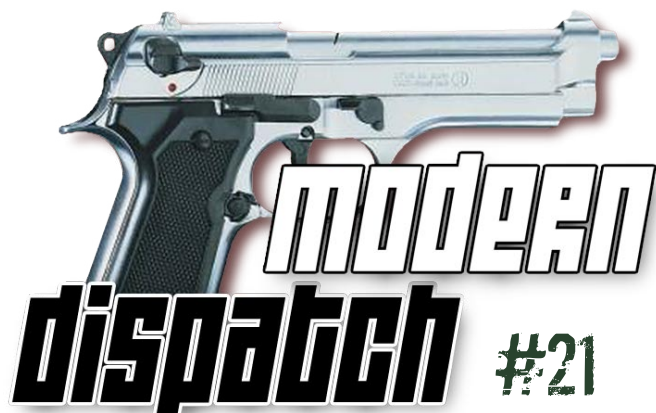




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THE AERIE

BY CHARLES RICE

"The Aerie" is a Darwin's World adventure for beginning level characters. This supplement also introduces a mini-setting designed to be the home base for a group of low-level characters. This home area is rich enough to allow for a host of adventures to occur in the general area, while generic enough that it could be placed almost anywhere on the Twisted Earth.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

In this adventure the characters are charged with the defense of their village, Derrick, from an unusual collection of adversaries. A tribe of winged ones has been preying on traders attempting to visit the village. The attacks have become so frequent that trade to the village has almost dried up entirely. This has led to critical shortages of materials that cannot be made in the village - most importantly water purifiers.

The characters' village sits on an ancient drilling station. While this pump still operates (barely) most of the substance pulled up from deep underground is a viscous black substance toxic to humankind. However this black substance is also mixed with water. The village elder, Fallon Aswert made a deal with a Far Trader clan almost twenty years ago. While water filters were expensive, it seemed the foolish trader had some use for the black poison the drill brought up from the ground. So every thirty days the caravans would arrive and deliver a set of fresh filters, taking the old ones away.

With the attacks of the Winged Ones, the last filter delivery was not made. If another delivery is missed the village will run out of fresh water and might be

forced to abandon their homes. All in the village have heard tales of the fate of those in the wilderness without shelter and know that they would either be food for the winged ones, or subject to a much, much worse fate at the hands of raiders or slavers.

The player characters, minor heroes of some repute, have been charged with finding the source of these. The lives of their families depend on the success of their mission.

GETTING THE PCS INVOLVED

Depending on your campaign several methods could be used to get the PCs involved in the adventure. Use the method that fits your players best or come up with a method of your own using the following suggestions for inspiration.

AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

The simplest way to get the PCs involved would be for Fallon to simply come and approach them. He has little to offer the PCs, beyond his good graces, but in a small town like Derrick that might be enough.

SURVIVAL

One of the main themes of Darwin's World as a whole, survival might be all the motivation the PCs need. If they don't do it the entire town will run out of water, including them.

FAMILY

The PCs might be hard bitten wasteland scabs, but everyone has a mother.

WHAT THE PCS KNOW

Derrick is a small town and news travels fast, so the PCs will be able to find out most details of the previous attacks without too much trouble.

1. The attacks started at least three weeks ago.
2. The second caravan to be attacked was well-guarded by crossbow-armed mercenaries.
3. The area around Derrick has had its share of raider activities but they leave these Far Trader shipments alone. A few have been attacked but neither the unused water filters nor the black substance the merchants trade them for were valuable enough for the raiders to bother.
4. There is an ancient dome well off the main road. This dome is guarded by “live metal” (the local slang for robots) and has always just been avoided by the locals.
5. The caravans to Derrick make a stop along the road, about a mile out of town, to trade with a small group that have taken residence in the hills off the main road. These newcomers keep to themselves but local rumor says they are seeking a way into the strange dome to plunder its treasures.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The caravans are being attacked by winged ones who have taken up residence in the nearby dome. Before the Fall the land of the Ancients was almost completely stripped of all its natural wonder. Although this was deemed necessary to build the wonders of the Ancients they still desired a connection with nature and wildlife.

