

INNER VOICE

Issue Five



Truly Rural Productions

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Inner Voice

issue five volume one

Truly Rural Productions

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For submission guidelines please check out the
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LAYOUT

by Derek Stoelting
original author's layout followed for style in each article

Monotone Introduction

by Peter Amthor

Well here we are for another issue. Didn't think we would make it this quick but low and behold this issue is full. Actually it's overfilled compared to the others. Usually I top them off around the thirty page mark but this time, as you can see, we over shot that by about ten or so. But then again more is better usually.

Also if you have noticed that there haven't been a lot of updates on the Truly Rural or Inner Voice pages that is due to the fact that I moved into a new place. My boy seems to like the new apartment, lots more room for him to run, play and terrorize everything that walks nearby. So I've also started doing things a little different on the ezine here as well. You may notice a few small things but over the next few issues I hope to make some changes that will enhance its appearance quite and layout.

Now that I am settled in at the new place I should have some changed done to the site as well. First off the Contributors page needs to be updated for this issue and the last. Then the whole thing needs a face lift of epic proportions, sadly I'm not the epic kind of person but it will be getting a decent make over. Also going to be adding a section in for Support, this will include banners for people to use; a donation section (either money for the web space or books and such to review or give away in some kind of contest) will also be going in.

All in all I hope these changes work out.

Now as for this issue you will notice quite a bit of gaming material this time around. Hopefully this trend will continue and the submissions keep coming in. Wouldn't mind if each issue was mostly comprised of gaming related material. So once again let me ask you all to keep spreading the word about Inner Voice, especially to those who may be interested in seeing their material in here.

Well that's all I've got right now so on with the contents.

The Hunter and His Eight

A Villain for **Barbarians Versus**

By Nathan J. Hill

Viss'Kizz is a specialist for the Brug forces. When a slave or target eludes control or destruction, Viss is brought in. His nickname among the Brug army is simply the Hunter. He and his eight loyal soldiers go on foot, tirelessly seeking out their prey. This quieter approach means Viss'Kizz will surprise his targets, although he prefers to play some cat-and-mouse before the hunt is finished. He will often let his prey escape once or twice to provide more satisfaction for the final kill.

To this day, Viss'Kizz has never lost a target.

His eight warriors are armed with acid projectile weapons, which spit gobs of searing blue and yellow acid on their targets. The warriors tend to corral the prey that Viss'Kizz seeks, allowing their master hunter the opportunity to go in for the kill. They unswervingly follow his commands. Indeed, a life serving the Hunter has its many benefits. Members of the Eight enjoy a more independent life style and greater prestige among the Brug race. Being a part of the mass Brug invasion means your exploits are often overshadowed. Being a member of the Eight is a prestigious opportunity to make a name for yourself and go on to greater things.

There is one unspoken rule between the Hunter and his Eight. If any of the Eight kill the Hunter's target, they have struck a terrible blow to his honor. This will lead to hand-to-hand combat between the Hunter and offender. The winner takes control of the Eight. From time to time, a number of members of the Eight have challenged Viss'Kizz, but thus far, they have all failed in their bid for power.

Game Ideas:

Your barbarian heroes may be in the midst of rescue missions for enslaved comrades, or they may escape a cunning ambush by Brug forces. At some point, the irritation of the barbarians angers the Brugs, so Viss'Kizz and the Eight are called out to destroy the heroes. This would lead to a wonderful series of sessions, where

Viss'Kizz dogs the barbarians and tries to destroy them. How can the Northerners outsmart this legendary Hunter? Or is there a way to challenge the legendary Hunter to a hand-to-hand combat for control of the Eight?

More information on Barbarians Versus here:

<http://www.mysticages.com/bv>

Viss'Kizz

The Hunter

Elite Brug Tracker and Warrior

Smash – 8 / Throw – 12

Feet – 8 / Craftiness – 7

Contemplating – 10

Guts – 54 / Grit – 18

Items:

Long Range Laser Blaster (5)

Camouflage Armored Suit (Half Damage)

Autoguided Game Tracker (3)

The Eight Acidic Warriors

Loyal Soldiers of the Hunter

Smash – 7 / Throw – 7

Feet – 7 / Craftiness – 5

Contemplating – 4

Guts – 34 / Grit – 11

Items:

Acid Projectiles (3)

Light Camouflage Armor Suit (Half Damage)

The Library

By Derek A. Stoelting

Conventions

This material is designed for use in a large city in a fantastical setting. Examples of such settings include certain Victoriana settings, *a|state*, and *Final Fantasy*. It may also work for *Iron Kingdoms* or the Metropolis portion of *Kult*, though it was not designed as such and may require some retooling.

The Library

The Library is a location that is lost from man's memory banks. It is a secret known to few researchers and those that survived the last cataclysm. The Library is said to contain knowledge from before the cataclysm. The texts are rumored to explore science, magic, and knowledge of the world before the cataclysm.

The Spire

At the intersection of three unused roads, stands the Spire. The Spire is the highest building in this section of the city, rising beyond the low-lying cloud cover. From the ground level, there is no visible means of egress into the Spire. The Spire is made from a man-made substance (concrete, brick, or something appropriate to your setting) containing no breaks or cracks in the skin of the Spire. The Spire is black in color, almost as if it absorbs all light that touches it. The Spire itself is nearly one hundred yards in diameter and circular in shape.

The ground around the Spire is made from the same substance as the three roads. It runs up to the Spire and covers a large circular area around the Spire. The ground appears undisturbed by previous traffic.

Between two of the roads rests a dirigible. Guarding the dirigible is a mountain of a man, made from glass, steel, and bits of iron – crowned by a human head. The Driver will notice the cast as they come into view. It makes no overt movements towards the cast. Instead, it steps to the door of the dirigible's basket and holds the door open. The Driver is unarmed and does not respond to any conversation the cast may attempt to start. The Driver will defend himself if attacked. If the Driver is

destroyed, the cast members will not be able to enter the Library. The dirigible uses technology that is completely unfamiliar to the cast.

The Driver will hold the door open until all cast members who wish to travel to the Library has entered the basket. The Driver will allow normal cast member races (in case of goblins, Bast, and such) and familiars, but will not allow for beasts of burden or war in the basket. It gently places a hand, palm up, facing the offending creature. It will then wave this hand to one side, indicating no entrance allowed to the creature. After the cast members have entered the basket, the Driver steps into the basket, closes the door, and starts the engines of the turbines. The basket is open to the air and large enough to transport twenty people.

Near the control center is a table containing masks. The masks are breathers that cover a person's nose and mouth, with a simple strap to hold them onto a person's head. After starting the engines, the Driver will walk over to the masks, collect enough for the cast, and then hand them out. After handing one to each cast member, it puts a hand over its mouth and nose, as if attempting to communicate its use to the cast. The Driver will not appear to notice if cast members do not wear the masks. The breathers do not interfere with breathing or speaking.

The basket contains three lit gas lamps. One is to the bow, the other aft, and the final next to the control center. Metal tubes run through the undercarriage of the basket and up through the control center into the same supply source for the envelope (gas bag). When all cast members appear to be settled on the dirigible, the Driver will put the controls to use and the dirigible will begin to ascend the Spire. The Driver pilots the dirigible around the Spire following a spiral path. The Spire does not change its appearance as the dirigible climbs higher and higher. The cast can look over the sides of the basket and see their surroundings.

After the cast has become acclimated to their situation, gothic style windows appear on the Spire. Inspecting the windows reveals that while all are covered on the inside by dirt and grime, a few of the arched windows have broken panes. Careful study of the panes reveals two things. The first is that there are no light sources inside them, making it impossible to actually see anything inside the Spire. The second item of note is that

a foul smelling gas is escaping the confines of the Spire. Any cast member not wearing a breather will begin coughing and convulsing. If the cast member does not don a breather soon, these dry coughs will begin damaging their lungs. At this point, the cast member may begin taking damage if the game master desires. Putting a mask on fixes the coughing problem. The Driver seems unaffected by the gas escaping the broken windows.

As the cast spends time investigating these windows, the sky turns to night without them noticing. In fact, they may notice this after asking if the outdoor, ambient light will supply enough of a light source to see into the Library. The night sky is empty of all celestial bodies appropriate to the setting. The ground is no longer visible to the cast, only the Spire, dirigible, and darkness exist, now.

Shining a flashlight or similar light source through broken windows will reveal a great emptiness inside the Library. Dust particles and the poisonous gas float throughout.

A few moments later, the cast will notice that some of the arched windows have a light source inside them. The windows are still dirty and grimy, distorting the light and making them useless to the eyes of man. None of these windows are broken. They are resistant to any methods the cast may use to break them open. In fact, if the cast does attempt to break open a window as they pass by, the Driver will move the dirigible further away from the Spire, rendering the cast members' efforts useless.

