

DEMONGROUND

The Electronic Panzine of Dark Conspiracy

JUNE 1999
VOL 5

CAREER
DAY
ISSUE!

In this Issue:

Sin City

Cover Art by Neal Dickinson

Generating New Careers

Home Rules by Geoff Skellams

Out, Back and Beyond

Adventure by Mike Marchi

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Kingdom of Zub

Protodimension by Lee Williams

Missed (Part 2)

Fiction by Marcus Bone

Plus:

The Mercenary Philosopher, New Equipment and
Vehicles, plus a lot more...

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



DEMONGROUND ISSUE 5

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Finding a Theme

Mike Marchi
welcomes
you to
Issue 5

Greetings, and welcome to Issue 5 of **DEMONGROUND: The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy**. This issue is special in a lot of ways. The first, you've probably already seen: the cover. This issue marks the first time somebody actually picked up a paintbrush and created an oil painting - specifically to be used as our cover! Neal Dickinson hails from Seattle, Washington, and created this dark vision of Sin City for us. As the author of the first book in the new DC series (*The Shadow Falls*), I have to admit, he's captured something there. And, it looks like whatever it is, is about to capture him right back!

But seriously, we're very excited that so many people care enough about this game that they want to devote their own free time to expanding the system. Why do you think your trusty editorial staff is here each issue? Here's hoping this is just the first piece of art like this we see from our many contributors! With each issue, we get better and better art pieces. Just compare this issue's banner piece (by our own Eyal Faingersh) and compare it to his earlier works. We think this is his best one yet!

The second way that this issue is special lies in its theme. Oddly enough, we didn't have one prior to the submission deadline. There we were, with a pile of submissions, and thinking the theme concept is completely overrated. Then we looked through the assembled articles and realized that half of them were written on the same subject: new careers for *Dark Conspiracy*. Thus, the **Career Day Issue** was born! Personally, I like the themed issues. And hope we have more in the future.

Which brings me to our third special item. The next issue of DEMONGROUND will not come out until AFTER GenCon '99, so this is our last chance to remind you guys about what's going to be happening there.

This year's GenCon is going to be the biggest yet for *Dark Conspiracy*! We have confirmed at least seven different DC events run by six different referees. Many of these events will be run in multiple timeslots throughout the convention. For a complete schedule of events, you can check the DARK TIMES news page at http://www.42north.org/~mjm/rpg/dc/DarkCon_News.html. Issue 6 of DEMONGROUND will come out toward the end of August and will be our **Special GenCon Issue** (see? another theme!), containing many of the adventure modules for the games run at the convention. Who knows, we might even swing some photos! I guess that's all I have to say right now, except Thanks for your readership! If it wasn't for people like you, people like us wouldn't be doing the things we do for you folks.

Mike Marchi June, 1999

"Some belief systems hold that reality is just a manifestations of the thoughts and beliefs held by the human mind; everything is just a dream.

"If that's the case, then there are some *seriously* sick people around."

- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary philosopher)



Making a Career of it

The Dark Conspiracy Player's Handbook, especially the Master Edition, has plethora of career choices for character creation. They cover a wide range of different occupations and can give you plenty of options when you are creating your character.

But sometimes you get an idea for a character that just won't go away, but none of the career options seems to mesh with what you want to do with the character's background. What do you do about it?

There are basically two options: you can forget about the character because nothing fits what you want to do with it, or you can design some new careers to let you do what you want with the character.

Designing new careers for Dark Conspiracy is extremely straightforward. All of the careers in the book have the same basic structure and give the PC roughly the same development options.

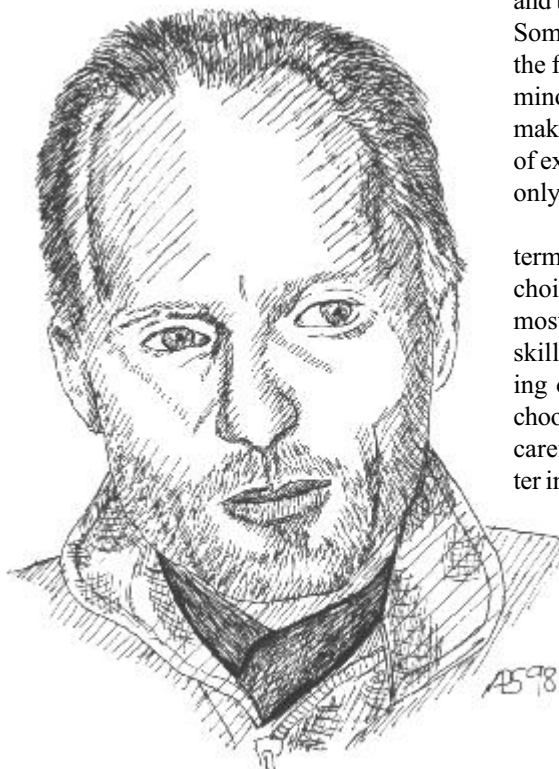
The first thing to do when you are designing a new career is to write down a couple of sentences describing what the character does. Have a read of the careers in the Player's Handbook to see the style and depth of the information that you will need to put in the descriptive text section. Be creative with this. Try to capture what it is like to be employed in that career. If a term spent in this career would be exciting, then mention that in some way. If the term is a dead end and essentially a waste of four years of the character's life, then try to capture that as well.

The next thing you need to determine is what the prerequisites for this career are; what does the character need before he or she could even think about doing this job. For this section, perhaps the best thing you can do is use your common sense. Look at the careers that people have in the real world and think about what that person needed to get into that position. Did they have to go to university to get the necessary knowledge? Do they have to possess some sort of

physical ability in a particular area? Is it a career that anybody could pick up regardless of his or her age or experience base. Use the existing careers as a guide; have a look at what they require of a character and see if any of the prerequisites listed for similar careers are applicable for the new career you are designing.

Once you've figured out what a character would need to start in this career, the next step is work out the skills a character would get in his or her first four years on the job. For the most part, these skills should be fixed; the player should not get to choose which skills they want from a list. Of course, there are always exceptions to this rule (for example, the prisoner career in the Master Edition).

For the most part, mundane human careers get 6 skill points in the first term. Empathic careers get 7 points in the first



Geoff Skellams
looks at how
to design new
careers

term. ET Careers or Rogue Darklings get 9 points, but they also do not get any secondary activities, which explains the additional two points. ET careers are only ever allowed as a first term option. A character **must** start their character generation with these terms and then move onto the other career options. Some mundane careers give seven points in the first term, but these are definitely in the minority. Only give seven skill points if it makes sense for the career to gain that level of experience. However, if you are in doubt, only give six points.

Subsequent terms are similar to first terms, except that they give the player more choice over the skills they can learn. Again, most careers only give six points worth of skills in the secondary terms. When working out the list of skills that a player may choose from, use your common sense. Think carefully about the sorts of skills a character in the career would pick up and list those.

A good rule of thumb is to list between six and twelve different skills for the players to choose from. Remember, the skills listed should be relevant for that career. It would not make sense for a baker to have Small Arms (Rifle) listed in the subsequent skills list. If you get stuck, just refer to the Players Handbook and see what



some of the other careers have done.

Once the skills have been worked out, the next thing to determine is the number and type of contacts that a character in that career would gain. Most careers only provide a character with one contact per term. There are exceptions to this rule, but they are the sorts of careers where the character would spend most of his or her time networking and communicating with other people. Use your common sense when working out how many contacts a career should provide. If you are at all in doubt, simply provide one.

Once you have figured out how many contacts the career will provide a character, you then have to determine what type of contacts they are. In Dark Conspiracy, general contacts are divided into fourteen broad categories. These are Academic, Business, Criminal, Empathic, Entertainment, Extraterrestrial, Government, Intelligence Community, Journalism, Law Enforcement, Medical, Military, Specialist or Wealthy. A Specialist contact usually requires a skill listed next to it to show what the contact is good at. Provide contact groups that make sense for your career. For example, a baker would probably only list Business contacts, although Government or Criminal might also make some sense. An Extraterrestrial, however, would not.

A contact has a chance of being designated as “foreign”. In Dark Conspiracy, a foreign contact need not be from another country. A foreign contact is one that works in an unusual area of that category. Use the careers in the Player’s Handbook as a guide for determining the chance of a foreign contact. If you think that a character in that career would meet a lot of strange people working in esoteric areas, then give a lower target number.

The last thing to work out is if there are any special conditions for that career. Most careers will not have any special cases attached to them. However, a few things need to be taken into consideration:

- If a career is based primarily on a single skill, then you should use the level of that skill for calculating income for that term, instead of defaulting to the characters EDU stat. For example, a computer programmer uses computer operation skill, and a gambler uses gambling.
- If the career stops the character from providing some sort of input into society, then they should not get any money for that term at all. An example of this is the Prole career, who relies on a corporation for all his or her basic needs.

- If the career puts the character in some sort of danger on a regular basis, then the character should be given a +1 to initiative for any terms served after the first.
- If there are any special things that need to be taken into consideration for this career, then they should be listed in the special section as well.

By the time you get to this stage, your new career should be complete.

You’re now ready to create a character using that career. However, if you are a player, you should always have your Referee look over the new career to make sure that he or she feels that it is balanced, and that they agree with the choices of skills and contacts that you have provided for that career.

Once you’ve created your new career and generated your character using it, then why not write it up and submit it to DEMONGROUND so that other players and referees can get some inspiration from what you have created.

Creating new career options for Dark Conspiracy is a relatively straightforward exercise that does not take very long. Within half an hour, you should be able to follow these guidelines and create your own new careers that will let your character do something that no one has seen before.

“A wise man once said that ‘goals are just dreams with deadlines’. The Dark Lords’ goals are to destroy humanity and take control of the Earth.

“We have to make sure they miss their deadline by making them wish they had never *dreamed* of coming here.”

- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary philosopher)



Children in the Shadows

Mike Marchi
presents some
enhanced
character
backgrounds

Introduction

While proofreading the Basic edition player's handbook, I came across a notation in the section on social class. It said that if you select the prole social class, then you had to spend your first term in any number of largely unsavory careers, among which was the Street Urchin. It was while viewing the rules in this context that a number of ideas gelled in my mind. I will get to them all in a moment, but first let me say, the Street Urchin is an excellent addition to the original DC character generation rules. It covers a class of humanity that had been sorely missing from not only DC, but a number of other gaming systems as well. The rules for DC seem to assume that only responsible adults will be wading through the sewers of this Dark World, in search of evil infestations to annihilate.

From the experiences with my own group, it has become obvious that this is not always the case. One of our players grew tired of being elected party spokesperson all the time. His attempt to discourage this typecast by electing to make his next character a mute, did little to keep the party from following his silent lead. His more recent attempt has been far more successful, and coincidentally, far more fun for him as well. He elected Street Urchin as his first term,

and selected it again for a second term. By the rules, this means his first term began at age 9, and his second at age 13. To enhance his unworthiness-to-lead in the eyes of the other players, we opted to end his second term, halfway through. The resulting character, Spike, is a 15-year-old street kid (actually he's 16 now, I forgot about his recent birthday – congrats on the driver's license, kid!). In order to make Spike a realistic character, some modifications and special interpretations of the rules had to be made. They form the basis for the mechanics of this article.

Recall that when generating a new character, the players need to roll their statistics prior to electing any careers. The character is assumed to begin this character generation process at the age of 17, and is assumed to have four skills available (each at level 2). These skills are selected from the background activities table, and represent skills the character earned in the process of growing up. It was this assumption which set off the red flag for me while proofreading the rulebook. The Street Urchin (added after the initial rules were created) violates this assumption by being a pre-generation career. It seemed to me (and in retrospect, I recall imposing this restriction on Spike), that the career of Street Urchin

should replace that background skill set. If it were in addition to those background skills, then every player would attempt to max their character out by taking this essentially free career. And so, I instituted a ruling in my game that if you wanted to take Sewer Urchin as a career, it had to be your first, and last career choice. I was, in effect, overcompensating for a hole in the system brought about by the addition of the urchin as a career. But now, I think I see a better way...

Children in Dark Conspiracy

Kids. They're everywhere. Whether you have one of them, or you are one of them, chances are pretty good that a child influences your life in some way. Why should your *Dark Conspiracy* universe be any different? The following set of rules is designed to provide you with the ability to generate characters who are still children, as well as providing an alternate, more involved way of generating those background skills received prior to age 17.

Attributes

Roll up Strength, Constitution, Agility, Intelligence and Empathy attributes for characters as per the normal rules. Educa-

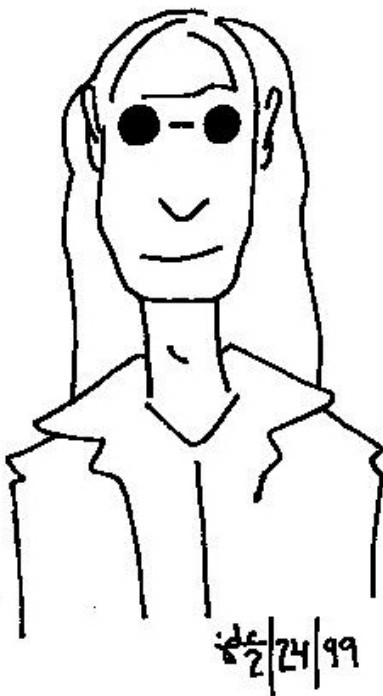
Generated Attribute	9 years	11 years	13 years	15 years	17 years
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	1	1	1	2	2
3	1	1	2	2	3
4	2	2	3	3	4
5	2	3	3	4	5
6	3	3	4	5	6
7	3	4	5	6	7
8	4	5	6	7	8
9	4	5	6	8	9
10	5	6	7	9	10

Table 1



tion is a special case as we will see below. The numbers you have just generated represent the values that this character will have when they reach adulthood, and thus are hardly appropriate for a 9-year old. This is especially true for the three physical stats, Strength, Constitution, and Agility. For simplicity, this system assumes that a 9-year old's physical attributes are 1/2 the final value they will achieve when they reach the ripe-old age of 17 (Intelligence and Empathy remain at full levels). And so, the values of the attributes are pro-rated across the eight year span according to Table 1.

The other exception to the default generation rule is Education. The Education of all 9-year olds is assumed to be 1. Education advancement is dependent on the childhood careers available to the character. There are now five childhood careers available, including Street Urchin. The four new careers are Silver Spoon, Suburban Brat, Underprivileged, and Hayseed. Each of these careers has an automatic Education modifier, which represents the educational opportunities available to these generic social classes.



Silver Spoon

You were born to privilege. Your parents wanted for nothing, and saw to it that you had every opportunity possible. You received the best education and spent much of your free time pursuing leisure activities. Due to your sheltered upbringing, you are naïve about the ways of the real world.

Entry: Gnome social class, Age 9

First Term Skills:

Education	2
Act/Bluff	1
Computer Operation	1
Luck	2
Persuasion	1
Swimming	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

Education	3
-----------	---

A total of four levels from any one or a combination of the following (no value may exceed 2):

Acrobatics
Act/Bluff
Archery
Business
Computer Operation
Horsemanship
Language (foreign)
Leadership
Melee Combat
Navigation
Persuasion
Small Arms
Swimming
Vehicle Use
Vessel Use

Contacts: None

Special: Unlike other careers, characters are silver spoons *before* the age of 17, not after. According to the new expanded rules, characters must begin at age 9. Silver spoon may not be chosen as a career after age 17, and therefore must be the character's first career. The die roll to end character generation is never made following a term in this career. One secondary activity per term is allowed for silver spoons.

Suburban Brat

You grew up in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area and spent much of your life in the relative shelter of your community. Although you haven't seen much of the world, you've heard a great many things about what goes on out there (mostly urban myths). This tends to make you a little overconfident about how much you really know. Your education was slightly above average.

