and as such has all relevant information readily available, if you want to play the scenario, don't read it.

Most sections of the scenario are detailed in 'scenes', much like those of a play or film. It is up to the individual Gamesmaster to 'stage' each scene by supplying atmosphere and backdrops, as well as being prepared to supply numerous 'extras' in the form of NPC's.

As a GM do not be afraid to tinker with the scenario, adding or taking out whatever you want. You must be comfortable with it, fitting it into your campaign world.

We have left out specific experience and credit awards, you will want to tailor these to met your own needs and those of your players.

The stuff in italics is written to be read straight to the players. For reasons of space, and personal style, we have kept these sections short. You should add whatever you want, concentrating on atmosphere and laying the foundations of your own World of Progress.

The list of Skill Rolls is by no means definitive, it is just a list of those skills which seemed most obvious to us at the time of writing. Different GM's place varying importance on the actual use of the rules, some prefer their players to role play their way in and out of all situations, while others like to use the rules to settle things at every turn. Change the skill rolls to suit your own style.

Beat Mask Recordings and Black Order have both been detailed in back issues of The Big Picture. Black Order are classed as a Soft Company, so are enemies of SLA Industries, while BMR are a wholly owned subsidiary (not common knowledge). These companies will give you a chance to set the tone for others in your world, it is worth developing them beyond the scenario.

Remember, guns kill but so does falling from tall buildings, taking poison, stepping on landmines, insulting Chagrins, the Ebb, pointy sticks, incurable disease, lack of oxygen, too much alcohol, knives, electricity, Cannibal Sector One, stapling your eyes shut.....

Scenario Outline And Objectives

Scene One: Interview by Cloak Division.

One of the Players is taken aside and chipped, as well as being given an additional briefing. The rest of the party are briefed. Sow seeds of suspicion and distrust, make them all feel uneasy.

Scene Two: Visit BPN Hall and pick up Red BPN to deal with Black Order terrorist.

Go to Mall and deal with terrorists, they may or may not find out about the 'beacon' running in reverse (sniper). Players must be made to work together, to start to trust each other.

Scene Three: Interview by Station Analysis on the Third Eye coverage and the part the players played in the BPN. Asked to go to Crib to pick up Orange BPN, which will be covered by Station Analysis. Begin to make them feel like a team, address them as a squad.

Scene Four: Crib, pick up Orange BPN. One days grace to research the BPN, do a little digging. Visit the Pit in the evening for a little partying. Explore Mort, move around, experience the Pit, let their hair down, explore their characters.

Scene Five: Meet with CEO of BMR, get briefing on schedule. DarkNight assassination of one of the BMR lower executives. Act as a squad to gain CEO's confidence, meet BMR head of security. Make the Operatives feel like outsiders, make them stick together. Immediate threat of DarkNight made real by assassination, encourage distrust of BMR security.

Scene Six: Narrative of two engagements with the CEO. Allow planning and a leader to emerge from the group. Take the squad through the stages of planning a security operation, let each Operative contribute their 'bit'.

Scene Seven: The awards ceremony where one of the players will be revealed to be a DarkNight insurgent operative (sleeper). Assassination attempt on the CEO. Spring surprise on players that one of them is the sleeper, do their best to assassinate the CEO, if get a chance, take out some of the other Operatives.

Scene Eight: Debriefing by Cloak Division. Get the Operatives to take a quick look at how they think they did, let

Darkfinders fill in some of the gaps. reward Operatives with experience and credits.

Introduction

Cloak Division. Internal Affairs. The two most feared departments within SLA Industries.

Internal Affairs, ultra secret, undercover, subtle, ever vigilant and everywhere. Cloak Division, brutal and direct, afraid of no one, they never let go.

The very mention of either of these two departments is enough to strike fear into any Operative.

And Cloak Division wants to see you.

Your whole squad has been summoned to the Security building in Uptown. Talk about a bad start to a career

Still, no need to panic, just tell them everything they want to know and you will be alright. What have you got to hide?

Give the players time to talk, to conjure up things from their past that they may be 'wanted' for. Just sit their looking inscrutable (pretend you need a good dump), their imaginations and your silence will do all the work.

Scene One

You travel into Uptown for your appointment with Cloak Division, although you are used to the cleanliness and order of Uptown, you still feel slightly uncomfortable with the high Shiver presence on the streets.

The Security building stands tall among the offices of Uptown, towering six hundred feet above the parks that surround it. Dark grey walls, stained black be the rain studded with thousands of glittering mirror windows, capped off with a golden roof like a pyramid. The upper floors have statues at the corners and small stone figures mounted over each window, they look like huge bats, hunched over, watching, so life like.

As you approach and enter you feel you are being watched, eyes are everywhere, cameras, monitors, detectors, all around you. Huge glass and steel doors are opened by two security guards, Darkfinders in corporate suits. They carry no weapons,

and for some reason this disturbs you more than if they were armed with Reapers.

You are allowed to keep your weapons with you, though you are told by the receptionist that "discharge of weapons within the Security building is frowned upon." You are issued with a pass card which clips like a MagHold just above your left breast, you are warned to wear the pass at all times while within the building.

Sitting in a designated reception area, you are surrounded by TV screens, showing all of what's on in Mort. After a short while a Vito A69 Tek Trex Drone rolls up to collect you, it leads you through the building, through many corridors and up in an elevator, you don't know exactly where you are in the building. You don't need to know. The Vito stops at a plain metal door which slides silently to one side. The room inside is dimly lit, sitting at a table in the centre of the room are two Darkfinders, both stand as you enter. A large screen on the far wall flickers in to life, an image of Mr. Slayer looms large, covering the whole wall.

One of the Darkfinders, a woman, motions to the chairs surrounding the table, you get the message, sit down and shut up.

Scene One: The briefing

Cloak Division believe that one (or possibly more) of the Operatives are DarkNight 'sleepers'. That is, DarkNight insurgents who have been psychologically altered to respond to a 'wake up call', some signal that will set them on a predetermined course of action. Cloak want to 'chip' one of the party to allow them to monitor the actions of the group.