The dirigible continues to climb in altitude until it passes the Dock. It will make one more pass, slowing down enough to come to a complete stop at the Dock. The Driver will move from the control center and open the door for the cast. It does not step out of the vehicle. As the cast members pass the Driver, he will motion for them to remove their masks and give them to him. He bows his head in thanks after each cast member gives their mask back to it. He will attempt to gently stop anyone from leaving with a mask.

What the Cast Finds

Exiting the dirigible, the cast finds itself on a gangway leading to a giant set of doors. The gangway is made from the same material as the Spire. It is an

outcropping from the Spire, lacking in both support material below and above, being freestanding in and of itself. A body's length from the dirigible's basket, a wrought iron rod extends upwards from the gangway. An iron arm extends from the rod, with a chime hanging from the arm. Next to the chime, tied to a chain, is a hammer. If the cast attempts to sound the chime without using the hammer, the Driver shakes its head "no." Nothing but the hammer will cause the chime to sound. The rod, chime, chain, and hammer will not break if attacked by cast members.

Walking the gangway takes the cast to a set of arched doors that stand fifteen feet tall. The wood is old and tired. Its edges are no longer smooth, its color faded. Steel straps and supports encompass the doors. Each door has a pull ring five feet above the gangway. The pull rings are made from iron.

Pulling the rings will cause the doors to open. The doors gently open, no opposition is given. Gas sconces light a foyer past the doors. Another large door with the same style pull ring lies through the foyer. It will not open unless the outer doors are closed.

Opening the next door splashes bright light upon the foyer and cast. Beyond the door lies the largest library the cast has ever viewed. The immediate room is open in the center, tables, and chairs filling the space therein. Shelves of books rise fifty feet in the air. These shelves run in concentric circles around the tables and chairs. The outside wall of the Library also contains shelves. Gas lamps abound in the room; some hang from the ceiling, others from the outer wall, and some are placed in posts near the tables in the center of the room.

Spiral staircases are placed in the four cardinal directions of the Library, an equal distance from the center point, the outer wall, and each other. The staircases are made from iron and are wide enough for three people to walk abreast.

The floor of the Library is made from grey marble. The ceiling is made from the same substance as the outside of the Library.

This floor of the Library is fifty feet tall. The floor and ceiling touch the outer wall, making the spiral staircases a necessary means of transport between floors.

Four rolling ladders are attached the outer wall, making it possible to retrieve books from the upper reaches. Similar ladders are attached to the shelves of books placed throughout this level of the Spire.

Ascending and descending the spiral staircases will lead cast members to more rooms with the exact same layout as the initial room (minus the foyer and gangway, of course). It is possible that the cast will climb the spiral staircases so high that they reach the apex of the Library. This final room has a vaulted ceiling and a chandelier looming over the center of the room.

Eventually, the cast may descend into the darkness. As they near the darkness, they will begin smelling the poisonous gas that they experienced outside the Spire. Two floors of the Library, that have light sources in them, contain this smell. The second of the two floors also contains enough of the gas that cast members see it floating in the air. A haze of the gas extends from the base of the spiral staircase, causing it to appear as a rolling fog.

All floors of the Library have the same height.

The gothic styled windows are places intermittently throughout the Spire. Cast members are free to look out them. However, there is nothing to see; the sky is still black and the ground too far away.

Denizens of the Library

The Library has a few residents. The first group of residents the cast is likely to experience is the deceased. Dead bodies may be found hidden behind shelves or under desks. Their belongings have long ago crumbled into uselessness. In some cases, the bodies are naught but bones, in other cases, bits of flesh and muscle still cling to the old bones. The bodies have nothing of use to the cast, they are but witnesses to the passing of time within the Library.

The Librarian is a matronly woman who moves throughout the Library putting books away and making sure that the shelves are in proper order. She is dressed appropriately for the setting of the cast member's world. She will "shush" any cast member causing noise to issue forth from themselves, chairs, ladders, or any other source near them. She will ignore the cast, unless approached. If

the cast approaches her, she will take notice of them and give them a disapproving look. She only has knowledge in reference to the Library's contents. She does not know how long the library has been here. Nor does she realize how long she has been here. If asked about her length of time spent in the Library or how long the Library has been in existence, she will simply reply with, "A very long time." She can direct cast members to areas of the Library with the appropriate knowledge. She will not take them to the exact book, but she can direct them to the correct row of shelves.

If cast members attempt to leave the Library with any books, the Librarian will be in the main room as the cast walks into the foyer. If the Librarian is elsewhere in the Spire helping someone else, she will politely excuse herself in time to arrive at the entrance level of the Spire in order to interact with those cast members leaving with books. She will clear her throat to gain their attention. She will motion for any and all cast members who have books to come back to her. She will look irritated, but not angry. She will ask the cast members with books if they would like to check out those books they are carrying. If they answer in the affirmative, she will tell them that they must give her their name, so that she may keep track of who has borrowed which books. All books must be returned before the borrower passes on. If the cast is borrowing the book for another person, they are still the responsible party for returning the book "on time." Overdue books are simply not allowed.

The Librarian is actually more than fifty years old and will die on her seventy-fifth birthday. How she knows this is unknown. During her seventy-fifth year she will take the time to approach each and every woman who comes crosses the gangway into the Library.

She will attempt to convince them to stay and take her place. The game master is encouraged to have the Librarian approach any female cast member and ask them to take her place. Libraries must have a Librarian, after all. If the female cast members will not take her place, it is assumed than another visitor will do so. On the Librarian's seventy-fifth birthday, she will descend into the darkness wherein the poisonous gas kills her.

As soon as a woman agrees to become the Librarian, the woman's memories begin to fade. Within a day's time, she will not remember anything of her past,

but she will know the Library and its contents instead.

The Librarian is not a creature to be attacked and killed. If she is attacked, she will attempt to flee. She has no offensive abilities to fend herself from “hack ‘n slashers.” If the cast members do this, the Driver will not arrive when summoned.

There is a slight, yet interesting, chance that the cast will come across another group of people doing research in the Library. These groups will most likely not be rivals. However, if by chance, a group of rivals followed the cast to the Spire and enters the dirigible’s basket, the Driver will bring them up to the gangway. While combat within the Library is discouraged, there is nothing to stop the two groups from fighting. However, there is no way to repair any book that is damaged or destroyed by careless visitors.

Other potential visitors to the Library that the cast could encounter are the Mad. The Mad have become lost in the Library and have no idea why they are here or how to leave. They wander the circular rows of shelves hoping to remember who they are and why they are here. Some have become violent in their madness, striking out at everyone they meet. Others sit with their back to a shelf, rocking themselves, and babbling what sounds like nonsensical thoughts.

Leaving the Spire

Leaving the Spire is nearly as easy as it was to enter. After checking out any books necessary, or simply leaving the Library, a cast member must use the hammer to sound the chime on the gangway. Fifteen minutes later, the dirigible will become a visible shape below the gangway, snaking its way around the Spire. Fifteen minutes after that, it will come to rest at the edge of the gangway. The Driver will hold the door open from inside the basket, as the cast members enter the dirigible. After everyone has entered the basket, the Driver will close the door and re-handout the breath masks before disembarking from the gangway. The trip down the Spire seems to last a much shorter amount of time than the ascension lasted.

If for some reason, the cast has not properly checked out their books from the Library, the chime will not sound and the dirigible will not arrive to take them back down the Spire.

Why the Library

The Library can appear in your games via a plethora of means.

A rich benefactor has heard rumor of its existence and wants the rumor verified.

A different benefactor may need knowledge that can only be found within the tomes of the Library.

The cast may need information to beat a “level boss” and they have yet to find a method to defeat this enemy.

The books contain knowledge that can help benefit the cast’s community or coffers. Simply insert a few clues on how to find the Library and the cast may hunt for it.

Perhaps the cast is a band of adventurers following up leads from a local finder of lost things who gets a cut of any profits the cast gains for supplying correct information. The information provided to the cast specifies the location of the Spire and to not speak to the Driver.

Another reason to go to the Library would be to find a missing person. Clues indicate that the missing person went to the Library seeking knowledge. Now that person has become one of the Mad. Can the cast remove him from the Library or will he stay there? Perhaps the missing person is a female that has become the Librarian.

Story out of Sequence

Part Five Discoveries

By Peter Amthor

“Vehicle is a white Monte Carlo year 1980, excellent condition, plates number is SD4 56T. Doors appear to be locked, windows are rolled up, no keys present in ignition.” Detective Samantha Haberlin circled the vehicle talking into a small recorder in her hand. “In the back seat there appears to be a plastic rifle case, several boxes of ammunition and a closed green sports bag. In the front there appears to be an empty bottle of Jack Daniels, an unfolded straight razor, loose cartridges for a pistol on the floorboards and a photograph of a girl. Oh and a sealed blank envelope on the dashboard.”

“You always seem to beat me to the scene Sam.” A voice sounded off from behind her.

“That’s right Murphy, always have and always will.” She turns to see the detective making his way around the police cruiser blocking off the alley. He looked like death warmed over this morning, probably hung over again. “Rough night?”

“As usual. It locked up?”

