

JOURNAL OF THE
PK InstituteTM
FOR INFORMATION ENGINEERING

Volume 5(2) Spring1996

In This Issue

Winter: Solomon's Story

Page 2

Bulking up this issue is the story of Henrik's e-mail adventures in the world of Winter. Secrets are revealed...

SupersPunk Characters

Page 36

Two new characters from the SupersPunk world: Gamma Ray and The Bouncing Bandit.

New Spells

Page 38

Because you can never have enough! Includes spells focusing on librarianship and computers.

Editor and Publisher:

David S. Carter
2921 International Drive #2011
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(313) 434-5812

superman@umich.edu

<http://www.si.umich.edu/~superman/>

The Winter e-mail game takes place five years after the state of Winter as I have been presenting it in the pages of the *Ap*. The text at the right, the same that I sent to the e-mail game participants, should be adequate to get you caught up to date.

How to read Solomon's Story

The story on the next several pages is the edited text of the e-mail exchanges between Henrik and myself. Henrik's writing are in normal courier font, while mine are indented in courier italics. I apologize for the tiny size, but it was necessary to keep the formatting of the messages the same as the originals and still fit it on the page.

The text in the sidebars are my comments regarding the direction the story is taking or background information. Henrik knew none of this information while he was playing (in fact, he is now seeing them for the first time!) I've also interspersed the usual reviews and clip art into the sidebars as well; I hope things don't become too confusing...

Winter: Solomon's Story

As many of you know, the Winter world material that I have been presenting sporadically over the last several years comes from a former campaign of mine that has had a couple of incarnations. Originally it was a straight GURPS campaign, but after a while I ran out of ideas and closed off the campaign. A year or so later I revived it as a campaign taking place over e-mail. I opened the game up to other people who weren't in the original group, and our good friend Henrik Mårtensson was one of the players. Henrik created a unique character, Solomon, and left me in the prime position of giving his character total amnesia.

The next thirty-or-so pages are the transcripts from our messages. A good deal of editing was done to turn the messages into a readable and mostly linear storyline; since we often had two or three trains of inquiry running parallel to each other amongst and across messages, I took the liberty of rearranging things for better comprehension. Besides the rearrangement and spell checking, very little else of substance was changed or deleted.

Playing by e-mail was a new experience for me. For the most part, I found it enjoyable. Having a day or two to respond to a player instead of having to respond instantly was the biggest difference. Since I generally make things up as I go along when GMing, I had the opportunity to think things through and make decisions that surely would have been different had I been required to give an answer on the spot. It was also nice to be able to fit in little spurts of gaming every day at my convenience. I should also note that Henrik made for a great player with whom I almost certainly would never have been able to game with in a normal fashion.

Winter — The Past Five Years

Five years ago a marching horde of faceless red 'robots' came from the northeast and began to cut a path of destruction across Winter. Before anyone knew what had happened they completely razed the settlement of Maxwell, burning it to the ground and killing all of the inhabitants. They then began to move on to Newton, but just before they began to attack the town, it was enveloped entirely within huge dome of darkness. The red horde thus turned away from Newton and marched on toward Einstein.

Meanwhile a coup had taken place in the kingdom of Einstein. The king was dethroned by one of his barons who crowned himself the new king. The old king's court magician was also killed in the conflict.

As the red invaders were approaching Einstein, they were met from behind by a small unit from one of the defending garrisons at Newton that had been left outside of the black dome. The red horde then suddenly changed it's tactics. A small group splintered off from the main group. The main group entered the caves beneath the central mountains — the gnome regions — and disappeared. To this day no one has heard from or seen either the red invaders or the gnomes since. The small splinter group, accompanied by the soldiers from Newton, then entered Einstein, where the leaders of the kingdom were found to be under the mental control of crab-like parasites. The hosts had to be killed but the rest of the kingdom was spared. They then moved on to Oppenheimer and Heisenberg, where the same procedure was followed. After all of the parasites had been destroyed the remaining splinter group entered the central mountains and disappeared. (Part of the above is a direct application of the 'Infection' adventure from *AotA* #9.)

While the rest of Winter recovered from the onslaught, the town of Newton remained under the black dome for nearly five years; things could pass into the dome but nothing ever came back out. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the dark dome receded. It was discovered that when the dome was raised a portal to the demonic netherrealms was opened and the town was invaded by demons. To make matters worse, time was distorted inside the dome; it flowed almost normal at the edge of the dome but was far slower at the center. As a result, while five years had passed in the outside world, at the center of the town (on the University campus) only two days had passed. The dome receded when a group of mages, some mercenaries and a visiting scientist from Oppenheimer (!) closed the portal and all of the invading demons were sucked back to where they came from.

As this new leg of the campaign opens nearly nine months have passed since Newton regained contact with the rest of Winter...

Solomon, 150 points
Race: Human/Unknown

10 ST 11
45 DX 14
30 IQ 13
20 HT 12

Move: 6.5

Advantages

Regeneration (1/h), 25pts
Combat Reflexes, 15pts
Danger Sense, 15pts
Magical Resistance, +5, 10pts

Disadvantages

Secret (Composite being, Imprisonment), -20pts
Amnesia, Partial, -10pts
(20 points reserved for GM assignment)

Quirks

Doesn't fidget, or move, when not necessary, -1

Stoic, tends to disregard less than debilitating pain, both in himself and others, -1

Fascinated by fractal patterns, can study fractal images for hours, -1

Does not show emotions, unless they are very strong, -1

Sometimes, especially when under stress, refers to himself and the host body as separate identities. May also exhibit other language quirks, -1

Skills	Points	Level
Astronomy	2	12
Beam Weapons	1	16
Brawling	2	15
Body Control	2	11
Breath Control	2	11
Chemistry	2	12
Computer Operation	1	13
Computer Programming	4	13
Ecology	2	12
Fast Draw(Beam Wpn.)	2	15
Fast Draw(Saber)	2	15
Fencing	4	15
Hypnotism	4	13
Intelligence Analysis	2	12
Mathematics	4	13
Meditation	2	11
Physics	2	12

2 points left for assignment by GM.

Phys. Attr:105

Advantages: 60

Disadv.: -50

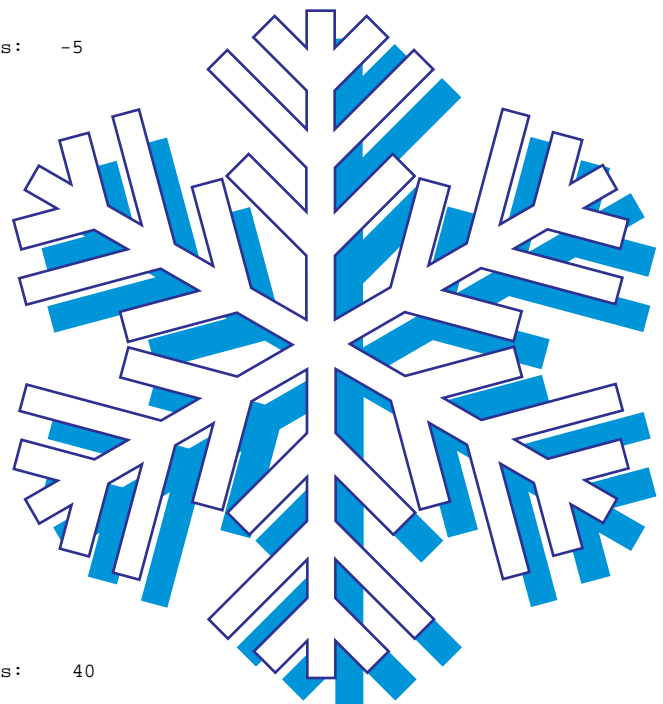
Quirks: -5

Skills: 40

Sackcloth 'n' Ashes
by 16 Horsepower

Media: album
In Short: sinister

The best description I've heard of this album is "southern rock by way of David Lynch." The sinister sound of 16 Horsepower sounds like a bad day in the back woods of the bayou, and I mean that in the best possible way. The only drawback to the album is that the mood is so one key sinister that by about two-thirds of the way through you've had enough. Still, this is a unique sound not to be missed.



Boys For Pele
by Tori Amos

Media: Album
In Short: good stuff

Tori's latest album once again shows growth as an artist, but still appeals to fans of her previous work. Not an easy thing to do, look at the number of artists who have tried for a new direction, only to fail miserably an alienate their former fans. Not so here, as Ms. Amos expands her musical horizons instead of replacing them. The songs in *Boys For Pele* center around the various facets of the relationship between the female and the divine, allowing her to create an album with a healthy mix of musical styles and lyrical moods. Although I personally could do without the synth-harpsichord that appears on a few songs, the rest of the album is a delight.



Starting Wealth: \$???

Equipment

Saber	\$700	2 lbs.
Middle-class clothing, Winter x3	\$240	
Overcoat	\$ 50	10 lbs.
Backpack	\$ 15	2 lbs.
Cloth gloves	\$ 15	
Leather boots	\$ 80	3 lbs.
Basic outdoor eq.	\$ 5	
Canteen	\$ 10	3 lbs.
Survival knife	\$ 40	1.5 lbs.

Cash: \$???

Background

Solomon doesn't know who, or even what, he is. The only memories he's got left of his old life, are the last moments:

Pain! Stronger than any he had ever endured, splintered his self. The personality matrix dissolving into frayed strands, dying piece by piece. On the verge of unconsciousness, his decaying self feels a weak alpha rythm. The body on the cave floor! It isn't dead. Maybe, just maybe, it can still serve as a host. Moving quickly he enters, imposing his matrix on the dying neurons, forcing the brain to function.

Damage, massive, the host is dead, only traces of life remains, but maybe enough. He sets up a repair cycle, strengthening it while fighting waves of nothingness. Finally, success, then his mind is swallowed by the night.

Most of his present skills aren't learned, they are vaguely remembered. Solomon's mental skills are severely hampered both by his damaged mind and by the unfamiliar perceptions of his host body. Using skills like Physics and Chemistry is very frustrating, because he knows he has lost so very much that he will never be able to relearn, that the limitations of his host bars him from, even if the intellectual knowledge was there. (For instance, he believes he ought to be able to *feel* the composition and molecular structure of any substance in his vicinity. It's incredibly frustrating that he can't.)

(Solomon considers the world as a set of conditions. Physical coordinates are only four [including time] of these conditions - and usually not the most important. To him, travelling is "achieving a state".)



Ok! Slowly awakening. Pain.

Damage assessment: No sense of <concept missing>. Matrix fragmented, no connection to the <untranslatable>, host damaged, no communication with bio repair cycle - matrix fragment on autonomous multi-threaded operation. Loss of <matrix damage - loss of what?>...

Solomon opens his eyes. What's happening?

Something must be wrong. Despite the fact that this form you are now inhabiting is garbed in many layers of clothing, you are still cold...

You seem to be in a cave of some sort. A little bit of light is coming in from the mouth of the cave, enough so that you find a lantern nearby. Instinctively you reach for a switch, but find none. Soon you realize that it requires a combustible to operate (how did you know that...?) and fishing through a nearby pack you find a match.

Lighting the lantern, you cause the cave to glow with light. It is fairly small, with the mouth of the cave about 50 feet away, around a bend.

Next you examine the form you seem to be in. (Why did you feel the desire to light the lantern before examining this body? How do you know it isn't your own? What are you?) It is humanoid, the usual two arms/legs/eyes variety. Using criteria unfamiliar to your conscious mind you judge it to be in good health. You are garbed in heavy clothes. Besides the pack (with basic provisions) and the lantern you also have a large wood-and-metal stick (a shotgun - a weapon, something within your memory identifies it.)

It is then that you realize you are not alone in the cave...

There are two other humanoids in the cave. You move to examine one of them. An inspection shows that it is no longer functioning. Half of one of its legs is missing, and a large amount of red fluid is pooled around it. The face of this dead humanoid seems familiar, almost haunting...

The other humanoid appears to still be functioning, though it seems to be in a low-powered state (sleeping, your memory explains.) This humanoid is similar to you and the other, though it is shaped somewhat differently (humanoid type designated 'female,' as opposed to your form and that of the non-functioning humanoid, designated 'male.') This female humanoid is also clothed in heavy garments (the non-functioning humanoid was wearing a thin, shiny cloth...)

You attempt to bring the female into an animate state. Soon she is awakened, and speaks to you: "Rorg, is that you?" the female says.

At first the words are meaningless to you, but after a few seconds language functions are accessed (which you were previously unaware of.) The meaning becomes clear: the female believes that you are designated Rorg. This is incorrect! Your designation is Solomon!

The female then speaks again. "Oh Rorg!" she exclaims. "Are we finally away from that horrible place?"