The Operative they choose to 'chip' will be taken aside for the operation, which will last an hour. While he/she is away, Cloak will tell the remaining Operatives that they suspect the person being chipped is in fact the DarkNight plant.

This is where you set the scene for the climax of the scenario, you must choose now, which (if any) of the players you want to make the plant. Remember, that the player you choose is probably going to die. The idea is to get the Sleeper next to Sylvia Britte at the awards ceremony (read on mcduff...), then give them their 'wake up call' so they can assassinate her.

If for some strange reason you don't want to kill one of your players, you can make Matt Dilaney the Sleeper, though this may seem a bit predictable, and you will have to 'tweak' him.

Cloak will tell the Operative being chipped that they know he/she is the only one from the squad that is definitely not the DarkNight insurgent, and that they are the only one to be trusted, the chosen Operative must keep a close watch on the squad.

Cloak Division may reveal that the Operative who has been indoctrinated by DarkNight may not be aware of their condition, which makes vigilance all the more necessary.

If the DarkNight agent reveals themselves, they are to be terminated by the squad immediately. If the squad terminate someone who turns out to be innocent, they are in deep, deep shit (Operatives cost a lot to train and equip).

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene One: Briefing by Cloak, manage to avoid incriminating themselves, even if they are completely innocent of everything (including the things they think they might be guilty of).

Primary

Interview (Charisma)

Diplomacy (Charisma)

Secondary

Leadership (Charisma) (attempt the 'grand clearance' of the whole party by nominated leader)

Psychology (Knowledge)

Bottom of the Barrel

Seduction (Charisma)

Bribery (Diagnose)

Scene Two

Now you have been told you may go about your business, you need to get some business. This means a visit to the Crib to pick up a BPN.

As usual, traffic around the Crib is at a standstill, with Shivers trying to get everything moving. The streets are filled with operatives, discussion BPN's or making plans. Shiver copters pass by

overhead, their sirens drowning out any conversation.

You move up the vast expanse of steps outside the Crib, pushing your way past the sea of people coming down, making your way into the huge main hall, you wait in line at one of the windows, waiting to register your arrival. An hour later you are sitting in the waiting area.

The seated waiting area is a vast expanse of benches and TV screens, with Operatives everywhere. Many are restless, impatient. The atmosphere is tense, tempers fray, words (and punches) are exchanged. Through the dim light of the hall, you can see hundreds of doors around the perimeter of the waiting area, each has a small green number above it. After three hours a door flashes your number.

Moving through in to the small cubicle the other side of the door, you are confronted by a huge glass panel, behind which sits your designated clerk. On his desk is a small keyboard, behind him a large screen. He takes your pass card and scans it, the screen behind him flickers, then details of your squad and training begin to scroll across the screen. The woman at the desk looks up and smiles, "now then, let's see what we can get you."

Scene Two: Getting a BPN

The clerk, Chalice, will offer the Operatives two very menial BPN's, which they will be made to feel are beneath their dignity and capabilities. A Blue, accompanying a squad of sweepers in the sewers of Suburbia, and a Yellow, searching the stalls of one of the markets in Downtown, looking for illegal goods.

While she is explaining the second of the two BPN's to the Operatives, a red light will flash on her terminal. She will look at the Operatives, then shaking her head she will mutter to herself, pushing a small button on her keyboard which stops the red light from flashing.

The Operatives should be drawn into inquiring about the red light (the red BPN), if they do not, the screen will flash red and Chalice will issue the BPN in a hurry, hustling the Operatives out to deal with it.

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Two: The BPN Hall, dealing with the Clerk and spotting the allocation of the Red BPN to his terminal, drawing out information.

Primary

Interview (Charisma)

Diplomacy (Charisma)

Secondary

Persuasion (Charisma)

Intimidation (Diagnose)

SLA Information (Knowledge)

Bottom of the Barrel

Seduction (Charisma)

Bribery (Diagnose)

Try to get the Operatives to rush to the shopping mall, maybe finding out a bit about Black Order on the way, you must decide how much to tell them.

The terrorist holding the hostages (five of them) is being covered by a sniper, who will try to take out as many Operatives as he can before he disappears.

Combat segment of scenario will be dealt with under combat skills. Finding out about the 'beacon' running in reverse and other Black Order traits:

Primary

Rival Company (Black Order) (Knowledge)

Secondary

Streetwise (Knowledge)

Tactics (Diagnose)

Bottom of the Barrel

Architecture (Knowledge) and Evaluate Opponent Knowledge)

BPN : Colour; Red

SCL : 10

Training Package recommended : Any

Summary : A Black Order terrorist has taken five hostages in the main plaza of the Karmalite Shopping Mall. Operatives to respond immediately. High media profile operation.

Coverage : Third Eye

Consolidated Bonus Scheme : 500c

Payment : Per Operative

Scene Three

After the carnage and chaos of the Shopping Mall and the coverage by 3rd Eye, you find yourselves in demand. Station Analysis want to see you. Now.

You arrive at the small, squat building which is the Station Analysis Headquarters for this sector, the armed guard on the door seems to be expecting you and you are hurried inside.

A Station Analysis rep. is waiting to see you. He is in a hurry, motioning you to follow him. You find yourselves in a small room with a mirror across one wall. He tells you that the interview is being recorded.

"Now then, what can you tell me about 3rd Eye?"

Scene Three: Station Analysis interview
Jed, the Station Analysis rep, wants to know everything the 3rd eye news team said and did.

If he is pushed (or gets careless) he may let slip that the broadcast from the chipped Operative was jammed and that Station have no record of the events, having to rely on 3rd Eye for second hand info.

The Operatives will each be asked to go over the events they witnessed in the greatest of detail.

Jed will then ask the Operatives to go to the Crib, where they will be assigned a new type of BPN. Their actions will be closely monitored, they are under the microscope. They are also warned that Station Analysis are covering the BPN, and that they should not try to get 3rd Eye involved.

After the Interview, it is back to the Crib to pick up the 'experimental' Orange BPN....

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Three: Station Analysis interview, giving them what they want to hear.