“Yeah, we’re supposed to get the keys for it sent down here once Julia gets done with the shit bag down in the morgue.” After pulling a five out of her coat pocket Samantha flags an officer over to her. “It looks like we will be here for a while why don’t you go get us all some coffee. Make mine black.”

“Same here.” Murphy spoke in as he peered through the side window of the car.

“Yes ma’am.” The officer turned away and headed off towards another patrol car on the street.

“So you think it’s going to be awhile before we get the keys Sam?”

“Well the body is pretty well ventilated. Jones is the one that finally took him down and you know how

trigger-happy he is. With the way this guy went off you know he didn’t spare him any lead either.”

“Last count I got on the way up here was nine dead and fifteen wounded. With two of the dead being cops. I just can’t wait until we get a bullet count of how many rounds he put into him.”

“Detective Haberlin?” An officer approached from the end of the alley. Sam turned and gave him a nod. “Miss Bates down at the morgue wanted me to deliver you this. She said you wanted it as soon as possible.”

“Thanks.” Sam takes the envelope and looks inside, “Better glove up Murphy. For once somebody worked in our favor. They went ahead and sent us the keys.”

“I call dibs on the trunk.”

“I figured that much.” She sat the envelope on the hood of the car and slipped her gloves on, then pulled the keys out. “Quite a few on here, guess later we get the honor of trying to find out what they all go to.”

“Yeah lots of fun that will be. Hopefully he had some local next of kin to help us out when we get ready to do that.” He made an angry face as he pulled his gloves on with a snap.

“You always look like you’re about to give a cavity search every time you do that.”

“Yeah but the guys down at the jail hate it when I do one, my hands are to big for their tastes. Now come on let’s open the baby up.”

Sam looks through the keys a bit before finally selecting one out. She slides it into the lock on the trunk and turns it. “Well time to see what a psycho gun nut keeps in his trunk.”

“Oh didn’t know we were going through Jones’s car.” Murphy said with a grin as the trunk rose. “Okay now that’s not what I expected.”

“Holy shit...” Sam raises the recorder up to her mouth, “Inside the trunk there are several knives lined up in a rack, varying in size. A box of latex gloves, plastic

bags, several rows of duck tape, rope, a Polaroid camera and some storage boxes.”

“I’m opening one of these boxes.” His hands gently lift the top of one of the boxes open while attempting not to disturb anything else. “Pictures, um ... nothing special just a few... wait a second.”

“What is it?”

Murphy stood back up and goes through a hand full of Polaroid’s while Sam looks over his shoulder. “Victims I assume. Bound up and apparently being cut to death.”

“I recognize that person. She’s one of the victims of that serial killer that disappeared about a year ago. You remember that?”

“Yeah the one who got nicknamed the slow slasher since he took his time killing the victims. That means our man lying on the slab at the morgue is him.”

“I’m gonna go call this in. This pulls it out of our jurisdiction now.”

Campaign Builder

By Ryan Rank

There is one question that seems to haunt every Game Master. It is the one question that should be asked in every gaming group. In my experience, many GMs don't seem to ask this question. Not asking this question has been the undoing of many games. The question? What makes a good campaign?

This is such a little question. It is so easy to ask, yet so difficult to answer. Throughout this article and any subsequent ones that I may write, I will try to answer this question. Bear in mind, that this is only my opinion. My views will not reflect the views of every player in the land, not by a long shot.

Before I fully get into answering this immortal question, I must first set some expectations for you, the reader. What can you expect from me? Basically, I will be telling you through some various tools what I think makes up a good campaign. You will see some advice and maybe even a couple "physical" tools that I use when I run a game. You will also see some stories from various games that I have played in that I did not enjoy, and some that I did enjoy.

Now that you know what to expect from me, I will continue on with what the real subject here is.

In order to define a good campaign, we must first define a bad campaign. The reason for this is that there are far too many easy pitfalls to fall into and turn a young, promising campaign into a dull, plodding one.

What do I think would make a bad campaign? First, a bad campaign is one that the players are not able to do what they want. A campaign where you, the GM, have the actions of the players figured out many sessions in advance can be very irritating, especially in the early going.

I have played in a game like this. As a player, I was bored out of my mind. One time, in order to make things a little more interesting for me and another player, we were having an in game conversation about our backgrounds. It helped develop our characters more and

it was all done in game. I asked him what the most difficult shot he ever made was. He gave me the answer and we went back and forth like this for a while.

The GM yelled at us (okay, so he didn't actually YELL, but he did scold us) for this conversation. We were missing a major plot point in the game. If I missed a plot point by being in character, I don't think that's a bad thing. Maybe I missed something about what a game is supposed to be about. I believe that a game is supposed to be about having fun. By giving myself, my character something to do, I was having fun.

By forcing a party to go in a certain direction, you are taking the element of choice away from a player. Having the freedom of choice is the essence of a role playing game. This is what makes a role playing game fun. If the players are not interested going in the direction you want to take them, adapt. Remember, the players are running the lives of the people in your world. People have choices, so should the players.

What else can make a good campaign go bad? The next answer I will give you may be something of a surprise. A bad pace can absolutely destroy an otherwise good campaign. A bad pace can either be too slow or too fast. A pace that is too slow is very easy to spot: your group spends 1 entire session going through 3 rooms in a dungeon crawl. If there is something special about the 3 rooms, that's fine. However, if the 3 rooms are just plain, ordinary everyday rooms (example: 2 bedrooms and a mess hall), this is unacceptable pacing.

A pace that is too fast is not as easy to spot. My rule of thumb for this is that if the players do not get a chance to play a personality for the characters, the pace is too fast. As a GM, you have to let the players and the characters have a chance to be themselves. Sometimes it's just something as simple as letting them sit and chat around a campfire. Other times it will be a bar scene where you, through an NPC, will have a conversation and try to pull the other characters into the conversation.

Another thing that will kill a campaign is something the GM only has some control over. This is something that you, as the GM, will have to work out with the players. Thing number three that will kill a campaign: poor characters.

I am very lenient on the characters that my players wish to act out. That is another one of the absolute bases of a role playing game. I role play to act out another persona that is unlike mine. It gives me a chance to cut loose, to escape from the reality of my life.

The characters that should not be allowed are the ones that are unplayable. You know your players better than I do, so I cannot tell you what is unplayable and what is not. Unplayable characters will bring a campaign into the gutter because the players are not taking it seriously.

Along the same line as the unplayable characters lies the horror of many GMs: poor names. Char Danburnt, Itza Delorean, Cole Minor, Lloyd Wright; these are just some of the names that I've heard and played with. With only one exception, it was hard to take the characters seriously because the player couldn't say the name without cracking up. If the player can't take his own character seriously, how could he take the rest of the world seriously?

The final thing that I will cover that will kill a good campaign is that the GM will not let the players have any fun. Remember, we're all trying to play a game, and the entire point of playing a game is to have fun.

If the players get off task for a little bit, that's a good thing. It will give you a chance to catch up with what the players are doing. Sometimes it will allow you to work a moment of inspiration into the game. Most importantly, it feels like you're playing the game to have fun. Role playing should not feel like a task. Those little goofy points allow everyone to recharge their batteries a little bit.

There is a limit as to how far off task you should let your players go. 5 minutes every now and again is fine. However, if you have a storyteller in the group who will tell an hour long, out of game, story in the middle of the game, put a stop to it. That goes beyond a recharge or a break.

Today, we covered some ground. We looked at what is a good way to kill a campaign. Not exactly the positive point you would want to start a series with, but it's a starting point nonetheless. The things I've covered that can kill a game are:

1. A plot that takes choice away from the players
2. Poor pacing
3. Bad characters and character names
4. GM not letting the players have fun and relax

There are more things that will kill a campaign, obviously. I'm sure that you can all add more to that list than I have on there. Some of those things you're probably wondering how I left it off the list. I am not here to focus on the negatives, though. I want to focus on the positives. I want to work with you on how to create a good campaign, not avoid a bad one.

Starting next entry into the series, we will start to cover how to lay the foundation for a good campaign. If you want specifics, well, stay tuned. Until next time, happy gaming!

The Call Of The Wolves

By Steven M. Finger (Laughing Chance)

The Wee Hours Of October 17th & 18th, 2005

* Partial editing by Christine Hasala (Loki)

I took the plates from the table and brought them into the kitchen. Placing them into the sink, I caught a quick glance out the window at the setting sun through the pine and oak trees. I'd love to have gone outside for a better view but these days the only times I ever leave the house is for errands and groceries.

It was a truly magnificent orange and blood-red hue mixture, that only the dramatic beauty of nature could create. The crickets began a new verse to their nightly lullaby completing the scene.

The last of the daylight was quickly fading as I finished up the dishes. Clearing up a small clog of food particles, the water slowly drained away and sucked at the air noisily until only tiny droplets of it remained on the cracked ceramic surface.

My elder, common-law wife had packed away the leftovers into her matching plastic tubs and placed them in the refrigerator as she did a thousand times before, then retired to the living room to relax and lose herself in either the television or one of her worn out musty books.