The dome near Derrick was a nature preserve for the Ancients, tended by robotic automatons. The dome was cracked during the battles that brought down the Ancients' civilization, allowing the birds to escape, much to the consternation of the tender druids charged with maintaining the preserve.

When the winged ones migrated in, they were mistaken by the tenders for the original inhabitants

of the aviary. Since that time the droids have been feeding and caring for the winged ones, a fact that caused the winged ones to stay in the area.

ENCOUNTER AREAS

AREA 1: VILLAGE

The village of Derrick

AREA 2: WATCHTOWERS

Each of these “towers” are in fact ancient telephone poles. During the day a winged one scout sits atop each one watching the road for potential prey. These scouts have the eyes of a hawk (literally) and it will be very difficult for the PCs to slip past all of them.

If a scout sees one of the PCs it will let out a screech and then circle over the PCs. This will draw the rest of the scouts in 1-4 rounds.

If the scouts think they can handle it themselves they will attempt to do so. If the PCs look especially powerful or some of the winged ones manage to get away they will retreat to the preserve and either summon help (from their leader and the remaining 5 members of their tribe) or attempt to hide there, forcing the PCs to fight the tender droids to get to them. These sentries are identical to the standard winged one in the Darwin's World core rules except that they have +8 Spot skill rather than the value.

AREA 3: RELIGIOUS SANCTUARY

This tiny collection of tents is the home to Corwil Madaven and his small group of adherents. They worship the live metal creatures and have even interacted with them. They are friendly to the PCs unless they have reason not to be (the PCs threaten them or attempt to steal from them) and will offer the PCs shelter for the night and medical attention (which

they might require after a battle with the winged ones' scouts).

If the PCs handle this situation with tact and intelligence Corwil could provide them with much more than a simple night's rest. Corwil will tell the PCs of the live metal in the dome of their desire to study them.

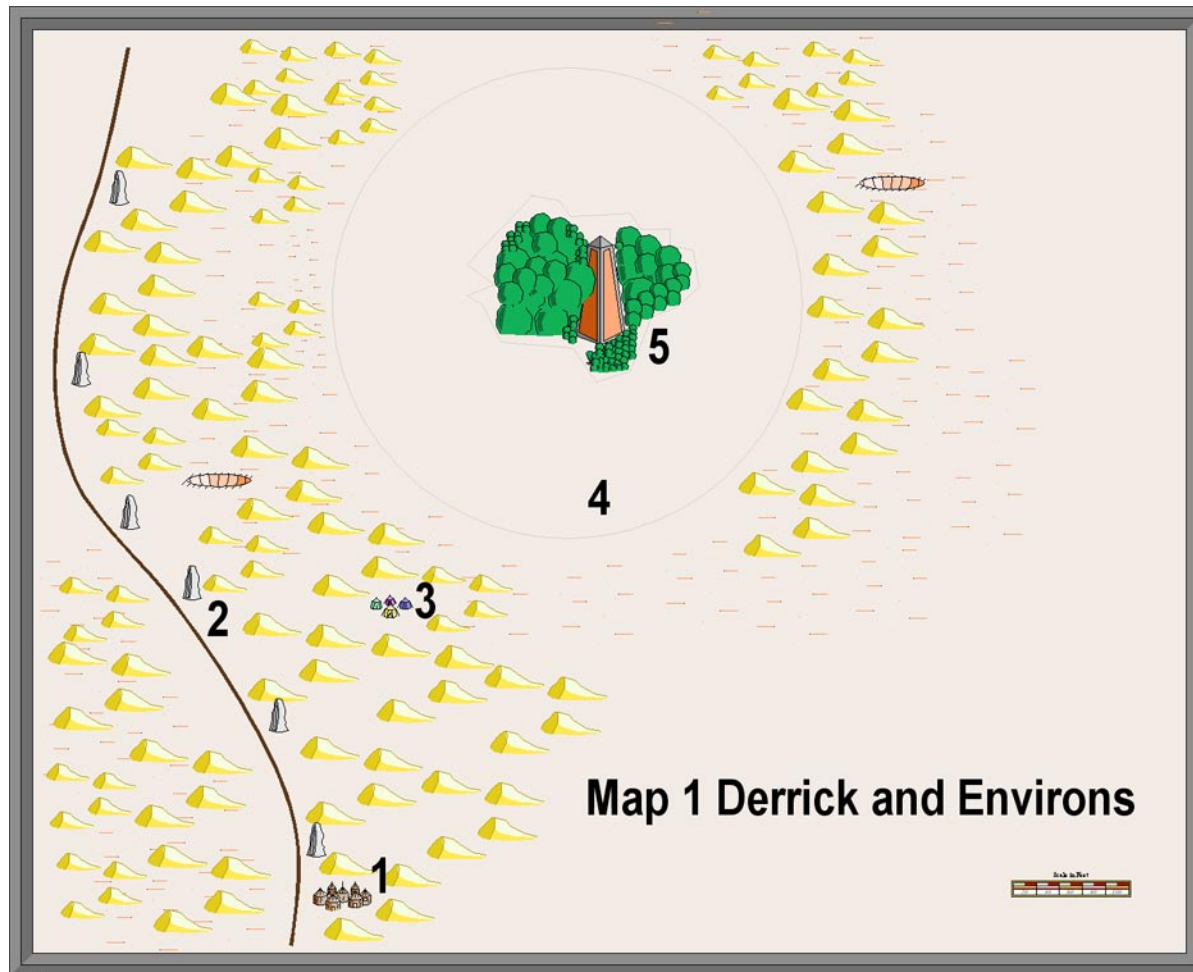
Corwil has found an identity card of a long-forgotten civil authority that the tender droids will respond to. The initial attitude of Corwil and his group is *friendly* (see the Diplomacy skill for more information). If the PCs manage to improve Corwil's attitude to *helpful* he will tell them of his identity card.