Primary
Interview (Charisma)
Diplomacy (Charisma)
Secondary
Leadership (Charisma) roll made to set up the whole party
SLA Information (Knowledge)
Bottom of the Barrel

Intimidation (Diagnose)

Dealing with the clerk in the Crib for the Orange BPN.

Primary
Interview (Charisma)
Diplomacy (Charisma)
Secondary
Persuasion (Charisma)
Intimidation (Diagnose)
SLA Information (Knowledge)
Bottom of the Barrel
Seduction (Charisma)
Bribery (Diagnose)

BPN : Colour; Orange

SCL : 10

Training Package recommended :

Investigation & Interrogation / Any

Summary : Operatives are needed to act as security agents for the CEO of BMR, to guard the person against threats made by DarkNight.

Coverage : Station Analysis

Consolidated Bonus Scheme : 1,500c

Payment : Per Operative

The Orange BPN is a new category, it entails the Operatives being 'sub-contracted' to a private sector company for the duration of the BPN.

Scene Four

So, you have the BPN, and some time to kill. Time to do a little digging, and tonight you can relax, maybe hit the Pit.

Scene Four: Beat Mask Recordings

Beat Mask Recordings are universally known as BMR, they are a large company which controls a large sector of the recording industry, specifically the music business. They are a large company, having over a thousand employees and owning three subsidiary companies. Their head office is a large building in Uptown, from where they run their operation. BMR are a fast turn around, aggressive company, they make money by exploiting artists, they are very clued up on what's going on on the street and they are not above bending the law to sign or sell artists work.

Over the last year three of their top executives have been attacked, two have been killed and one put has had both his

legs blown off. As well as this, two of the subsidiary companies have had their headquarters bombed, killing no one but causing a massive amount of collateral damage.

SLA Industries suspect DarkNight involvement, and they want to extend protection to BMR. BMR are in fact a wholly owned subsidiary of SLA Industries (though this is a secret).

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Four: Research into the BPN, particularly into BMR and their history of troubles. Let the players suggest both contacts and skills to be used, let them be creative.

The visit to the Pit in the evening must be a little risky, if a lot of fun/mayhem. Introduce a couple of Operatives (Ghost & Newt?) as potential friends and contacts.

Scene Five

It's time to meet your new 'employer', the person you will be subcontracted out to for the duration of this Orange BPN. The Chief Executive Officer of BMR is Ms. Sylvia Britte, it is her you have to protect.

Ms. Britte's office is on the top floor of BMR Tower, you are shown in by two corporate security guards, both of whom make their feelings towards you known, they do not like you and they do not trust you. They see no point in having you around. Nice people.

The office looks out over Mort, the Uptown district sprawls before you, majestic towers and glistening Malls, all covered with the sheen of the rain. people small as insects hurry round below you, copters fly past below your line of sight. ms Brittes office is at least as big as all of your apartments put together, it is luxurious and spacious, decorated with style, everywhere you look speaks of the wealth of the CEO. You are all seated at a large, wooden conference table, the bodyguards bring in trays of food and drink. After a short wait, Ms Britte herself enters the room.

The meeting goes as well as can be expected, Ms Britte is pleasant enough, although you do get the feeling she has little confidence in you. Suddenly your body

guard friends run for the door, their headsets bleed over into yours, "code green, executive downed, ground floor, all teams assist."

Scene Five: Meeting Ms Britte

The Operatives must be made aware of the importance of their client, and the fact that they are (technically) working for her for the duration of the BPN. The BMR bodyguards seem to be well trained, professionals, the Operatives may be made to feel they are slightly out of their depth. It is up to them to convince Ms Britte that they are not. Introduce Ms Britte's chief of security, Matt Dillaney. Use ex-War Criminal stats, though you may want to tone down the arms and armour (you may not...). It is clear to all of the Operatives that Matt needs them like he needs another psychoses, maybe Ms Britte just wants someone a little more stable around.

As the meeting with Ms Britte is drawing to a natural close, have the DarkNight assassin pop one of the lower executives as they are entering the building, the Operatives (along with Matt) get a chance to respond.

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Five: Meeting with CEO to gain confidence, trust and information as well as co-operation in the bodyguards roll.

Primary

Leadership (Charisma)

Seduction (Charisma)

Secondary

Diplomacy (Charisma)

Persuasion (Charisma)

Bottom of the Barrel

Intimidation (Diagnose)

SLA Information (Knowledge)

Streetwise (Knowledge)

Possible encounter with DarkNight Assassin (after he has struck and killed a BMR executive)

Primary

Running (Physique)

Secondary

Streetwise (Knowledge)

Bottom of the Barrel

Tactics (Diagnose)
Evaluate Opponent (Knowledge)

Scene Six

After the assassination of the BMR executive, you are extremely tense, not looking forward to the two engagements for Ms Britte over the next two days.

The first appearance poses few problems, or so her bodyguards seem to think. She is to meet the board from one of BMR's subsidiary companies. The meeting is to vote on selling 49% of the shares in the company direct to BMR, who currently own 3% shares, though they effectively run the administration of the company.

The second meeting is more worrying. Ms Britte is to present a special service award to one of the major outlets for BMR products in Mort, Pinnacle Sight and Sound (known as PSS). The award is to take place in PSS's main store in Mort Central, a massive mega store with seventeen floors. This seems to be the main area for concern.

You need to plan and co-ordinate with the BMR staff, better get on with it, it is going to be a long couple of days.

Scene Six: Public engagements

The Operatives are made to feel that either of the two engagements poses a threat. They must plan the security for each meeting, taking into account the BMR bodyguards, especially the chief of BMR security, Matt Dillaney.

The threat of an attack must seem real, paranoia must set in. You may actually want to bring the DarkNight attack on Sylvia forward to the first meeting, though it is more fun to build the suspense for the grand finale.

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Six: Mainly narrative. Allow only a couple of rolls, suggested by the players to increase the quality of the information they get hold of through the experience. Allow them to make plans and to 'elect' a leader (one should have emerged naturally by now).

Scene Seven

The biggest awards ceremony of the year for the entertainment's industry, all the big people are there, with their bodyguards. Ms Britte has decided to take a chance and has allowed you to be hers.