I had never learned to read. It was a simpler time when I grew up on the mountain. It gave me all I needed to get by. She found me near death one summer and brought me here, patched me up good. Before I knew it, I was defying my very nature and doing chores to pay back the debt. She'd slowly tamed my wild side over the years. She corrupted my being until I became the man I am today. Old and tired, missing my lost youth and my mountain adventures. I hate what I have become, often wishing I'd died out there. It was so long ago that truthfully, I can barely remember much of it anymore.

It was now completely dark and although I could not see them, I knew they were out there closing in little by little. I pulled the curtains closed but it made little if any difference. They knew we were here and I knew they were there.

I often imagined they sensed our movements as easily as I could envision theirs. I'm sure they could smell our food and our scents from miles away, even on the other side of this now bustling mountain community. I liked it better when we were the only ones, well... I should say among the first ones here.

I was drying my hands with the hand towel when I noticed the carving knife on the stained up birch side counter, just beside the stove. The counter had yellowed with age, just as I had.

It was unlike me to miss something so obvious and break with my routine. The bloody juices from the roast beef still trickled from it in the gentle air currents the kitchen vents provided for us. We rarely opened the windows anymore. She didn't care much for the draft it created in the house.

I bet they didn't miss it out there. I knew they would settle for some scraps of our little meal these days but would much prefer the hunt these woodland hills once provided us. Six point bucks, wild pigs, rabbits and turkey... Just imagine, the thrill of the chase, the take down of the prey, nature in all it's glory, just running free in the wild during your prime, being truly alive.

Unfortunately for them, the hunting wasn't so good these days. Man's intrusion into their domain, alterations in the environment and relocating animals had thinned out all but the most resilient and smallest prey.

Lack of any true predators had allowed them to once again increase their numbers but at the same time, creating hardship for the pack to endure and to adjust to while generally staying out of Mankind's way.

Sometimes I'd hear them scratching at the door or getting into the trash. I was born and raised here in the wilderness, thus understanding nature far better than most. The very thought of these ever spiritual princes of the forest having to scavenge through a waste can for a meal sickens me.

I picked up the knife and before I knew it I'd tasted the juices. I savored them for a moment and then began to wash it. However my thoughts were still with the plight of the packs out there. Like the older Wolves,

I too dreamed of the old days.

I could hear them howling both far and near, gathering their brethren with the call, gathering the pack for the hunt. Perhaps it was also a warning to their prey they were coming. Perhaps it was a song of lament for how far they had fallen and what they had become. Perhaps they were calling me to join them under the stars and moonlight.

Sometimes I felt as if it was calling to me... I felt an odd stirring within me. I was a like spirit. Essentially, I too was now living on the scraps of another's hunt. Each passing day my world was compromised more and more around me and it had gone on for far to long.

"Hey, what's taking so goddamn long in here?" she snapped at me as she suddenly entered the kitchen.

"I'm just finishing up you old witch...!" I shouted back at her suddenly, still holding the knife as our eyes met. Yes, the thought crossed my mind many a day and tonight I felt as if I could just do it and feast on her rotting heart. I'd held my tongue all these years but my gratitude had run out and I wanted to be free of her influences.

This endless, tedious, mediocrity was getting harder and harder to take as the years rolled by. Even after a lifetime together it was still her house and our relationship was fruitless and loveless. No one should have to live like this.

I dropped my head in shame, in a moment of human weakness. "I'm sorry... I..."

She walked to the kitchen door and slowly undid each latch with her twisted old arthritic fingers. With more force than I expected of her she flung open the door, slamming it into the wall. She was still someone to be reckoned with despite her advanced age. She had a sheer determination and fierceness that was frightening.

The night was immensely black and the moon was shining as if it were brand new. I could see the eyes of my soul mates at the edge of the brush. The sheen of their fur creating a spectral like outline, visible to even these weak and weary eyes. They looked cautiously and curiously upon

us. Seeing us more truly than we ever could ourselves.

"The door is open" she said, "if you walk through it there is no coming back, no matter how hard you scratch at it. If that's what you want you ungrateful animal, then go now from this house and I'll be glad to be rid of you!"

I couldn't believe my initial hesitation but then off in the distance I heard a prideful howling. A glorious call that echoed through the vast night to my ears at this moment. The call of the wolves...

I dropped the knife in the sink and undid the vintage needle point apron, placing it on the decrepit side counter. I still couldn't quite look her in the eyes, especially when she was angry, surely a failing of my current self.

I took a deep breath and smiled as I walked outside to my ever patient awaiting little brothers. The door slammed closed behind me. I took a few steps and suddenly howled with joy at my newly found freedom and I just stared up at the full moon, waiting for them to come over and join me.

Gaming News - New PBEM resource

From Brandon Blackmoor

As you might be aware, the Irony Games' "PBEM News" site at <http://www.pbem.com> went offline some months ago. Since I have used this site many times myself, I called Ed Taychert the other day to see if there's anything I could do to help bring PBEM News back online, up to and including taking on the trouble and expense of hosting the site myself. Ed wasn't interested, and I don't expect PBEM News to come back any time soon, if ever.

Since I'm not aware of a site which serves exactly the same purpose as Irony Games' PBEM News did, but I think one is really needed, I created one: <http://www.rpglibrary.org/news/>.

If you are currently running a PBEM game, you might consider adding your game to the RPG Library PBEM News under "Games in progress". And of course, if you are looking for players, feel free to post under "PBEM games seeking players", as well. Entries in "Games in progress" stay online indefinitely, and announcements under "PBEM games seeking players" stay online for 30 days.

Let me know if you have any questions, and please pass along the link to RPG Library's PBEM News to your players:

<http://www.rpglibrary.org/news/>. Thanks.



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When Duty Calls: Investigation / Interrogation

*Material and character creation advice
for SLA Industries*

By Max Hattuer

Investigation and Interrogation

Why?

Investigation and Interrogation Operatives are the backbone of SLA Industries. Sent out to investigate everything from minor crimes to high level treason and terrorism, these Operatives have to be alert and extremely skilled.

Every successful Department, Company and squad should have an I&I Operative on their roster.

Usually the I&I Operatives are the curious and determined people who care more for finding out what is going on in the world around them, or why. A dangerous occupation in the World of Progress to be sure, but also a very profitable one for Operatives who know how to use the knowledge that they find to the best advantage.

Character Generation

Attributes

Diagnose, Concentration and Charisma are extremely important to this training package, allowing the Operative to do research and interview the various people they may come into contact with in order to complete their goals.

Cool is usually above average considering the amount of violent crimes that occur on Mort.

Skills

Skill selection should be focused around obtaining and presenting information. Interview, Streetwise, Detect and Communiqué are essential. Forensics, Pathology, SLA Info and Rival Company Info are also very important.

Follow these up with Lock picking (Manual), Photography and Computer Use and you have a nicely well-rounded Investigator.

Advantages

Good Reputation with SLA Administration or Downtowners is useful. Also, good vision, good hearing, good speech and good timekeeper are great additions to this character type.

Disadvantages

Minor/Major Enemy (for some wrong done in the past) can be a decent choice, as well as Medical. Try to stay away from Bad Reputations and Psychoses.

Weapons

I&I Operatives usually prefer easy-to-use, not-to-flashy weapons that get the job done quickly to the more flashy and brutal weapons.

Weapons for the I&I also serve a double purpose, that of tools. Intimidation is always a factor, and the ability to use a weapon in a non-traditional manner may be of great benefit at times.

Melee

A good knife is always a plus, for its many uses outside of combat. Baseball bats also make wonderful intimidation tools.

Thrown

Concussion and Gas grenades. What else allows you to knock people down and out, while still being able to get the information you need.

Also, by using these instead of the more deadly thrown weapons available, you can possibly get a bonus for the apprehension of criminals instead of the usual bounty for bringing in their dead bodies.

Firearms

Pistols

Choice pistols will consist of functionality and intimidation, and you should always carry a good backup hidden somewhere.

SLA Industries provides the most reliable backup pistol available on the market, the FEN 603, upon

graduation from Meny, but what it has in reliability and ease of use, it lacks in intimidation value.

To counter this, a BLA “Blitzer,” GA 47, or some other larger frame pistol should be used as a primary firearm.

Rifles

Shotgun, period, end of story. The best all-around intimidation with the ability of taking out doors with ease make this the greatest asset to I&I Operatives all over the

World of Progress.

Also, with the ability to change between slug and shot rounds, control of how much damage you cause is simply a matter of changing clips.

Armour

Blocker is a great starter, but the savvy investigator knows that Exo-Heavy is what you really need. Also, a good assortment of normal clothing should also be bought often, to keep up with the styles of downtown when travel there is needed.

Equipment

Investigators will need highly specialized equipment for their job. Environmental scanners, Oysters and cell phones are especially handy for this training package.

Also, a cheap camera and a way to develop the film can also help in Investigations.