Subject: Female humanoid bioconstruct -> Temporary ID_tag assignment
<the female>

Problem: The female uses wrong ID_tag

Probable Cause: The female addresses host identity matrix

Implication: The female suffers sensory deprivation

The female is deliberately feeding Solomon identity misleading information

The female's natural sensory organs severely limited

(X-check: Host body sensor capabilities

Electromagnetic - severely limited
2 photon sensors
approximate bandwidth 400 nm

Pressure sensors - severely limited
2 vibration sensitive membranes
approximate bandwidth 20 kHz

Tactile sensors - excellent
99% body of body surface contain sensors
very good sensitivity in manipulatory members

A little explanation is in order here.

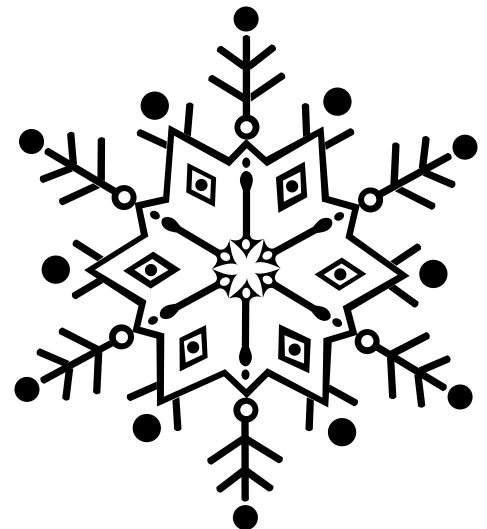
In the waning sessions of the original Winter campaign, I decided to have the PCs kidnapped and taken to a place remarkably like The Village from The Prisoner. While they were there, they were subjected to numerous mental tortures, including waking up one day to find that their minds had all switched bodies in the last session. My original intent was to have the PCs awaken in the next session in the technology hating, theocratic settlement of DeBroglie, but the campaign was never continued in normal fashion. I never did decide exactly who the people were who kidnapped the PCs, except that they were members of a secret settlement of humans to the south (hereafter referred to as the Cabal).

When I decided to run the game via e-mail, I came up with an idea: since it had already been established that the Cabal used clones, I decided that the purpose of kidnapping the PCs was to clone them, then use their experiences in the village to record their mental processes and thought patterns, which could then be altered and installed into the clones. The clones would then be released back into Winter, where they would do the bidding of the Cabal. The plan called for the original PCs to be killed, but through an unexplained mechanism there was a mix-up and the PCs were released back into Winter along with their clones.

The body that Solomon is waking up in is the clone of one of the PCs from the campaign: Rorg Gutfriend. The woman Rorg's wife, who had been captured by the Cabal and used by them to force Rorg to betray his friends in The Village. The real Rorg has been placed down in one of the southern farming towns.

So what exactly is Solomon? Read on...

The body in the cave belongs to Solomon's previous host body.



approximate bandwidth - \$\$\$%&/&((f"

Result: Mistaken identity designation due to limited sensory capabilities - VERY HIGH

)

Primary Action: Activate host identity matrix.
Secondary Action: Host body function check.

—

In other words, I flex my fingers and stretch a little to check that the host body is functioning properly. I also try to locate Rorg inside our skull (Do I get a roll vs. Meditation skill?). If he's there, I want to let him handle the present situation.

I am going to assume that I don't succeed :-)

That would be a good assumption. You appear to have overwritten a large portion of the 'Rorg' identity, though there are a few memory stores which you don't recognize and don't seem to be able to access at the present time...

The host body, on the other hand, seems to be working rather well.

So, if I am alone in my head, I'll continue something like this:

—

Host body identity matrix search: Negative
Suggested action: Correct erroneous ID_tag designation
Problem: May cause information overload in the female
Recommended action: delay correction of ID_tag

Action: Vocal organ function check
Open communication channel: "This unit suffers disorientation problems. Define 'that horrible place'."

—

After this brilliant conversational gambit, I stand still, waiting for a response. (And I mean 'I stand still', no movement at all, unless I see or hear something that catches my interest.)

"That, that village, whatever it was. Oh, Rorg, they did such horrible things to us there!" The female throws her arms around you in an embrace. Then she continues: "Where are we now? Are you okay?"

BTW, you don't have to worry about me keeping up this style of writing throughout the campaign. I'm going to humanize Solomon a bit when I get the chance.

Actually I'm finding it rather enjoyable, at least for the time being :-)

Problem: Matrix damage - unable to access 11-dimensional space-time
<orientation/translation/rotation/concept missing>
Problem: The female refers to self-identity matrix/host unit as "Okay"
Implication: The female has detected identity matrix not Rorg.
New mistaken identity, Okay.
Query: Female possesses tactile sensors capable of limited identity matrix identification?
Probability evaluation: HIGH
Assessment: probability using ID_tag Okay without mismatch being detected, LOW

Response: Data correction. Transmit ID_tag Solomon
Communication channel: "Spatial evaluation system damage. Unable to provide desired space-time coordinates. This unit not-Rorg, not-Okay. This unit is identity matrix Solomon/host body Rorg fusion. Preferred ID_tag Solomon."

—

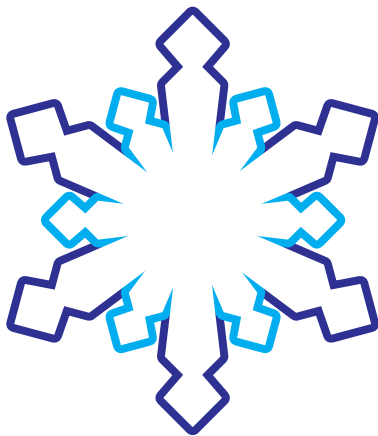
Since the hug my host body got was not fast enough to be an attack, I ignored it. Since the female asked if I was this guy named Okay after hugging the host, it seemed only logical to assume that females (at least this one) can

Arcane

Future Publishing

Media: Gaming Magazine
In Short: excellent

Although I have only seen one issue (#5) I must say that *Arcane* is the gaming magazine that I have been waiting for for a long time. A truly generic gaming magazine, the UK based *Arcane* contains not one piece of rules-specific information, instead concentrating on articles about broad issues and relying of the intelligence of its reading to figure out how to adapt things to their favorite system. Issue number 5 contains a news section (UK centric but still useful); an opinion piece or two; a fascinating report on the state of RPGs in Japan (GURPS is big there, due in part to excellent marketing: it was released in a small-book format which allows it to be sold easily in normal bookstores, and Japanese writers are actually encouraged to publish their own supplements); an article about using warfare to spice up a campaign; part five of a series on world building, focusing on cities and technology; and a generic setting/adventure about passenger trains in the late 19th century. The second half of the magazine contains numerous reviews of games and other items of interest to gamers. Most importantly, *Arcane* is a role-playing magazine. Although CCGs, board games and computer games are covered in the news and reviews sections, the magazine's main editorial focus is squarely on RPGs. You may have trouble tracking down a copy of this imported publication (I found it in Tower Records, of all places), but I guarantee it will be worth the effort.



sense an identity matrix if they touch the host. (Though not very well, or she would have sensed I am Solomon, not Okay.)

So far, I am just gathering data though. Any conclusions are preliminary.

The female stops her embrace. "What... what are you talking about? Oh God, Rorg, what have they done to you?! What have they done to your mind?!?!" At this point the female becomes hysterical; tears are rolling out from her eyes and she begins to beat on your chest with her fists (but not too hard – you don't suffer any damage.) "Those dirty bastards! They promised! They promised they wouldn't hurt you if I cooperated!"

Problem: The female displays erratic behavior.
Probable cause: Female is acting from incorrect information model.
Female identity matrix information model manager damaged.
Biochemically induced identity matrix instability.
Action: Stimulate matrix self-repair in female matrix information model manager.

Communication channel: "Probable matrix damage. Information request: Female identity matrix/host ID_tag. Current n-spatial space/time vectors."

So, I've finally concluded that she has trouble accepting that I'm not Rorg. I try to bring her out of her shocked state by cleverly asking her for help.

Of course, she might have a bit of trouble with my speech patterns. If I don't get an intelligible, rational response within a few seconds, I try to rephrase my statement.

Communication channel: "I do not remember. What is your name? Where are we? Give me a brief account of events since our first space-time intersection."

Quite eloquent for Solomon, isn't it?

If she calms down a bit, I'll try to get as much information from her as I can.

"Oh, Rorg! They've taken away your memory! Okay. I'm Darcy. I'm your wife. We met four years ago, after you helped to get rid of the red men. We live in Heisenberg, or at least we did until we were kidnapped and taken to that horrible village. They must have done something to you there. Don't you remember any of this?"

The female seems to have calmed down now. That is, until she sees the other (non-functioning) humanoid in the cave. "Who's that? What's happened to him?" She gets a closer look. "Oh, God, Rorg, he's dead!"

Communication channel: "Prefer ID_tag, name, Solomon. Memory damage. Rorg identity matrix inaccessible. Host unit on floor permanently dysfunctional."

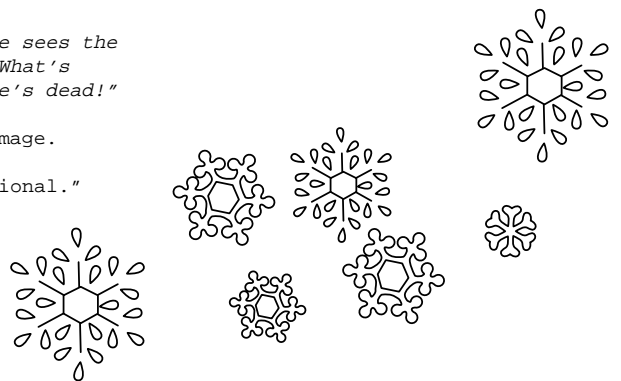
Logical assignment: The female -> Darcy

Objectives: Verify security of proximity space
Determine maximum probability action sequence
Achieve optimal survival state
Retrieve information from Darcy

In other words, I decide to check the cave, and to have a quick look outside to see if there are any immediate dangers threatening. The next goal is to determine what to do about the current situation. This will probably involve moving to another location.

In the back of the cave you find a passageway, presumably leading further down in. It is quite dark, and this unit seems to have very limited optical capacity (no infrared or ultraviolet, just the 'visible' spectrum.)

Outside the ground is covered with a large amount of ice & snow. The sky is overcast but there is no precipitation. You appear to be in a



cave on the south side of a large mountain range.

I also decide to pump Darcy for as much information as possible. I will also try to find out more about the kidnapping and the "horrible village".

This is an accurate description of Rorg's adventures during the campaign.

Darcy still has a hard time comprehending that you are not Rorg – she seems to believe that you are Rorg with a memory problem, not an altogether different entity...

You (or rather Rorg) are a blacksmith by trade, and apparently a somewhat reluctant adventurer. About five years ago, through an incredible set of circumstances, you became involved with stopping a group of mysterious red automatons that were ravishing the land, which Darcy has referred to as 'Winter.' You settled back into Heisenberg and took up a position of de facto leadership within the community. You and Darcy have been married for about three years.

About six months ago you learned that the mysterious black dome which had covered a place called 'Newton' had been lifted. Three of your traveling companions (who she calls Dr. Summer, Cyrus, and The Major) had been trapped within, so you went back to Newton to be reunited with them. While you were gone, Darcy was kidnapped and held for ransom. You and your companions tried to rescue her, but were captured as well.

The five of you were taken to a strange village in an unknown location (though Darcy figures that due to the milder climate it must have been somewhere south of known territory.) You were physically and mentally tortured until you betrayed your companions in order to save Darcy's life. The next thing that Darcy remembers is waking up here in the cave.



While checking the cave, far enough to see what's outside the entrance, I continue the conversation with Darcy. I assume she will stay within hearing distance.

Communication channel: "Important improve survivability. Proposal: cooperative efforts.
One. Verify immediate security.
Two. Gather survival equipment.
Three. Achieve Heisenberg state."

If Darcy understands that I want to examine the cave a bit further, gather what survival equipment we can, and set off for Heisenberg, everything is fine. She might have other ideas of course...

Darcy looks outside the cave and recognizes the mountain range – she figures that you are about half-a-day's travel west of Heisenberg. She seems to think that going to Heisenberg would be the best course of action; she says that she doesn't trust the mountain caves, especially since the red automatons and the entire race of something she calls 'gnomes' entirely disappeared five years ago...

Check: Crystalline hydrodioxide, local compression area

Negative -> (Bioconstructs relocated through space-time discontinuity)
(Bioconstructs continuously translated through cave)

Positive -> (Bioconstructs continuously translated via cave entrance)

If there are no traces in the snow outside, we either teleported in, or came from further into the cave.

I check for tracks.