Entry: Mike social class, Age 9

First Term Skills:

Education	2
Computer Operation	1
Luck	1
Observation	1
Stealth	2
Swimming	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

Education	2
-----------	---

A total of four levels from any one or a combination of the following (no value may exceed 2):

Acrobatics
Act/Bluff
Climbing
Computer Operations
Horsemanship
Language (foreign)
Leadership
Luck
Melee Combat
Small Arms
Stealth
Swimming
Vehicle Use

Contacts: None

Special: Unlike other careers, characters are suburban brats *before* the age of 17, not after. According to the new expanded rules, characters must begin at age 9. Suburban brat may not be chosen as a career after age 17, and therefore must be the character's first career. The die roll to end character generation is never made following a term in this career. One secondary activity per term is allowed for suburban brats.



Underprivileged

You grew up in the housing projects and your parents had nothing to call their own. Your education ended when you were very young; government funding dried up too soon for you to really benefit. Most of your life lessons were learned from others in the projects, or people on the street. You have heard just about every hard-luck story from anyone that has ever tried and lost. Somehow, you hope that you won't share the fate of those around you.

Entry: Prole social class, Age 9

First Term Skills:

Education	1
Luck	1
Observation	1
Melee Combat	1
Stealth	1
Streetwise	2

Subsequent Term Skills:

Education	1
-----------	---

A total of four levels from any one or a combination of the following (no value may exceed 2):

Act/Bluff
Archery
Bargain
Disguise
Luck
Melee Combat
Observation
Pickpocket
Stalking
Streetwise
Thrown Weapon

Contacts: None

Special: Unlike other careers, characters are underprivileged *before* the age of 17, not after. According to the new expanded rules, characters must begin at age 9. Underprivileged may not be chosen as a career after age 17, and therefore must be the character's first career. The die roll to end character generation is never made following a term in this career. One secondary activity per term is allowed for underprivileged.

Street Urchin

You don't remember your parents; your earliest memories are of running with a "pack" of other homeless children. Few of them survived the hazards of street life, but somehow you did. Maybe you were just smarter, or quicker, or just luckier than the others.

Entry: Age 9

First Term Skills:

Education	0 (no education)
Luck	1
Observation	1
Pickpocket	1
Stealth	2
Streetwise	2

Subsequent Term Skills:

Education	0 (no education)
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A total of four levels from any one or a combination of the following (no value may exceed 2):

Act/Bluff
Bargain
Disguise
Foreboding (if EMP 1+)
Forgery
Leadership
Lockpick
Luck
Melee Combat
Observation
Pickpocket
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise
Tracking

Contacts: One per term, criminal.

Special: Unlike other careers, characters are street urchins *before* the age of 17, not after. According to the new expanded rules, characters must begin at age 9. Street urchin may not be chosen as a career after age 17, and therefore must be the character's first career. The die roll to end character generation is never made following a term in this career. No secondary activities are allowed for street urchins.

Hayseed

The countryside has been your home for as long as you can remember. You've never seen a city, but have always wondered what they would be like. You grown up with animals of all kinds, whether that was in terms of caring for them, or hunting them.

Entry: Prole or Mike social class, Age 9

First Term Skills:

Education	1
Animal Empathy	1 (if EMP 1+)
Observation	1
HorsemanSHIP	1
Stealth	1
Swimming	1
Tracking	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

Education	1
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A total of four levels from any one or a combination of the following (no value may exceed 2):

Animal Empathy (if EMP 1+)
Archery
Biology
Foreboding (if EMP 1+)
HorsemanSHIP
Luck
Mechanic
Melee Combat
Observation
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Swimming
Tracking
Vehicle Use

Contacts: None

Special: Unlike other careers, characters are hayseeds *before* the age of 17, not after. According to the new expanded rules, characters must begin at age 9. Hayseed may not be chosen as a career after age 17, and therefore must be the character's first career. The die roll to end character generation is never made following a term in this career. One secondary activity per term is allowed for hayseed.



New Careers

Monk

More and more people are feeling increasingly frustrated and unable to cope with the stresses of life in the modern world. Some turn within themselves for the answers. Monasteries and other similar establishments provide the opportunity to spend time meditating and learning the answers to the question of life from deep within.

Entry: EMP 1+

First Term Skills:

+2 EMP	
Human Empathy	3
Willpower	2
Empathic Healing	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

A total of seven levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- +1 CHR
- +1 EMP
- Animal Empathy
- Empathic Healing
- Foreboding
- Human Empathy
- Observation
- Project Thought
- Project Emotion
- Willpower

Contacts: one empathic per term. Contact is foreign on a roll of 8+.

Special: No secondary activities are allowed. Only a quarter of the normal starting money is received for each term spent as a monk.

Healer

Somewhere along the line, you realised that you had a gift for healing people. Disease is not something that you need to treat with drugs or surgery; by changing a person's mindset, you can create immediate and permanent healing in their physical bodies. You have given your time and energy to helping others, knowing that by healing others, you heal yourself.

Entry: EMP 2+, Empathic Healing 1+

First Term Skills:

+1 EMP	
Empathic Healing	2
Human Empathy	1
Psychology	1
Willpower	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

A total of seven levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- +1 EMP
- Act/Bluff
- Empathic Healing
- Human Empathy
- Medical
- Project Emotion
- Project Thought
- Psychology
- Willpower
- Willpower Drain

Contacts: one empathic or medical per term. Contact is foreign on a roll of 8+.

Special: Use Empathic Healing instead of EDU for calculating starting money.

Firefighter

With the increase in the populations of the big metroplexes, people are being shoved closer together. Silly things can happen and fires can start. Unless they are brought under control quickly, the death toll can be enormous. You've accepted the responsibility to help people get out of danger and to minimize the damage caused by the fire.

Entry: STR 6+, AGL 6+, CON 7+

First Term Skills:

+1 STR	
+1 CON	
Medical	1
Engineer	2
Luck	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

A total of six levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- +1 STR
- +1 AGL
- +1 CON
- Acrobatics
- Chemistry
- Engineer
- Foreboding (if EMP 1+)
- Luck
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Willpower

Contacts: one government or law enforcement per term. Roll 1D10 for 10 for the contact to be foreign.

Special: None.

Chris Carpenter, Geoff Skellams, Ian Sullivan and Lee Williams use the new career generation guidelines to extend the options for character creation



Fixer

People want stuff that's hard to get, especially if it's illegal. That's when they come to you. You know people who know people who can get stuff. You don't mind acting as a middleman, so long as you get a cut of the price. In this business, it's not what you know. It's definitely who you know and how well you get on with them.

Entry: CHR 7+, Bargain 3+

First Term Skills:

Act/Bluff	1
Bargain	3
Business	1
Luck	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

A total of five levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Bargain
Business
Computer Operation
Language
Luck
Observation
Persuasion
Scrounging
Streetwise

Contacts: four government, criminal, military, business or intelligence community per term. Roll 1D10 for 5+ for the contact to be foreign.

Special: Use Bargain instead of EDU when calculating starting money. Also, roll once per term versus Intelligence to avoid capture. If unsuccessful, the next career choice must be Criminal.

Pirate

In the past, you would have plundered the Spanish Main. Nowadays, speed and stealth are the prime tools of your trade. You use powerboats to hit your targets hard and flee to international waters before the coastguards can intercept you. Your treasure in these is high-tech goods, and even corporate secrets. At least it's never dull...

Entry Requirements: At least one Criminal contact.

First Term Skills:

Vessel Use (Boat)	2
Navigation	1
Swimming	1
Observation	1
Armed Melee	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

Any combination of Six levels from the following list:

Climbing
Electronics
Heavy Weapons
Lockpick
Luck
Mechanic
Melee Combat (Unarmed)
Melee Combat (Armed)
Navigation
Observation
Small Arms
Stealth
Swimming
Thrown Weapon
Vessel Use (Boat or Ship)

Contacts: one per term, Criminal, Law Enforcement. On a D10 roll of 7 or more the contact is foreign.

Special: For each term served roll 1D10, on a roll of 8+ the character is captured by the authorities and must spend a term as a Prisoner. +1 to initiative if the character spends more than one term in this career. Starting money for this career is calculated by rolling 4D6 per term spent in this service and multiplying the total by \$1000.

Meter Reader

The economy may crash, but people will always need gas, water, and electricity, and the meter reader stands as the utilities' front line in quality service. Fending off human attacks has become as common as dog attacks, and the "unarmed" reader must be prepared for anything. Meter Reading is hard work, and physical enhancement is an initial result. There is a high turn-over in readers, and those willing to stay are rewarded with increased pay and benefits.

Entry: Vehicle Use (Wheeled), INT 4+, CON 5+

First Term Skills:

+1 CON	
Computer Operation	1
Lockpick	1
Melee Combat (Armed)	1
Observation	1
Stealth	1
Vehicle Use (Wheeled)	1

Subsequent Term Skills:

A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

+1 AGL (see below)
+1 CON (see below)
Animal Empathy (if EMP 1+)
Business
Computer Operation
Lockpick
Melee Combat (Armed)
Observation
Stealth
Vehicle Use (Wheeled)

Contacts: One per term, business or criminal. No chance for foreign.

Special: The +1 STR and +1 CON for subsequent terms cost 2 skill levels each, instead of just one.

Income for terms after the first is figured by adding 1 to the controlling attribute (EDU) for every term after the first. (Example: a character with 3 total terms would add 2 to EDU for figuring income.)



Getting Jiggy With It

Let's face it: The skill list in the Dark Conspiracy rulebook is pretty short. There are a lot of things that it just doesn't cover. Sometimes, you can bend the definition an existing skill to fit. But those situations tend to stop game play while you and your Referee argue over which is the most effective skill to use and how it is going to work. If you were in the middle of a really tense scene, the atmosphere is going to evaporate faster than liquid oxygen on a hot barbecue plate.

Possibly the best way to alleviate this problem to some extent is to extend the skills list. There are certainly new skills that could be added that would provide extra depth and color without ruining the game balance, or being overly specific to make them useless.

Here is a list of new skills for Dark Conspiracy; some have been adapted from Twilight: 2000. Fitting them into character generation is left to the referee. Some may be used to replace skills for certain careers; others may be taken as background skills. Some of these skills may only be learnt during game play.

Archaeology (EDU): Characters with this skill have knowledge about the races of antiquity. It can be useful when the character is examining ancient stone carvings or artifacts. It can also be used to excavate object or corpses and preserve any clues that may exist.

Artistry (INT): Artistry is a cascade skill representing the creation of pieces of art, including Painting, Drawing, Sculpture and Computer Graphics.

Astronomy (EDU): Characters with Astronomy have spent their time studying the stars. Although not a cascade skills, PCs should choose a specialization, either optical or radio astronomy.

Fishing (INT): Fishing allows a character to catch fish. This can be done either using a hook and line, or by using nets or traps.

Catching fish is a Difficult task without adequate equipment, or an Average one with adequate equipment. Using the skill to construct the equipment is a Difficult task.

Forensics (EDU): This skill allows a character to examine a crime scene and to deduce the turn of events from the clues left there. If this skill is used in conjunction with Psychology, it can be used to determine the motives of a suspect, based solely on evidence at the crime scene.

Gunsmith (AGL): A character with this skill has the ability to make and repair weapons. Tasks can include fitting a telescopic sight to a rifle (Average); Fitting a starlight scope (Easy); Constructing a crossbow or crossbow bolts (Average).

Machinist (AGL): This skill gives a character the ability to use machine tools (such as lathes) to make other machinery.

Metallurgy (EDU): The knowledge of smelting ore into metal, forming alloys and basic metalworking. Tasks can include using a smelter to smelt ores (Easy); Forging objects given the correct equipment (Average); constructing a forge or smelter with the right equipment (Average).

Meteorology (EDU): The skill gives the character an understanding of weather patterns and the forces of nature that give rise to them. Predicting the weather later today is an Easy task; tomorrow is Average and the following day is Difficult.

Philosophy (EDU): The character is familiar with thought and the different ways of looking at human existence. It also covers the philosophies of different religions, both ancient and modern. Although not a cascade skill, a character should choose an area of specialty.

Photography (EDU): An understanding of how to best use a camera to take a photo. This skill also covers the development and manipulation of photographic images, provided the character has access to darkroom facilities.

Extending Dark Conspiracy's skills list with Geoff Skellams

Production (EDU): This is a cascade skill covering the creation of performance pieces for the entertainment or education of others. It includes Film, Television, Radio, Newspapers, Stage, Multimedia and Special Effects.

Scrounging (INT): The ability to find man-made objects, such as spare parts, ammunition or tools. When a character attempts to find an object, he or she must specify a search location. The referee will need to determine a difficulty level based on the environment and the object being sought; the higher the character's skill in scrounging, the greater the chance they have of finding something in an unusual place.

Scuba (CON): The ability to use underwater breathing apparatus safely. Avoiding a mishap while underwater (Easy); Navigation underwater (Average). This skill may not be taken at a level higher than the characters swimming skill.

Snow Skiing (AGL): This skill gives the character the ability to travel using snow skis.

Survival (INT): A character with Survival is familiar with the techniques required to gather food and water and to create shelter while trapped in hostile or remote environments. It is a cascade skill and includes Arctic, Desert, Tropical, Temperate and Ocean.



Out, Back and Beyond

The Vorceki Saga Part 3 by Mike Marchi

“Forced down in the Australian out-back, our intrepid band must find a way to get their newly acquired gate components back to their patron at NASA. Little do they realize that they are not the only people searching for these components... and perhaps more importantly, they are not the only people to have found any!”

Foreword

This adventure is the third installment in a series of adventures begun in Volume 3 of DEMONGROUND, with “Pines and Sunshine” by Dr. Michael C. LaBossiere, and continued in Volume 4 with “It’s Cold in Space” by Michael H. Wittek.

I can assure you, that this disturbing tendency to have people named Mike write the chapters of this story will end with this episode. The remaining two chapters will not be written by anyone with the name, Mike, Michael, or any sub-derivation there-of.

Non-Player Characters

Rather than rehashing the same material over and over as each episode in this series progresses, the following is a short summary of the major NPC’s that have been carried over from previous episodes. You can refer to the adventure in DG Volume 4

for the detailed information.

- Dr. Karl West (human): Primary/Initial patron - discovered alien DNA in humans
- Dr. Blake Lansing (Terceki hybrid): Obsessed with finding the gate components
- Major Janice Reed (Vorceki hybrid): Hot-tempered. She is also obsessed with finding gate components. To aid her in this quest, she has started a cult. Membership is restricted to Vorceki hybrids.
- Jeff Cohen (human): NASA Deputy Missions Director. He gave the party their shot at space. Now that they practically destroyed his precious shuttle, and landed it in the wrong place,...
- Robert “Wolf” Wolfgang Zimmerman (human): Fighter/bodyguard for “The Resistance”
- Dr. Eagon Spangler (human): A loner. Founder of “The Resistance” Contact with ‘the dark’ caused him to dedicate his life to fighting it.

A Long Time Ago...

Three and a half million years ago, an ancient alien race known as the Vorceki (the people), achieved space flight and discovered an even more ancient, even more alien, teleportation network. Using this network of gateways, the Vorceki combed the galaxy in search of other intelligent races. Failing that, they settled upon helping primitive, evolving races on the road to more advanced development.

Around this time, one of the Vorceki exploration teams discovered the biggest gateway yet - a super gateway capable of sending travelers not only to other parts of the galaxy, but to other dimensions as well. A team of highly qualified explorers was

selected.

They entered the gateway, and returned a short time later. But they were changed by the experience. A dark influence gripped their souls, turning these explorers against their own people. They became known as the Terceki (ghosts) and set about trying to control the teleportation network to use toward their own twisted purpose.

Too late, the Vorceki realized what the Terceki were up to. The only course of action available was to destroy the gate network, in order to prevent the spread of the Terceki’s evil influence. For the most part, they were successful, but their actions left many members of both races scattered and stranded forever on distant worlds.

In the process of its destruction, the gateway on earth blew apart into six segments, which were scattered across the face of the planet. On earth, a few of the Vorceki and Terceki survived the destruction of the gate.