The BPN

Before the BPN

Do the research! Find out what the people are like in the area that you will be going. Talking to these people can save you a lot of headaches and false leads in the long run.

During the BPN

During White BPNs, the I&I Operative will more than likely take the forefront until combat starts.

Make sure that everybody knows who you are going after, why, and what they may come up against. Your squad mates are there to complete the job just the same as you, and need to know what they are up against.

During BPNs of other colour codes, the I&I will usually take a more backseat role depending on what is going on.

After the BPN

File the notes you have gathered for future reference, everything you learn now may help you out later.

Also, keep the names and numbers of the contacts you made while out on the BPN somewhere that you can find them. The more people you know, the more information you have available to you.

Also, make a list of the loose ends so you can tie them up later.

The Librarian

Part II

by J.A.H Martinez

Library concept by Derek A. Stoelting

Author's Note: If you haven't read part one of this story, go download Inner Voice Issue Four. Gil isn't too fond of recapping.

I don't do the smart thing. The smart thing to do is to go home, reload the "girls", call in some backup, then go to Boku Bucks and get the book back. I've never been accused of being smart though. I just want to get this over with as fast as possible. It's been a rough week at work and I just want to go home, shower, beat off, and sleep for a few days. Commuting to and from Metropolis can wear a guy out in a hurry.

Its about ten at night and I'm doing 90 down a main drag in the "real world". I have no idea what day it is. Judging by the light traffic that I've had to swerve around it's a weekday. I'm getting attached to this big old black Impala. It may not be all that smooth but it eats up the road in big greedy bites. Blowing through an intersection cars flash and scream past me like a spray of bullets. None hit me. That's good. Car jacking is my least favorite activity.

I'm only about 15 minutes away from Boku Bucks, getting the Library book back and killing Tungsten. Probably not in that order. Sorcerers usually don't like it when you waltz into their night clubs and try and plug them a few times. That's fine with me, I don't mind ruining his day. After all he tried to have me killed today, by a couple of Daemons. All on account of him not liking the fact that I banged one out of his protegee back in the day. I have to wonder why he's waited so long to take a shot at me considering I did the deed a few years back. He wasn't all that powerful back then or that high up in his Chantry. Maybe now that he's got some chin whiskers he's started feeling his oats. It really doesn't matter to me. You only get to take a shot at me once.

Tungsten is one of the newer breeds of Magik users. All that power in a thirty something year old body. He's not like some of the elder ones. They try not to attract attention to themselves or their dealings. The older

guys try and keep the others in line, but Tungsten doesn't like to listen. Word on the street is that he's pissing off the Elders with his all his power plays to get on the same level as them. Because of that and the fact that I work for a major resource that these Sorcerers depend on, I can afford to be little carefree when I get my hands on him. I'm humming with excitement.

I'm still annoyed and amused that he's trying to kill me over a little piece of ass and his wounded pride. Tungsten never did have the biggest set of stones. Vee was dynamite in the sack, but not worth getting yourself killed over. I wasn't even sure if he was tapping her back then. I just know his groupies started staring, pointing, and whispering when I came around. Hell if I knew there was the possibility of getting killed over this, I would have done it more then once. I hope I don't have to put a bullet in her too. She was a good girl back then, if a bit young, but good girls don't always turn into good women. Especially when it comes to power and Magik. I wonder if she's still got those two dimples on the small of her back. I'm a sucker for gals that still have "puppy fat" on them.

There's a line in a song I can't stand, sung by a singer I can't stand. Something to the effect of "*you ain't as green, as you are young.*" That was Vee in a nutshell. With that long curly black hair and those light green eyes, she had lot of folks sniffing around. I remember she had overly pronounced canines that came forward a bit too far. I'm fond of gals with imperfect teeth. I knew better then to make it anything more serious then a night. She always had a hungry look that sits right behind her eyes. I've seen predators get that look in their eye when they look into you and size you up, just imagining how good your going to taste. Back then she was an eager young Sorcerer's protegee that was just looking for a good time. Today she may be a full blown Sorceress who won't look to kindly on me killing her mentor. Either way, I don't plan on losing any sleep tonight.

I pull into the club's half filled parking lot, smirking at the mix of hearses, beaters, and Volkos. I back the Impala in the second row away from entrance. Two reasons, cover fire and it's easier for me to pull out if I have to leave in a hurry. I make the door groan as I get out and survey the lot. Nobody is out here, not even door men. I have no idea if that's a good thing or a bad

thing. Popping a few more Dexs, I go around and open my trunk. Inside is a round point shovel, a few Chinese bootlegged porn DVDs, and my sawed off shot gun.

I break the shot gun open and see two shells, one in each barrel. Between them, the 7 bullets (total) in my .38s and my highly ineffective social skills are all I've got to keep me alive. Screw the Boy Scout motto, I'll just have to go ugly early. I start for the club's entrance and keep checking and waiting for someone to pop up and make a move. Nothing happens. I'm actually disappointed, I haven't shot anything in almost an hour. I stow the pistols and zip the shotgun up in my book bag. I don't worry about it going off and shooting me in the ass accidentally. Nothing can get through that bag, it's Magikal. It's about the only perk to being a Librarian. Well that and getting paid to shoot at people is fun to.

I step under the big neon Boku Bucks sign. The "u" is burned out in Boku. I push open the door and find myself in the club's foyer. Man this place has gone downhill. A few yellow light bulbs hang here and there, antiquating the whole room. They've dry walled over the old coat checking room, and they've installed a new steel door as the main entrance into the inner club. Two guys are sitting at a small table by the metal door. One's playing a Game Boy, the other is talking on his cell phone. I hate progress.

The one with the phone eyeballs me and nudges his partner's foot under the table. Game Boy looks up, after he puts his game on pause, and stands up. He's wearing a oversized hooded sweatshirt and jeans. In the old days there was no dress code either, but you dressed nice because you wanted to look sharp when folks saw you. Well that and to get some tail. He takes a few steps and gets about ten feet from me. Any closer and I promise myself I get to shoot him.

"Were closed right now buddy." he mentions half bored, half hoping I start something. *I've got your "buddy" right here pal. Buddy freaking Rich.* Instead I'll try this the nice way, hoping secretly it'll go south.

"There's a bunch of cars out in the parking lot and I can hear music through the door. You don't look closed to me." I sneak a glance at Cell Phone. He's still sitting there babbling. I switch back, looking at Game Boy. He's the bigger of the two and I can't see anything

to indicate that he's got a piece on him. Maybe I won't have to shoot him, I'm trying to save my bullets.

"Hey jerk off I said we're closed, it means we're closed. Are you deaf or just stupid?" He's angry now. He doesn't like it when folks don't take him seriously. It must be hard to be that beefy and have a skinny guy like me talk back to him. I've got him pegged as a card carrying member of the six inches or less club.

"I'm here to see you boss, Tongue Job...he's expecting me." I watch as Game Boy's eyes get a little wider realizing I'm not just some guy off the street. Cell Phone mumbles a *"I gotta go"*, and flips his phone shut. I don't think these guys like me. Cell Phone gets up and stands next to Game Boy.

"Look buddy, I don't know who you are, but Mr. T., doesn't have time to see little pissants like you right now. Who do you think you are anyway waltzing in here and demanding to see him?" Cell Phone tries to use his best tough guy voice. Bingo, douche bag, you just told me Tungsten is here. I'm not liking these odds, especially since I'm trying to conserve ammo.

"Buddy Rich." I enjoy the quizzical look on both their faces. *"My name is actually Gil. I'm a Librarian and I'm here to see your boss, Tungsten. He's got an overdue book and we want it back."* I watch as their able to hold their laughter in for a split second before they crumble. They start to guffaw and almost back slap over the fact that I'm a Librarian. I join in with a few chuckles and a smile myself right before I kick Game Boy square in the testicles. He doubles over instantly and wishes he was dead.

It takes Cell Phone a second to react, his eyes widening quickly as his brain takes in the situation. His left hand goes for the small of his back, right as I swing the backpack filled with several pounds of shotgun into his face. I don't worry about my gun breaking, but his cheekbone isn't so lucky. He spins around to the side, and I grab the pistol out of the small of his back before he hits the floor. I swing it back over and pound it into the back of Game Boy's head. Two down. I think their both still alive. The pistol is a small .22. Not sexy at all, but I pocket it anyway. Caliber be damned, at this point bullets are bullets.

I watch the steel door for a second, waiting for a gaggle of Sorcerers to come through it and light me up. Nothing happens. Faint KMFD-like tunes seep through the door into the foyer. I sling the book bag back over my shoulder and push the door open. The music hits me before anything else. This place has gone to hell. Opened up in front of me is a large swarm of tables with mismatching chairs. There are several folks sitting at a bunch of the tables. Beyond that is a bar along one side of the joint and a DJ booth/stage on the opposite. The DJ barely looks old enough to shave. In the middle of the club is a space that I guess is reserved for dancing. Nobody's dancing, but a few of the table goers are bobbing their heads. That's about to change.