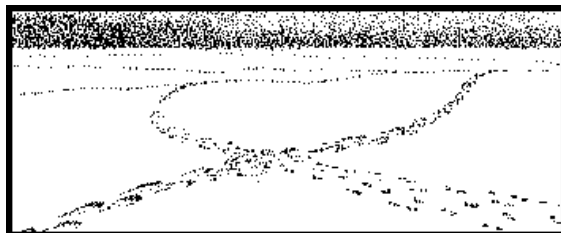
I'll assume there were none.

Ah, but then you'd be assuming wrong :-)

Due to freshly fallen snow, you cannot see any tracks outside. However, there are several sets of fairly recent footprints, you'd guess at least seven different physical entities, near the cave entrance. Close

The tracks belong to the Cabal members who deposited Darcy and Rorg-clone in the cave.

inspection also reveals a trail of (now dried) red liquid running from the mouth of the cave to the non-functioning unit.



—
Evaluate: (Achieve state Heisenberg)
(continuous space-time translation -> cave)
Action: Pick up photon emitting devise
Translate along space-time vector designated cave
Communication channel: First objective, search cave.
Second objective, achieve Heisenberg state

—
If Darcy doesn't protest, we will explore the cave a bit further using the lamp. If we don't find anything interesting within a reasonable time limit - say 45 minutes we will return to the cave entrance, rest a bit, and then begin our journey to Heisenberg. (I would like to search longer, but considering the limitations of the host, it might be best to make as much of the trip as possible in daylight.

You travel down the cave for about twenty minutes before heading back. The only thing of interest that you encounter are various glyphs every 200 metres or so - Darcy identifies them as 'Gnomish' but does not know what they mean.

After packing up your belongings (or rather, Rorg's belongings) you and Darcy head towards Heisenberg. After about an hour of traveling you notice off in the distance a group of entities: six or so about the same size as the host you now reside in and two more which are much larger, covered in brown hair, and have large tusks and trunks. Darcy remarks that they "look like a search party."

The search party consists of Cabal members who are searching for Solomon. They fatally wounded his previous host. The Cabal wants Solomon for its own nefarious purposes. In a case of the Cabal's left hand not knowing what its right hand is doing, these Cabal members are unaware that the Rorg-clone and Darcy were deposited nearby.

Query: relative position (entities)-(Solomon+Darcy)-Heisenberg
Unidentified entities <-observation->Solomon+Darcy
Tracking?
Select: (e)-(S+D)-H
(S+D)-(e)-H
NOT observed
observed
NOT tracking
Tracking
Compute: Optimum speed(terrain,fatigue,strength,stamina,Darcy,Solomon)
Action: Evade
optimize spatial translation->Heisenberg

—
Are they between us and Heisenberg?
Have they spotted us?
Do they seem to be following our tracks?

No to all three, so far...

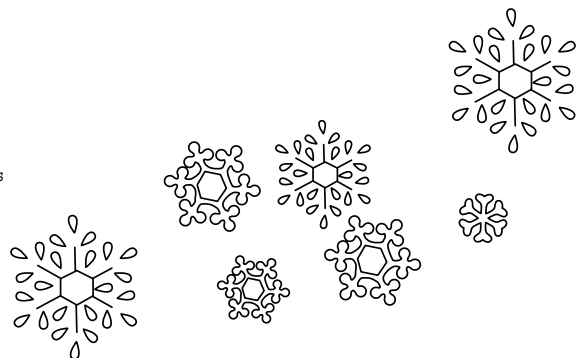
First we crouch down, trying to avoid getting spotted. I assume that we have them in front of us. If so, we start circling them. It is probably best giving them a wide berth, and press on towards Heisenberg. (Of course we only do this if the terrain allows us a reasonable chance of success.)

Oh, and it might be smart to get Darcy's opinion on this before taking action - she knows the world, the terrain, and is a much better judge of potential threats than I am.

If Darcy agrees to try to circle them, we will take care to pace ourselves - It is a long trek to Heisenberg.

—
Communication channel: "Query: search party evaluated as potential threat to host bodies."

Darcy agrees with your assessment; she seems to be worried that whoever the entities are may be searching for the two of you to take you back to The Village (whatever that is...)



Okay. To make a long story short, you are successful in evading the search party and make it back to Heisenberg shortly after nightfall. Darcy leads you through town to a dwelling that she refers to as "Our House." Upon arriving at the dwelling, Darcy points out that there is a light on within, and this disturbs her since "who would be inside Our House with a light on?"

Evaluate: Probability enemy reveals itself by photon emission.
LOW.

Communication channel: "Danger level: Low. Action: Check window.
Evaluate. Open door. Enter."

—
Still being cautious after the recent events, I step up to a window (quietly) and have a look. I if I'm not immediately spotted from within, I let Darcy have a look too.

If we see no signs of danger, I walk up to the front door and reach out for the door handle. Just before touching it, I make a slight pause.

If I sense no danger, I will try the handle, open the door and enter.

Of course, if there really is something dangerous in there, I won't just barge in.

Looking inside you see a man sitting in a chair reading a book. "It's just my brother Davis," Darcy tells you. "He's probably looking after the house, bless him." Obviously Darcy does not see the entity 'Davis' as a threat.

Ugh! Danger Sense! I suppose I'd better warn you: for some reason, I have a problem with Danger Sense. It's not that I don't like it, I just seem to forget that players have it! I dunno, it's some sort of mental block or something. So you may have to remind me about it from time to time... :-)

Anyway, there obviously isn't any danger here, for the time being.

When you enter, Davis puts his book down, stands up, and grabs his shotgun.

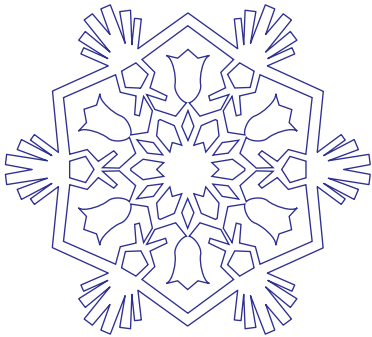
"Davis, it's us!" Darcy says.

"Darcy! Rorg! Thank God, I was worried sick about you two! Where have you been for the past six months?" As Davis says this he gives big hugs to Darcy and then you.

"Six months?" Darcy says, "but we've only been gone about three weeks!"

The conversation continues on until Davis convinces Darcy that she and Rorg have indeed been gone for sixth months. Oddly, Darcy makes no mention of this 'The Village' place to Davis...

I'll pause the narrative here if you'd like to make any comments. Else, Davis will soon leave and you and Darcy spend an uneventful night until the next day...



Darcy is under a post-hypnotic suggestion to not talk about The Village. For some reason, it does not work when she talks with Solomon/Rorg-clone.

I will keep as quiet as possible during Darcy's conversation with Davis. Her omissions will be noted, however. When we are alone I'll ask her why she didn't tell Davis about 'The Village'.

"I don't know," Darcy replies. "I wanted to, but I couldn't."
(An ominous, cryptic answer if I've ever heard one! <grin>)

When we get to bed, I'll spend some time sorting data, determining courses of action, etc. Learning to speak the way the bioconstructs do, and finding out more about accepted standards of behavior seems important if I am to stay here for a long time.

After some searching you find the language area of the host's memories. The vocabulary database has, unfortunately, undergone massive damage, but the grammar constructs are largely intact. You are able to successfully integrate the surviving language components into your own memory matrix.

Observing the conversation between Darcy & Davis has also helped you

to narrow down sets of behavioral norms that you have found in your own systems. However, much more observation will be necessary before you will feel comfortable operating in this society – an observational trip may be in order for tomorrow.

Finding out who or what I am is important too, but at the moment it is more of a mid to long range goal.

Agreed, and though some answers may come sooner than you'd expect, realize that your true situation may not be as obviously apparent as it first appears (as Dave enters severe cryptic mode <grin>)

It is nice for me to know you short and long-term goals – helps me to plan events and the such, so feel free to keep me informed of your thoughts and desires as well as those of your character.

I also resolve to find out more about my own capabilities, and limitations. For instance, Rorg was a blacksmith. What does a blacksmith do, and can I fulfill that capacity? Otherwise I will probably have to find some other way to contribute to the society. (BTW, I do consider the society a living organism. Makes no difference to me whether an organism is constructed of cells or of larger, more complex units.)

Rorg's blacksmithing abilities are accessible to you and can be integrated into your operational matrix. Also, Rorg seems to have been a fairly competent armorer and weapons smith as well, roughly corresponding to TL 5-6 technology.

Then I go to sleep.

Good. This host organism seems to be subject to tiring and wear, and rest periods comprising about a quarter to a third of total operational time would probably be in order.

You do not dream. You find this not to be significant.

When you awaken in the morning, 'Our House' is filled with an odor which your olfactory sensors register as burning organic matter, probably animal. Following the source of the odor downstairs, you discover... Darcy making breakfast. "Good morning," she says as she kisses your cheek. "How's your memory this morning?"

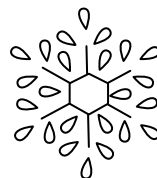
Just as she asks the question, you hear a knocking from the front of the house. "Oh, could you go see who's at the door?" Darcy asks you. "I have my hands full at the moment." Analysis of the situation indicates that the knocking sound you heard was an entity seeking admission into 'Our House' and Darcy would like you to see who is at the entrance.

Opening the door, you see two men, heavily clothed and carrying no visible armaments. "Please excuse the intrusion, sir," one of the men says. "We are looking for a friend of ours who is missing. He answers to the name 'Solomon.'" The man shows you a two-dimensional image of a face. The face matches that belonging to the non-functioning entity that was in the cave with you and Darcy. At this point you get the feeling that this situation is becoming dangerous (i.e. your Danger Sense is going off!)

If I get the situation right, the two men do not immediately recognize my host body. Otherwise they wouldn't have bothered handing me the photo.

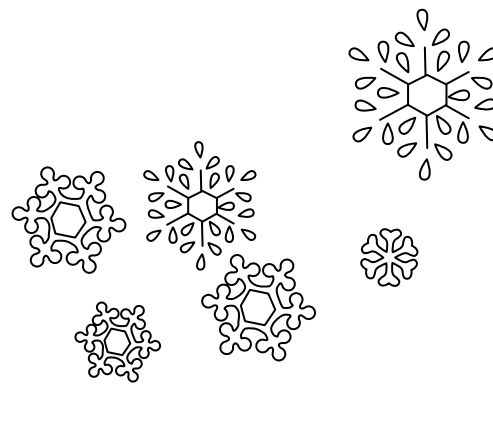
If my danger sense goes off, it seems logical to assume that a new element is about to enter the situation. - Darcy is probably on her way towards the door.

Options: Close door
Attack bioconstructs
Wait
Query: Distance Solomon-shotgun
Sturdiness door
Bioconstruct attack preparation



The bit about not dreaming is in fact potentially significant, although there is no way that Henrik could know this. In the campaign, dreams were often prophetic, used by me to cryptically warn the players that they were heading down a path with dire consequences, or to add some foreshadowing.

The men are two members of the previously mentioned search party.



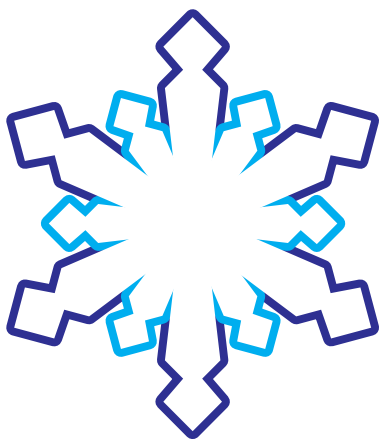
Akiko

Sirius

Media: Comic

In Short: Darling

Mark Crilley's *Akiko* is just about the darlinest comic I have seen in a long time. *Akiko* is an Earth girl who periodically journeys to the planet Smoo to have adventures (a robot duplicate is left behind so her parents won't get worried). The stories are quite similar to the types of fantasies that I, and I suspect many others, had as a child, told in a manner to appeal to both adults and kids. If there are any young ones in your life, buy *Akiko* and sit down and read it with them. If not, read it anyway!



Pieces of You

by Jewel

Media: Album

In Short: modern folkness

Jewel is a talented singer-songwriter from Alaska with a talent for writing catchy but not simplistic songs and a uniquely talented voice. In any other time, her debut album would be classified as folk music, but in this day and age it is being marketed as alternative. Regardless, Jewel shows talent and a lot of promise. Give it a listen.

In other words, if I slam the door shut, will I be able to reach my shotgun before these two get it open? (I assume the door can be locked or bolted quickly.)

If that seems improbable, I prepare to attack directly. However, I won't move unless one of them tries a suspicious move first, or reacts with surprise when Darcy shows up in the doorway.

(I can't quite figure why they'd recognize Darcy, but not Rorg. This makes me wonder whether I have interpreted the situation right. The danger might come from some other quarter.)

Are there any other weapons that could be reached quickly if I shut the door?