Realizing that they would not be able to survive on the earth as the food supplies ran out and their equipment fell apart, both sides sought desperately for a way to survive and defeat the other. The Terceki tampered with the genes of some of the proto-humans and embedded their DNA into the genetic code of these creatures.

When these beings eventually evolved into intelligent life forms, the genetic codes would become active, triggering genetic “memories” and “programming”. The surviving Vorceki learned of this plan when they finally defeated the last of the Terceki on earth. The Vorceki, weak and dying, could not find and destroy all the infected proto-humans, so they decided to counter by creating hybrids of their own. These proto-humans would bear in their genes the “memories” they would need to continue the fight.

The Recent Past ...

Millions of years after the tampering



of the Terceki and Vorceki, their horrific labors have finally borne fruit. Some humans, infected with now active Terceki and Vorceki DNA, have set out to find the parts of the ancient gate and reactivate it. This yearning is part of their subconscious, but is growing stronger.

The players were first contacted several months earlier by Dr. Karl West, a physician from the Northeast United States who had noticed a disturbing increase in the recent incidence of birth defects. His research had led to the disturbing conclusion that the defects were not the result of a random mutation, but some sort of genetic marker built into the DNA of the child's parents, and passed on to the child.

They met Dr. Blake Lansing, a colleague of Dr. West's who had the same genetic marker as the deformed children, and claimed to be plagued by strange dreams. Through Doctor West, the players and Dr. Lansing met briefly with David Beck, a man who bore the active version of the genetic marker. His body showed disturbing physical deformities - oddly discolored skin, thick tentacles radiating out from his torso, and in the center of his abdomen, a gaping razor-toothed mouth. David Beck exhibited a rather pointed dislike for Dr. Lansing - and was killed while trying to figure out which

of his two mouths would do a better job of gutting the good doctor like a fish.

With information found in Beck's house, and the help of Dr. Lansing's dreams, the party found their way to Florida, where they discovered a tracking device of alien origin.

Here, they met Major Janice Reed, a military agent for the U.S. Government who also appeared to have the alien DNA marker, and also claimed to be plagued by dreams. She arranged for the tracking device to fall into the party's hands, on the condition that they would inform her if they found anything.

Following the signals emitted by this detector, they made their way back to Maine, and discovered an enormous gate component buried in the forest near Beck's remote cabin.

Yesterday...

The party, acting as a specialist team aboard the STS Shuttle Orbiter arrived quite suddenly and unexpectedly in Woomera, Australia. The orbiter had been sent to intercept an alien spacecraft found drifting past earth. Upon boarding, the party was shocked to discover not one, but two more components for the alien gate.

After defeating the guardian robots protecting the cargo, they secured the two components aboard the STS and left. The orbiter was severely damaged by an energy beam from the derelict starship as they made off with their prize.

The orbiter plummeted to earth as a hurtling ball of flame. Only the tremendous skill of the pilot allowed them enough control over the crippled STS to make an emergency landing at the Australian Space Center.

Today...

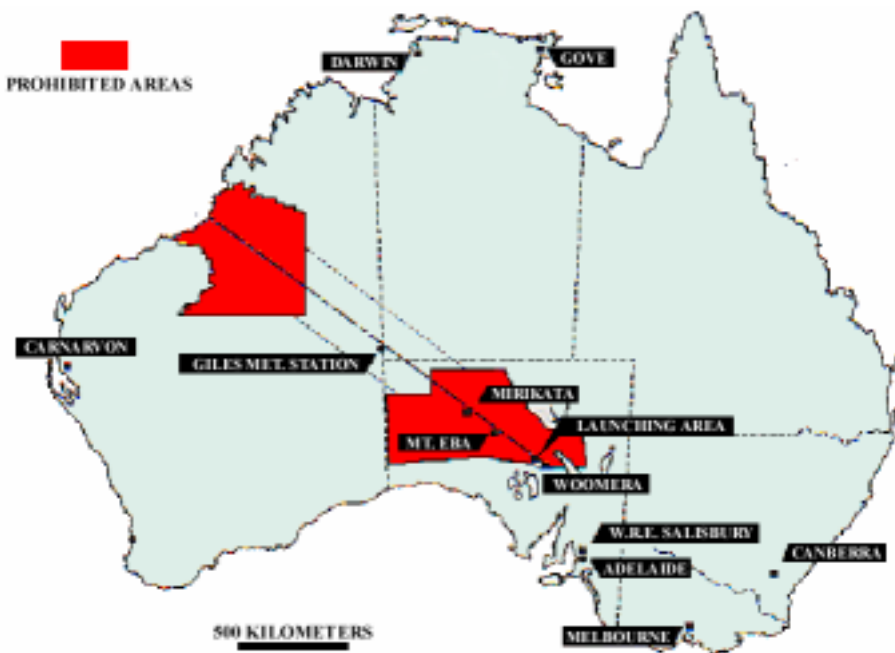
As soon as the players have finished with their post-flight decontamination procedures, a specially fitted Boeing 747, bearing the NASA logo on its flank, will arrive at the Australian Space Center. The two most unusual features of the jet are the extra set of stabilizers attached to the tail section, and the mounting bracket framework attached to the upper spine. The special shuttle-transport 747 taxis up to the featureless building where the STS Orbiter is currently hangared.

The first man off the plane when the portable gangway is rolled up, is Jeff Cohen, the NASA Deputy Missions Director. A dozen men in white clean-room suits follow him, each carrying a case of equipment. Cohen's steady trek toward the hangar is interrupted for only a moment to converse with the armed sentry outside the hangar. His team disappears into the hangar, to begin their inspection of the spacecraft.

Jeff Cohen's primary reason for coming to Woomera is to supervise the return of the STS Orbiter to the States. A team of technicians has arrived with him, and they immediately begin swarming over the shuttle with instrumentation and sensors.

It doesn't take long for the crew to report their preliminary findings on the extent of the damage to the spacecraft. Cohen is furious. The flight crew is separated from the party, leaving only the party members and Dr. Lansing alone to face the wrath of the Deputy Missions Director.

For his part, Dr. Lansing is content to sit in the corner of the briefing room staring down at the gate component locator device





sitting in his lap. Every so often, he activates the device, and listens to the rhythmic tone caused by the proximity of the two gate components in the hold of the STS orbiter. Whenever he does this, a faint smile crosses his lips, and his gaze grows unfocused, as if he is deep in thought.

Cohen's tirade winds up accomplishing very little. He paces excitedly around the room and shouts at the characters, and then at the walls. Nothing anyone can do will change the simple fact that the shuttle is going to be out of commission for quite some time.

Eventually, the door to the briefing room swings open, and three more familiar figures file in: Dr. Karl West, Dr. Eagon Spangler, and Wolf Zimmerman. Spangler will speak first, advising Cohen to calm down, then turn to the characters. He asks them to relate everything that transpired aboard the alien ship, paying particular attention to the details about the alien body they found onboard.

Dr. West is extremely interested in the description as well. He starts speculating that the creature they found, might be the true form that the alien DNA that infects Dr. Lansing, Major Reed and the others is striving to achieve. The four large tentacles at the midline of the disk-shaped body, with four smaller, more agile tentacles in between... the large mouth structure at the center of the abdomen ... all sound like the birth defects and deformities that Dr. West had observed. Dr. Lansing seems very uncomfortable with this discussion, and begins pacing around the room, self-consciously scratching his stomach through his shirt. (If anyone thinks to check, Dr. Lansing has four red welts forming around his midriff. Right now, they resemble a bad case of hives.)

Call from the Wastes

At last, the debriefing ends. For the moment, the group has been returned to the care of Drs. West and Spangler. Arrangements are made for the group to stay for the night, and a small bus arrives to pick them up and transport them to their hotel.

As the bus turns out along the access road from the space center, Lansing flips the

switch on the tracking device again. The thought of leaving the gate components behind, even for a short time, was clearly agitating him. For some reason, listening to the familiar tones of the tracking device as it confirms the continued existence of the two components calms him. Even if the players express annoyance over the monotonous double-pinging sound, Lansing will refuse to shut off the device. But as the bus rolls through the space center gate, and out onto the open road, the sound begins to change. P-PING ... P-PING ... P-PING ... p-P-PING ... p-P-PING ... p-P-PING ... p-P-PING ...

Lansing jumps to his feet, screaming for the driver to stop the bus. The driver is taken completely by surprise and pulls to the side of the road. Lansing pushes the exit door roughly open, and begins running out across the barren countryside, holding the tracking device out before him. He stops around 100 meters away from the bus starts screaming for the others to join him.

Dr. Blake Lansing is beside himself with excitement. "Look at this!" he says insistently while pointing the device back toward the base. The characters watch, and listen to the familiar double ping that indicates the presence of the two gate components in the hangar. Then he turns around, pointing the device toward the northwest. The double-ping grows softer, and is quickly overshadowed by a third, stronger signal. "There's another one!" Blake cries with glee, "There's another gate component out there! And it's not too far away."

Dangerous Venture

There can be no denying the evidence. There is something in the outback, to the northwest of Woomera that is causing a signal on the gate component locator. Lansing is insistent that the group mounts an expedition into the wastes as soon as possible. If there is another component out there, he wants to find it.

When maps of the area are consulted, and compared to the signal strength, they conclude that the device is located approximately 200 km away, near Mount Eba. The intervening terrain gets quite rocky, and the

group quickly votes down Lansing's suggestion that they simply drive cross-country to investigate. It is Dr. Spangler who comes across as the voice of reason in the discussion.

First of all, the area indicated by the locator is in what is called the "Prohibited Area" of the Woomera Test Range. The facility at Woomera is not only a rocket launch facility, but also a weapons test range. The sensitive nature of these operations forbids travel in these regions whenever a test is active or pending. As it turns out, there is a satellite launch slated two days hence.

The Referee is encouraged to have the players work through attempting to gain access to the Prohibited Area. The only way they will get access is if they can get clearance from the Australian space center administrators. They are extremely reluctant to grant passage to the players. Dr. Spangler will attempt to pressure the administrator from his end, while Dr. West will try to enlist the aid of Cohen.

In the end, the group will be granted limited access. The administrators refuse to delay the launch of the satellite, and will insist that if the group should fly into the Prohibited Area, that they be out of there within 24 hours.

The helicopter that is assigned to the group is a Mil Mi-17 Hip H, (a large transport craft of Russian design). Their pilot is Geoff Dundee, a grim man who is an extremely competent pilot and a long-standing officer in the Australian Air Force. Dundee understands the situation. He agrees to fly the group into the Prohibited Area, but they must dust off from the landing site by 18:30 hours the following day in order to beat the no-fly-zone deadline. He will insist upon following that guideline, and will not fly the chopper after that time.

Referee's Note: The preparations for the expedition need to be made relatively quickly. Make sure the group is realistic in their timing. They have 24-hours. They must equip themselves, fly to the site, locate the component, load it into harness and fly it back to Woomera. Dr. Lansing will absolutely force the issue. They must leave sooner, rather than later. Waiting for the



Mil Mi-17 Hip H

Powerplant: two 1,270 kW (1,703 shp) Isotov TV2-117A turboshafts
Dimensions: length 25.24 m (82ft 9.5in); height 5.65m (18ft 6.5 in); main rotor diameter 29.29m (69 ft 10.5 in)
Weights: take-off ('clean') 11,100 kg (24,470 lb); MTOW 12,000 kg (26,455 lb)
Performance: max level speed at 1,000 m (3,280 ft) 260 km/h (161 mph); service ceiling 4,500 m (14, 760 ft)
Armament: this is carried on two outriggers extending from the fuselage sides, and comprises four launchers each carrying 32.55mm (2.17 in) rockets.

Geoff suggests that Morgan Scrimshaw would be a good addition to the team. He is a heavy-load specialist with whom he has worked in the past. Based on the size of the previous components, Lansing reluctantly agrees that a heavy payload specialist might be a benefit.

At the appointed time, the group will assemble. The Players, Dr. Lansing, Wolf Zimmerman, Geoff Dundee and Morgan Scrimshaw will board the Mil. The massive helicopter will come to life and rise like a leviathan into the sky, steadying itself for only a moment before tipping forward and climbing into the northwest sky.

Boeing C-17A Globemaster III

Power Plant	Four Pratt & Whitney F117-PW-100 turbofan engines
Thrust	44,400 pounds per engine
Cruise Speed	540 (Mach 0.77) normal, 575 mph (Mach 0.87) max
Take Off/Land Distances	7,740 feet at max gross weight 3,000 feet with 160,000 pound load
Range	Unlimited with in-flight refueling
Fuel Capacity	181,054 pounds (28,000 gallons)
Operating Weight	276,000 pounds
Max. Takeoff Weight	585,000 pounds
Wingspan	170 feet, 9 inches (to winglet tips)
Length	173 feet, 11 inches
Height At Tail	55 feet
Tailspan	65 feet
Cargo Compartment Size	Height: 12 feet, 4 inches forward of the wing; Height: 13 feet, 6 inches aft of the wing; Width: 18 feet; length: 85 feet (inc. aft ramp)
Number of 463L Pallets	18
Number of Seats	54 (27 sidewall seats on each side)
Maximum Payload	70,400 pounds
Basic Crew	Three (pilot, copilot, loadmaster)

Interlude: Major Reed's Arrival

A half-hour after the helicopter departs the Woomera space center, a Boeing C-17 Globemaster III cargo plane will land at the Woomera facility. Major Janice Reed, U.S. government agent, (and Voceki/human hybrid with whom the party has had dealings in the past), will arrive on the scene with a team of a dozen mercenaries.

She had hoped to intercept and debrief the party, and is quite upset to learn that they have already left. When Dr. West informs her that the group has tracked down another gate component, she grows introspective, and seems lost in thought. She turns around and strides purposefully out of the meeting...

Near Miss

The majority of the flight out to Mt. Eba is uneventful. Dundee flies the Mi-17 expertly over the test range, passing over increasingly rocky terrain. The outback of the prohibited area is far from lifeless. Several rivers cut deep into the surrounding landscape, wildlife of every description flees beneath them as the helicopter flies by at an altitude of only a few hundred feet.

At one point, Dundee points down at an aborigine hunting party, whose cover is blown by the passing 'copter. Dundee chuckles to himself as the unsuspecting prey scatters beneath them.

Mt. Eba, is an ambitious name for the

three-day launch blackout to pass is not acceptable to him.

Departure

Dr. Spangler will assign Wolf Zimmerman to accompany the group on the

mission. Wolf is good in a fight, and will make sure that the players and Dr. Lansing operate in the best interests of the overall mission. Provide Zimmerman with at least as much firepower as your best-equipped player.



rocky outcropping that rises only a little more sharply and slightly higher than the surrounding terrain. Dundee throttles back as they approach within 15 minutes of their target. Dr. Lansing has the tracking device turned on again, and is busy trying to triangulate the exact location of the component. The party has little choice, but to sit with Wolf Zimmerman and scan the surrounding countryside through the small porthole windows set in the flank of the aircraft.

Suddenly, the helicopter pitches drastically to port, the whine of the twin turboshafts rising to a keening cry as Dundee frantically maxes out the throttle. Any character who isn't strapped into a seat should make a Difficult: Acrobatics roll to avoid being thrown around the cabin. (If the character doesn't have Acrobatics, it is a Formidable: Agility check. If the character is strapped in, the task changes to Easy, with a mishap causing the player to rap their head against the bulkhead next to their seat).

Anyone who looks out the window will see an ultralight airplane pass beneath them. The starboard wingtip of the ultralight appears to be damaged, torn fabric flaps in the wind as the pilot frantically tries to retain control from the downwash of the helicopter.

Swearing an oath, Dundee turns the helio around and begins pursuing the reckless pilot who popped suddenly up in front of him. The tattered flap of fabric on the outer wing continues to tear as the ultralight pilot boosts the throttle and attempts to make a run for home. The helicopter pursues the pilot into a nearby valley.