Nobody has tried to kill me yet. I'm beginning to think that I was mistaken and they weren't laying a trap for me. I don't see Tungsten anywhere but I notice a velvet curtain at the back corner of the club and an old fire exit. The fire exit is chained shut. Lotta good that'll do. I walk over to the group sitting at the tables. They look like their having some sort of meeting, I'm happy to crash it. They're all staring at me. It's your basic collection of trendy retail store cashiers all latexed and vamped up. I can barely tell whose a guy from whose a gal. One things for sure, no Vee and no Tungsten.

"Is this drag queens anonymous?" I ask smiling. I scan the group, nobody is making a move. Some joker wearing nylons on his/her arms pipes up.

"Uhhh were closed. Private rental. Get out, now." I'm impressed that it keeps it's voice from cracking with nervousness.

"The last two people that told me that are bleeding all over the foyer." I casually mention as I point my thumb back towards the way I came in. It takes them a second or two to realize I'm being serious

"Who are you man? This is a private meeting and you don't have any business being in here." A different one pipes up. Their finding their stones now, realizing that there's about 12 of them and one of me. I scan them all looking for trouble. I hate Sorcerers, they look like everybody else, you don't know whose the real deal and whose a poser.

"First, my name is Gil. I'm a Librarian." I watch two of them react to that and I peg them. If they've heard of me or the Library chances are they can sling Mojo. *"Second of all, I'm here to talk to your boss Tungsten. Where is he?"*

One of the one's I've pegged as a Sorcerer, speaks up and tells me that he's in his office. It points to the black velvet curtain. I nod a thanks and head across the dance floor. I'm waiting for someone to zap me from behind. Nothing happens. This is getting weirder and that's quite a feat. I make it to the curtain alive and move it to one side. There's an old scarred wooden door with "Office" stenciled on it in once white paint. I think about knocking for a spilt second. Instead I draw both my .38s and kick it in.

The door goes flying open and bangs loudly off the wall only to slam back shut in my face. *Damn. It always works in the movies.* I open it slowly and peak in. Sitting behind a desk is a surprised Tungsten. He looks like the same pasty faced W.A.S.P as the days of old but he's got a hell of a comb over going on now. Nice to see even Magik users go bald. His face looks a bit heavier but all in all he basically looks the same. Right down to the cheap suit.

Over on the couch is Vanessa, laying on her stomach flipping through some sort of magazine. She's got on a long black skirt and a halter top that shows of her pale shoulders and arms. Her long, curly, hair hangs down the sides of her face. Yup she still looks good...Hell even better then good. *I just might have to start bragging to folks that I hit that.*

Tungsten's office is painted some once dark color that's turned to gray and has long spidery plaster cracks running through the walls. Both of them are staring at me, as I enter the office.

"Hey Vee, long time no see. Your still looking fine." I act like I'm ignoring Tungsten. I want to shoot him, but I need to find out where he's got that book hidden first. Well that and I want to needle him a bit too. *"In fact, I think the last time I saw you, you were in that position."* I give her my best smile. I see anger flash in her green eyes for a second, and she opens her mouth to say something, but Tuggy doesn't give her the chance.

“Gilbert, what the hell are you doing barging in my office? What the hell is going on, if you...” He stops cold as I pull one of my guns on him before he can blink. I cock back the hammer for kicks. His mouth opens and closes once, like a fish gasping for air.

“First things first, Tungsten. First shut up. Second. Vee get out. This doesn’t concern you and you don’t want it to concern you. On your way out, it’d probably be a smart idea to get that drag queen, wannabee, Mage of the month club out of here too.” She looks at me for a long second, and I see something pass over her features. I’ve never been good at reading women’s minds. Normally I just want to know if I have to wear a raincoat.

I’m surprised when she gets up and smoothes down her skirt over her hips. She gives a look in Tungsten’s direction and he meets it with a pitiful look of his own. I smile inwardly when I see his eyes ask her not to go. She walks over to me, with her heels stabbing into the ground. One foot in front of the other. Its the sort of a walk a woman puts on when she wants to show you what she’s got. I stop her in her tracks by pulling out my other pistol and pointing it at her chest.

“Sorry dollface. No offense.” I can smell her. It’s some sort of sweet flower. A dangerous sweet flower. She smiles, but it never reaches her eyes. I can see that old predator look in her eyes. That little girl is all grown up.

“Same old Gil aren’t you? Pointing your guns at everything that scares you. You don’t have to be sacred of me Gil. I just wanted to say hello.” Damn. I almost pull my other pistol off Tuggy and point it at her. She’s putting out some serious juice. She’s up to something.

“Back at you babe, but right now I want a word alone with your boss.” I don’t even try and be witty with her. This little girl grew up into a man eater. There’s no possibility of her helping me out for old times sake. She smiles that half smile of hers and walks around me, over to the door. I angle myself so I can keep an eye and a piece on both of them. She opens the door and walks out backwards, that same smile on her face. I keep an eye on Tungsten and walk over and lock the office door, behind her.

“Gil, whatever’s wrong we can work it out. Just tell me what’s going on.” I watch his eyes bulge like a frogs, he’s not used to people pointing a gun at him. For a guy who tried to kill me tonight, he sure is pussing out on me.

“Shut up. I want to see your hands Tungsten. Put them both in the air. If I even see your fingers twitch I’m going to paste your brains all over that wall calendar behind you.” He slowly raises his hands. *“I gotta tell you Tungsten, you sure picked a nice looking lady to try and kill me over. I have to ask, why you waited so long though. She cut you off all of a sudden?”*

I watch his eyes narrow. *“Gil, I have no idea what your talking about. I’ve never tried to kill you, why would I even want to kill you, I’ve got no prob...”* That’s when I shoot him in his right hand. I hate being lied too. Blood and some meaty bits hit the wall behind him. It misses the calendar. He almost falls out of his chair and he cradles his bloody hand in his lap.

“Jesus, God! What the hell was that for! You blew off my goddamn hand!” For the record I didn’t. But he did have a few less fingers.

“I figured we needed to start over. That’s my reset button. You lie, I shoot something off. You have lots of dangly bits. I have lots of bullets”, I recock the hammer. *“Now lets try a different question. Where’s the book? The Nottingtree Collection.”*

His eyes go wide and the color leaves his face. I don’t know if it’s shock or what I just asked him. *“Jesus, Gil I returned it. I swear on life I returned it. Three days ago. Oh man Gil this is all a mix up, I sent it back.”* He’s babbling now, thinking that I’ll buy his story, buying him some time. Only I know it hasn’t been returned. We don’t make mistakes.

“Raise your left hand, Tuggy. I’m about to hit reset.” He covers his face with his arms. I watch blood spurt out of the wounded one. *Idiot. “Didn’t I just threaten to shoot you in the hand? So why would you put it by your head? You know I always thought you were a chump, but you didn’t even have the stones to try and take me out yourself. Your pathetic.”*

“Goddamn it Gil, don’t shoot me, I swear I took it back! Jesus Christ, I did. We can go, I can show you! I never tried to hurt you!” His comb-over has gotten messed up. Man that’s a lot of hair.

“Quit lying!” I run over behind his desk and start pistol whipping the hell out of him. I’m yelling now but I can’t help myself. It’s been awhile since I’ve slept. *“You son of a bitch! You didn’t return it, because we don’t have it. You sent those Daemons after me to take me out, over some goddamn chic of yours that I banged a couple of years ago! Then you sit here and lie to my face about it!”*

He’s on the floor now, his face is a mess and there’s blood on my pants. I can’t tell if he’s dying or crying. Maybe both. I might feel bad, if I thought it would matter. Well that and the fact that he tried to kill me. I better find out where the book is before I lose my temper again. I reach down and grab him by his shirt to pull him up, when the door blows open. In the doorway is one of the two I had pegged for a Sorcerer that was sitting out in the club. I start to draw a bead on them when their hands come up and I go flying hard into the plaster and lathe board behind me. It’s been my experience that drywall is much softer to get thrown into than plaster.

I get the wind knocked out of me for the second time tonight and I manage to drop one of my guns. I don’t see where it goes. All I’m seeing right now are black and silver streaks as my brain tries to reboot. I start to climb to my feet, to take a shot at the bastard that blasted me, but some force rips me off the ground and slams me into the ceiling. I manage to stay conscious somehow. The next thing I know I’m on my back in Tungsten’s office and I’m staring up at a big fresh crack in the ceiling. From the way my head feels, you’d think I’d have left on of those cartoon imprints of my body in it. Sort of like Gil E. Coyote.

I feel my brain try and slip into either death or sleep, but I fight it off. I try and roll over but nothing happens. I try and curse and all that comes out is a mumble. At least I can breath again. Somewhere in the room I hear chanting. I try and turn my head and I black out for a few seconds. I can still hear the chanting when I come to. I’m able to wiggle my toes and crane my neck to see the Sorcerer that blasted me crouched over Tungsten. It’s got it’s hands on Tuggy’s bloody head (*I*

did that! a happy little voice in my head chimes up), and there’s a glow surrounding them.