If the PCs promise not to harm the live metal or violate the dome (which also houses other forms of life sheltered by the androids since the Fall) Corwil will accompany them and convince the androids that the winged ones are not their charges and are in fact harming the ecosystem of the dome (this is true, the winged ones have been dining on their “fellow guests” at night when the tender droids power down for the evening- the droids know predators are getting into the dome somehow but are not truly intelligent and have thus not made the connection between the predation inside the dome and the arrival of the winged ones).

If the PCs express a desire to harm the tender droids or the dome itself, Corwil and his followers will attack the PCs in their sleep. He will try to subdue them but is willing to kill to protect these marvels of the ancient world if necessary.

AREA 4: DOME PRESERVE

This area is attended three supplementary tenders and one chief tender. The chief tender will detect the PCs' entrance to the dome via electronic monitoring devices (unless one of the PCs has at 4 ranks of Ancient Lore they should have no chance to even detect these wondrous spying devices). He will demand to see the PCs' “ticket” or else a civilian authority access card (Blue Stage IIIC access or



Map 1 Derrick and Environs

better). If the PCs have neither, the chief tender will politely ask them to leave immediately. If they refuse, resist or ignore the chief tender, it will silently summon the three supplementary tenders while monitoring the PCs, attempting to engage them in conversation.

When the supplementary tenders arrive, the chief tender will attempt to remove the PCs by any means necessary.

AREA 5: DOME HOLE

This gigantic hole in the ceiling of the dome is how the winged ones enter and leave. If the PCs succeed in getting the winged ones “evicted” the winged ones will fly out here, giving the PCs their chance to kill or drive them away.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

The “micro setting” presented in conjunction with this scenario provides the GM with many opportunities to extend the adventure and/or run further adventures using Derrick, the robot-worshipping monks led by Corwil, the Far Traders trading oil for water and the dome wildlife preserve.

Following are some suggestions of further adventures.

OIL AND WATER

The Far Traders are a small family run trading cartel willing to trade filters for oil a little at a time. Other cartels are more aggressive. If they got wind of the potential profit the tiny town of Derrick was sitting on (both oil *and* water) they might attempt to buy the town out (offering to relocate the citizens to a larger community with a healthy stack of corium for each one). If this offer is rebuffed (as it almost certainly would be- corium is nice but a stable home is the best treasure the Twisted Earth has to offer) the cartel will attempt to drive the villagers off the land and seize it.