There, the pilot touches down on a well-used dirt runway, and taxis toward a fenced compound, which appears to be a junkyard of some kind. Before Dundee can decide the best way to teach the pilot a lesson, Lansing enters the cockpit and insists that he discontinue this pointless game of cat and mouse. The helicopter pilot looks into the driven stare of Dr. Blake Lansing, and turns the Mi-17 back toward the source of the signal.

The 'People'

The arrival at the base of Mt. Eba is

anticlimactic. There is a small settlement of aborigine bark huts nearby. Dundee lands the helicopter, and the PCs get out. Lansing reactivates the gate locator, and indicates that a worn path leading into the lowland region at the base of the mountain appears to be their target.

The aborigines in this tribe are painted with many decorative tattoos and other markings. The center of their stomach is painted with an elaborate circle with crossed lines meeting at the center, like bicycle spokes. Around their midriff, wavy lines stretch both upward along the chest and downward along the legs. Their chests are painted with several sets of paired circular markings, like additional sets of eyes.

The players will have no way of knowing from just looking at the natives that allow themselves to be seen, but this entire tribe consists of Vorceki/Human hybrids - like Major Reed. Only the genes that were implanted in these people have been active for several generations. The odd tattoos and markings emulate the physical manifestations of the true Vorceki form. Rest assured, there are members of this tribe, who have not revealed themselves, who do not need the paint to show these markings. All anyone can tell is that this tribe appears to have a unique costume.

Dr. Lansing, of course can sense something more. He is after all, Terceki, and the closest thing these people have to a natural enemy. The tribe, of course recognizes him as a threat to them. And deep down inside, they know it has something to do with what lies in the clearing beyond the worn path.

Component

The group will have to find some way to get down that path. The aborigines in the village are the most "human" of the tribe members. They are ill-equipped to assault an armed squad of adventurers. A simple demonstration of strength will be enough to send them scattering into the surrounding hills.

At the center of the clearing, a huge smooth stone object rests, buried in the ground. The silver-black rock forms a smooth "altar" upon which this tribe of

Vorceki hybrids performs their own brand of religious ritual. It is also the gate component which they seek.

The gate component is the huge central piece of the gate structure. Normally, a solid object the size of this component would be impossible to be lifted by a helicopter, or even carried by truck. But the material from which these components are constructed has some special properties which either produce extremely low density, or somehow counteract the force of gravity in such a way that the object appears considerably lighter than it should be.

Scrimshaw immediately begins checking out the object to see how best to hook it up to the helicopter. It is decided that a harness wrapped around the long axis of the piece, just outboard of the rounded area would be most effective. The only problem is getting the lifting straps under and around the artifact. There is no choice but for the players to dig. This action will take time. No matter how much time they have, when they start digging, they will be within 1/2 hour of their deadline when Scrimshaw announces that he can start hooking up the gate component.

Interlude: The Unexpected Gift

Major Janice Reed paced back and forth with increased agitation. Dr. Spangler watched her with interest as she grabbed her cell phone and dialed out for yet another status report. "Where the hell are they?" she snapped, yet again. "They're almost out of time."

Spangler does his best to console her, but fails. Ever since she had tried to get clearance to fly into the Prohibited Area in pursuit of Black Lansing and his party, she has been on the warpath. The deadline for the airspace lockdown was less than a half-hour away ... too soon to reach Mt. Eba and return. So her request had been categorically denied.

Suddenly the door of the briefing room banged open, and Dr. West entered the room followed by Jeffrey Cohen. "What is the meaning of this, Major?" demanded the



Deputy Mission Director. “Why are your people taking the alien artifacts from the shuttle?”

Major Reed turns back. “Mr. Cohen. I’m sure you can appreciate the concept of National Security. We are taking possession of the artifacts. We’ll put them in the C-17 and transport them back to the United States.”

The argument which ensues, lasts for several minutes, until the Major’s cell-phone rings. She listens for a few moments and then shouts an exclamation of anger. “WHAT!?” She resumes pacing. “We can’t allow that. This is getting out of hand.” She listens for a full minute this time, occasionally sighing or shaking her head ever so slightly. “All right, this is what I want you to do. That stone must not be allowed to leave the valley. You know what to do. Don’t worry about it. There is nothing they can do to harm the artifact.”

Dr. West looks expectantly at the Major. When no explanation appears to be forthcoming, he prods her slightly. “What is it, Major?”

“It is nothing. It has been taken care of.”

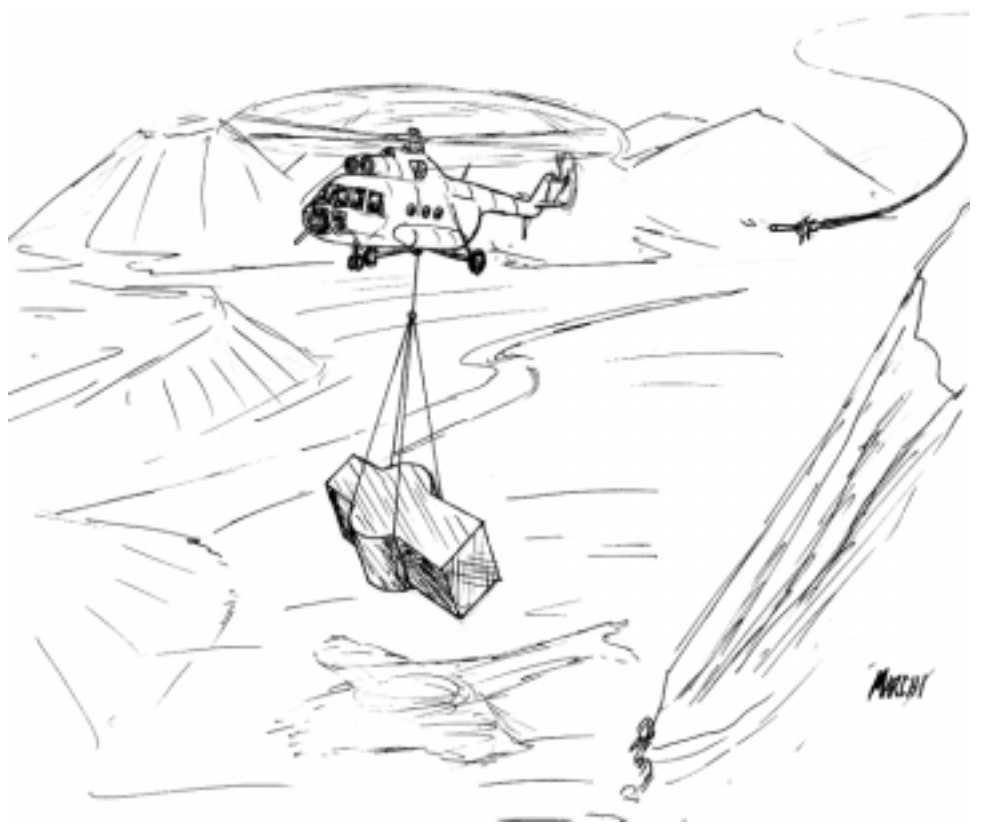
A moment later, a series of warning klaxons start buzzing out on the test range, followed by a short report, and a high-pitched whooshing sound that quickly fades, doppler-shifted into the distance.

Cohen’s face goes white. “My god. What have you done?”

Lockdown

The downwash from the Mi-17 is tremendous. Geoff Dundee maneuvers the craft into position over the altar stone even as Morgan Scrimshaw attaches the last of the lifting straps to the cable harness. The players have been digging in the dirt around the silver-black stone for well over two hours. They finally managed to clear enough of the object to allow the heavy-load specialist to thread the lifting straps around the massive component. The players continue to stand guard on the perimeter, keeping a watchful eye for the aborigine tribe.

At last, Scrimshaw steps back and shouts a command into his walkie talkie.



Wolf Zimmerman, working the winch inside the Helicopter, swears under his breath as the cable slips momentarily through the cleat, before catching and allowing the lifting straps to grow taut.

The whine of the turbfans above rises another octave, and the dust storm caused by the downwash flares up yet again, threatening to blind everyone on the ground. The straps begin to stretch ever so slightly. For a moment, it seems as if the straps will snap before the earth gives up its prize.

The players all stand back, saying a silent prayer for success. Suddenly, there is a distinct sucking sound, and the massive silver-black altar stone begins to rise out of the ground. The block continues to climb upward. Fiery orange sunlight stabs over the horizon, catching on the whirring rotors of the aircraft. Morgan is doing a happy-dance and shouting excitedly into his portable radio.

Without warning it came. Nobody is certain if Geoff Dundee even heard a warning signal of any kind. Nor are the certain whether or not Wolf Zimmerman received

any sort of heads-up from his commanding officer.

All they know, is one second, the Mi-17 Helicopter was flying overhead, bearing their prize and doing so with a full ten minutes to spare in their project timeline. . . . and the next, a streak of white flashed out of the southeast, and struck the craft amidships. It is a miracle that the PCs survive the resulting ball of fire erupting over their heads. It is another miracle that the cloud of flaming wreckage and debris manages to miss them all. And it is an even greater miracle that nobody is crushed by the fall of the massive altar stone.

Everyone stares dumbfounded for several minutes at the flaming wreckage that had been their only transportation. The altar stone seems to have crashed to the ground, no worse for the experience. It has created a very minor impact crater in the dusty ground below . . . a major improvement over the half buried state it had been in a scant five minutes sooner.

The clock ticks onward, past 18:30 and continues on. The group has missed their



deadline. They are now under a three-day air traffic lockdown. Their long-range communications equipment went down with the helicopter, and they lost a perfectly good pilot and a trained mercenary to boot.

The Junkman

A whoop of triumph echoes from the surrounding cliffs. The aborigine tribe is celebrating their good fortune. Somehow, the spirits have answered their prayers and stopped the intruders from stealing their precious altar.

Scrimshaw goes pale when he hears the cries of the aborigines. "I hate to point this out, but that was our ride home." He gestures toward the cliffs. "It will get dark soon. The natives will not allow us to just stay here on their holy ground. They will kill us if we don't leave."

Blake Lansing stumbles forward and puts both his hands against the smooth, stone surface. "We have to get this out of here."

There will likely be much debate as to what the group should do next. Unless they can come up with some way to move the stone, they will have to abandon it here, and begin a three-day trek across the outback. If the players don't think of it, have Lansing make the suggestion. "The man in the ultralight plane we passed on the way here...surely he would have some way for us to make contact with our people in Woomera."

The party is going to have to split up to get to Fred Stafford, the junkman who they practically knocked out of the sky. Fred's compound is located at least an hour's walk from the aborigine village. As long as Dr. Lansing stays by the gate component, it is unlikely that the party members travelling cross-country will be attacked (by the tribe, anyway).

Fred's compound is fenced off and patrolled by a half-dozen ragged-looking collection of semi-wild dogs. The dogs will bark at the approach of any living creature, raising a very effective alarm.

The badly corroded chain-link fence is 8 feet high, and topped with a loop of barbed wire. It completely encircles the 1/2 acre plot of land that Fred Stafford calls home. There

is a medium-sized house trailer located in the center of the compound, next to a twenty-foot water tower and a corrugated tin lean-to beneath which he parks his vehicles.

The outer rim of the yard is a collection of junk piles. Rusty, broken parts litter the ground in piles ranging from single pieces, up to six or more feet in height. There is a very large gate at the end of a long, straight driveway, which probably doubles as runway for the ultralight. The motorized gate swings wide enough open to allow the full wingspan of the small plane to pass through the gap.

Fred Stafford is in a really foul mood. The PCs did after all practically kill him. He has a number of vehicles in his "collection" that actually function. The largest vehicle that Fred has in his collection is an old Czech-built Tatra T815 8x8.

Fred doesn't even realize it, but he has

been drawn to this region because of the proximity to the aboriginal "altar" stone. The Vorceki-hybrid tribe of aborigines had an instinctive reaction of hatred toward Stafford. Over the years, they have made several attempts to get into his compound, and rid themselves of the perceived threat that his heritage presented to them.

Remember that the players will have no way of verifying if Stafford is a full human, or an alien hybrid. He shows no physical manifestations of the genetic tampering. Therefore, Stafford will make a big show of asking what kind of payment the players can provide. When it gets right down to it, something deep down inside him really wants to help get that altar stone onto the back of his truck, and get it away from here. It's almost as if it was the whole reason for acquiring the vehicle in the first place.

With this in mind, it is pretty much a foregone conclusion that not only will he

Fred Stafford

Level: Elite
Initiative: 4
Skills: As per Elite NPC, plus Mechanic 3, Small Arms (Rifle) 4, Acrobatics 1, Stealth 1, Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 4, Vehicle Use (Heavy) 2, Pilot (Fixed-Wing) 3, Navigation 2, Engineer 2, Bargain 4, Persuasion 2.

Fred is a Terceki/Human hybrid. His genetic material is stable and gives him excellent physical and mental capabilities; he shows absolutely no physical sign of the alien influence. Only a complete blood workup (which is not currently possible) would reveal a positive test for the DNA fragments.

Fred has suffered vivid nightmares his entire life. He cannot explain why he has chosen to become a hermit living in the Australian outback. Nor can he tell you why he chose this place, or why he receives these overpowering urges to collect vehicles.

Apart from his now-damaged ultralight airplane, Stafford has a Hummer, equipped with a crane and winch. He also has a large Caterpillar Bulldozer. But his pride and joy is a Czechoslovakian Tatra T815 8-wheel drive truck. The Tatra is the fourth iteration of his personal vehicular obsession with size. He started with a Chrysler Conestoga 5/4 Ton Pickup Truck. Within a few months, he decided the pickup wasn't large enough and traded it in on a second Hummer. Several months later, the Hummer was replaced by an Orca 2½ Ton Truck, and still he felt incomplete. It wasn't until he saw the Tatra; a massive all-wheel-drive vehicle with a 7½ Ton cargo capacity, that he felt he could be satisfied.



Tatra T815 8x8

Description:	crew cab + sleeper truck with drop-side tray, 6 seats, 4 doors
Dimensions:	10.36m (34'), width 2.5m (8' 3")
Ground clearance:	0.4m (16")
Weight:	15,000kg (34,000lbs) (unladen), max load 15,000kg (34,000lbs)
Engine:	multi-fuel V12 air-cooled engine
Transmission:	5 speed gearbox with 2-speed transfer case
Suspension:	independent by swinging-arms & leaf springs.
Max speed:	80kph (52mph)

allow the party to use the Tatra, but will volunteer to drive it for them too. Of course, any payment they manage to “bribe” him with, will be a welcome side-effect of the bargaining process.

The High Road

Getting the Gate Component up on the truck is easier than anyone imagines. Sometimes, the device just seems to want to float under its own power. A simple ramp up the back of the truck, and a hookup to the winch gives more than enough lift to slide the component up onto the Tatra. Within a few minutes, the canvas tarp is secured over the bed of the truck, and the party is ready to begin the long trek back to Woomera.

According to Stafford, there are two possible routes that might get the group back to Woomera. Both should be passable by the Tatra, but he is concerned that the river bed which they must traverse on the lowland route might be a flood-stage in some areas. He recommends the party takes the high-passage over the mountains. It will be a little slower, but the truck is more than capable.

The rocky pass is a very narrow road. During the entire trip, the steady drone of the V12 engine is their constant companion. The PCs will be constantly assaulted by the feeling that they are being watched.

They will start scanning the rocky cliffs on either side of them for any sign of pursuit.

After about an hour of travel, they will come to a ravine. The bridge that spanned the ravine is out...and based on the cloud of residual dust still hanging in the air around the site, it collapsed within the last few minutes!

Referee's Note: If you would prefer, have the aborigines merely sabotage the bridge so that the moment the truck begins to cross, the bridge starts to collapse. You can use this to great cinematic effect by playing up the PCs' attempts to reverse direction before plummeting into the gorge.