The Hall of Fame is a vast stadium, seating some five thousand people in luxurious comfort. The hall itself is legendary for it's opulence and decadent styling, gold and velvet hang with other exotic fabrics, a throw back to the 'old world' style of pre conflict war society. Karma have helped bring the hall, literally to life, with many bio-materials, for seats, curtains, stages and alcoves.

The hall is broken up into hundreds of booths, each with it's own view of the main stage, as well as three TV screens.

Smart passes are issued and must be worn at all times, the outer corridors and halls are patrolled by Tek Trex Buzzards, who shoot first and don't bother to ask questions afterwards. Somehow you don't trust them.

In security terms, the hall is a nightmare. Dimly lit, with thousands of shadowy nooks and crannies. All of the security chiefs look exhausted, their staff nervous. It is going to be a very long night.

Scene Seven : The awards ceremony

Many of the stars of Mort are present, security is high profile, smart passes abound. Tek Trex robots abound in the corridors around the hall, they will open fire on anyone who does not have a smart pass. All robots are Buzzards, F2 Drones (Security).

The player who is the DarkNight sleeper must not be revealed until Ms Britte takes the stage to hand over the BMR award for best newcomer. Then they will act. All of the Operatives must be made acutely aware that tonight is the night. Suspicion is rife, paranoia rules.

Once activated it must be made clear that the Sleeper is going to kill Sylvia, unless the Operatives intervene....

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Seven: The uncovering of the DarkNight 'sleeper' just prior to his/her revealing themselves.

Primary
Ebon Skills. Such as Mind Read 3
(Communication).
Secondary
Psychology (Knowledge)
Evaluate Opponent (Knowledge)
Bottom of the Barrel
Rival Company (DarkNight) (Knowledge)
Tactics (Diagnose)
Leadership (Charisma)
Pistol (Dexterity)

Scene Eight

You are recalled by Cloak Division for a complete debriefing, the BPN is effectively over. You get the feeling they are satisfied with your performance. You hope they are.

Scene Eight: Debriefing

Cloak Division want all the details of the operation, and especially reports on the actions of the DarkNight sleeper. They will be lenient over any minor indiscretions, though if they feel it is warranted, they will not only withhold the reward for the completion of the BPN, they will also impose a punishment in the form of a fine or SCL decrease.

Suggested Skill Rolls

Scene Eight: The players are on their own, suggest skills, but their own words will clear /incriminate / endear them more than any skill rolls.

REFLECTION

So, your players either hate you for making one of them the Sleeper (we find making the Sleeper the one that was taken aside and chipped works best), or they have become heroes in the eyes of Mort, saving Sylvia from certain death, and they love you (steady). Either way, they will get the message that the World of Progress is full of deadly surprises.

A variation on the theme has been to bring in an outside Contract killer to assassinate Ms Britte, leaving the DarkNight connection for another time.

Remember, guns are tools.... so are torque wrenches.

NPC'S USED IN SCENARIO

Scene One
2 DarkFinder Cloak Division Operatives.

Scene Two
BPN Hall clerk. Possibly NPC Operatives in Crib. 2 Black Order terrorists. 5 Hostages. 3rd Eye news team, Anchorman, soundwoman, camerawoman, Stormer guard/driver.

Scene Three
Station Analysis clerk. BPN Hall clerk.

Scene Four
Operative contacts, NPC Operatives at Pit.

Scene Five
CEO of BMR. Head of Security at BMR. BMR security 'goons', DarkNight assassin.

Scene Six
Narrative, may mention some names for possible development as contacts etc.

Scene Seven
Tek Trex robots (Buzzards). Possibly uncover one of the NPC Operatives as DarkNight sleeper.

Scene Eight
2 DarkFinder Cloak Division Operatives.

ECLIPSE

Writer: Chris Cotgrove
Artist: Adam Beckett

The barren planetoid known as Eclipse is used by SLA Industries as one of it's many sources of mineral ore used in industrial metallurgy, and as a convenient place to store some of the World of Progress' criminals.

Roughly 60% of the workforce is made up of convicts, and the largest single structure

on the surface of Eclipse, a towering city-complex known as 'The Hold', is itself a converted prison colony.

Passage to and from the system is made difficult by an encircling asteroid belt known among SLA pilots as the Abyss. FoldShips usually arrive outside, and visitors and new workers (including convicts) are transported through the belt by freighter.

This dangerous and harrowing trip can take over four hours. As such, Eclipse receives supplies rarely, in bulk shipments every three months. Freighters ferry stockpiles of ore back through the Abyss to waiting FoldShips, and then on to Industrial Worlds all across the known universe.

What awaits on the other side of the Abyss is hardly worth risking life and limb for. Eclipse is regarded as a backwater hellhole, the destination for those employees and Operatives who screw up. Even the civilian mining colonists hate the world to which they have been assigned, but special ten year contracts condemn them to a decade of claustrophobic existence.

To many, Eclipse symbolises what the World of Progress has become; a vision of wealth and prosperity that has gradually lead to depression, decay and stagnation, under the distant, watchful eye of SLA Industries.

Eclipse itself is a barren, rocky wasteland, dotted with isolated colonies and processing plants.

SLA has no intention of wasting time and resources on terraforming the planetoid, and so it remains without any breathable atmosphere. The surface temperature is scorching during the time eclipse is exposed to the light of the systems star; it plummets far below freezing in the hours when Eclipse is obscured.

A 'day' on Eclipse only lasts for eight standard hours at best, enveloping the planetoid in frozen pitch darkness for up to sixteen hours at a time, and producing the spectacular daily solar eclipses for which the planetoid is named - it's only redeeming natural feature.

Travel across the surface is achieved using SLA 'land-trak' vehicles, which operate on guidance systems locked on to beacons in several of the mining sub-stations. Without environment suits and sealed habitats,

Eclipse would be completely uninhabitable. Even so, the workers have to deal with constant problems of daily survival, mostly with power; blackouts occur frequently in some habitats; numerous back up systems have been re-installed after a malfunction shut down the life support in habitat for twenty four hours, resulting in the death of over forty colonists.