BOOMTOWN

A variation on the idea presented above, the cartel might instead offer to set up a much more sophisticated separator to extract the oil at a much greater rate. This would create a massive surplus of water allowing real irrigation and agriculture to spring up as the villagers purchased higher quality seeds and equipment (from the cartel extracting the oil of course). This food would attract a substantial number of settlers to Derrick, turning the quiet little town into a boomtown.

LOCUSTS

If Derrick becomes a boomtown of new settlers, water, and oil, it could draw a powerful gang of raiders to the area who would offer to “protect” the town.

PLAGUE

A mysterious disease could strike Derrick. The cure could very well be found in the nearby dome, since the robots doubtless have veterinarian medical facilities for the care of the animals under their care. Can the PCs exercise the diplomacy necessary to convince Corwil to allow them a much more extended exploration of the dome and find the cure before time runs out? Will they force the issue, seizing the identity card for their own purposes? This adventure offers the PCs the chance to role-play, explore and discover the mysteries of the preserve dome and moral ambiguities aplenty.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

A more serious problem would be a permanent malfunction of the oil pump around which the tiny village of Derrick has sprung. If the PCs have the technical expertise to repair it (or can find someone who does), this adventure could play out much like the Plague above with the PCs convincing Corwil to let them explore the dome and borrow some replacement parts from it.

However if the PCs do not have the skill and are of a ruthless bent, it might just occur to them that the dome, with its plant life, water supply and game would be as close to paradise as they are likely to encounter. Are they willing to kill Corwil and battle the robots to seize the dome for their village? The chief tender has enough autonomy that he will not allow “vagrants” to take up residence in the dome no matter what their identity card says (he certainly had to deal with similar situations during the Fall).

Not only that, but what other surprises are held

within the dome? Some of the animals could have mutated. The winged ones might return in force, or other more dangerous robots could lurk deeper inside the preserve.

Also remember that achieving a prize is often easier than holding onto it. The dome will certainly attract settlers, traders and raiders. This scenario could lead into Locusts, Boomtown, Oil and Water and even more.

NPCs

Winged One Scout (Dedicated Hero 1): CR 3; Medium-sized Monstrous Humanoid; HD 3d8+1d6; HP 17; Mas 10; Init +1; Spd 30 ft, fly 60 ft (average); Defense 16, touch 14, flatfooted 15 (+1 Dex, +2 natural, +2 equipment, +1 class); BAB +3; Grap +3; Atk +4 melee (1d4, talon), or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ piercing shriek; AL none; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 10.

Skills: Hide +3, Intimidate +4, Navigate +3, Search +3, Spot +13, Survival +4.

Feats: Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Hover, Primitive Technology, Wingover, Alertness.

Talents: Insightful (Spot)

Possessions: Longbow, 24 Arrows, Leather Armor.

Advancement: By character class.

Winged One Leader (Raider 3): CR 5; Medium-sized Monstrous Humanoid; HD 3d8+3d10+12; HP 42; Mas 14; Init +3; Spd 30 ft, fly 60 ft (average); Defense 20, touch 15, flatfooted 17 (+3 Dex, +2 class, +2 natural, +3 equipment); BAB +6; Grap +6; Atk +6 melee (1d4, talon), or +9 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); Full Atk +6/+1 melee (1d4, talon), or +9/+4 ranged (2d8, Bushmaster M-17S); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ piercing shriek, chaps and chains +1, bloodthirsty

cry; AL none; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +3; AP 3; Rep +1; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 12.

Skills: Hide +2, Intimidate +5, Navigate +4, Search +3, Spot +3, Survival +3.

Feats: Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Hover, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Post Apocalyptic Technology, Wingover.

Possessions: Bushmaster M-17S Assault Rifle, (2) Boxes 5.56 Ammunition, Leather Armor.