Actually, I meant to imply that your danger sense started going off when they showed you the picture and you realized who they were looking for; i.e. the danger is dependent on how you answer the question. Did that make any sense? In plain English: You get the feeling that if you say, "Why, I'm Solomon! I'm just in a different body!" it would be a bad thing.

But to answer your other questions: the door is fairly sturdy and yes it can be bolted quickly.

Your shotgun is probably nearby, and is the only real actual weapon that could be grabbed quickly. Of course chairs, lamps with hot oil, and the such could also be used as weapons.

Anyway, while you are thinking over the situation, Darcy calls from back in the kitchen, "Rorg, who's at the door?" The men don't seem startled by her voice or anything.

Since there seems to be no immediate physical danger, I won't attack unless provoked.

I take a good look at the photograph, paying attention not only to the face of the bioconstruct, but also to clothing, background details, etc.

Just a head-and-shoulders shot, with a nondescript blue background. He's wearing whatever it was he was wearing when you saw him in the cave - I think that it was a silver jumpsuit.

I am also paying attention to the hand that holds the photo. Is it large, small, strong looking? Are there any discoloring (nicotine spots), abnormally enlarged knuckles? Are the nails well manicured, long, short, dirty?

Boy, you sure like details :-)

The hand is large and strong, No discoloration, well manicured.

I also compare the voice pattern of the speaker with Darcy's voice. Are there any marked differences?

Yes, there is a different accent, but you haven't had enough experience with the language to be able to tell what the difference signifies.

Do I notice anything else about these two that might be of interest?

Well, if you were more familiar with humans, you might suspect that they have gone out of their way to look as nondescript as possible - they just look too darn normal. But you don't know that :-)

Communication channel: "I do not think I've met him. Are you certain your friend has been here in Heisenberg?"

"No," the man with the picture replies, "but we know that he was in the mountains near here. We are staying at the Straw Man Inn on the other side of town - if you see him or hear of anything, please leave a message there for us. Thank you for your time." And with that the men move on down the road (toward the center of town) to the next house.

I close the door and go to Darcy in the kitchen. Entering the kitchen, I stop, and watch closely what she is doing.

—
Communication channel: "There were two men. They showed me a picture of the dead man in the cave, asked me if I had seen him."

—
I wait to see if this draws Darcy's attention. If she turns and looks toward me, I look her straight in the eye.

—
Communication channel: "They said the man in the picture was named Solomon."

—
Then I just wait. No gestures, or other little movements, no particular facial expression, simply no body language, just waiting for a response.

"Well, I hope you told them no." Then: "Solomon. Isn't that who you think you are?"

I just continue to wait, letting her draw her own conclusions, rather than arguing.

If she does not start making conclusions about my identity on her own, I'll change the subject.

Darcy is certainly intelligent enough and has enough information to form the proper conclusion, but subconsciously seems to be resisting it. Perhaps it is safer for her to believe that you are Rorg with a memory lapse than someone else in Rorg's body...

"Those men have important information. We should retrieve it."

"Do you think that's wise? Perhaps we should just rest for a couple of days - and I think that you should see a doctor about your memory. I know a doctor in Oppenheimer that we could get to come over to have a look at you."

"The memory matrix is damaged, the information destroyed. The Rorg matrix was already gone when I achieved this state. It was an emergency. The damage to my identity matrix would have been terminal, if I had not reached a new host. That much I do remember.

The men with the photograph were asking about me. I *am* Solomon."

—
One little thing; when I regenerated the host body, did the wounds leave any scars? Quickly fading scars might help convince Darcy that something more than a bump on the head and temporarily lost memory is the issue here.

"Okay, okay. You're Solomon. Fine." You get the feeling that she still doesn't really believe you; if you knew more about humans, you'd think that she was humoring you. "I still think that we should have a doctor take a look at you. I know, let's contact your friend Dr. Sumner over in Oppenheimer. I'm sure that he'd love to have a look at you."

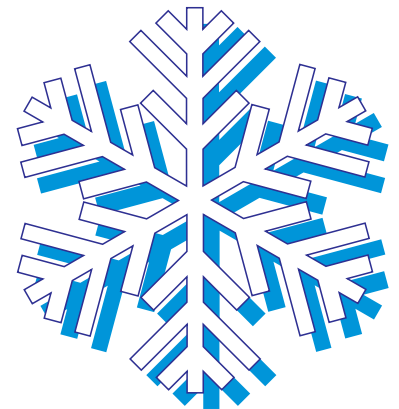
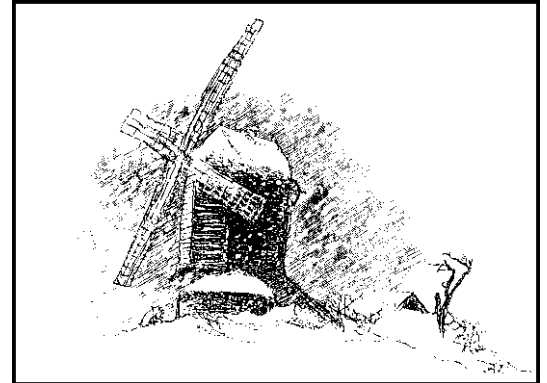
The damage you repaired in the host body was chiefly neurological; there was little physical damage.

"What kind of doctor is Dr. Sumner? Is he a close friend of yours?"

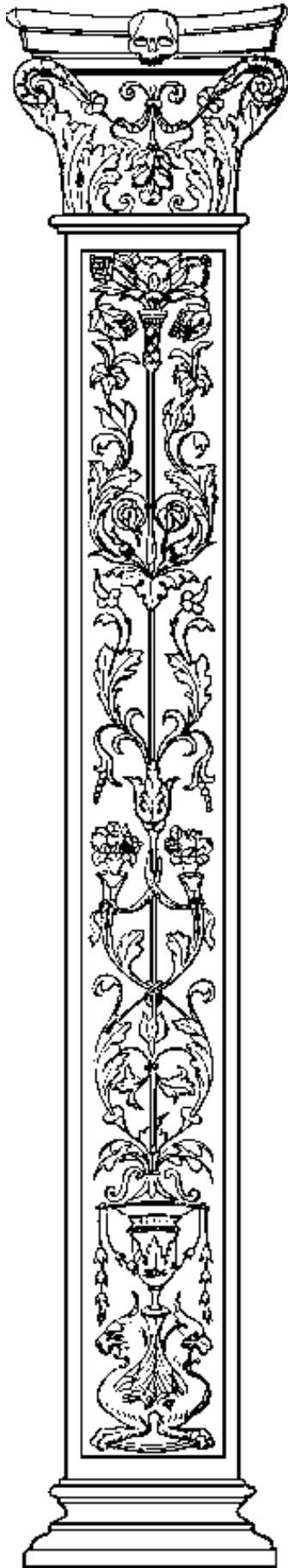
"Actually, he's a close friend of yours. Or rather, of Rorg's. He's a scientist of some sort; you told me that he was always interested in strange phenomena."

I am wondering if he could help restore my memory. Go to Oppenheimer, or question the two thugs? Choices, choices... It crosses my mind that questioning the two men may have consequences.

Yes, well, that's part of the fun :-)



Dr. Jeffrey Babbage Sumner was Tim Carroll's character in the campaign (Tim described him in a previous Apa). Dr. Sumner is trying to form a theory relating the phenomena of science and magic.



"Those two men followed us from the cave. They might object to questioning by me. Would it break any social taboos if I shot one of them before obtaining information from the other? Controlling one subject would be much simpler than handling them both."

"Yes, that would not be considered sociable. But then again, you've done that sort of thing before..."

I have briefly considered stabbing myself and regenerating the wound so that she can see that I can do things Rorg would not. However, she seems to be quite unstable, and might find it unsettling. Besides, I am not certain she would stand around and watch the regeneration process.

That would be an accurate assessment of the situation.

"I am going to visit the inn this evening. Maybe it will be possible to gain some information from the men. I will try not to break any social taboos. Then we can go to Oppenheimer and meet Dr. Sumner."

I look at her.

"Is this course of action acceptable to you?"

"Yes, I suppose. But try to be careful. Interacting with a large group of people might be difficult in your, umm, condition."

If she agrees, I will ask her if she wants join me when I go to the inn this evening.

"No, I think I'll stay here this evening."

Then I have a suggestion:

"You still think of me as Rorg. Please do not. It does not matter if you or I am right about the causes, the identity matrix occupying this body is Solomon. If you are right, Solomon is a sub-mind, in control because the Rorg personality has been, perhaps temporarily, fractured. If I am right, I, Solomon, is a complete, integrated entity, though with some damage.

If you think of me as Rorg, you will expect me to follow his behavior patterns. I will not, and in fact can not. Since visual similarities constantly reinforce the illusion that I am Rorg, try to think of me as Rorg's twin brother. It may make things easier for you.

If you are right, the Rorg personality may eventually be reintegrated. Please do not hope too much."

Being treated as someone else has been impairing to some of my thought processes. I recognize it as a feeling, "irritation". Biological constructs are to a large extent ruled by biochemical reactions. It is not to be tolerated. I am Solomon, I will rule this body, not the other way around.

"I'll hope all I want to! That's my husband's body and my husband's mind is in there somewhere; and you had better take care of both of them. You, Solomon, are only temporary. Remember that."

Darcy is visibly upset with you. On the positive side, she seems to be drawing a conceptual line between you, Solomon, and Rorg...

I try to spend the rest of the day gaining a better understanding of my body and it's autonomous processes. I set up a long term program to be followed every day. It includes meditation, body control exercises and auto hypnosis.

If Darcy shows an interest in what I am doing, I will explain it to her. Using Body Control, I demonstrate by doing a few simple tricks, like blushing with half my face, letting one hand grow warmer, while the other grows colder. (Oh, and if the dice roll my way, I change the flow of blood in some of the vessels near the skin so as to write "Hello Darcy" across my chest. I'm not certain you wish to allow this trick, but compared to entering a death-like trance, or flushing a poison, it ought to be a comparatively easy exercise.)

Darcy avoids you for the rest of the day, stopping to talk to you

briefly to tell you that she is going to visit her brother.

When the evening comes, we leave for the inn.

That evening you head off for the inn. You intend on going to the closest one, but your body navigates with seemingly a mind of its own. You decide to go with the flow, and find yourself at an inn a few blocks away.

Entering the inn, you find yourself greeted warmly as everyone in the inn turns toward you and calls out "Rorg!" (If you've ever seen the American sit-com Cheers, when the character Norm enters the bar and everyone shouts "Norm!" it's just like that. If you've never seen it, my reference is wasted...) Despite your irritation at being confused with Rorg again, you sense that Rorg is welcome here, and there is a high sense of camaraderie in this inn.

OOPS! I think I was a bit unclear. I go to the Straw Man Inn, at the other side of town. My intention is to find out a bit more about the two men. If Rorg used to go somewhere else, I don't want to go there. Meeting Rorg's friends could easily create difficult situations.

If I do bump into Rorg's old friends at the Straw Man Inn, I'll have to play it by ear. (Why does the name "Spock" enter my mind. After a few moments of unsuccessful searching of my ruined memory matrix, I dismiss the thought.) I will not try to avoid them, since that could create suspicions.

Oh, and I will not use any substances that alter my consciousness. This includes alcohol and tobacco, once I become aware of their effects. If I should happen to imbibe any such substances, I will try to use Body Control to flush the poison out.

(BTW, I have seen Cheers, but only once or twice.)

Ah, okay. Erase that last part!

You discover that Rorg is well known in this town. Though holding no official position of power, he seems to hold quite a deal of influence. You are greeted friendly here as well (though not in the same overflowing manner as in the place you now did not go into). "Nice to see you again, Rorg. I haven't seen you in, oh, six months or so." That sort of thing. You are able to fake your way through the conversations adequately.

When you approach the bar, the barkeep immediately serves up one of your 'usual'. You determine it to be some sort of grain alcohol, but Rorg seems to have a strong constitution as far as alcohol goes. You figure that you could successfully 'nurse' the drink through the evening without any ill affects.

After getting the drink from the barkeep, I ask him if he has seen the two strangers.

"Yeah, a couple of guys were in here earlier, asking about some guy named Solomon. Showed me a picture too. I told 'em I hadn't seen the guy, which I hadn't. I think they may have been from Oppenheimer; they seemed to have a lot of tech with 'em."

I am considering the possibility that the two men recognized me or Darcy. Why should they know about my old host body, but not recognize other bioconstructs that have been associated with me?

-Unlikely.

If they recognized the Rorg body, why show the photo?