The overall state of the facility is run down and outdated; the most recent shipment of 'new' equipment included several 'Low Wave' 114 Stormers and their handlers to assist with heavy lifting work. However, most of the labour is still accomplished by miners with the use of out dated (in some cases antique) machinery, only kept in working order with semi-regular shipments of spare parts.

Recent surveys have shown that after centuries of mining, Eclipse is finally being stripped of it's mineral resources. In another fifty to hundred years it will be just a mined out rock floating in space. SLA already have plans to designate Eclipse as a large scale weapons testing site, or a military training world.

The Hold

The Hold is the central control facility of all mining operations on Eclipse; it is a vast, converted prison colony, reaching up from the rock like a monstrous needle. It is run by The Board, a group of executives headed by Director Keller, a coldly efficient man believed by many to have been transferred to Eclipse for some past indiscretion.

The upper levels are reserved for control and administration, and for the luxurious personal quarters of The Board. They are off limits to all but the administrative staff. Miners are usually only called to the Upper levels to be reprimanded, and reminded of where they are in the overall scheme of things.

Its middle levels serve to house the civilian workforce of eclipse, the colonists who came to Eclipse hoping to make a new start. The middle levels also include recreational areas (bars, clubs and brothels) for civilian miners, who are rotated to The Hold every three months from the various

sub-stations in a half hearted attempt to improve morale among the workforce.

The use of drugs, including alcohol, among the miners is prohibited for safety reasons. However, there is a flourishing Black Market presence on Eclipse, catering exclusively to the tastes of the bored and depressed miners.

There is also a DarkNight presence, as the Soft Company sees Eclipse as an opportunity for extensive anti-SLA operations, and as a site for recruitment.

The lower levels of The Hold consist of fusion generators, waste recycling plants, atmospheric processors and storage vaults. There are also numerous connections to rapid transit tubes to and from the landing fields and two of the closer mining sub stations.

The Warrens

Beneath the surface of Eclipse lies the Warrens; mile upon mile of artificial tunnel networks, created by centuries of miners in search of mineral ore. They are reached by elevator from the surface, and remain the foremost method of mining on Eclipse.

Some of the Warrens have been converted into rapid transit tubes, taking ore to landing fields, from which they are stockpiled to be taken out of the system when the tri-monthly supply ships arrive.

Other tunnels are avoided by miners, following unexplained disappearances. To date the disappearances have not been frequent enough to warrant investigation by SLA Industries. It is widely believed amongst the miners that the artificial tunnels connect in places to natural caverns and tunnels that have existed since long before any SLA personnel arrived on Eclipse. Wilder tales speak of 'creatures'; inhabiting the deeper tunnel networks. However, no scan of the planetoid has ever detected life forms, and the stories are passed off as mining superstition.

Whole areas of the Warrens have not been explored in centuries, and act as places for the Black Market to store it's goods, or as boltholes for DarkNight operatives.

The main function of the Warrens is to accommodate the convict workforce. The convicts still work ores from the tunnels, branching out when a network dries up.

This system has lead to a series of unstable and unmarked tunnels, in which accidents and cave-ins are frequent.

Lighting is best described as sporadic in the Warrens, entire networks remain unlit, and blackouts due to power loss are common, leaving miners in pitch darkness for hours on end. many of the mysterious disappearances take place during these blackouts, they have been attributed to miners going insane, DarkNight activity, convicts attempting to escape, and the creatures from the lower tunnels.

Since no one has ever been found, it is assumed they have simply become lost in the Warrens, and have died when their air supply ran out.

The convicts are held in bare metal cells, filled with stale recycled air. The corridors are not pressurised and environment suits have to be worn at all times. The convicts are also held by the fact that their suits oxygen supply can only be re-filled from coded points in the Warrens by a Warden. In the event of a breakout, the Warrens would be sealed off, and the convicts left to die of oxygen starvation.

The present prison supervisor is an employee of SLA Industries, by the name of Phillip Stark. He treats the convicts fairly, as many of them have become friends with the civilian miners.

Running Games On Eclipse

The main themes for Eclipse are decay, stagnation and isolation. A feeling of claustrophobia is ideal, especially for trips into the Warrens.

The planetoid is far away from any major help from SLA, a thousand disasters just waiting to happen, this should also be emphasised.

Please note that a lot of the material has been left deliberately open ended, and up to the individual GM's discretion.

Sources of inspiration for Eclipse: Outland, Alien 3 and Total Recall. Each demonstrates aspects of Eclipse worth exploring; mining colony, work force and corporate influence.

NEVER MIND THE PIG

By: Chris Cotgrove & Adam Beckett

SEWER WORM

Over the 900 years that SLA Industries has occupied Mort, mutation has become common place among the indigenous 'wildlife'. A prime example of this is the Sewer Worm.

Recently, following a number of Blue BPN's in the deeper sewer sections, Ops and Shivers began to report the appearance of these 'new' species.

Sewer Worms are pale white worms that grow up to two meters in length. They are covered in segmented, overlapping rings of natural armour, and possess a valve like mouth up to 25cm across, which contains rows of powerful retractable mandibles.

The worms are hermaphroditic, fertilising eggs internally, and laying them in clusters in the sewers. The currents carry the eggs to other sections, and enable the worm to spread.

Sewer Worms are naturally blind, possessing no visual sense organs, a dissected specimen showed that the worms instead possess a form of motion detection, picking up vibrations through their skin.

Stats.	Min.	Max.	Norm.
STR	2	8	5
DEX	4	7	5
DIA	0	1	0
CONC	0	0	0
HITS	5	16	10
Weight	60kg	130kg	90kg
Length	50cm	2M	1M

SKILLS	RANK
Unarmed (Bite)	5
Unarmed (Grapple)	5
Swim	10
Dodge	5
Detect	8

Weapons	PEN	DMG	AD
Bite	4	2	1
Grapple	0	3	2

Sewer Worms usually attack by staying under water, wrapping themselves around their target (grapple), dragging them under and then delivering the bite.

The Department of Health and Safety have posted a BPN to capture a live Sewer Worm, and another to gather their eggs.

TELICH

There was another beastie, the Telich, which was basically a highly toxic fly, who's lava emitted all kinds of oozing, pussy nastiness.