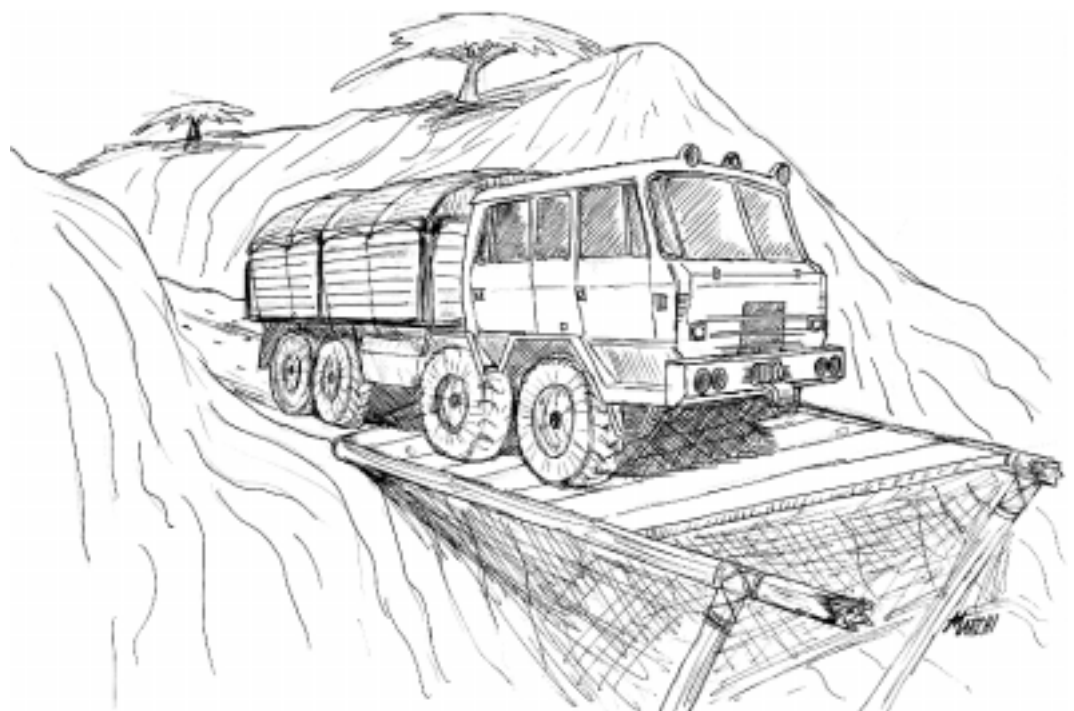
The first aborigine attack will take place at this point. The first attacks will take place with spears and throwing sticks. As long as the players stay within the confines of the truck, they should stay relatively safe.

The main danger is that a spear might penetrate one of the massive wheels of the truck. The vehicle is capable of operating with any one wheel on either side, flat. It can even operate with two wheels from the same side, as long as the missing wheels are not the front two, or the back two wheels. The truck is equipped with only two spare tires!

Due to the narrow nature of the road, it will be very difficult to turn the truck around. They will have to back it up at least a half-mile before coming to a wide-enough place. The group has little choice than to turn back and try the lowland route.

Haven't We Been Here Before?

Upon returning to the crossroads between the High Road and the Low Road, the truck is attacked again. This time, the attack is more vicious. In order to begin giving the players the feeling that they are being hunted, now is a good place for Scrimshaw to be killed. How you off the





poor bastard is left to the imagination of the Referee.

The Low Road

A river valley, or a shore along water. The travel here is much slower going. There is no actual road to speak of. Quite often, they truck will have to ride along the riverbed itself, slogging along through water that reaches anywhere from the bottom of their rims, to the underside of the cab windows.

The Vorceki are amphibious. The Vorceki/Human hybrids have gill slits and are able to breathe underwater. There are at least a dozen aborigine/Vorceki warriors tracking the progress of the party. They can sense that Stafford and Lansing are on the truck. They will stop at nothing to try to pick those two off.

Dark Hunt

The players shouldn't realize what is attacking them. At points where the truck is forced into the water, many things seem to happen. Several times, the undercarriage of the truck gets hung up on unseen obstacles. This causes the truck to grind to a halt. The truck can be freed on an Average task vs. Heavy Vehicle by rocking it in forward and reverse.

The Referee is encouraged to play up the paranoia of the hunt at this point. Their amphibious quarry can pull off gas caps, causing water to get into the gas tank. They can try to slice the tires of the Tatra. They can even use open windows or the fact that it's only a canvas tarp over the back of the truck to effectively attack. The full Vorceki hybrids are formidable opponents. They can grapple their target with the tentacles around their midriff, while performing two simultaneous bite attacks. The bite from the lower mouth is quite nasty, inflicting 3D6 of damage if the victim is held securely in the tentacle grip. The upper mouth does only 1D6.

The Vorceki should ultimately succeed in getting Fred Stafford. Again, this is left to the imagination of the Referee. One suggestion would be to have the truck hit a dropoff in the riverbed, and list suddenly to one side. A Vorceki warrior in the water can

smash the window next to Stafford, and pull him out - killing him in short order.

Final Stand

The harassing attacks of the Vorceki will continue. The players will eventually realize that it is the aborigines who are hunting them, and they are after Dr. Lansing. This should be a major dilemma for the party; they can't just toss Dr. Lansing overboard.

Throughout the trip down the river, he has been going on about having seen all this in a dream. His nightmares have foretold of this conflict, and he must live to see the gate components fully assembled. If all else fails, have him point out that at this point, he is the only Terceki that they know. They may not even have the same motivations as he. Play on their fear of the unknown.

After 160km of travel, the river bed widens, to allow the truck to climb out onto higher ground. The attacks will end at this point (The Vorceki would also stop attacking if Lansing and Stafford are both killed and the players push the stone off the truck, or in some other way abandon the gate component).

As the truck attempts to pull out for the last time, it gets hung up on something in the water. The wheels spin uselessly on the steep bank. If the truck were to leave the water, the Vorceki will have lost their advantage. One last all-out assault will be visited upon the players at this point.

During the course of that battle, Dr. Lansing will suddenly cry out in agony. He starts screaming. "It's me they want!" He starts shouting out the windows at the attacking hybrids. "You've won this battle. You've taken them all away from me! But it won't matter. You'll never win the war!" Anyone watching will see that the skin beneath his shirt appears to be writhing moving with a life of its own. A giant spot of blood will appear in the center of his stomach, and he will rip the shirt from his chest, revealing his mutating flesh. "Don't let them get this piece too! I beg you all. Guard it with your lives!"

Doctor Blake Lansing is no longer entirely human. An uncontrolled rage will overtake him and he will make every attempt to

get out of the truck and attack the pursuing Vorceki. If anyone tries to stop him, he will turn on the party member and attack with the same ferocity of any of the aborigine warriors. Dr. Lansing is set upon by the remaining warriors, and they all disappear into the murky depths of the water. A moment later, the truck finds purchase, and powers its way out of the river bed onto dry land.

As mentioned earlier, once they clear the riverbed, and are able to travel freely overland, the threat of the Vorceki hybrids is essentially ended. The players will have effectively survived the gauntlet, and will be free to complete their journey.

Return to Woomera

Arrival back at the Woomera Space Center should be a triumphant return. Unfortunately, their celebration is short-lived.

Upon their return, the party learns that Major Janice Reed has come and gone. She arrived with a large transport aircraft, confiscated the two gate components, and took off again. One of the workers who helped load the components thought it was odd that there was already another piece in the transport that seemed to be made of the same material. It appears that Reed has the arched top component that the group first discovered with her as well.

The party also learns that it was Major Reed who ordered the missile strike which destroyed their helicopter. West and Spangler alone, remain to pass this information on. Cohen and his team have secured the shuttle to the top of the 747 transport, and are preparing to return to the States.

Departure

When all the fervor dies down, Dr. Spangler will receive an anonymous phone call. He will speak for several moments, and then thank the person and hang up. "We've got a trace on Reed's C-17. They went to Auckland, New Zealand."

To be continued...



Draolings

Eyal Faingersh takes a look at the Dark Elves

The Draoling sat down on the cold, barren ground and wiped the blood from his lips. The taste of the stranger was awful, but that was better than starving to death. Droughts were a frequent phenomenon in the plains and cannibalism was essential to survive.

Most of the time, his clan preyed upon lone strangers that seemed to pass by or weaker groups of Draolings. He still remembered how he negotiated once with a larger clan, giving them the old and useless members of his own, those who could not fight or breed anymore... his parents amongst them. He remembered how he had smashed the skull of the female that gave birth to him, without regret borne out of the need for self-preservation.

Now he was sitting alone, away from his primitive, animalistic brethren who were fighting over the remains of the stranger. Sitting and thinking about the Humans, the ones who were responsible for this miserable savage existence. And hatred burnt like the fires of hell inside him.

If he could only reach them, looking into their eyes, as he slowly killed each one of them, absorb the horror that reflected their surprised expression and feel the warm blood flowing from their wounds. But he couldn't, no matter how he tried, there was always that barrier that prevented him from reach-

ing them, instead he could only watch.

At times, when the winds grew stronger, he could see into the human realm easily, viewing their world as if he himself was right there. Sometimes, he could push a little further through the barrier, and whisper into the human world... to a lone person in the quiet darkness. He would speak words of the hatred that burnt inside him and tell of the slow painful death that person would receive. In the end he would slowly but surely drive his victim into panic and madness.

The hunger for humanity rose again inside of him and he felt the need to try and again peek into the human realm, watch and learn, and if he was lucky enough, whisper once again to one of them. He closed his eyes, thinking of earth, allowing the hatred to fuel his efforts to glance into the cursed realm...

And there it was. Clear and within reach, as if someone removed... the Barrier! The Draoling jumped back in shock. The barrier was no more! Somehow it was gone, as if removed... nothing now standing between him and... the Prey! Concentrating harder he opened a portal into his favorite spot - An alleyway in the city where he had once only watched.

Opening this gate was almost as easy as opening one onto the other Draoling realms. This was an opportunity he must seize immediately. One last glance at the savage animals that were his brethren was enough, deciding never to return to this place again. With that one thought, he entered the portal.

Somewhere in one of earth's vast metropolises, in a dark dirty alley full of lurking shadows, a place where drug addicts lie in the mud watching the night skies and murderers disposed of their corpses, a portal from another dimension was opened and a Dark Elf entered our world.

Arcadia History

The mythical Elves of the medieval era are no more. Truly there once existed a race of gentle humanoids. Their hair bright and long as the rays of spring's sun, their almond shaped eyes as green as the grass of the vast plains. Childlike in appearance they brought cheer and delight to a lucky witness of their joyful celebrations in the clears of the ancient endless forests of medieval Europe. These Elves were fragile and peaceful beings, good natured and shy, but also naive and trustful. It was this last virtue, trust, that was to become the Elves' downfall.

Hundreds of years passed while the Elves kept out of the reach of humans, using their powerful Empathic talents they eluded the Knights who hunted them and tricked the Sorcerers who tried to capture them.

But the friendly race yearned for contact, even if the humans were still primitive, savage and untrustworthy. The Elven nature of sociability and adventure eventually repressed these warning signs and soon the Elves contacted humans with the childish cheer and delight.

Kings and Sorcerers were contacted first, but many were not as eager to introduce their new friends to the rest of the world. Instead many began to take advantage of their elven friends, preying on their trustful nature to learn as much as possible from their magicks and even tricking them into allowing humans into Arcadia, the home dimension of the delicate race.

As with everything mankind touches, Arcadia was soon no more.

There are no records of the events before or after the contact with the Elves in Human history, other than some mythologies of northern Europe mentioning a particular Sorcerer or Knight who launched a campaign to invade Arcadia.



What really occurred is known only to the descendants of those that survived the demise of Arcadia. However the one and only fact that has any significance in the present era is the blame rests solely on the human race for the terrible disaster that happened a thousand years ago.

The Present

The dimension of Arcadia has been fragmented a millenium ago as a result of intrusions of the humans. What was once a fertile world has now been ripped apart to become numerous protodimensions, all splinterlands. These protodimensions differ from each other in both terrain and their governing environmental and physical laws and yet still share three characteristics that make them similar to each other.

The First is their inhabitants, the Dark Elves (the normal dark elves, and their animalistic brethren). The Second is the Hostile environment (survival is possible, but food is scarce and life is hard), and the third are the remains of the once magnificent Arcadia. These monuments remain as reminders of mankind's betrayal and the Elves future redemption.

Dark Elves

Two types of dark elves exist. Both are descendents of the original race that lived in arcadia during the time of the human invaders.

Most common are the crossbreeds with the humans creating an animalistic savages race that roams the remains of Arcadia. These creatures are similar to the dark elves from the rulebooks, except for a fairly low INT and EDU while retaining their high Empathy. They are violent and irrational and are usually led by more intelligent clan members. These clan members are the Dark Elves that are presented in the Dark Conspiracy Referee's Guide.

These individuals seem to be no more than a hand full of the total population. Unlike their barbaric brethren, who share an ancient hatred they cannot understand towards humanity, the Intelligent Dark Elves know parts if not all the story behind the

demise of Arcadia.

These Dark Elves try, whenever it is possible, to peek into earth's dimension, watching and learning about their most hated enemy. In fact many spend so much time and effort to learning as much as possible about humans and earth, that if they are ever able to travel here, they already have expansive knowledge of us and find it simple to mingle with human society.

Since they are fairly intelligent, the Dark Elves do not just go on a killing rampage upon reaching Earth but rather try to use their high charisma and empathic talents to acquire power and doing what dark elves do better than anyone else... Trouble.

The Dark Elven language, surprisingly, is English. There is of course the language of the primitive Elves, which consists mostly of grunts and gestures, but the intelligent Elves learned learned most of their knowledge from observing North America and have adopted the English language... proof that English is not only an international language, but also interdimensional.

Dimensions

Name: Barren Rock

Type: Splinterland, sphere

Discontinuity: 1

Assimilation Effect

Value: 0

Barren Rock is possibly the largest fragment of Arcadia. The whole dimension is an endless desert of gray rocky soil, which is blown around by strong cold winds.

There are also oasis' in this desert environ, small islands of wet soil near muddy swamps that are scattered here and there across the dimension. These swamps are pro-

tected by various clans who claim desperate ownership over these life giving properties, fighting to the death against any who would try and take them.

The inhabitants are mostly the barbaric, primitive Elves, the more intelligent Elves preferring to migrate to another more habitable dimensions, or to earth. There is however one advantage in living on 'Barren Rock': its low discontinuity allowing easy access to Earth. Therefore it has become a bridge between Earth and the other dimensions populated by Dark Elves. (Clairvoyance into Earth is easier too).

The intelligent Dark Elves seem to have no interest in their primitive brethren that dwell in Barren Rock, nor do they seem to keep an eye on whatever happens there. But seeing as Barren Rock may be as big as Asia, if not larger, this is understandable.

The barbaric Elves do share the ancient enmity toward humans, and will recognize one by sight. They will probably attack instantly but will keep away when situation





proves that they are outnumbered or outgunned in combat (killing the leader would do the trick). Saying that however they will, as far as their limited intelligence allows, take any possible advantage to harm the PC's. For example, an intelligent Dark Elf, pretending to be an idiot might lead his clan to attack while the overconfident humans ease their guard.

Living in Barren Rock, as the barbaric Elves have been doing for a thousand years. Is a simple tribal life under the blue windy skies: Eating, Sleeping and Breeding. Food is scarce and obtained from simple agriculture (the soil islands) and cannibalism. Sleeping and Breeding is not different from any other mammal on earth.

Encounters: *Barren Rock seems to be deserted. The few clans and individuals that live there are easily seen from distance. A traveler can spend months without encountering anyone (and unless stuck there, nobody would want to).*

That is why there is no need for encounters table and the issue is up to the Referee.