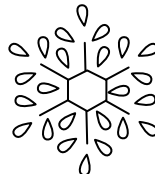
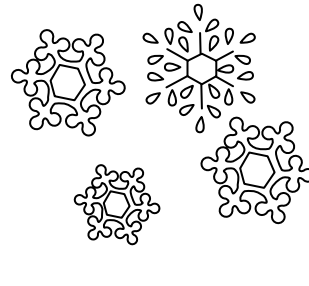
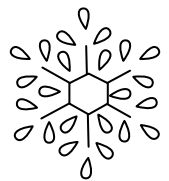
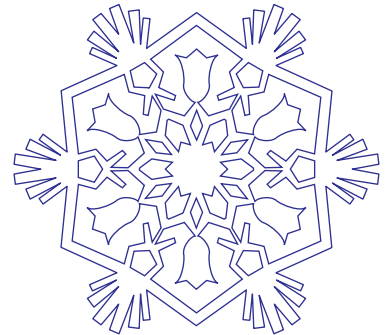
-Inconclusive. Lack of data.

Evaluate: (Assuming they recognized me, or Darcy, what would they do?)

Action: Immediate return to space time coordinates designated home

I pay the drink, wave good-bye and leave. Then I return home, setting the optimum speed that will still allow me to be in condition to do something when I get back.

Besides visiting her brother, Darcy is also going to meet with the men from the Cabal. She makes a deal with them: she can give them Solomon if they help her husband. A check with their superiors confirms Darcy's story. The plan devised is for Solomon to go to Oppenheimer and visit Dr. Sumner (who is actually Sumner-clone and working for the Cabal, though Darcy does not know this) who will separate Solomon from Rorg. Thus the Cabal gets Solomon, Darcy gets Rorg back, and everybody is happy (except for Solomon).





(Yep! I just had a real paranoia attack there. It just struck me that you might be just as sneaky and underhanded a GM as I am. :-))

The house is dark when you get back, so you enter very cautiously. You find no intruders inside, but do find a note on the kitchen table. It is addressed to Rorg, but the name Rorg is crossed out and Solomon written neatly beside it:

*I have gone to my brother's for the night. I'll see you tomorrow.
- Darcy*

I rip the note to pieces and throw it away. Low probability of anything having happened to Darcy.

If it's not too late, I go out again. This time with no particular plan other than getting a bit of exercise, and learning a bit more about the town.

As you wander around, you have a sense of deja vu. Even though you've never been in this town (that you can remember) things look familiar. You figure that it must be some of Rorg's residual memories.

Eventually, I go to the Straw Man again.

If nothing interesting has happened by midnight, I'll go home. I enter the house carefully, as before.

Just as you get to the Straw Man, you see the two men who were asking around about you earlier. They appear to be getting a room for the evening, and are being shown upstairs by the proprietor.

A plan is brewing. Since there is a quite high probability it will be dangerous, and involves Darcy, I decide to interface with her tomorrow.

I wait at the Straw Man for a little while, then go back home.

Before sleeping, I spend some more time meditating.

The next morning, I start the day early, doing some Body Control exercises, running a few kilometres, and take a shower before breakfast. (If Darcy shows up, I make breakfast for her too, of course.)

While on your morning jog, you come across several people who seem to know you ("Hey Rorg! Long time no see!" That sort of thing.) You also see the two men asking around about Solomon again...

I have plans for the day, but want to talk to Darcy first.

Darcy shows up at the house at about noontime. "Oh, Ror... um Solomon. I didn't think you'd be here. How are you feeling?"

"I am feeling quite well, thank you."

I pause slightly before continuing.

"Darcy, I am still curious about the two men that are looking for me. I have considered telling them that I have seen the man they are looking for, on the way to Oppenheimer. Since you and I are also going to Oppenheimer to see Dr. Sumner, we might get them to travel with us. During such a journey, there would be opportunities to gather some more information.

The drawback is that I compute a quite high degree of risk. Since you are with me, it could be dangerous for you too. I will not endanger you if you are against it.

What do you say?"

If she agrees, we will discuss the idea further. I will suggest that she asks one of her and Rorg's friends to provide the false information to the men, to lull suspicions. (The basic idea is to strike up a conversation with them in the Straw Man, and have a third person supply the false information, then suggest that they join us, because we are headed for Oppenheimer to see a friend anyway.)

"Hmm. That sounds like something Rorg would have come up with. Okay, I'm game."

After you've explained the plan to her, she tells you that she'll arrange for a friend of Rorg's named Gundar to meet you at the inn this evening to assist in the deception.

Is there anything else you'd like to do during the rest of the day, or shall we jump ahead to this evening?

I spend much of the day meditating and doing Body Control exercises. I also talk with Darcy about Rorg, trying to gather as much information as I can about him. Hopefully this will make it easier to impersonate him. I ask Darcy to start calling me Rorg again, even in private. I do not want any unfortunate slip-ups.

Since we hardly need to go into detail about this, lets skip ahead.

You get to the Straw Man early, so that you can get a feel of the place in case things go wrong. You also study the people that come and go, hoping that you might be able to catch a clue if something suspicious is going down.

The two men arrive at the Straw Man at about the same time that they did the previous night. They immediately start to head up to their room.

I queue Gundar to call them. (Discretely of course.)

Unless Gundar is a singularly bad actor, I think it is best if he starts the conversation with the two men.

Gundar heads over and strikes up a conversation with the two men. During the course of the conversation, you see him gesture over towards your direction, apparently telling them that his friends Rorg and Darcy will also be traveling to Oppenheimer, and wouldn't they like to travel together? The men seem to be uninterested, but they do pay Gundar a good fee for the information provided and then head back up the stairs.

Gundar comes over to you: "Well, they bought the story about Solomon heading towards Oppenheimer, but didn't seem to be too interested in traveling with you and Darcy."

"It is good enough. Thank you Gundar."

We sit at the table for a while, conversing with Gundar. I am still learning things, sorting and filing information, idioms, mannerisms... I am learning how to be human. (Or rather, how to imitate one.)

Later when Darcy and I get home, we pack for the trip to Oppenheimer.

I do some body control exercises, and meditate, before going to sleep.

—

A few reflections:

Life on Winter is pretty hard, right? Since the general TL of transportation is pretty low (walking, riding), I assume that it is quite common for travelers to band together.

Correct. Darcy & Gundar both verify your suspicions and agree with your analysis.

There could be several reasons why the two weren't interested:

1. They have better transportation hidden outside of town, possibly an aircraft.
2. They are ignorant of the customs of Winter.
3. They don't care if they appear a bit odd, and they don't consider it safer to travel in company. (I.e. they probably have sophisticated cold weather equipment.)

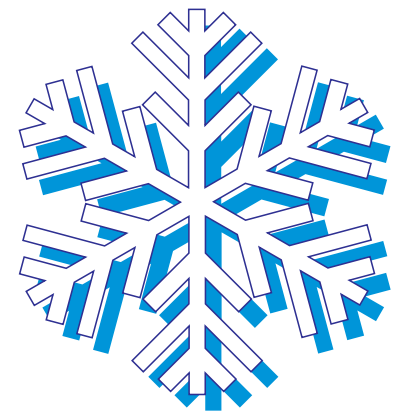
Kindred: The Embraced

FOX, Wednesdays at 9pm eastern time

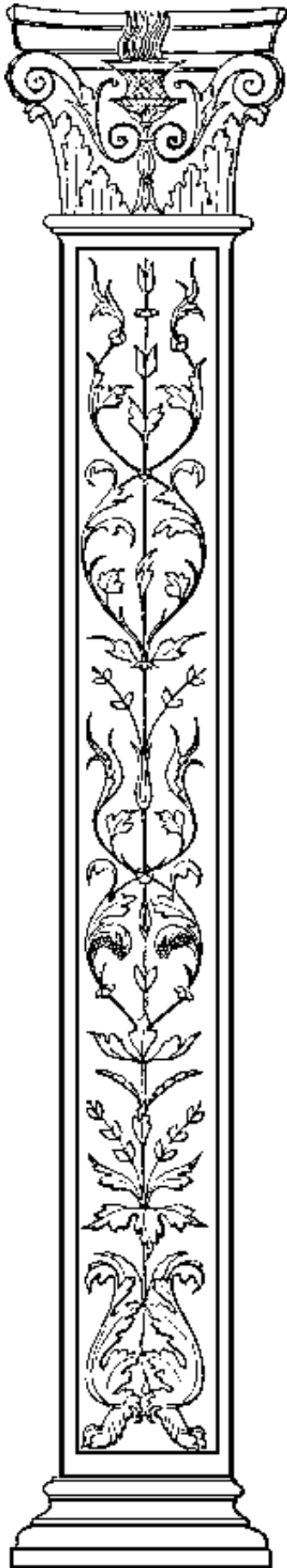
Media: television drama

In Short: just what you'd think

To say that this is the best adaptation of a role-playing game to television since the old *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon isn't really saying a whole lot. This television show turns out to be just what you'd expect: a combination of Aaron Spelling nighttime soaps with the world of White Wolf's *Vampire: The Rave*. What hurts the show the most is the absolutely abysmal acting of star C. Thomas Howell, the human cop who discovers the Masquerade. Even Kelly Rutherford, who was brilliant in *Brisco County*, seems out of sorts here. Apparently neither the writers nor the actors seem to know what to do with this mishmash of genres. Ratings are bad enough that the show's return is doubtful, which is kind of a shame, because there are numerous RPG worlds which would make for excellent translation to the world of TV and films, but won't see the light of day now.



The answer to this is 1. The Cabal has technology superior to the rest of Winter.



They are not beings like myself, because then they would probably have recognized me regardless of body. Nor would they even have expected me to be in the same body. (They obviously don't know about the cave where my old body lies.)

Darcy and I won't push our luck with these two unknown quantities. The next morning, after the usual exercise routine and a hearty breakfast, we set out for Oppenheimer.

With luck, we will find some answers there.

The journey to Oppenheimer should take about two days, barring any unforeseen events such as major snowstorms. Do you wish to try to find a merchant caravan to travel along with, or head out on your own? Also, Gundar volunteers to go along with you, if you so desire.

If Darcy suggests it, we will try to find a merchant caravan. I will not suggest it myself. I will thank Gundar, but tell him it is not necessary. We do not know when we will get back. - It would be regrettable if Gundar accompanies us because the journey is dangerous, and then has to go back by himself.

Gundar protests a bit, but not much. In a way, he seems relieved.

Darcy does indeed suggest it, so the next morning the two of you find a caravan heading toward Oppenheimer and join along.

The journey to Oppenheimer takes about a day and a half, and nothing much interesting happens (you do get the opportunity to study lots and lots of snow and ice...)

Upon arriving in Oppenheimer, you notice immediately that it has a different "feel" to it than Heisenberg. Whereas Heisenberg was just sort of there beside a mountain, Oppenheimer seems more logical and planned. The settlement is arranged in a circular fashion, like a hub and a series of spokes: farmers and ranchers on the outside, merchants and craftsmen in the middle, and government and scientists at the hub.

It is late afternoon when you arrive. Darcy suggests that you may want to find a place to stay, then try to find Dr. Sumner in the morning.

I agree with Darcy. We go looking for lodgings. I ask Darcy if she can suggest a place. Otherwise we will have to explore.

Asking around, you come to the conclusion that there are two good places to stay: The Philosopher's Inn, which is near the science district, or Auntie Fae's Bed & Breakfast, which is in the merchant district. The PI is more of a tavern with an inn attached, while Auntie Fae's is more for people who would rather just crash.

I have no preferences. Physical surroundings mean little to me, unless they make me curious, or are dangerous.

Unless Darcy prefers one over the other, we'll take the cheapest one.

Darcy opts for Auntie Fae's, which also happens to be slightly cheaper.

While on your way to the inn, a soldier on the street seems to recognize you: "Rorg! So good to see you again!" he calls as he approaches you with his hand outstretched in greeting. "Are you in town to visit with Dr. Sumner?"

"Yes."

I see no reason to lie, or mislead the soldier, and so answers his question. On the other hand, I see no reason to elaborate. If the man wants to continue talking with me, I will stop and do so, if not, I will give him a friendly greeting (How are you? Just fine. The standard stuff.) and continue.

I will remember his features, and note the voice, inflection, body language, body size, hands, etc. I will ask Dr Sumner about him later.

From the brief conversation you have with the soldier, Lt. Tom Davis, you determine that he and Rorg, worked together while fighting the

red automatons that Darcy told you about. You are able, along with Darcy's help, to successfully bluff your way through the encounter.

After finding lodgings, we go out to eat something. If possible, I choose a vegetarian meal. If not, meat is fine.

You successfully make your way to Auntie Fae's, check in, and have an uneventful evening. (Auntie Fae turns out to be the now deceased mother of the brother and sister who are now running the inn. There are seven guest rooms in the inn, one of which you & Darcy occupy, and breakfast is served at 7:30 am down in the kitchen.)