The Telich was the originator of a terrible plague called the Black Deth.

Unfortunately the Telich file has gone byes.

Sorry about that.

FACELESS MASSES?

I know this is getting a bit tedious, and believe me, much more for me than you.... But the files for this piece have disappeared, but of irony there with the title and all.

It was a cool piece on NPC's, how to bring them to life, and how they function within a plot or story arc.

Bugger eh?

Maybe there was some kind of collusion with the Telich? They were all killed by the Black Deth?

Another good reason for you to have bought the originals at the time, you wont be going through all this, you can quite happily flick through your copies, lauding it over those who are only now coming to realise the brilliance of TBP....

☺

Or something like that....

FINDING A JOB: BPN'S

Right about now, you're probably thinking, "is this bloke taking the piss? Has he got any frikkin' files from number five still around?"

Well, yeah, I think so....

This is a good indication of the problems I was having producing TBP, both at the time and now.

The only PC I had access to at the time, worked in Ami-Pro, a version of Word Pro, both of which are pants. The files corrupt and they are a bugger to de-bug. As a consequence it's taken me a bloody life time to get these pdf's together for TBP.

Realistically I was expecting to lose a few files, it's just sods law they've all (so far) disappeared from the same issue.

So. Sorry again, and let's move on to the next bit....

Oh, yeah, the original BPN's in issue five, were a very annoying Blue (as it should be) and a very tricky Silver.... in case you were wondering.

EQUIPMENT

TEK TREX BB9 'HAYWIRE'

By: Chris Cotgrove &
Adam Beckett

Originally designed as a technical repair unit, the BB9 (popularly known among Operatives as the 'Bomber Bug') now functions as a sabotage drone. The BB9 has an impressive array of tools and an advanced CPU, rumoured to incorporate Tek Trex's 'hive' technology.

The BB9 Haywire is based on a Scarab chassis, utilising Tek Trex most successful unit, though with the modifications it is barley recognisable.

The Haywire is usually released in built up areas or in Downtown, where it can more easily fulfil it's sabotage program. The BB9's strategy is to 'strike and hide'.

The Haywire can install miniature explosives, plant computer viruses or damage cable, weld shut panels, etc..

The BB9 is fitted with a 10,000 hour power supply and rumour has it that it is being fitted with a re-charge ability.

The BB9 carries tools for electronic sabotage and small scale demolition, as well as the more mundane tools such as arc welder, screwdrivers, pliers and the like.

The Haywire is fitted with a 5mm SMG and carries 10 clips of standard ammo. BB9's have been known to self destruct if cornered or tampered with, setting off all of their on board explosives.

The explosive charges carried by the Haywire are each equivalent to two DA90 frag grenades.

The exact number of BB9's in operation is not known, though they are proving to be a huge thorn in the side of SLA and their discovery and destruction are high on the BPN list.

Game System Stuff

Walk	Run	Sprint
1	2	3
DEX 8	STR 5	
Height: 1m	Weight: 40kg	
PV 5	ID 30	
SKILLS		Rank
Lockpicking		4
Electronic Lockpicking		5
Sneak		5
Hide		4
Climb		6
Demolitions		4
Electronics repair		4
Mechanics repair		4
Computer use		6
Computer subterfuge		6
Auto support		7

Note

Placing the BB9 in your campaign will obviously depend upon how you play Tek Trex. If you have them as a 'sell to the highest bidder' Soft Company, the BB9 will

obviously find uses with such organisations as DarkNight and Black Order.

KARMA RESTRAINT COLLAR

By: Chris Cotgrove

The Karma Restraint Collar (KRC) was produced to fill a demand from Shivers and Monarch, both of whom need to capture dangerous criminals alive.

The KRC is a biogenetically engineered organism, a parasitic creature that resembles a thick coil of muscular intestine. The KRC is kept at a 'laval' stage by storage in a nutrient fluid when not in use. No KRC's are allowed to reach maturity, though it is rumoured they turn into something akin to Sewer Worms if allowed to grow.

When removed from it's fluid and placed around the neck of it's new host, the parasite inserts hollow, tooth-like protrusions into the hosts skin. Then, a mild painkiller is injected, after which it secretes a viscous fluid. The fluid rapidly hardens into a chitinous protective carapace, which forms a solid skin, both for the KRC, and for the 'collar'.

The KRC sustains itself by feeding on small amounts of blood and spinal fluid from its host. This causes some discomfort, but does not harm the host.

The collar has a number of specialised chemical production glands which it uses upon receiving signals from it's 'handler'. Signals are electrical, and sent through a small transmitter throat mike from the handler to the collar.

The KRC can release three chemicals into the hosts bloodstream; a powerful hallucinogenic, a lethal poison or a mild pain killer.

If the KRC is cut or assaulted, it will release it's full amount of all chemicals into it's hosts bloodstream, killing them within one minute.

The KRC is essentially muscle tissue, and it may be made to constrict, strangling the host.

The collar is removed by injecting a harmless drug into the hosts bloodstream, which the KRC is allergic to, the collar can then be removed without pain to be placed back into it's storage fluid.

Game System Stuff

The potency of the collars venom will usually result in the painful death of the host in under a minute. The collar can quickly manufacture an antidote to it's own poison, which can act faster than the poison.

The hallucinogens manufactured are used to provoke a pleasurable response in the host, used as a reward for the wearer. Treat as Beat, with no psychosis and no Detox.

The collar cannot be used on Ebons, BrainWasters or Stormers. The flow of the Ebb through a body seems to disrupt the KRC, causing it to die within two minutes of being attached. Stormers muscle tissue rejects the probing KRC's 'teeth' due to similar tissue design.

When the collar constricts, the host must make a PHYS roll to stay conscious, with a -1 for each phase that the collar has constricted.

The KRC may be supplied to Operatives or Shivers who are involved in a BPN where the live capture of a dangerous individual is imperative. A special dispensation is required to obtain one.

Rumours of larval collars appearing on the Black Market are as yet unfounded, though it can't be long before the Skin Trade gets hold of them.