Special Sites

Hole in the Ground

In the middle of nowhere there is a round canyon, 1000 meters wide and 100 meters deep, seemingly created by an earthquake. In the bottom, the rocks from the rocky, gray walls mixes with bones and corpses (some of which are fresh) of the dimension's natives. Their source is unknown but probably results from suicide or some form of sacrifice. The walls do not seem scalable without climbing equipment (which the barbarian Elves lack, a fact that might explain why do they all end up dead at the bottom).

The Truth: The place is actually a portal very close to earth and can be opened using the DarkTek devices buried under the rubble in the center of the canyon.

This portal is used by the "Unseelie Court", a Dark Elf cell (see below) as a way

of transporting equipment, prisoners and Dark Elves who cannot dimension walk themselves. The site is left unwatched.

However, there is a beacon installed on the DarkTek devices that sends a signal to the "Unseelie" whenever the portal has been activated.

The actual DarkTek machinery that opens the portal to earth is hidden 2 meters under the rocks and can be activated by a remote control that some Dark Elves from Unseelie carry. This remote control is a small biotechnology device, usually masqueraded in a car alarm's plastic box.

The hole is a crossroad, a place that corresponds with easily accessible sites in North America (weak inter-dimensional fabric) and other dimension "close" to Barren Rock.

The Elven corpses in the hole belong to some of the more empathic barbarians who were drawn to the gate and have died in a desperate attempt to reach the bottom of the canyon.

The Unseelie Court

Goals: Advance the aims of Dark Elves

Methods: Any

Empathic Philosophy: Darkling

Organization: Dictatorial Unit

Assets: Superior resources (over \$10,000,000 plus DarkTek)

Size: 40 members

Level of activity: High

Relations with ETs: Distrustful (ETs that serve the dark)

Relations with other cells: Conflict with all.

Description:

The "Unseelie Court", named after the mythical Evil Fairies, is a highly dedicated group of dark elves from Barren Rock, who have been to earth and managed to survive the secret war between man and darkness. "Unseelie Court" has two goals - the first is to oppose any Minion Hunters (a small group is working to discover the Delta7 di-

mension) and the second is to acquire assets on earth (members of powerful Megacorporations stockholders have been subverted and several Unseelie members have actually become corporate leaders themselves) and to collect DarkTek (armaments and any useful equipment can prove beneficial for the Unseelie's goals). The reason for these actions? Only the leader of Unseelie knows.

Unseelie Court usually ignore other darkling cells that they know of, and seldom do they use another Dark Elf or Human Igors to advance their aims, although it is not unknown for them to do so.

However, staying unknown and out of reach of Minion Hunters is at top priority since Unseelie feel they cannot oppose their foes at the present. The Unseelie also fear any contact with other powerful darklings (ET's) and the Dark Lords that might dominate them.

The leader of the Unseelie is a mysterious individual that might not even be a Dark Elf (Dark Lord?) who is known only to his 3 lieutenants, who keep an eye for him and fulfil his commands without hesitation.

DarkTek: Unseelie have collected an impressive, but terrifying stock of weapons and DarkTek.

They have established a base of operations at an unknown dimension, probably accessible only through Barren Rock. It is a small underground cavern world of high discontinuity (that is why a portal is a good transportation solution)

The source of this DarkTek is another dimension, the ruins of an extinct civilization that the leader knows of. While not having any scientists or labs to fix and build any DarkTek, the leader seems to know much about the technology found in the ruins and with his guidance heavy equipment has been recovered, along with several weapons yet to be seen on earth (yet!). However, the Unseelie have a vast arsenal of the latest Earth technology and the its members are well trained in the use of such.



F.I.S.T. of Iron

Lee Williams looks at the Army of the Republic of Britain

“Swift and Bold”

- motto of the Royal Regiment of Green Jackets.

The average squaddie in the British Army is actually one of the best trained and equipped soldiers in the world of Dark Conspiracy. As mentioned in the original Dark Britain article in DEMONGROUND 3, the corporations who backed the Recovery parliament financially and materially demanded certain privileges in return.

Foremost amongst these was the re-starting of the Future Infantry Soldier Technology (FIST) programme, which had been cancelled by the SPP during the troubles of 2008. The advances made over the decade following the Recovery have given Republic forces the edge as regards ground combat.

Although the army is quite a lot smaller than it was in the 1990s, the provision of the latest technology has improved the operational ability of each individual soldier by a large margin. The latest kit includes full body armour with full NBC protection, helmet with built-in tactical radio and night vision visor, lightweight survival kit and all units are now being equipped with the latest small arm, designated L 201. There is

also a squad automatic weapon version with a heavy barrel and optional 120 round magazine, the L 202. Squaddies have already nicknamed these weapons Paw and Saw, from Personal Assault Weapon and Section Automatic Weapon. These weapons use ammunition based on the 5.7mm caseless FN round, first used in the FN P90 PDW. The advantage of using this round is that all standard small arms in British service now use the same ammunition, including the FN pistol which is now the standard British forces sidearm.

The top elite forces are given the option of using the new cybernetic implant to control their weapons. These so-called smartsights offer instant target acquisition and improved hit capability. They are very expensive however, so all volunteers are carefully tested first.

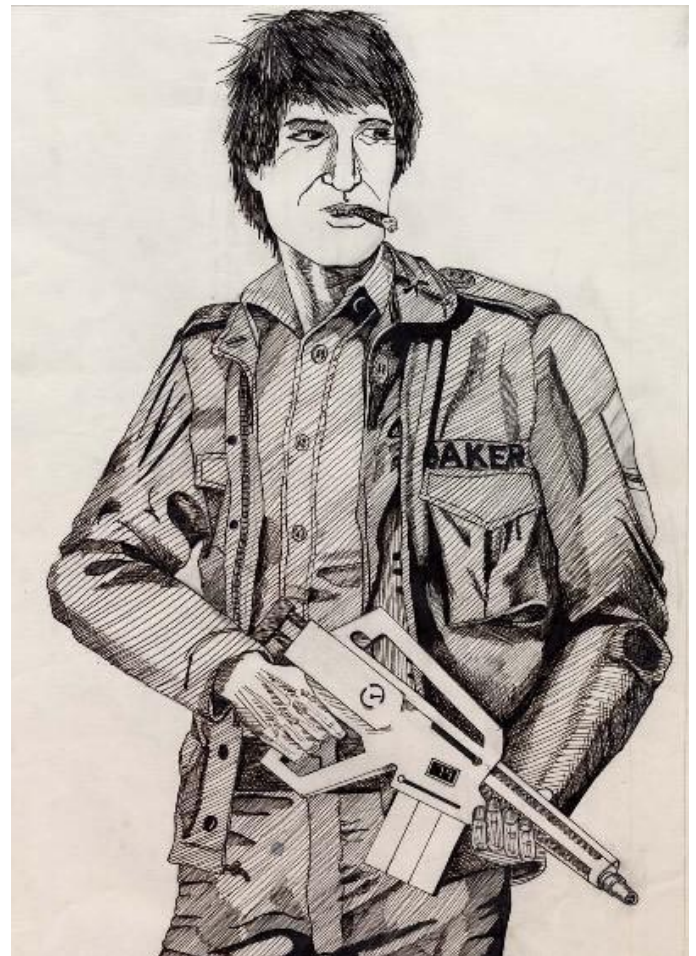
Armoured battlefield transport is provided by the latest version of the Warrior 2 APC, usually armed with a 25mm automatic cannon and two light machineguns. Standard light vehicle is still the trusty Land Rover 4x4, going strong sixty years after the original was built.

Moving up in size, the latest main battle tank to be issued is the Vickers-Rover Chevalier. This is the British built version of the new Eurotank 21, a project intended to standardise heavy vehicles throughout the European Com-

munity defence forces. This makes it easier to resupply on the battlefield. The Chevalier is highly advanced, though it is only a conventional MBT and has no next-generation weaponry.

Combat Infantryman's Suit

The CIS offers full body protection except the head. The material gives an AV of 1 to arms and legs and AV 2 to the chest and abdomen. It has a small hump on the back which contains the NBC respirator and filters, which give up to 8 hours protection each.. The advanced construction means that the garment weighs only 5kg and there is a





minus 1 penalty to Initiative and Agility. The suit collar has a built-in folding hood to enable NBC protection for those who are not wearing the combat helmet. The collar also has a sealing ring which mates to the helmet.

Combat Helmet

This has a built in light amplification visor for night actions, a tactical radio and a head-up display offering GPS and tactical data. The actual hardware for the latter device is carried externally on the equipment harness. The helmet weighs 1.5kg and gives an AV of 2 to the top back and sides of the head, and AV 1 to the face.

L-201 PAW

The Personal Assault Weapon has been developed to replace the L85 family of small arms (also called the SA 80 by troops). Using a new caseless round based on the 5.7mm FN ammunition, the L-201 is made from lightweight modern materials, and has very low recoil compared to the SA 80. It is fitted with an optical sight. Reliability is also improved, as the caseless ammo means the weapon needs no ejector mechanism. There is a single shot grenade launcher in development which can be attached to the foregrip.

Length: 84cm.
Loaded Weight: 3.4 kilos.

L-202 SAW

This is a squad automatic weapon based around the same mechanism as the PAW. It has a higher cyclic rate than the L-201 and therefore has a heavy barrel to aid longevity. It can use the magazine from the PAW as well as its own specially developed 120 round magazine. It is fitted with a light bipod and uses the same sight as the L-201. It can also be fitted as a vehicle weapon, using a NATO light mounting.

Length: 99cm.
Loaded Weight: 5 kilos
(with 100 round mag)

New Weapon Charts

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	- Recoil -		Rng
L201	3	3	1-nil	4	40	SS	Brst	40

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	- Recoil -		Rng
L202	10	3	1-nil	5	40/120	SS	Brst	55
bipod	10	3	1-nil	5	40/120	1	3	70

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	- Recoil -		Rng
FN 57	SA	2	1-1-nil	1	20	2	-	16

FN Five-Seven

A semi-auto pistol first produced in the late 1990s, using the latest materials. It is lighter than most 9mm pistols, yet has a 20 round capacity. The use of FN's own 5.7mm ammo ensures good reliability and stopping power, especially against body armour.

Loaded Weight: 0.9kg.

Smartsight

This device is a sighting system for weapons that can be plugged into a neural interface. The smartsight increases the Short Range band of a weapon by 20 metres when carrying out Aimed shots. It also reduces Task Difficulty to hit by one level with Aimed shots.

In addition, the system allows firing at night using its built-in light amplification and image enhancement capabilities, though the Range bonus is not applied to unaimed fire in this case. Smartsights are as yet too big to be fitted to weapons with a Bulk of 3 or less. The current model weighs about 500 grammes. Maximum visibility range is 500 metres at night. Note that the army only issue it to certain members of the elite forces such as the SAS.

EMC Land Rover MD 60

The latest Military Duty version of the world famous Land Rover, now manufactured by English Motor Company. MD 60 embodies all of the rugged and reliable features of its predecessors plus the latest economical engine technology. The engine is also able to run for some time with no coolant, a safety feature first seen on American cars of the 1990s. Many variants of the MD 60 are in service, including field ambulances and mobile workshops.

Standard 4x4 configuration

Price: N/A (-/-)
Fuel Type: G,D,A
Load: 1 tonne
Weight: 1.6 tonnes
Crew: 1 (plus 7 if no cargo)
Night Vision: Headlights

Cruise Speed: 100/45
Com Mov: 65/25
Fuel Cap: 180
Fuel Cons: 9

I have provided no specifications for the Warrior 2 or Chevalier tank as I have no wish to turn Dark Conspiracy into Twilight 2000 version 3. Remember though that none of the weapons in the standard rulebooks will do much damage to an MBT.



Jean-Pierre Valjean

This is a character I am currently playing in my DC campaign; you may use it as an NPC if you wish. Referees should make the numerical statistics fit the part he is playing.

"One night I dreamt that I had made a pact with the devil; he was my servant, and anticipated every wish...I found myself handing him my violin to see if he might manage some pretty tunes; but imagine my astonishment when I heard a sonata so unusual and so beautiful, performed with such mastery and intelligence, on a level I had never before conceived was possible! I was so overcome that I stopped breathing and awoke gasping. Immediately I seized my violin, hoping to recall some shred of what I had just heard—but in vain. The piece I then composed is without doubt my best, and I still recall The Devil's Sonata, but it falls so far short of the one that stunned me that I would have smashed my violin and given up music forever if I could possess it."

- Tartini to J.J. de Lalande, *Voyage d'un François en Italie* (1765-66)

"But we shall play a game of Chess, Pressing lidless eyes and Waiting for a knock upon the door."

- T. S. Eliot

Short history

He came to this world in the year of our Lord 1497, Near Florence, Italy; on top of a mountain, which had a small village at its base. He saw his first person that day. He still remembers him with fondness centuries later, at the time he did not know it but, that person was a hunch-back, disfigured, smelled so bad that you could feel its stench leagues away. Even though that creature was a leper and weak from hunger, he was able to don that lepers mantle and go forth into the world of humans, slowly approaching

their beings and learning their alien ways. Later when he had come back to that place at the mountain where he had been transported from. He found that the Gate was destroyed, apparently by a secret society that had sensed the Gates use, and then later sealed it.

Over the centuries he has journeyed across the world, he has been a stable hand in the stables of the de Medici, a pilgrim in Israel, a Barons advisor in Germany, a French court violinist, an English nobles manservant, a reporter in the Mexican American war, an analyst in Mossad, etc. *"If you don't feel it, you will never get it."* - Faust, Johann Wolfgang Goethe

An important event in his history

While he was a violinist in Louis XII of France's Court, he met a sweet maiden called Ettienne De Amberville. The rest of the story can be squeezed into the classical beauty and the beast story:

- Beauty and Beast meet
- Beauty and Beast fall in love
- Beast eats Beauty
- Beast seeks absolution for the rest of his life.

"So I have travelled throughout the land and was a pilgrim all my life, alone and a stranger feeling alien. Then Thou has made grow in me Thine art under the breath of the terrible storm in me."

- Paracelsus

Skills and statistics

He is very good in some skills, some just good. The very good skill levels are described just to give an understanding of the

Lauri
Gardner
presents a
detailed NPC

level. It is suggested that you consider what and how high skills and statistics he might have in the role he is currently portraying.

- Musical instrument (Violin) (Plays like a virtuoso with 200 hundred years time to polish his technique)
- Games (Chess) (Grand-Master level)
- Sword (Fencing) (Could give Zorro tips)
- Mathematics (20 years ahead of his time, if some-one could understand his notes though)
- Library Search (Over the past five thousand years, up to the eighteen century, he can 100% percent of the time name the title, 75% of them he has read and can quote from (including very rare books))
- Human Perception (the ability to read people, and understand their current mental processes)

Some skills that he doesn't know:

- Computer related skills (programming, hacking etc.). Can use a computer enough to turn it on and load writing program.
- Any other skills that have progressed



greatly over the past 50 years (like electronics), he does not understand. But he is learning.

"A room without books is like a body without a soul."

- Cicero

Accommodations

He lives on top of an old antique shop. The whole building has been changed into his lair. He has lived there for the past 150 years. His main living area in the house is on the second floor. It is a big room that has a skylight for a ceiling.

The antique shop is occasionally open, selling curiosities, old books and common items from the 1800 century onwards (works as his front, and gets rid of most of the junk he has collected over the years).

He owns a castle in Germany, which he has not been to for several years (since the beginning of the Second World War to be exact).

Noteworthy appliances in his lair:

- Old stereo, which has a CD player connected to them.
- A computer (286/ps2), has an unusual keyboard (every key is separate and taped in an unusual configuration on to the desk).
- In the middle of the room there is a large pot that contains a massive rose bush, which is lighted with different types of lights (IR, UV, and normal).
- In one corner is a harpsichord, which has a violin case on top, and some sheet music next to it.
- The walls are covered with bookshelves filled with books.
- He has a massive wardrobe, where he has clothes from near all ages, types and places. Some have started to fall apart.
- One of the walls has a picture of Ettienne, instead of books.