I try to get Darcy to talk about herself, both to get to know her, and to practice conversation skills. I share what meager memories I have freely, if she is interested, but not otherwise.

Darcy was born and raised in Heisenberg, the daughter of an important merchant. She met and married Rorg about 5.5 years ago, after he had helped to defeat the red-cyborg-things. Before being kidnapped six months ago, she had led a relatively eventless life.

When we get to our lodgings, I meditate and practice my body control skills before going to sleep.

Your plans for the next day?

After the usual mental and physical practice, we go visit Dr. Sumner. (I try to get up a bit earlier than Darcy, so she won't have to sit and wait while I practice controlling my heartbeat, making one ear blush and things like that.)

I anticipate some difficulty convincing Dr. Sumner of who I am. Demonstrating that I can do a few things Rorg could not might help.

After not too much asking around you find Dr. Sumner's lab. It's located in one of the large science compounds in the central science district.

The receptionist at the compound seems to be expecting you! "Ah, yes, Mr. Gutfriend, Dr. Sumner is expecting you. If you'd like to follow me, I'll take you back to his lab."

You look over at Darcy, and she seems as surprised at this as you are.

I assimilate the new data, extrapolating it into an open-ended speculative event matrix.

Hypothesis:

- a. Mistaken identity. Visual identification, especially based on descriptive references instead of memory matrix is quite prone to error. The designation "Mr. Gutfriend" supports this extrapolation model.

Probability level: HIGH

- b. Dr. Sumner has access to unknown information sources.

Probability level: INSUFFICIENT DATA

Action:

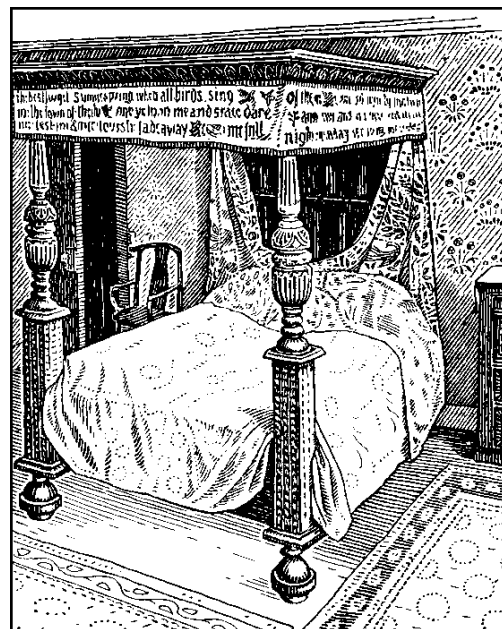
Follow the receptionist.

We follow the receptionist to Dr. Sumner. (This might be a good time to remind you of Solomon's Danger Sense.)

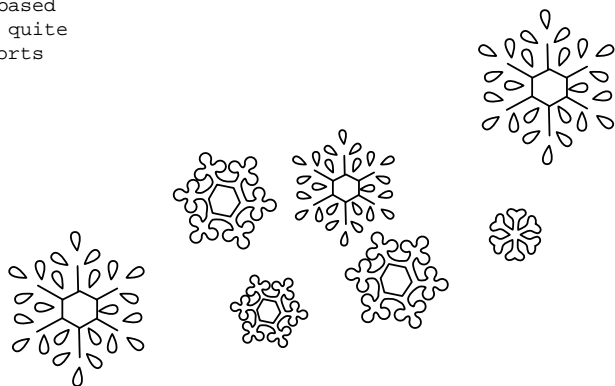
Yes, well, as you follow the receptionist down the hall, you start to feel an impending sense of danger, which increases as you head further towards Dr. Sumner's lab...

I touch the receptionist's shoulder with my hand. "Please wait a minute. Does Dr. Sumner have other visitors?"

Yes, I know I don't have Body Language or Muscle Reading skills,



A little digression about Mr. Rutledge: in the original campaign, Dan Rutledge was the enemy of one of the PCs (The Major) and a juggernaut (as described by Scott in the last Apa). Making use of the Imagus region (see one of my previous JPKs) and an nearly inexhaustible supply of clones, every time they killed off Rutledge, he would come back later to plague them again. Making him the new assistant of Sumner-clone was just a further indignity to pour upon the hapless PCs. Rutledge's job is to monitor Sumner-clone and report to the Cabal.



*Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat
Idiot and Other Observations*
by Al Franken

Media: Book
In Short: funny and biting

Al Franken targets his satirical pen at Rush Limbaugh and other neo-conservatives and doesn't miss a beat. Franken punctures the hypocrisy of the members of the new right with a sharp wit, mining such things as Limbaugh's time on welfare, Gingrich's status as a dead beat dad who left his wife when she was undergoing cancer surgery, Gramm's investment in soft-core porn films, and Dole's attacks on violent depraved Hollywood films as long as they don't star Republicans. This book also contains the funniest chapter I have ever read that deals with database searching.

In Tim's e-mail adventures, Sumner (the real one) passed through Heisenberg, in disguise and using Doyle Coleridge as an alias.



but touching her might give me some indication of her reaction to my question. It might also give me some warning if she should decide to attack. (I just hope she does not have Judo skill...)

In fact, if she is dangerous, my touching her might trigger a premature attack from her.

(No, I do not think she is dangerous, I'm just trying to foresee even unlikely eventualities.)

"No, as far as I'm aware, only Dr. Sumner and his assistant, Mr. Rutledge, are in the lab now." As far as you can tell, the receptionist is not unnerved by your question.

—
For the record, I do carry a knife, but unless it is very common to wear weapons here, I do not have the shotgun or a sword with me.

Well, not in the lab, that's for sure! :-)

—
I also ask her whether there are any other ways into Dr. Sumner's lab.

"There is a fire exit, but the alarm system goes off whenever it is used."

I decide to play it by ear. We continue down the corridor.
I am ready for instant action. (Or the best the body construct I am wearing is capable of.)

When we get to the lab door and open it, I am going to stop for an instant, checking the interior before stepping through. (Just enough to make sure I won't be attacked the moment I enter. Not enough for it to seem strangely hesitant.)

Nope, no one there to attack you. That feeling of impending danger is still there, though...

(I'm assuming that Darcy came along with you to the lab. stop me if I'm wrong.)

When you enter the lab, Dr. Sumner comes over to shake your and Darcy's hands. "Rorg! I'm so glad that you came to visit. I've been wondering what happened to you." He is younger than you expected; he looks to be in his late twenties/early thirties. (You can read Tim's description of him in AotA #19.) He also bears an uncanny resemblance to someone you saw a few days ago, back in Heisenberg! You never talked to the man, but he looked rather odd so you asked Gundar about him. Gundar told you that he was Doyle Coleridge, an author who was traveling about the different settlements of Winter writing a travelogue. He was traveling with a young woman at the time...

The lab itself is rather spacious. The main room is a rather odd blend of high tech electronic equipment and middle ages chemistry stuff. You don't see anyone else in the lab, but there are a couple of back rooms and short passages that you can't see into/down.

I shake his hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Dr. Sumner. I too have been wondering what happened to me."

"Oh? How so?"

—
Is it Dr. Sumner that makes me uneasy, or something else?

You can't really tell for certain. All that you can tell for sure is that you are in a dangerous situation.

BTW, it is Dr. Sumner, isn't it? I suppose Darcy have met him before, and could tell me if it was an impostor.

Darcy has indeed met Dr. Sumner before, and has not given you any indications that this is not the real Dr. Sumner.

—
Rats! I know I'm walking into danger, and paranoia runs rampant in my soul. With so little to go on, I will trust in my Danger Sense and Combat Reflexes to keep me alive. Besides, Solomon is careful, but not as paranoid as I am.

"I have lost my memory. We came here because we thought you might be able to help."

—
I'll be a bit careful here, and play the part of Rorg the Amnesiac. I will definitely not say anything about me not being Rorg.

If asked about how it happened, I'll just say that I do not know, and that Darcy found me wandering about near our home.

I hope Darcy takes the cue and plays along.

"Of course. I'm always willing to help. Let's start by hooking you up to the EKG; I want to see what your brainwave patterns are doing."

(Darcy plays along beautifully)

I will go along with it, up to a point. (Uneasy or not, a thorough examination was one of the things I came here for.) If my sense of unease increases when he is about to attach the electrodes, I will refuse to let him do it. - Very firmly if necessary.

I will also watch out for any suspicious moves - I hope my reflexes are faster than his.

Nothing wrong with the electrodes. You hear him make comments, mostly to himself, while looking at your brainwave patterns:

"Very interesting, there are almost two different patterns here, one is very faint... your higher order brain functions are going like wildfire... if I didn't know any better, I'd say that this looks like the brainwave pattern of a mage; it's similar but quite different..."

Dr. Sumner then calls up another brainwave pattern on a separate monitor, and seems to be comparing yours to it; they look almost identical. He grabs something out of the pocket in his lab coat, then moves towards you. At this point your danger sense kicks up about twenty notches...

I was watching for suspicious moves, so if you allow it, I'll kick into action while his hand is still on its way into the pocket.

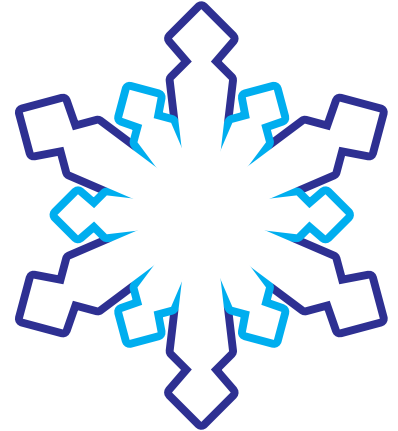
Exactly what I'll do depends a bit on the situation.

- * How far away is Dr. Sumner? Is there anything blocking the way between us?
- * I suppose I can ignore the electrodes, but what kind of chair am I sitting in? Am I lying on a bench? How long will it take to get to a standing position?
- * Where is Darcy in relation to me and Dr. Sumner? I do not want her in the line of fire. (If the thing he's going to pick out of his pocket is a weapon. I am *not* waiting long enough to make sure what it is - I already know it's something dangerous.)
- * Is there anything throwable within reach? I do not want to hurt the good Dr., but a distraction could come in handy.

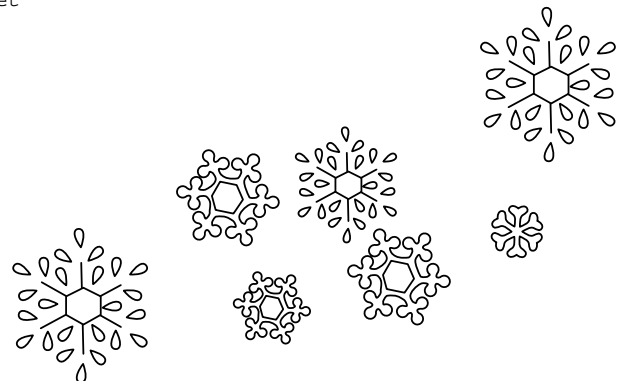
Here are some alternative actions, depending on the circumstances:

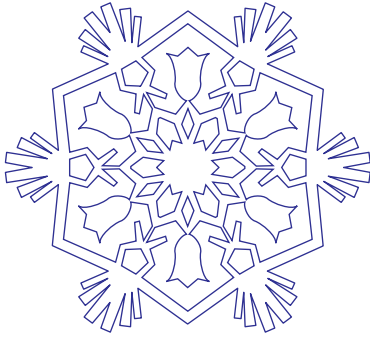
1. If Dr. Sumner is close enough, I won't waste time with any maneuvering, I'll just rush him, and try to grab his arm. I will *not* try to hit him, just grab the arm and then try to grapple and pin him.

I just might surprise him. :-)



Sumner has found Solomon's brain-wave patterns in Rorg-clone's body and is comparing them to previous measurements taken by the Cabal. Solomon's brainwaves look similar to a mage's because Solomon is a magical construct...





No dice were ever rolled during this combat. In fact, no dice were ever rolled during the e-mail campaign. Playing out combat may be enjoyable in real-time gaming, but it is boring as all get out if you have to wait a day or more between combat rounds. Turns out that GURPS makes a fairly adequate diceless system!

Oyster by Heather Nova

Media: Album
In Short: top notch

Compared to her previous live recordings, Heather Nova's major label debut is heavily produced. Although it results in a rather different sound, it is still quite good, and still unmistakably Heather Nova. You sometimes have to listen hard for the cello, but it's still there. Nearly every song on *Oyster* is a type of double entendre, having lyrics that could be taken both sexually and non-sexually, depending on where your mind is.