Karma will issue a White BPN to investigate such misuse of the KRC, and Cloak or Internal may issue a Grey to investigate the Black Market source of KRC's.

KRC:	PV	Hits	Cost	B/MCost
	4	12	30u	900c

K A F K A Konsolidated Arms Fabrication Kaliber Application

By: Tony Maguire

This was really, really good. Excellent stuff from Tony.

Basically an extension of the CAF 5mm ammo use, exploiting simple, cheap, efficient designs, but with greater force and multiple uses.

It's gone the way of some of the issue five files.

But you're getting tired of hearing by now....

-o0o-

So.

I've stuck in a piece on customising the old PP644 Blocker Body Armour as a consolation. so far, this piece hasn't appeared anywhere else....

PP644+ Blocker Body Armour

Phase Inc. Press Release

"Blocker Body Armour can now be more than a billboard for sponsorship logos, worth more than the paper it's used as to write on. Want to know more? Contact your local Phase Inc. dealer"

Phase Inc. Graffiti campaign street release, Mort 903 SD.

Interview with R&D Technician Robert 'Waldo' Harrison, Phase Inc. Field research Dept., taken from the independent magazine 'Hardware Guide', Autumn 903 SD. edition (5cr.):

HG: "Mr Harrison, what was the main thrust behind the development of the Blocker Body custom project?"

RH: "We were aware of the limitations of the PP644, but were also aware of some opportunities."

HG: "(laughs).... Opportunities.... For the PP644....? You guys must really be visionaries!"

RH: "Well not really, it was prompted by reports and comments from numerous Operatives working the Downtown Sectors."

HG: "Operatives came out of Downtown alive.... wearing PP644!?"

RH: "Yes. Exactly."

HG: "I'm sorry. I must be missing something...."

RH: "Operatives in PP644 are not usually thought of as much of a threat by most Downtown denizens, especially the more heavily armed ones. They figure Op's in PP644 can be taken out at leisure, and so treat them with a kind of dismissive contempt...."

HG: "Ahh.... I think I see where this is going...."

RH: "Exactly. Keep the look of PP644, keep up the illusion of weakness, but give it the strength to withstand a first strike."

HG: "Right. Clever."

RH: "Easy in theory. Not so in practice."

HG: "Why was that?"

RH: "The PP644 is only lightly powered, the motors are primarily used to disperse the weight of the armour, not to move it. Increase the weight, with extra thickness, and you increase the weight, but you can't really increase the motors without moving to either a power chassis or destroying the illusion of PP644."

HG: "So the solution was?"

RH: "Lateral thinking."

HG: "Right."

RH: "We utilised the basis of the suit, the flak fibre jump suit is was based on. It is easy to get material to resemble flak-fibre, and we developed the hydraulic webbing network pioneered by Defence Systems Inc. in their 'Hurcules' unit (TBP 12), to support the extra weight of the thicker plates, which turned out to be not very much extra weight due to the ceramic/steel lattice construction of the under plates...."

HG: "Sorry, lost me there.... 'under plates'?...."

RH: "We have kept the original outer plates of the PP644, just added layering beneath each one.... under plates.... means the PP644 still reacts the same to all light sources, all liquids... you know rain.... all

visuals and even smells.... important if you want the complete illusion.”

HG: “Ingenious.”

RH: Pragmatic. Common sense really.”

HG: “The suite has undergone field trials?”

RH: “Yes and no really. Yes, because it’s been put out on Operatives in the field, but no, because it’s generally done it’s job and avoided being shot at.... on the few occasions it’s been needed it’s come through with flying colours. All reports are extremely favourable. One thing we have to combat is the relatively low I.D. per location, but it’s the best we can do, and the stopping power is definitely there....”

HG: “That’s a very frank admission, and covers another question I had. Is it a case of Phase Inc. marketing an after sales repair service rather than a solid suite of ballistic protection.”

RH: “Of course not. you’ll have to speak to marketing....”

HG: “But the price? It is very expensive....”

RH: “It’s as much about style as function. It’s good value for money. It performs admirably under fire and often prevents the firefight, maintaining the illusion required.”

HG: “Thank you for your time.”

RH: “Always a pleasure. Please feel free to take whatever visual images you require of our model.”

HG: “Thank you, but I don’t think scruffy pictures of PP644 are exactly front cover material....”

RH: (smiling) “Well there you are then.”

Official Phase Inc. catalogue summary:

“We can take your Blocker Body Armour and reinforce it to give you that stopping power you need. Give us your armour and 24 hours, and we’ll give you back an exact look alike, but with the power to keep you alive in a fire fight. Keep the edge, keep the illusion.”

“This stuff is a bitch to work on. We are way undercharging. I just hope them Slops appreciate it, like they could even care. Makes you wonder how many of them would be draining LAD accounts if it weren’t for this mod. Sure I use it. People just look right through your wearing PP644.... when was the last time you took

anyone seriously who wore body toilet paper?”

Unofficial quote from Marcus ‘Booty’ Blythe, Phase Inc. technician and street engineer, Mort 903 SD.

Game System Stuff

Armour Type

Modified Body Blocker (Phase Inc. catalogue reference PP644+).

Cost

1,600 credits.

Black Market Cost

33,000 unis.

Characteristics

	I.D. / Location			
P.V.	Head	Torso	Arms	Legs
9	12	30	20	25

Modifiers

None.

SOFT COMPANIES

So....

There’s this guy, he walks in to a bar and says, “have you got a stiff drink?”

The barman says, “where do you think you are? A pub!?”

The guy says, “yeah, stupid of me really, to expect something to do what it’s supposed to.”

At this point it’s worth mentioning that Ami-Pro and Word Pro may be fine, upstanding, useful pieces of kit. But not for me. Not today. And never again.

Originally we had White Lodge, ShadowFire and Bounce in here.... and great they were too.

NOT AT ALL FUZZY

Being a Gamesmaster is never easy. Most times it is a frustrating, slightly depressing experience whose only redeeming feature is the enjoyment your players get from your games. Sometimes though it can be rewarding beyond belief.

People get in to running games for various reason, the most common being that their friends push them in to it. For whatever reason, once you find yourself being the designated GM for SLA Industries, you need to sort out a number of things.