Bloody Hell. It’s healing him. I need to get up and take down that SOB fast, but I have no idea where I’ve dropped my .38s. That’s when I remember the .22 I lifted off the bouncer out front. It seems like it takes my hand 20 minutes to reach into my suit pocket and grab it. It’s a bit light for my tastes, but I manage to pull it out and slip off the safety. I think the Dexedrine pumping through my system is the only thing keeping me awake at this point. I pull myself up into a sitting position, hoping the guy that just beat my ass, doesn’t notice. It does. It looks right at me and they start to raise their arm when I shoot them 3 times with the .22. It’s body jerks back a little before thue falls in a slump on top of Tungsten. Score one for the Librarian.

Just when I think I might make it out of this alive, Game Boy runs in. He takes one look at the bloody duo and he runs over to me and tries to kick me in the head. I lose count of the number of times I shoot him before he gets too me. *Should have stayed down kid.* Game Boy’s momentum carries his muscle bound body right into me and I black out for what feels like a few seconds. When I come too, it’s just me and the two dead guys. No Tungsten. That’s not good.

I finally get my legs to support my weight and I stand for a few seconds, waiting for Tungsten to come back through the door and blast me. Nothing happens, but I don’t hear music from the club anymore. I find both my .38’s, pop a few Dexs, make sure my back pack is on tight, and head out to the dance floor.

Out here I don’t see Tungsten or Vee, but I see the clubbers all walking towards me, some holding beer bottles, some with knives. *Silly rabbit, never bring a knife to a gun fight.* I walk towards them without my breaking stride. Their lead “it” is the other one I had pegged for a Sorcerer. As I pass by the bar, I grab one of those old heavy glass ashtrays off the top of it and sling it with all my might at “it’s” face. The ashtray doesn’t break when it hits them, but from the way “it” drops in a puddle of blood and mucus I’m guessing that hurt. I’ve never been good at playing with others.

“Now, before I start playing rough, I suggest you little kids drop your toys and get Dr. Frank N. Furter

there to a doctor.” I gesture at both them and “it” with a pistol. They stop in their tracks and for a split second I think their going to charge me. I don’t have enough bullets for all of them. Instead they start to mutter and drop their weapons. I decide to push my luck. *“You. With the nose ring. Come here.”* I think it’s a girl, but I’m not sure. Nervously she walks over to me. I feel bad for a split second that she’s afraid of me. It passes when I remember she had a knife in her hand a few seconds ago. *“Listen girly. I’m probably not going to hurt you. What’s your name?”*

“Kkkaren...Karen Katz. Mmmy friends call me Kat.” I wince as she stammers her words.

“Karen you seem like a nice girl. Now without stuttering like a moron, tell me where did Tungsten go?” I stop pointing my gun at her.

“I dunno, hhe ran out the door yelling for help.” I watch her arm as she points out the front doorway.

“Thanks toots.” I toss her a wink, and head out the front door. After stepping over Cell Phone I see there’s a Volvo missing from the parking lot. That bastards got a head start on me, but I think know where he’s going. I bet he’s running home to the Chantry he belongs too, counting on the Elders to save his ass. Too bad I plan on getting there first.

I’m going God knows how fast in the Impala, when I spot him. I was dead on. We’re about five blocks from the Chantry. I push the pedal all the way to the floor and feel my front tires start to lose their grip. She stays on the road and I nearly broadside a pizza delivery boy and that makes me stomach growl. Tungsten must spot me in his mirror because he speeds up and takes a hard left like he’s actually going to lose me. *You can’t lose me Tuggy, I’m like Buddy Rich when I fly off the handle.*

I end up on two wheels as I go around the corner, I crash into a parked car and that drops me back down to four. We both blow through an intersection almost getting killed when he takes a hard right. I can’t make the turn and I blow right past it. Damn. Whipping the wheel around, I hear my tires scream as I take the next street

over. I gun it and after a few more turns I find him again. I’m only a few feet, when I pull up along his drivers side. I say hello by whipping the Impala into his side. The crash makes my teeth clack together. He’s able to maintain control and I have to brake to avoid spinning out. Damn that fine German engineering.

I punch the pedal into the floor boards and get right on his ass. I don’t know how I coax more speed out of her, but I manage to catch up and smash right into his fender. We both lose control and the Volvo slams head long into row of parked cars. I slam on the brakes manage to wrestle the car to a stop before I kill myself. I leap out of the car and sling on the back pack. I pull out both my “girls”. I’ve got six shots left. All the onlookers that gathered start running when they see me. In the distance I hear sirens. It’ll all be over before then. I head towards the bastard that tried to kill me tonight.

Coming around the front of his car, I know there’s no way he survived that. Nothing could. The front end is crumpled so badly, that it’ll be a miracle if I can even find any solid pieces of him. As I look in the shattered drivers window, I see the air bag’s deployed, but there’s no body. The hair on the back of my neck stands up and I throw myself to the ground as I feel a surge of electricity shoot past me. It rakes into the car blistering the paint.

“Gil, you son of a bitch. You come into my club and try and kill me when I haven’t done a damn thing to you.” I push myself up and leap before another blue bolt darts into the ground right where I was. *“I told you, I took your goddamn book back, but for some insane reason you won’t listen.”*

That bastard must have teleported out of the car before the crash. I manage to slither over a hood of a parked car before he tries to blast me again. Okay, now he’s pissed. Can’t say that I blame him. I pop up from behind the car and unload my last six shots into his midsection. My heart breaks like a little girls, when I see the bullets slam into some sort of bluish shield in front of his body. I hate Sorcerers. I stare into his wide white eyes. The drying blood on his face looks like a mask. Some deranged trick or treater. Now my night is going a little more like I expected it to.

“At least you’re going to finish the job yourself, Tug Job. I hate it when people get other folks to do their

dirty work. So let's get it over with." We both stand there staring at one another over the car.

"You haven't heard a damn word I've said, have you Gil? I've told you all night long I didn't try and kill you. I never have. You're the one who came after me! I've done nothing to you!"

I'm starting to get the feeling he's been telling the truth all night long. Damn. *"Those three mooks that tried to plug me back in Metropolis weren't sent by you?"* I watch as he shakes his head slowly. Opps. *"Well what about the Library book then, what about that?"*

"I had her deliver that 3 days ago, Gil. Your chasing shadows. I can't believe you'd think I'd kill you over her, you know. We both know what an eager little tramp she was." Electricity starts to crackle at the fingertips of his good hand.

I'm finding myself out of options here. Tungsten may have not tried to kill me earlier tonight, but he's going to now. I toss the .38s on the roof of the car in front of me. *"Okay, Tungsten. You win. Do me a favor..."* I start to take off my book bag. *"after I'm dead. How about you blow me for half an hour?"*

I watch as his face contorts into a snarl and he flings his arm up at me. I barely see the bolt shoot out from his palm before I raise the book bag like a shield in front of me. I fall down to the ground behind the car. I quietly unzip the bag and reach in to grab the pistol gripped shot gun. I cock back each hammer on the two sawed off barrels as I hear his feet come around the car. I leave the gun in the unzipped bag, with my hand on it. I close my eyes to a thin slit and wait for him to inspect his handiwork.

I see him standing over me and his eyes widen when he sees I'm not charred to a crisp. He bends down to get a closer look. *"How did you..."* He starts to say when I yank the shotgun out of the bag and pull both triggers right into his gut. The gun roars to life and blows him up and over. I see the blue shield protecting him shatter like glass.

"It's Magik, douche bag." I get up and hurry over to where he's laying. I roll him over on his back and see that he's got blood coming out of his mouth. He

doesn't even have any pellets in him, but some of the force of the blast must have gotten through. If he hadn't had that shield up, I would have blown him in half. I grab him by his bloody shirt collar. *"Listen, Tungsten I may have screwed up about you killing me, but I'm telling you we don't have your book. Where is it, who did you have deliver it?"*

He coughs out a few wet sounds and he starts to speak, *"Van..."* when a single shot rings out. I look up and point the empty shot gun on reflex. I see Vee standing there, with a pistol in her hand, smoke still coming out of the barrel. Suddenly it all falls into place. Her smile sickens me as the scent of her perfume reaches my nose.

"Sorry Gil." she says sweetly. *"Don't bother pointing that thing at me anyway. we both know it's empty."*

She's right. I let my arm hang by my side. I should have seen it coming. Damn, I'm an idiot. *"Why Vee? Why me?"*

"Because I knew if you thought my dear old boyfriend Tungsten tried to steal one of your Library's books, you'd go after him. I knew you'd make it personal. I wanted his club, I wanted his seat in the Chantry. Don't look so pitiful Gil, don't pretend you care that he's dead. I know better."

"True." I nod, *"but lady, you better kill me right now because if you don't I'm going to come gunning for you."* I hear the sirens getting closer now. I need to stall. Problem is she can either shoot me or cast some sort of spell on me anytime she wants. I'm just as dead either way.