2. If he is too far away, or I won't be able to get up instantly, I'll try to throw something at him to distract him for a second or two, then rush him as above. I won't try to aim of course, just bash something as closely in his direction as possible.
3. If Darcy is in the line of fire, I'll try to move so that she is out of danger before moving in. If he's got a gun, this will probably mean I'll take a hit or two before I can reach him. If he actually shoots at me, I'll try to take him out as quickly and efficiently as possible, even if it hurts him.
4. If I can't act without putting Darcy in immediate danger, I will stand up, but not attack. Fast-Talk may still carry the day!

The general idea is to restrain Dr. Sumner without hurting him, then try to sort things out by talking to him. I can't do that if he is badly hurt, unconscious or dead.

Besides, I'd rather not hurt anyone, if I can avoid it.

Well, I was wondering how well combat would go online... :-)

Darcy is standing a bit away from you and Dr. Sumner, so is in no immediate danger. The chair you are in resembles a dentist's chair. There are numerous bits of scientific and electronic equipment laying around on counters and tables throughout the room.

Dr. Sumner is close enough, so you grapple him, but before you can pin he kicks you off and you land on your rear on the floor next to one of the tables.

Was he lucky, skilled, or very strong, or did I blow my die roll?

I want to get an impression of what kind of man I'm fighting.

One part skill, one part luck. You get the feeling that in a fair hand-to-hand fight, you could take him fairly handily.

—
Did I by any chance manage to grab hold of whatever he had in his pocket before he kicked me off?

Oh, well, probably not.

I suppose there is nothing useful on or under the table either. A laser, blaster, or other beam weapon? He didn't happen to polish his old family saber just before we showed up, and then carelessly left it on the table...

Hmm, I thought not.

"Dan! I need some help in here restraining Mr. Gutfriend!" He calls, and almost immediately a man appears from the back room (this man, wearing a white lab coat, is presumably Dr. Sumner's assistant)

While he is talking, I'll get off the floor and attack. This time I will not be nice. I will try to incapacitate him quickly, before the orderly has time to act.

Though I attack quickly and decisively, I am not making an all out attack.

Prime targets are his legs (kneecaps are wonderful targets, easy to break, hard to defend), solar plexus, genitalia and ears. (Slapping his ears would not only be incapacitatingly painful, it would also disturb his balance).

If GURPS didn't have somewhat skewed combat modifiers, there are one or two other nasty things I would try.

Though shocked but the sudden outbreak of violence, Darcy starts to scream when she sees the assistant. Judging by Darcy's reaction, and her earlier description of her kidnapping to you, you deduce that this assistant is the same man that kidnapped her (and apparently capturing Rorg, Dr. Sumner, and two of their companions: The Major

and Cyrus Nomes)

Without slowing down my attack for an instant, I yell, "Darcy, get out of here!"

If I do not manage to take Dr. Sumner out quickly, I may be in *really* serious trouble. If I do have to fight both at once, I'll try to maneuver so that both can't get at me at once.

I'll also utilize the environment as much as possible, keeping tables and counters between me and at least one of my opponents. If there is anything throwable handy, I'll use it (scalpels, acid bottles).

As you move in to attack Dr. Sumner again, you notice that he has got the thing out of his pocket and is holding it in his hand. It looks to be a device for administering medicine through the skin. If you get close enough to engage him, there is a very good possibility that he may end up hitting you with it.

Darcy scurries out of the room in a flash.

There are a few flasks of unidentifiable chemicals on the table you are next to...

The problem is, using the GURPS rules, it takes too long to pick up and throw them. They might come in handy later when I'm fighting the assistant though.

You have two, maybe three seconds to react before the assistant gets close enough to attack you (unless he has some sort of ranged weapon- but you haven't seen one.)

Is your goal for this combat to a) defeat the attackers, b) escape, or c) something else?

My current goal is to defeat them. I am not to worried about the syringe, or whatever it is Dr. Sumner has. Most sedatives take several seconds, or even minutes to work - longer than this fight will take, no matter who wins. Even if I am injected, my Body Control skill stands a good chance of dealing with it. (I've lent my Martial Arts supplement to a friend, but if I remember it correctly, most poisons that do actual damage can be flushed out of the system with a successful skill roll. A sedative is probably easier to handle. Of course it could be a nerve toxin that gives me -25 to the skill roll.)

Of course, if its a stunner of some sort, well you can't win them all...

I just wish I had put a couple of more points into the Body Control skill.

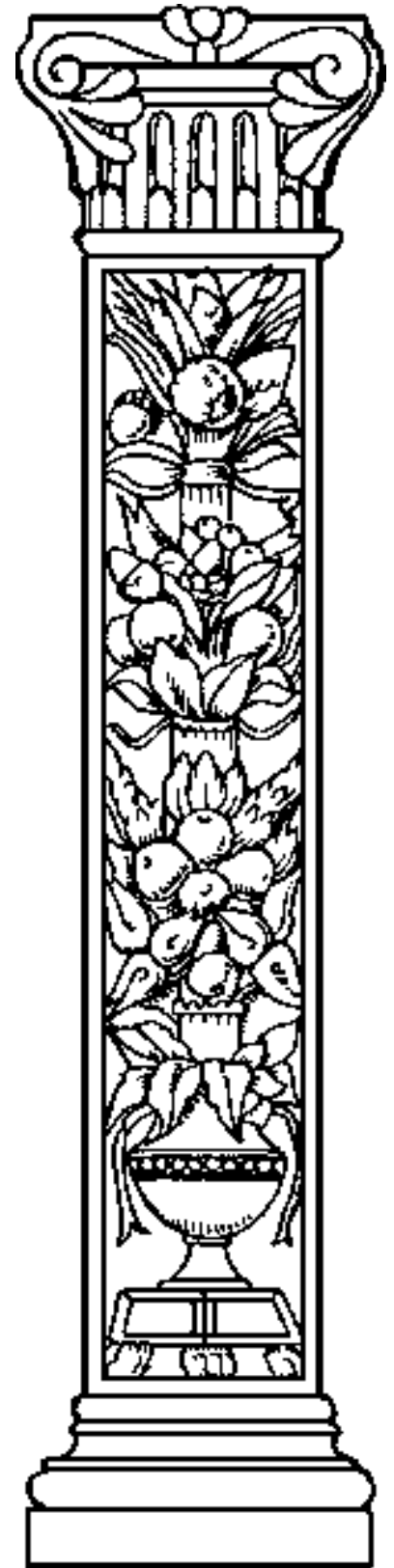
If I do not manage to damage Dr. Sumner with my first attack, I'll switch to plan b). If I do hurt him, I'll use my 2nd second to follow up, trying to take him out of the fight. Then I'll just hope I'm good enough to deal with the assistant.

Okay, to make a long story a bit shorter...:

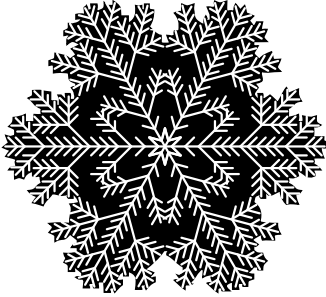
You succeed in knocking Dr. Sumner into unconsciousness, but not before he zaps you in the neck with a hypo. As you suspected, it is a sedative, and you manage to shake it off, but not before the assistant hits you upside the head with a chair. You are very groggy, but have the presence of mind to grab the hypo that Dr. Sumner had used on you and apply it to the assistant. He goes down quickly like a rock. As a result of the fight: you have two unconscious people, a nearly intact lab, and a big ol' bump on your head (which should heal okay).

First I grab the brainwave charts, mine and the other one the doctor had. I go through Dr. Sumner's desk quickly, and take anything that looks interesting - diaries, letters, mysterious TL 24 artifacts, the sort of thing mad scientists usually keeps in their desk drawers.

I do this search very quickly - someone will probably be coming here pretty soon. Even if no one heard the scuffle, Darcy will probably bring help.



Sumner uses the wrist-comp for notes etc. Sumner-clone's wrist comp is an exact duplicate of the original Sumner's wrist-comp, up to the time just before they were captured.



Patty Cake

Permanent Press

Media: Comic

In Short: Loads of Fun

I manage to laugh out loud at least twice while reading an issue of Patty Cake. The title character of Scott Roberts' comic is a young girl with a precocious streak that just won't stop. Patty spends her days with her friends, the younger Irving and the older José getting in and out of trouble. She also torments her older sister and tries to figure out her Dad, big and scary but with a heart of gold. This is a comic about kids for grown-ups who remember how much fun it was to be a kid.



Ah, but, strangely enough, this scientist hasn't much in the way of diaries or notes. He does, however, have what appears to be a multipurpose wrist-computer which would probably be an excellent means for him to store those type of mad scientist things You remove it from Dr. Sumner's unconscious body and try to fiddle around with it, but it has some sort of security lock-out that prevents you from accessing anything.

I pocket the wrist-comp.

The assistant will probably be out for a while. If he shows signs of coming too, I give him a shot of the sedative again.

I consider my options:

- a. Slip out the back door, and be a hunted man, by the doctor, and perhaps by the authorities.
- b. Stay, and hope that nobody noticed the sounds, and that Darcy does not manage to get help. I could tie the doctor up, make a more thorough search of the premises, and question the doctor when he wakes up.
- c. I could try to take the doctor with me when I leave, and find somewhere to question him at leisure.

c. has a very low probability of success - it is broad daylight, and lugging an unconscious person around is bound to attract attention. a. would probably work in the short run, but would have long term consequences that might be hard to deal with. b. is risky, but has great potential. Even if someone does show up too soon, it might be possible to reason with them, or just slip away.

I quickly check the corridor outside the room. If everything seems okay, I go for option b. (Perhaps not the smartest choice, but as Solomon, I am not used to handling interpersonal relations. It might be that I underestimate the difficulties of just reasoning with the people that may show up.)

(I didn't want to waste too much time with combat—once I was pretty sure how you wanted to approach things, I just did the gestalt method. Hope that's okay!)

Of course it's okay. I won!

Seriously, it's the most practical way of handling combat in play-by-email campaigns. - Combat in Amber is handled in much the same way, and that's my favorite RPG, besides GURPS.

Oh, and you have no idea where Darcy is at this point (though she probably hasn't gotten far, it's only been about a minute or so since she ran from the room).

The probability of her finding me if I stay put, is greater than of me finding her if I leave.

As you are starting to tie Dr. Sumner up, you danger sense kicks into high gear—someone (or someones) is approaching the lab...

It could be Darcy, or it could be real trouble.

I quickly stuff the doctor and the assistant behind a desk, so that they can't be seen from the door. If the hypo hasn't been emptied yet, I put it in a pocket. Then I go to the door, open it, step out in the corridor and close the door behind me.

I am prepared for combat, of course, but will try to handle the upcoming situation peacefully, if possible. I judge it very unlikely that whoever is coming will attack immediately - since they probably do not know who I am, they have no reason to, even if they are associates of the doctor.

And, of course, it is not unlikely that it is Darcy that is coming back.

I consider trying to slip out the back door, but that might be counter productive in the long run. - Better to try to keep the initiative, and to try to keep the enemy unbalanced.

Epecially since the back door is undoubtedly an emergency exit, and the resulting alarm would probably bring unwanted attention...

"Solomon, I presume?"

The voice comes from one of the two men at the end of the hall; the same two men who had been looking for Solomon back in Heisenberg!

They are both armed with handguns of some sort, and are about 20 yards away from you.

"Please come along peacefully; we don't want to have to damage you."

Without waiting for them to finish speaking, I open the door again, dive through and slam it shut. If it can be locked from the inside, I do that. Then I run to the back door, open it, get out and do my best to get out of sight before they reach the back door.

This is worrisome. The doctor hasn't had time or opportunity to call them. That they showed up, with guns in their hands, and knowing my identity, means they must have tracked me since before I met the doctor. Thus, they probably know what inn we were staying at too. There is also a quite high probability that they met Darcy on their way in.

When you open up the back door, loud alarms go off. You figure that very quickly the place will be swarming with security guards and the like, not to mention that the locked door won't hold those two guys forever! Where would you like to head towards (the center of town, outside of town, stay in the area and try to hide, etc.)?

I am not certain whether Darcy got away or not, but if she did, it seems likely that she would show up at our hotel.

So will the bad guys, of course...

I hurry back to the hotel. I will go to our room and get everything useful. (Like the shotgun, for instance.)

I will be **VERY** careful, so that I do not walk into a trap.

If I get the gear all right, I'll stake out the hotel. Maybe Darcy will show up, maybe somebody else...

Darcy is not at the inn, but your stuff still is and there's no sign of your pursuers.

As you are gathering your things together, you suddenly notice someone standing quietly in the corner of the room; you could've sworn that no one was there when you came in, and you would have remembered someone entering while you were there...

By the looks of him, he seems to be one of the Vellnes that Darcy described to you. He is about 5-and-a-half feet tall, with brown hair and a beard. He is wearing non-descript garments and carrying a staff. "Hello, Solomon," he says to you. "I was wondering how long it would take you to notice me! My name is Garon; I've been sent to take you back home!"