"I am what I am"

What he might look like:

A very muscular (not like a bodybuilder, more compact). He has a very muscular face (sort of like Arnold), which somehow looks refined. He has dirty white hair drawn back into a ponytail. Oxygonal glasses cover his eyes; he doesn't look around like a normal person, as if he were blind. He smells faintly of roses and wet dog. He wears white gloves that cover his hands.

He is dressed in a white trench coat, black trousers and brown, well-worn, leather shoes. He also has with him a walking stick (black, except for a finely engraved silver



knob), and a black fedora.

When he speaks he seems to have a faint European accent, which cannot be placed.

"Chess is Life"

- Bobby Fischer

"Life is a kind of Chess"

- Benjamin Franklin

Personality

He will always act like a Victorian gentleman, and will never act brashly or out of anger. He holds two concepts very closely: a chivalric type of honour and duty. He will always act upon these concepts very closely.

He will never use wanton violence. Killing is an option for him, not a means.

It should be noted that he is a very complex character and should be played as such.

"Well, think a little. Men have always fought each other; always created chaos. That's familiar and safe, they know where they are in those circumstances. But to hazard a step into the unknown and love one and other is far too risky for them. So if the demons do invade the world bringing terror and misery with them don't you think that men might welcome them as bearers of what they desire?"

- Demon City Shinjuku, Mephisto

"It is always best to sacrifice you opponent's men"

- Savielly Tartakover (Polish GM)

Motivations

His true motivations are highly complex to say the least. He is struggling between different duties, his duty to the Black Guard (see below), his duty to Ettienne whom he believes is trapped somewhere within him, and to get himself off the chess board, on which he believes himself to be a pawn.

"Ahh...The little things in life. Such quaint pleasures."

Other quirks

Whenever he is not prowling the streets, searching for damsels to be defended from meals in the form of ruffians, he is usually at home. He is either catching up on his reading or the world situation, passing his time taking care of his rose bush, Manfred, with Mozart's 9th symphony playing loud enough to wake the dead, practising his violin skills or writing up another report on humanity for the awaiting army.

"Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it, they are idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they characterized as simply villainous or cowardly."



Hence the typical character...tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game."

- Anatomy of Criticism, Northop Frye

How players might meet him

He might either arrange to meet the characters, using a vast information network he has built up over the centuries. He may run into them on the street, if they are in a battle that they are losing, coming in like a white knight to save them.

His purpose will be to either use minion hunters to his advantage (gaining information about a cell or a key person that the characters know about, or even to attempt to remove obstructing dark minions that hinder his goals) or gain their trust and help them out with information.

Remember, he will work in confusing and even contradictory fashion occasionally. This might be because of a situation that might affect him. For example, drawing away a reporter that is showing interest in him by having the minion hunters become interested about an article that the reporter has written, or to muddle the trail that leads to him to confuse other information gatherers and opposing agents.

He will usually refer to himself, when questioned about his motives, on being part of an organisation with vested interests against the Dark ones, and that he is just an underling working for that organisation.

Before he confronts anyone he will do thorough background check. This will enable him to glean information about different organisations that the characters have been affiliated with, and then either masquerading as a person they have met belonging to that organisation, or as someone who has a mutual friendship with a person the characters trust.

"Some people have called me Demonic. Unjustly."

- Demon City Shinjuku, Mephisto



Abilities and features

His body is basically made up of muscle tissue, except for the mouths that have spike-like teeth. These mouths he can grow by will anywhere on his body. His head is actually a giant mouth, and its teeth are hidden under the wig.

He is able to consciously control his growth. This ability enables him to grow into almost any shape he wants, within reason of course. His most common form, and the one he feels the most natural with, is a humanoid form that has snake-like appendages growing all over him, and which are constantly moving and twisting.

Because he has full control over his body, he can do things that a normal person could not do, like jump off the seventh floor without looking like a bloody pancake, or run along a wire.

Also, because he can control his own growth he also has the ability to regenerate himself.

He has plant empathy (first level), even though he doesn't consciously know it.

He has eidetic memory and can read very fast

"King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and that was this: that him seemed he sat upon a chaflet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of Gold . . . and suddenly the thought the wheel turned up-so-down, and he fell among the

serpents, and every beast took him by a limb; and then the king cried as he lay in his bed and slept, 'Help.'"

- Le Morte d'Arthur, Sir Thomas Malory

The negative aspects of his body

He has to eat half his body weight in live meat a day (considering he weighs 300 kg; 150 kg, half a cow). He has to feed more frequently if hurt or used any special abilities recently.

Whenever he becomes badly wounded, his consciousness takes a break. He becomes a killing machine which only thoughts are geared towards self-preservation. Friend and foe mean the same thing to him: food!

When he has assimilated enough to gain his hitpoints back and is not in a dangerous situation, he slowly regains control of his body. He, of course, remembers everything he has done while in this preservation mode. If he dies, his body starts to quickly decompose (under ten minutes), after which only charred remains are left.

Animals are neutral towards him (they just think he smells different)

Because he does not have any bones, he has to flex himself whenever he is in one form after 18 hours (move the muscles that proxy as bones) for about one and half hours, normally changing back into his most comfortable form. If he doesn't do this, his muscles have tendency of cramping up.

"The Game we play could be considered at best as a chess game on a board approaching infinity, with rules no-one will tell, and which side you are playing against, or how many opponents there are. This game takes place in the past, present, and future; each one intertwined to form a non-linear kaleidoscope of non-possibilities. The place for my kind is with the knights, the infantry on their thrones. Always attacking unexpectedly and moving in mysterious ways.

Tell me what is your position? Is it with the queens whose potential has already peaked, so sure of your power, yet without the knowledge to use the power correctly;



or are you a pawn, whose potential is still across the board, inaccessible; or perhaps you are like the king, you have passed over your potential, writhing in the knowledge that your death may hold the fate of multiverses or that of a dust mote.”

- Jean-Pierre Valjean, ruminating over philosophy with a past meal

Black Guard

Very little is known about the Black Guard, even among those that serve under that name. Some people say that they are servants of the Dark Lords.

However, what is known makes it gain highly sinister. The Black Guard can be considered an Intelligence organization that is organised into cells. This force on some levels regulates the actions of Dark Lords, either covertly or plainly.

Most Dark Lords loathe and fear the Black Guard. Its members are recruited according to certain criteria, and sometimes whole species are recruited according to their usefulness, whether in knowledge, skills, abilities, potential, or sheer wickedness. Some Dark Minions, ETs and humans are members of the Black Guard without even knowing it.

It is unknown whether there is a group, a single entity, or maybe even no one that is in control over the Black Guards actions.

Most Black Guards consider some races, humans included, as ants.

Referee Note

Play the Black Guard as being a sinister force that is always three steps ahead of everyone else. Remember that anything that

will be seen to conflict with their goals will be remorselessly squashed, even Dark Lords.

The best way on bringing these into a campaign might be by having the Minion Hunters come across evidence of some force that has been hunting Dark Minions. Perhaps even such a direct confrontation as having found the lair of some Dark Minion and during the confrontation with it, some type creature comes out of the shadows and shreds it up (think *Alien*).

It is good to introduce the Black Guard when they are deep in a campaign, or when the players seem to be unfazed by Dark Minions in general.

“When I was a child my speech, feeling and thinking were those of a child. Now that I am a man I have no longer use for childish ways. And now I can say these things without help and in my own voice. Because I am now neither the woman who was known as the Major, nor the program called the Puppetmaster”

- Ghost in the Shell, Major Motoko Kusanagi.

Empathic abilities among the Black Guard

These general empathic abilities are infused into members of the Black Guards. More specialised abilities are bestowed according to their mission and specialisation.

- The ability to walk through shadows, in other words the ability to move himself or a part of oneself in a 50 meter radius (clothes and other accessories cannot do this). Moving through shadows with a living being accompanying

may have fatal and unpredictable consequences.

- The ability to detect and break psychic barriers (psychic barriers could be considered a type of holy ground, which can be found in some churches, their purpose is to prevent otherworldly beings entering the area). He cannot prevent any alarms that are connected or a part of the psychic barrier (for instance, in some Shinto and Buddhist temples there are bells that supposedly will ring by themselves whenever an evil spirit enters the grounds of the temple).
- Empathic protection. This protects from members of the Black Guards from empathic attacks or scanning. A strong attack can cause the empathic protection to break though. However, it will also cause a backwash of energy causing the Black Guard to self-destruct by destroying neural pathways, and thereby physically destroying whatever it uses as a brain.

Inspiration & bibliography

The Seventh Guest's first track. A hauntingly demonic solo violin piece, with instrumental accompaniment.

The Devil's Sonata and other works, Giuseppe Tartini. Possibly the best baroque solo violin work by Adrew Manze.

Demon City Shinjuku (Monster City). I highly recommend it, if nothing else than for the character Mephisto and the portrayal of a Demonground.

The idea for the Black Guard was taken from the movie, *Wicked City*.

“Help can come from the strangest places. Be thankful and accept it. It's not everyday you get a lucky break.”

**- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary philosopher)**



Kingdom of Zub

Zub is a splinterland with a Discontinuity of 1 and an Assimilation Effect Value of 0. It may or may not be a hardened proto-dimension depending on the circumstances (see below).

Zub is suitable for use in campaigns using the limited access method of dimensional travel, as it can only be accessed from a point in the Libyan Sahara about 200 miles west of Umm El Raha. This physical location is the site of the Imperial Palace of the ancient kings of Zub, a race who arrived in northern Africa at an as yet undetermined time period.

Ancient Arabic and Hebrew folklore states that the ruins stand on the site of the original Garden of Eden, and that all mankind grew in the image of the people of Zub. This of course remains an unproven hypothesis.

The proto-dimension of Zub is unusual for several other reasons. In appearance, it is a desert oasis with palms and fruit trees, rivers and mountains and animals frolicking in the brush. It is a toroid in shape, about 500 metres wide, and a 5 kilometre walk will take you back to where you started. A person entering Zub immediately feels more relaxed and confident, willing to take a few moments to chill out and calm their minds.

There is also no sensation of urgency here, although timepieces do still work it feels unnecessary to check them. This effect is not deleterious in any way and the person can leave at any time they choose.

This is the true nature of Zub, as it was found to be conducive to meditation and creativity by the priestly mages of the ancient kingdom. Indeed, the Persian emperors were so jealous of what they thought was the King of Zub's secret garden that they stormed the kingdom. When they found no sign of the garden the Persians killed the king and razed the buildings to the ground, slaughtering all of the people of Zub. This was relatively easy as the Zub believed in

peace and harmony, and were ill-prepared to combat the mighty Persian armies.

The other major feature of Zub is that it is inhabited by several human beings who have a very odd history. As part of an experiment into connections between empathy and heredity, the British Home Office and Ministry of Defence created four human clones, using the genetic material of two civil servants who had proven themselves to have fully eidetic memories.

Due to the impending population crisis the experiment was kept as secret as possible, and the four clones were duly delivered. They were fostered out to families who knew nothing of their extraordinary origins, so as to develop as normally as possible. On their 16th birthday Alvin, Bruce, Colin and Desmond arrived separately at the office of Professor Miriam Poynter, the doctor in charge of the entire project.

After the initial shock of discovering themselves to be not one but four wore off the four clones began demonstrating their extremely powerful abilities. It transpired that the psychic energy produced by each of the clones could be amplified by the others. Empathic teachers and researchers have speculated that rather than each clones psi abilities being added to that of the other three, their Empathic abilities are in fact four to the power of four. This would lead very rapidly to an extreme level of power which would be difficult to control.

When the government realized that they would soon not be able to control the four boys they ordered them to be separated permanently and undergo brain surgery to remove their memories. In a chase that led from London to North Africa via Scotland and the Netherlands, the clones (with some assistance) eventually managed to access Zub. After leaving a message with the European governments assuring that they would not use their powers to threaten planet Earth nor in fact ever return to this

Lee Williams
shows us that
not all proto-
dimensions are
dangerous

dimension, they sealed themselves and their friends in Zub.

The clone entities have complete control of the proto-dimension but are not unfriendly to travellers, who they occasionally let in so as to keep up with news from Earth. It is possible that when merged into one entity the clones are as powerful as a Dark Lord, though they are almost the direct opposite. If humanity is ever in very grave danger then the clones just might take a stand against the Darkness. For now, they are content to explore the limits of their power and to meditate about who knows what. The new rulers of Zub could possibly be the first "Light Lords", although they would probably be embarrassed to be called such.

The Kingdom of Zub is great to use as a rest stop for exhausted and combat-weary player characters, if the clones will let them in of course. Bear in mind that no PC will be able to bring about any harm here, even by accident. Zub is a place for relaxation and fun, where the struggle against the Dark can be left behind for a while. If combat-oriented characters get bored with it, they can leave whenever they choose.

Inspiration for Zub taken from "Clone" by Richard Cowper and is used here without permission.



Missed

Into the Truth that light brings forth

Marcus Bone brings us part 2 of his story

The phone rang beside him. Leaning across his desk he picked it up, raising it to his ear.

"Hello, This is Professor William Fraser..." There was no response, not even the sound of breathing... nothing.

For a second he just listened not knowing what to think. Then in the back of his mind something clicked.

"Martha..." the Professor spoke into the receiver, "Martha if that's you... You know there's a court injunction out against you bothering me like this."

Still there was no response from the other end of the phone...

"God damn you girl! Can't you leave me alone!" Fraser slammed the phone down with a crash, shaking the side table it rested on.

Fraser was angry now. That girl had cost him his place on the school board, his wife and hundreds of dollars in court costs. He had thought she'd given up at last, not a call in weeks ... now this. For Christ sake he had only slept with her once!

He looked at the phone and thought for a second. Reaching across he picked it up, this time with the intention of calling the police. The detective had told him to ring if the calls began again.

Bringing the receiver to his ear, he be-

gan to push the number he'd been given... and then he stopped. The phone had no dial tone. Tapping the receiver hook a few times had no effect. The phone was dead.

What's that girl done? he thought. *The silly tart never knew when to give up.*

Getting up from the desk where he was working, he looked out the large plate glass windows that surrounded his study. It was dark outside. He checked his watch, noted the time and stretched.

Picking up the piece of paper that he had written the Detectives number on, he started towards the hall phone.

It was then he heard the crash of a window. From somewhere in the house! Fraser jumped ... in his house! After the incident with the phone he was a little on edge. Recovering quickly from the fright however, he moved to the umbrella stand beside the fireplace and retrieved what had been his grandfather's walking stick. If some kids had smashed his windows, by jolly, they would pay.

Making his way through the darkened halls of his house he slowly examined each room. Flicking on the lights revealed nothing, each room the same as he'd left it. Finally however he reached the kitchen downstairs, finding the source of the broken window. The top pane of the backdoor window had been broken; the glass scattered now across the kitchen floor.

The first thought to enter his mind was that of the girl, Martha. But she had never done anything like this before. In fact she'd attempted nothing more than a few late night phone calls.

Unsure what to make of such strange happenings, the professor shook his head and moved purposefully to the backdoor. Perhaps he could still catch the perpetrators.

As he got closer a feeling came over him, like that of when someone is close but yet cannot be seen. Behind him? Fraser twirled around to survey the kitchen ... it was empty.

Turning back he heard a noise outside the backdoor. A funny noise almost like chanting...

Fraser peered through the broken window, outside there was a man, and yes he was chanting. Words that seemed unrecognisable to Fraser...

"Seesk Nak Char"

It had been a week since Colin had gone missing from the hospital ... yes, while unconscious he had somehow 'disappeared'. Neither the staff nor the police knew what had happened, or so they said and yet Becky Harris didn't believe them.

And would you? She had told the officer that came and saw her every day. He always just smiled, in the way a parent smiled when humoring their child. Becky knew it too; she herself was a master at it when it came to her two girls.