"Ah Gil, that's what you do isn't it. Come after people. Come after their books, their lives, whatever. A man with a gun and no conscious. Why is that Gil? Why don't you care about anything?"

That's the difference between men and women right there in a nutshell. They always want to know what your thinking. *"Because dollface. None of this so called 'real world' matters. Your little reality is a lie. I hate that lie."* I see her face become a mixture of confusion and intrigue. Then she raises the gun higher at my head.

“Gil is there anything in this world that you “do” like?”

“Puppies and blowjobs.”

For a split second its deathly quiet. Then she throws her head back and laughs one of the loudest and most genuine laughs I’ve ever heard. I think about ducking for cover, but then she takes the pistol off me and throws it down between us.

“Your a funny boy Gilbert.” With a wave of her hand I see the book I was sent to collect, the Nottingtree Collection, appear on the ground between us a foot or two away from the gun. “As you’ve probably guessed I never took it back. It’s unharmed, as are you.”

I scoop down and pick up the book, shoving it in the book bag and zipping it up. I don’t go for the gun, because I know for right now, she’s got the drop on me. “If you think this changes anything, your dead wrong Vee. I hate being used and whether it was you or Tungsten, someone tried to have me killed tonight.”

I want to say more, but she waves her hand and I stop in mid motion. I can’t move anything. I stand there frozen like some statue as she walks up to me, her heels clicking on the street. Cold bitch or not, that woman flaunts what she’s got. She grabs my face in both hands and leans her face into mine. I can still smell and whatever she’s wearing is heady. I can feel her warmth against me as she presses her body into mine. Its probably a good thing a certain part of me is frozen right now.

“Gilbert, just one more thing.” He green eyes look up into mine, and I wish I could look away. “I may have used you to help me take out Tungsten, but I never sent anyone to kill you. Someone else out there, is probably looking for you head.” She kisses me fiercely on the lips. Not a passionate kiss or even a playful one. It’s a “I own you” kiss. Like a predator marking their prey. I hear her walk a few steps behind me, then all of a sudden I can move again. I whirl around to look for her but she’s gone. I follow suit before the sirens show up.

The Impala runs alright, but it’s pulling a little to the right. I baby it at 75 all the way back to Metropolis. My head is swimming with all sorts of thoughts. I’m too tired to be upset right now. Besides, I’m out of bullets. Between almost getting killed by that moron Tungsten and getting used by my new found psycho man eater Vee, it’s been a long night. I hate Sorcerers. I’ve got this nagging feeling that I’m going to run into Vee again whether I go after her or not. A woman with her ambition and ruthlessness is going to be all over the place. And now apparently there’s someone else out there that wants me dead. Someone with enough swag to send three Daemons after me. Wonderful. I’ve pissed off too many people over the years to even begin to figure out who it is. I’m sure whoever it was, will try again.

I put all of that on the back burner and put a little more speed into the Impala. I can worry about all that later. Right now I’m heading back to Metropolis. To the Library. I’ve got an overdue book to return.

~~Unknown Armies Material~~

Asking of the Dead a ritual for a darkened theater

by: Peter Amthor

Power: significant

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: This will give the caster the answer to a question that a dead person knows. The answer itself is played on the movie screen as if it was filmed involving the deceased person. If questions such as their PIN number were asked it will show the person at an ATM and then the camera will zoom in so the viewer can see the number being punched in. However only questions that the deceased knows will be answered.

Ritual Action: First off you must have the ashes of the deceased person. Also access to a fully operation movie theatre that serves popcorn and uses the old style film reel projectors.

A common teaspoon purchased from a regular retail store must be used to put exactly one teaspoon of the ashes into the popcorn mix before it begins popping but while it is hot. While doing so you must close your eyes and ask the question you want the answer to quietly three times. The spoon must then be placed inside the container holding the ashes and put aside. The popcorn must then be allowed to pop and then served to the patrons of only one movie, the one playing in the room you will be getting answer in.

A little over five and a half hours later you must into that screening room and walk to the centermost seat. On your person must be the container holding the remainder of the ashes, a used ticket stub for that movie that was previously playing while the popcorn was consumed and a change in your pocket equal to as if you paid for your ticket with a twenty dollar bill. Once you are at the seat look directly at the screen and ask the question out loud three times. Then turn around twice and sit down. The projector will then click on and play the answer to the question as described in the Effect.

Ritual Components

compiled by Peter Amthor

In the Unknown Armies second edition rulebook there is a wonderful list of various ingredients for rituals and other magickal workings (page 285). Well this is my addition to that. A compilation of strange and bizarre components for you to use whenever you suddenly need to come up with something in the middle of a game. Originally I was hoping to get a list of a hundred components but I think this one of just twenty will suffice.

- Seven ball point pens that are out of ink.
- Small jar of toenail clippings from at least three different women.
- 17 losing lottery tickets.
- Gallon of year old milk.
- A dissected Rolex watch.
- An envelope of business cards from your hometown.
- A pad of yellow post-it notes.
- A mannequin covered with thumbtacks.
- A roll of 1959 pennies.
- A 25 foot strand of paperclips.
- The break buzzer from where you've worked for the last year.
- A jar filled with 'Red Wing Boot' brand name labels.
- A child's lunchbox filled with broken glass from a wrecked car.
- A wallet with nine strips of dried flesh inside.
- A glass salt shaker filled with pepper and a plastic pepper shaker filled with salt.
- 333 burnt matches.
- Panties worn by a retired porn star.
- 52 playing cards, each from a different style set.
- A quart of human sweat.
- A 20 cent stamp laced with acid.

~~Unknown Armies Material~~

Rumors

By Peter Anthor

This is a quick list of various rumors that I came up with for Unknown Armies. Hope they make a few players scratch their heads, or make a few GM's smile with an evil glee. Enjoy.

Some crazy bastard out there is charging up a bunch of swords and selling them out randomly. Whenever somebody in possession of one of these things meets another person with one they get the overwhelming feeling of anger and rage that drives them to attack the other. So now it's starting to look like highlander all over again out there. People are walking up pulling out their blades and going at it until only one of them walks away with a pulse. A lot of times it actually ends up with a decapitation, guess people do watch to many movies. Also whoever this is, or they are, isn't just doing this to one kind of sword. It's popping up in Pakistani rip offs, quality Spanish blades and even katanas.

From a report there has been news of interesting developments on the Mak Attack listserv. It all seems to be centering on the 'new point of delivery', one that is just as popular as the regular fast food joint with just as much potential. Currently everything seems to point towards the retail giant called Wal-Mart.

The old tales of natives thinking that their souls were stolen buy having their pictures taken aren't just tales. Those old style cameras that may take up to a minute or more for the picture to take are the real deal.

Very common in the old west when folks had to pose for a while in front of the camera while the picture developed on the film. Well during this time the person was having part of or their entire soul sucked into the camera itself. Now they are making a small comeback. All these old time photo shops are opening up with these cameras so the picture looks even more accurate to those of long ago. Slowly they are taking away more and more from the populace.

The books written by Dr Seuss are all actually

cleverly disguised rituals. Only those who study these texts in great detail will figure them out. The Cat in the Hat is one of the most complex and powerful rituals ever put to paper. If only it could be deciphered.

You can store charges in old unopened bottle of Coca Cola from 1985.

Ballpoint pens made in a factory someplace in Maine never run out of ink. That factory has 333 employees.

Mechanomancers are being outdone by a new school of adepts who are behind the whole robot wars/ battle bots craze.

The world is a lie, an illusion put in place to keep us from seeing true reality and our true nature as gods.

Aliens aren't creating crop circles; they are being created by supernatural means.

Remember that game AD&D that had bags of holding? Well those things are based off of real items. I have a friend who has a wallet of holding. Wonder if the bags of devouring are real also?

There is a house in Missouri made completely out of compact disks and the user is a very powerful adept.

Rice has a chemical in it that makes women become more fertile. This explains the population of China now doesn't it?

The Hells Angels are almost completely comprised of Entropomancers.

Playing solitaire for hours can generate some magic for anybody that uses a math heavy school of magic. This explains why Bill Gates had it put on Windows.

Links of Note

This section will contain links back to the personal or favorite sites that contributors to Inner Voice suggest. Want a link to your site to appear in an issue of Inner Voice? Well then submit some material and include a note letting us know about the link you want added it. It's that easy.

<http://www.maxhattuer.com>

PsychoThriller: a collection of articles for various RPGs ran by Max Hattuer.

<http://www.shinies.net/village/html/>

The Village: a gaming site ran by Derek Stoelting aka Oaxaca. Also oft visited by J.A.H. Martinez.

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

Mystic Ages online: The home site of Nathan J. Hill

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

Dark fiction, music and art from Steven M. Finger

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

Home of this ezine and homepage of PeterAmthor.

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

Excellent horror rpg information and forum site.

<http://www.slave-state.com>

Site owned by Ryan Northcott with a forum section discussing games, general topics and politics.