Supplementary Tenders (3 Agrobots): CR 2; Large Robotic Construct; HD 3d10+20; HP 37; Mas -; Init -1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 16, touch 8, flatfooted 13 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +8 natural); BAB +2; Grap +10; Atk +6 melee (1d10+4, shear); Full Atk +6 melee (1d10+4, 2 shears); FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 10 ft; SQ robotic construct, command level (IIC); AL none; SV Fort -, Ref +0, Will -4; AP 1; Rep +0; Str 20, Dex 9, Con -, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1.

Skills: Knowledge (earth and natural sciences) +5.

Feats: Advanced Technology, Weapon Focus (shear).

Chief Tender (Scientist Android Smart Hero 3): CR 3; Medium Size Android Construct; HD 3d10+10; HP 27; Mas -; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 13, touch 11, flatfooted 13 (+1 class, +2 natural); BAB +1; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6, slam); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6, slam); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ android construct, command level (IIM), computer link, savant (research), linguist; AL owner; SV Fort -, Ref +1, Will +4; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 10, Dex 10, Con -, Int 18, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Computer Use +21, Craft (chemical) +6, Craft (electronic) +12, Craft (mechanical) +10, Craft (pharmaceutical) +10, Craft (structural) +10, Decipher Script +8, Disable Device +8, Drive +1, Investigate +10, Knowledge (ancient lore) +10, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +12, Knowledge (physical sciences) +12, Knowledge (technology) +10, Navigate +5, Pilot +2, Read/Write (ancient), Repair +10, Research +10,

Speak Language (ancient), Treat Injury +4, Handle Animal +8.

Feats: Advanced Technology, Builder, Educated, Remote Computer Link.

Possessions: Chemical Toolkit, Electronic Toolkit, Mechanical

Corwil Madaven (Dedicated Hero 4/Demagogue 1): CR 5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d6+4 plus 1d6+1; HP 23; Mas 13; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 14, touch 13, flatfooted 14 (+3 class, +1 equipment); BAB +3; Grap +2; Atk +2 melee (1d4-1, pistol whip), or +3 ranged (2d6, Sa.23); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ medical incompatibility, increased critical threat; AL Corwil; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +9; AP 2; Rep +4; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 14.

Occupation: Demagogue (Diplomacy, Knowledge [Theology and Philosophy])

Background: Visionary Reinventor (Knowledge [Technology])

Mutations and Defects: Expanded Optic Orbit, Critical Vulnerability

Skills: Diplomacy +8, Gather Information +4, Knowledge (Ancient Lore) +9, Knowledge (Technology) +10, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +10, Listen +6, Sense Motive +7, Speak Language +1 (unislang, ancient), Spot +5, Survival +5, Treat Injury +6

Feats: Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Advanced Technology, Educated (Knowledge [Ancient Lore], Knowledge [Theology and Philosophy]), Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Post-Apocalyptic Technology, Primitive Technology

Talents (Dedicated Hero): Skill Emphasis (Knowledge [Technology]), Faith

Talents (Demagogue): Followers

Possessions: leather armor, pistol whip, Sa.23, 2 boxes 9mmR ammunition

Typical Adherent (Dedicated Hero 1): CR 1; Medium-size humanoid; HD 1d6+1; HP 5; Mas 13; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 11, touch 11, flatfooted 11 (+0 Dex, +1 class); BAB +0; Grap -1; Atk -1 melee (1d4-1, pistol whip), or +0 ranged (2d4, Calico M100); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL Corwil; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +5; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Occupation: Demagogue (Diplomacy, Knowledge [Theology and Philosophy])

Background: Visionary Reinventor (Knowledge [Technology])

Skills: Diplomacy +5, Knowledge (Technology) +8, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +5, Listen +5, Sense Motive +4, Speak Language +1 (unislang, ancient), Spot +4, Survival +4, Treat Injury +5

Feats: Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Post-Apocalyptic Technology, Primitive Technology

Talents (Dedicated Hero): Skill Emphasis (Knowledge [Technology])

Possessions: pistol whip, Calico M100, box .22 ammunition

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