Firstly, what exactly is SLA Industries, and where is the universe of Progress? This may sound a bit dumb, but think about it. Once you have read the rule book (at least fifteen times is recommended) you will either have the impression that progress is in fact our own universe in the far future, or that it is a new environment, parallel but not mirroring our own. This first impression will affect the way you look at developing Progress, from what references you use, to what is 'current' and what is to come.

Next comes SLA Industries. The rule book will give you a feel for the company, and nearly all GM's develop a different picture. Ideas range from a cross between the CIA and the Third Reich, to an amalgamation of the Catholic Church and Big Brother. All sorts of ideas and influences will come flooding in, and it will be tempting to just let them all swim around together, forming a pool you can draw on later. You must not let the enormity of the task depress you. Do not succumb to the temptation of leaving your ideas in a state of flux. You cannot start playing SLA Industries without a fixed idea firmly placed behind all of your games. Decide now what form SLA Industries will take, and work out where the various key characters fit within this picture.

To all intents and purposes, Mr. Slayer and his merry gang will be God like beings to one and all, whether this is close to the truth will be up to you to decide, but to all citizens, and most starting Op's, Slayer will be so powerful that he might as well be a God, regardless of his actual physicality or

spiritual state. And never forget that Mr. Slayer controls it *all*. SLA Industries is Mr. Slayer.

Now you have sketched out the rough outline for the universe, and hopefully SLA Industries, it is time to decide what you want to change. I know it may seem a bit presumptuous to start tinkering with the rules at this basic stage, but you will need to make some fundamental decisions about things you want to change before you actually start playing. The most obvious deviation from other 'dark future' games is the lack of rules and background dedicated to computers and cyber technology. The world of Progress appears to be run by people, not machines, and computers are given scant mention in the rules. They are nowhere near being the all powerful, all influential entities they are in other projections of the future. Do you agree with this? Do you want to have more contact with computers and with the virtual world they hint at?

Cyber technology has been toyed with and abandoned in favour of genetic engineering and bio-technology. New life forms are created and existing ones can be augmented with 'natural' implants. Do you want more interaction between man and machine, is there going to be a cyber-punk element to your games?

You need to decide, to make your choices now, before you introduce players in to your world.

The last major decision you need to make before forging ahead with actual games concerns the 'truth' and the use of guns.

One of the cornerstones of the SLA universe is the adage 'guns kill but so does the truth'. This hints at a terrible, dark, all consuming secret lying behind the whole of Progress. A secret so vast and hideous that it's very investigation will lead to your death, it's uncovering does not bear thinking about. You will have to decide what this could be, how it affects the universe and how horrific it actually is. It is impossible to advise someone how to construct and GM a deception so great and all pervading that it threatens to destroy the whole universe if it is discovered, you will have to figure this out for yourselves. But this is one area where you, as a Gamesmaster can quite happily remain a

little vague. Hints and whispered half truths will encourage the players to imagine their own secrets. Let them do some of the work for you. And of course they must *never* actually discover the real deception, though you may want to let them think they are getting close.

Then there are the guns (heavy sigh).

There is absolutely no point in pretending that guns are not going to play a large part in most of your games. They are. You may want to steer clear of them altogether, you may hate them, you may control them with a ferocity that is frightening in itself, but they *will* figure heavily in the SLA universe. You must come to terms with this and develop an alternative strategy to controlling guns in Progress.

Use the general population, the citizens of Mort, they will not want firefights every five minutes, their protests and riots will ensure that SLA acts to stop the irresponsible use of firearms. Use the media, Third Eye want good close up action, with blades and fists. Use the 'baddies', fight the Op's with tooth and claw as much as with bullets, combat them with frustration and paperwork, bureaucracy and small minded corporate in fighting as much as with automatic weapons. Arms races are rarely won by the GM, and players soon get fed up with being taken out by bigger guns. Then there's the Ebb.

Let's be honest and candid here, it's just 'magic' by another name, right? Well, yes. And no. This is up to you. Once you start to mess with the Ebb, you will soon realise that Ebons, Brain Wasters and (of course) Necanthropes, pose the greatest threat to both you as a GM and the players. Playing an Ebb user demands a thirst for knowledge, a driven curiosity and a determination to develop the character through investigation, a commitment not all are willing to make. Many players will want to play Ebb users like Wizards, gain in experience to learn more powerful 'spells', all the better to blast the bad guys and on it goes.

As a GM you will have to guide the players in the Ebb, leading by example with NPC's and help with the rules as well as with changing them to suite your style of play. The Ebb is the most vital part of the game for both players and GM's to agree upon.

Altercations in other areas can quite easily be settled by the 'it's my ball' method, where as the Ebb is the fabric of the universe surrounding the players.

Well that seems to have covered most of the immediate basics, though I have obviously missed out most of what you actually wanted me to cover.

So, on to running games.

One of the blessings of the game is the concept of the BPN. This allows the beginning GM to keep things nice and straight forward, with straightforward goals and objectives, clearly defined rewards and well outlined time frames. This 'modular' approach is perfect to begin with.

You should use BPN's to channel the players in to areas you want to explore, especially in the early games when forming the foundation is just as important as the actual subjects of the BPN. Don't worry too much about messing up at this stage, both you and the players will make mistakes, and you will both learn from them. So one adventure it's a Silver, the next it's a Yellow. Lighten up.

We have found the best way forward for a beginning GM is to eliminate the elements he does *not* want in each scenario, then focus the BPN on those that he wants to highlight.

The first few scenarios should break in the rules bit by bit, firefights, unarmed combat, the Ebb and skill use (and reward). Stick to simple, uncomplicated plot lines, emphasise style and atmosphere. Don't let the players side track you, keep things that should be out of their reach, er, well, out of their reach. Information is rationed, your starting Op's are at the back of the queue. Throw them scraps, tit-bits, morsels to whet their appetite, keep the real meat for later.

The last part of this article has been eaten by the Goat that is Word Pro.

I'm going to bail on issue 5.

Enough is enough.

Some really good stuff has disappeared, you'll just have to get a look at an original hard copy.

Max Bantleman, 2001.