But the officer was a nice guy, just doing his job. Everyday he would pop in for a coffee, to update Becky on the latest news. Not that there was much to tell. And somehow he would always turn the conversation around, trying in a subtle way to grill her for more information from Colin's past.

But she had told them all that she knew and was as stumped as any of them as to the reason behind Colin's vanishing act.

This day had been like all the others so far, no clues, no leads and a bunch of confused policemen. The only new news was that the case was about to be downgraded, with the number of men reduced to just one from its present dozen.

"Some cases just are getting more important ma'am... cases with leads". The young officer got up and put his notebook back in his pocket. "I'll come and visit you again in a day or two... okay?"

Becky just nodded. She was shocked, only a week and they had already given up. What was going wrong with this world?



After the policeman had left Becky was at a loose end. The girls were still with Colin's mother and wouldn't be coming home for another few days yet. There wasn't much she could do. If the police force couldn't figure out what had happened what chance did she have?

Thinking she could really use a strong stiff drink she made her way to kitchen. However before she could get there she heard a knock at the door. Thinking it was the young officer back again she rushed over to the door and flung it open.

But no, it wasn't the officer at all. Rather it was a short man in a trench coat and a hat. He seemed as surprised at the speed in which the door had been opened, as Becky was to the fact that he wasn't the policeman.

For a second there was an embarrassed silence, as both regathered their wits. The man smiled at Becky and removed his hat. "Mrs Harris?" he asked.

"Yes... yes I am." She replied taking in the mans appearance. He was middle-aged, balding she could see now that he had removed his hat. He was obviously also South American, or of that descent at least. But perhaps the most striking thing about him was his face, which while not unattractive, seemed to be hiding something.

"Mrs Harris, I am Hector Tanscon, a private investigator." Hector put out his hand. Becky reluctantly took it and shook. "What can I do for you, Mr Tanscon?" Becky asked, almost sarcastically. Of course she knew what a man like this was doing here.

"Mrs Harris I have heard that your husband disappeared from the Central Municipal Hospital last week, and I'm here to offer my services to you in finding him..."

Becky screwed up her face. "Mr Tanscon, we are not a rich family, I'm not sure I could afford your services?"

Becky knew this man's type exactly. She would put money on the fact that he picked cases like hers to make a quick buck. Probably listened to a police scanner and choose to follow up the people who seemed desperate enough to give away their money to a lost cause. Well Becky sure was des-

perate, but she wasn't stupid. In fact she thought routines like this one appeared only on television.

"Oh the money is not so important... Rebecca, may I call you Rebecca?" he said. Becky didn't respond.

"I am more worried about the whereabouts of your husband... can I please come inside and explain?"

Becky paused for a second, although she didn't trust this man, he seemed sincere enough.

The seconds ticked past and then she relented, swinging the door open.

Hector Tanscon was a much nicer man than Becky had first thought. He revealed that he had heard about her situation while down at the local precinct contacting the Desk Sergeant about another case he was working on. The rumours and stories had been flying about an unconscious man who had somehow disappeared from Central late one night. Making it even weirder, the mans Doctor, a Mr Shavor, had also vanished on the same night. In fact the only evidence that could be found was that, the missing patients lock on his door had been jimmied and in the corridor outside that door a small pile of carbon had been found. Unfortunately, because the corridor was so well used, no more information could be found. Even the minute blood samples found belonged to three different blood types.

Hector had been so intrigued by these stories that he had to find out what had happened that night. As he explained to Becky, chances like this don't come every often.

Tanscon had investigated further being able to get a glance at the lab results on the Carbon that had been found. The most surprising fact to come from this study was the fact that the residue links in the molecule chain resembled those present in a human body, and yet the Lab could not say anything further about them.

What this all meant Hector couldn't say, but it had intrigued him further. Becky for her part had been quite shocked at this information; it was certainly more that the police had been willing to reveal to her any-

way.

By the end of the conversation, Hector had promised to find out more for her and would stay in contact. In return, Becky would find some sort of payment for his services... but only after he had found out what had happened to Colin.

As she saw him to the door Becky had a tear in her eye.

"Thank you so much Hector, I had honestly thought that people like you didn't exist anymore."

Hector smiled at her. "It's okay Becky, it may be a Dark World but some of us still care."

They shook hands once again and the Hector left. After he had gone Becky broken down in tears. So much had happened in the last week and no one had offered any explanations. At last some one had come to her at least attempting to straighten out the mess in her mind. The release of tension was massive and for a while she could do nothing but cry. She owed herself that much.

Hector was smiling as he got into his car. In the passengers seat his partner sat.

"Well Jerry we got her." Hector was smiling even brighter now. "The silly woman actually believes that her husband is still alive."

Jerry Coldrum, a young man in his twenties, had a worried look on his face.

"Are you sure she fell for it?" he asked.

"Of course I'm sure," Hector scowled at the younger man. "Listen sonny, how many times do I have to tell you. I've been doing this gig for... well Christ knows how long... and it's a win-win situation. Man some people are just so stupid, don't they read the papers... hundreds of people go missing every day in this city, and yet for some reason all their families think that they will be the ones coming home. Listen up buddy, they don't come back... never."

Jerry just stared back, obviously a little overawed by Hectors spiel. "As long as you're sure Hector, just as long as you're sure".

Hector just glared back and then... laughed, shaking his head at his partner.



Colin's head spun, as if he was stuck in a carnival ride. It was a nauseous feeling, and for a time he couldn't decide if it was the room or his head that was the real source of the constant spinning.

Suddenly a man came into his vision, or what he thought was a man anyway. All Colin could see was a big dark shape appear in front of him, a shape that had teeth and eyes.

"You okay man? You look as if you're about to hurl." The voice of from the shape was defiantly male and spoke with a very thick accent.

It took Colin a few seconds to compose himself enough to answer. "Yeah I'll be... be alright in a second." As if that was a sign, Colin was suddenly ill. His stomach straining to release it's contents. He closed his eyes, using all his concentration to prevent himself from vomiting.

"Man, you could have fooled me man." He heard his visitor chuckle deep and loud. "Here man this one we cleaned out already."

Colin felt something pushed into his hands, a container of some sort. A bucket if he figured correctly. Placing his head deep inside he relaxed and allowed his body to purge itself.

After he had recovered, he looked up and founds that his vision had got much better. Indeed there was a man standing beside him, and he himself was lying on a bunk, much like he had seen in Navy movies. The man in front of him was a large and black, with muscular shoulders and abdomen. Colin could see that he was a not a typical American, perhaps an African?

The big man smiled at Colin, bright white teeth a contrast to his very dark face. "You look better now man, let all of the bad stuff out".

Colin was barely listening to the man, but rather exploring his surroundings with his recently returned sight. It seemed as if, yes, he was in some sort of boat, the door was one of reinforced steel and the far wall

has a porthole in it. Apart from that and the bed the room had little else in it. A locker at his feet and a small basin and that was it.

"...you think you can get up now man?" The stranger was talking to him still.

"Yeah ... yeah I think so." Colin answered. He struggled to his feet the man holding his arm to help steady him. As he got up onto both feet however, his knees seemed to buckle, but before he could fall the stranger had taken his weight and had swung Colin's arm over his shoulder. Colin just grimaced at him, and he just smiled back.



"Man you okay." As the stranger helped Colin out of the room he introduced himself. "I'm Suva man, been looking after you for this last week."

"Week... week!?!?" Colin was shocked what the hell had happened to him?

"Yeah man a week, not that you were a bad patient".

As they walked the corridors, Colin noticed his surroundings. They were definitely on a ship of some sort, because the corridors looked just like the ones he'd seen in those old World Two movies. Narrow and cramped it was almost impossible for them walk two abreast.

"So Suva, where are we going?" Colin asked his helper.

"You'll see man... you got to speak to Miles before we know what we got to do." was his answer.

"Oh okay," replied Colin. What else could he say, here he was lost and at the mercy of some large black one who smelt of Tropical Sun block. In fact that Coconut smell really got his stomach going again.

"Um... I don't feel so well".

"Man you don't look so well either".

Hector sat in his car, reading a newspaper, nothing but more deaths and disappearances... just the way he like it.

Occupied though he was, he heard Jerry before he got to the car. Putting down the paper he watched as the young man ran towards him.

Before Jerry could speak Hector started. "What's the rush little guy?"

It took Jerry a few breaths to recover. "You were right. This is the same thing."

Hector had heard from his contact down at West precinct that another pile of 'Carbon' had been found, this time at the house of a missing Professor. Curious rather than anything else they had gone down for a look, just to find the place swarming with cops. He'd sent Jerry to find out what was going on.

"So spill the beans boy, what's happening here?"

"Hell Hector, I don't even think the coppers know. Someone up on high has ordered the street beaters to find out what's happened to the Teach. It seems he had friends in high places."

"Typical... well we ain't going to get anything out of this one. We might as well saddle up and mossy on down to the local watering hole. What you say?"

Jerry grinned. Nodding his head as he got in the car he said, "You're the boss."

At least Colin could walk by himself by the time they got to their destination. A large room with a double bed and a desk. All the works compared to the small 'dun-



geon' he had come from.

In the room there was three men, of various ages and looks. The oldest was at least over 50, dressed in a fine suit wearing a vest that would have been fashionable before Colin's own birth, stood in the corner.

The youngest not older than his teens, wearing T and jeans slouched in a seat at the desk. Twiddling his thumbs he seemed bored. However the most intriguing man was aged obviously between these two. In fact somewhere in the back of Colin's mind, this man seemed familiar.

"Ah Colin," said the man, "it is good to see you could join us. In fact since you've already met our Fijian warrior Suva, it would be rude of me not to introduce the rest of our merry band."

Colin just nodded in agreement, not sure there was anything else he could say or do.

"This is Doctor Curtis, late of the Physics Department of Cambridge." The Doctor nodded at Colin. "Our young apprentice here is Kerry Graham, computer genius." The teenager shot the speaker an evil look. "As for me, I was hoping you'd recognise me."

Colin shook his head, but somehow a vague memory tingled in the back of his mind.

"Oh that disappoints me, you can't even remember the man who saved your life." The speaker smiled at Colin "My name is Miles Lynne, a ... um... traveller I suppose."

There was a pause as the rest of the room's occupants looked over Colin. Feeling a need to get at least one question off his chest, Colin broke the silence.

"So can I ask why am I here, and what do you want from me?"

Miles laughed. "Colin, it's not what you can do for us. Rather, it's what you can do for the world!"

Hector got home late that night after dropping Jerry home; it was at least 3 in the morning. He was dog-tired, and was half-asleep by the time he hit the bed, shoes and all.

Sleep beckoned and Hector was going to oblige. But then the phone rang... once... twice... three times. By the time it reached the eighth ring, Hector guessed the caller wasn't about to give up. Reaching across he picked up the receiver and almost dropping it a couple of times eventually got it his ear.

"Tanscon speak'n."

The first thing he heard back was a scream, a man's scream as if some part of him being cut off or worse.

"What the ..."

Before Hector could finish his words, a voice came on the line. Calm and collected, it seemed to emit a sense of evil, even over the phone line.

"Mr Tanscon this is a warning... drop the Harris case or worse will happen to you."

"Who is this ... why the ..." Hector was frantic. What sort of lunatic did this sort of thing?

"Your friend is no more. So let me remind you - drop the case before you join him."

In the background another voice could be clearly heard...

"Seesk Nak Char"

And then the phone went dead.

By the time Hector got to Jerry's place, it was obvious that he was too late and in some ways he was thankful.

The door to Jerry's inner-city apartment was ajar. The lock visibly broken.

But where were the cops? Sure it was the rough part of town, but surely the sound

of that man screaming would have made someone ring the police.

Approaching the door, Hector pushed it with the barrel of his Colt Python. With the slightest pressure, it swung open. Inside was a mess. Some sort of scuffle had taken place. Hector just hoped Jerry's girl Suzie hadn't stayed over.

Apart from the mess, there was little in the main room. Making his way to the bedroom, he entered slowly scanning for any signs of intruders. There were none, but the first thing he did notice was the hand.

A hand lay on the side table next to the phone. A phone which had been violently yanked from the wall.

Getting closer to the hand Hector noticed a small pile of grit on the ground. Bending closer it looked as if someone had deposited a pile of black chalk on the ground.

Staring at it for a second longer he recognised the significance in connection to the Fraser and Harris cases, but did not understand its meaning.

The hand was still there however, and the dread of what it might mean still hung around in the pit of his stomach. Although he knew what he was going to find, it did little to calm him as he got nearer. Without touching it he knew it belonged to Jerry, the ring that he always talked about was still on the severed hand, the one he had received the day his college soccer team had won their regional championships.

Staring at it for a second longer Hector could no longer contain himself, gagging as he raced towards the apartments bathroom.

And still the Police did not come.

To Be Continued



TABLOIDS

Chimney Noises "un'soot'able" says Resident

John Bambrick decided to call in his local vicar to exorcise his house after a series of wailings and scratching noises began to emanate from the solid brick walls.

The house, at Old Hill near Birmingham in England, was at first thought to be built over old mine workings. This would cause air gusts in the mineshafts to echo through the foundations.

However, a check of the surveys made when the house was built revealed this was not the case. As the noises continued, Mr. Bambrick decided to call upon the services of his local clergyman.

Reverend Peter Worrall turned up with full kit for exorcisms, and set to work. As the ceremony progressed the noises began

again, this time from the chimney. The intrepid vicar put his head in the unlit fireplace and looked up but was unable to see anything, but a result was obtained when he stuck his arm up the flue - a trapped cat mauled his arm.

"He put his hand up and got it scratched to bits" said Mr. Bambrick. "I think he was relieved that he wasn't sucked up the chimney by a ghoul". The cat, nicknamed Sooty, is being cared for by the RSPCA.

Coastguard Chase

An emergency call to police in Dorset SW England sparked off a remarkable chain of events last week.

A member of the public phoned the Weymouth police at around 23.30 and re-

ported what he thought was a large orange-coloured hot air balloon coming down in the sea. He also reported that the balloon was behaving erratically.

The police alerted the lifeboat at Swanage to the east and the Portland coast-guard station to the south. The lifeboat managed to get within a couple of miles of the object, which they then observed through night vision scopes. They were unable to ascertain what the object actually was, and as they got closer the object zoomed off at great speed.

The crew of the lifeboat stated that the object was hovering at a height of less than 30 metres for about twenty-five minutes, a very dangerous manoeuvre for a balloon pilot. Their statements are now believed to be in government hands.

TABLOID HOOKS

Chimney Noises

John Bambrick's house is in fact built over old mine works, the surveyors map is wrong.

Some 600 metres below, there is a small chamber which is a Humanoid ET laboratory. They are working on genetic manipulation of animals, as they know humans keep pets. If they could turn domestic pets against humans it might make conquest easier for them and their masters.

The cat stuck in the chimney is one of their first experimental animals, which managed to escape and climb through the network of tunnels until eventually emerging

in Bambrick's back yard. It slipped into the house and became wedged firmly in the chimney flue.

The cat has been infected with an ET virus which destroys the bodies ability to metabolise sugar, thus causing extreme diabetes. If anyone who has been scratched or bitten by the cat does not seek medical help within 12 hours they will go into a diabetic coma. This may be fatal if they are alone or far from a hospital.

Coastguard Chase

This was a kind of mating ritual, being conducted by a group of Energy ETs. They transfer parts of their knowledge and personality to each other, eventually causing one of them to split into two. Each of the two retains the entire knowledge of it's parent, whilst retaining the capacity to learn at least as much again.

This group has made its home in the abandoned naval base at Portland, once one of the Royal Navy's largest installations and the main staging point for the D-day landings of WWII. This base can be used by GM's to cause all sorts of bother.

Lee Williams brings us two short adventure seeds



THE LOOSE ENDS

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New Zena Marley quotes written by Marcus Bone and Geoff Skellams.

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
Dark Conspiracy Related Fiction
Tabloid Articles
House Rules
NPCs
Milieu

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*.

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