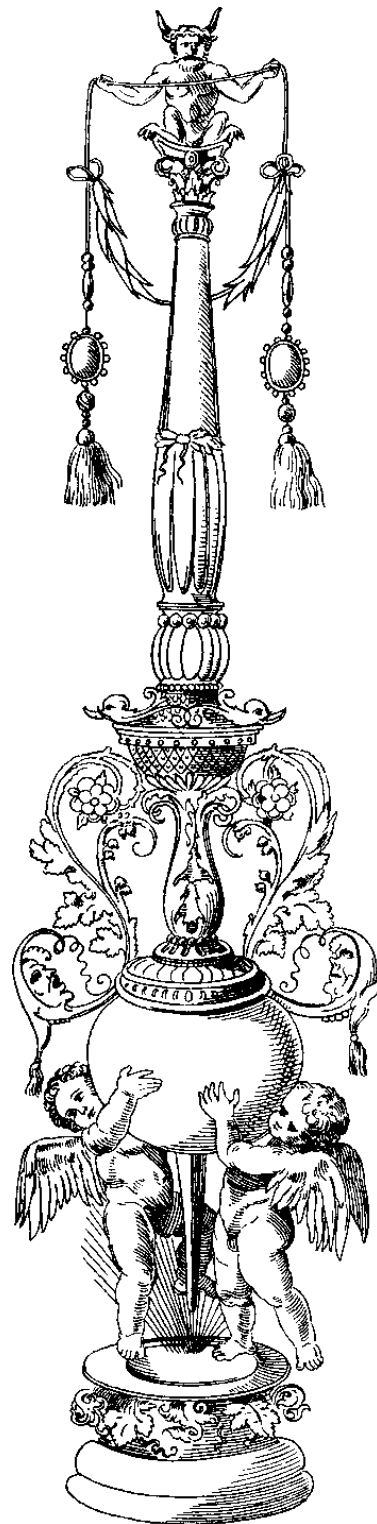
"Then you would not mind filling in a few blanks," I reply.

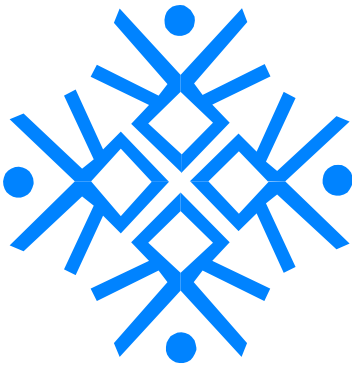
I will remain on my guard, but will not start any trouble. If Garon seems amenable to a bit of conversation, I will ask him to fill me in on the current situation, since I've been out of it for a while. (I will not tell him I am an amnesiac, if I can avoid it. Nor will I tell him about the little computer in my pocket.)

Garon appears to be looking you over, but doesn't make any hostile moves (nor is your danger sense warning you of anything).

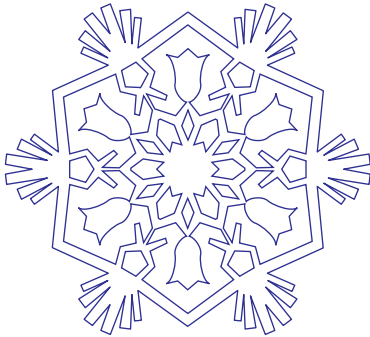
"How does your interface with the human system work? Have you experienced any compatibility problems? When did you become reactivated?"

"The interface is working well. Damage to the identity matrix has resulted in lost data. Retrieval probability low. Request immediate verbal reconstruction of data matrix."





The story that Garon is telling Solomon is mostly true, but he is leaving out some important details. A long time ago, the Kestral and the Banin were two large Vellnes superpower nations who were at war with each other off and on for over a hundred years. The Banin (not the Kestral) created Solomon and others like him for use as spies and assassins. Recently, many of the Vellnes elite have begun to align themselves under the old Banin and Kestral lines and are secretly preparing to go to war against each other. Both parties want Solomon for their own use.



Sumner-clone was acting. Darcy wanted to protect Rorg, and the Cabal men decided to play along, since they wanted to get Solomon over to Sumner-clone anyway.

In other words, I am fine, but have lost some of my memory, please fill me in. What has happened?

"Somehow, after hundreds of years, you were reactivated. When we received notice we attempted to locate you, but were expecting that you would be inhabiting a Vellnes host, not a human. Once we made the adjustment, it was fairly easy to track you down."

"How much of your memory was damaged? What is the earliest moment you can recall?"

"Complete reorientation required. Damage assessment not possible at present. External factors, currently not computable, make the situation unstable. Need more data."

"You are Solomon, an artificial metaphysical construct, created by the Kestral three millennia ago. There were twenty constructs like yourself, each serving the Kestral as a spy against the Banin. All were assumed to have been destroyed during the Great Cataclysm, but about a month ago we became aware that you had been reactivated. We had a hard time locating you, and after you did not return to us on your own, we assumed that something went wrong, so I was sent to retrieve you."

He pauses for a moment in concentration, then says: "Hmmm, I sense that you are being pursued. We should leave immediately." He reaches over to lay a hand on you... (again, no danger is sensed, but hey, how much can you really trust this guy?)

I take a quick step back, out of reach.

"Negative. Problem here remains unresolved. I cannot leave until I have verified the safety of the entity that helped me here. Debts must be paid."

For some reason I feel inclined to trust this guy. Perhaps because he is one of the few who has not tried pointing something dangerous at me. -Of course it could be that he is just a little sneakier than the rest. Time will almost certainly tell.

"Hmmm. Bother. I wonder if this is the result of the damage to your memory, or if this seeming independence is part of your normal programming? It's hard to tell, since the information that we have on you is sketchy at best."

"Now then, which 'entity' are you referring to? Not that woman, I hope. She set you up, you know. Right now she's leading them back here to the inn!"

Hmm! The trouble with this is that it explains some things, but not everything.

+ It would explain how the two goons could appear so quickly.

+ It would also explain how they suddenly could identify me as Solomon.

- On the other hand, the doctor did seem taken a bit by surprise when he read my EEG. - He probably wasn't in on any set up.

- Darcy could have turned me over to the two goons much earlier, if she had wanted to.

There are still a lot of pieces missing here.

"Affirmative. The unit is designated Darcy. She had a close relationship with Rorg, the entity previously inhabiting this bio-construct."

"Recent events may have caused severe disturbance of her identity matrix. Her present situation, and safety, will have to be verified before relocating to other space-time intersection."

"Suggest relocating to position where arrival of Darcy entity can be observed unseen."

In other words, I suggest that we should try to hide where we can observe without being seen ourselves. This could be in the street outside, observing from a doorway, an adjoining room, a discreetly placed table downstairs in the bar, or whatever.

Garon decides to humor you, since it will probably be easier than convincing you to leave right away. He motions you over to the side of the room, then places his hand on your shoulder. According to the optical feedback from the mirror on the far side of the room, you and Garon have both disappeared from normal human sight parameters.

Before leaving the room I quickly grab my things, not forgetting my weapons.

I do feel inclined to trust Garon, but then I did feel inclined to trust both Darcy and Dr. Summer too. This may be due to the damage my identity matrix has taken. My ability to evaluate the motivations of other entities may be damaged. I will keep this in mind in the future.

However, I will tell Garon one more thing:

"I am fully self-aware, and autonomous within the limits of my prime directives. My behavioral algorithms incorporate rules of conduct, you would call them ethics. It is important to me not to leave the Darcy entity in a potentially dangerous situation, or with matrix aberrations that could cause permanent disturbances."

It will be interesting to see how he reacts to this. I'm still evaluating him.

"I... see. That is most interesting, and unexpected. We will have to evaluate this when we return to the boroughs."

Moments later the two men enter the room. They take a brief glance around and notice you're not there. "Damn. He didn't head back here to the inn. You go down and take the woman someplace safe; we may still need her as bait. I'll take a look around here to see if I can find anything useful." And with that one of the men leaves the room while the other starts searching...

I wait a few seconds, to make sure the man who left the room isn't within hearing distance. Then I sneak up on the man searching the room and give him a knock on the head from behind.

Assuming I manage to knock him out, I set out after the man who just left. (I assume that I will lose my invisibility as soon as Garon stops touching me, so I'll be careful.)

Yup, you lose the invisibility.

I'll try to catch up with him before Darcy and he leave the premises.

As you head down the stairs, you see Darcy and the man walking out the front door. They don't appear to have seen you, but there are two other people standing about in the lobby.

Please describe them to me a bit closer.

A man & a woman, who appear to be together. They look to be in their mid-50s age wise, and are dressed in a way that they appear quite comfortably financially. They are currently looking at one of the paintings hanging on the wall opposite the staircase.

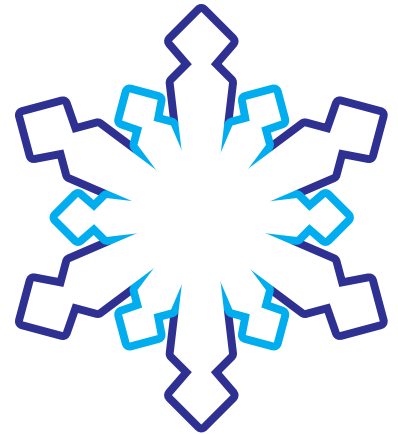
Is there another way out of the inn, which does not lead past the lobby?

Well, you could always go out the window of your room. There is also a door at the other end of the hallway which looks as though it leads to another staircase, perhaps leading to a back entrance/exit.

Unless my danger sense tells me it's a bad idea, I go down the stairs and straight through the lobby. I'll walk briskly, but I do not run.

You head out into the street with no problem. About 15 to 20 metres ahead of you, walking but not meandering, and not talking to each other, are Darcy and the other man. He is looking about nervously, but does not seem

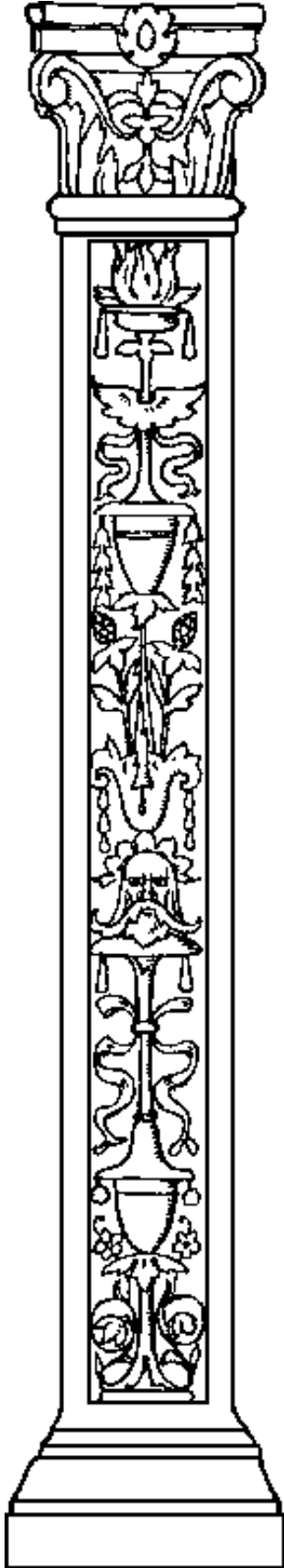
Trust is a dangerous thing. Everybody wants to control Solomon (or get rid of him, as the case may be).



GURPS Places of Mystery Steve Jackson Games

Media: RPG Supplement
In Short: too much and too little

GURPS Places of Mystery tries to cover too much in its 128 pages, and ends up covering all its topics in such a surface manner so as to be next to useless for anyone who would want to run a campaign centered around one of the places. Each chapter deserves its own worldbook, not five to ten pages. While I'm at it, I want to take the opportunity to rant about bibliographies. A good bibliography is paramount for a work like this. It would be a real help if the listings in the bibliographies in the worldbooks contained full citation information. It is much easier to track down a book from a library or other source when you know such things as publisher and year of publication in addition to the author and title. Brief annotations for all entries would also be a big help.



to have spotted you yet...

Are there lots of people about? Any useful doorways to skulk in?

I'll take care not to look *more* suspicious by quickly darting under cover, peering from behind corners, and the like.

If he stops looking around, I'll try to close the gap. If he does not, I'll keep the distance.

Should he spot me, I'll rush him, trusting my combat reflexes and speed to get me close enough to him to persuade him not to pursue any unpleasant course of action.

(Yep, rushing an armed and nervous opponent may seem kind of reckless, but hey, you only live once.)

It is getting towards midday, so there are plenty of people about. Skulking around is fairly easy. He does keep looking about, though so you are unable to close the distance.

Eventually you see them duck inside of a tailor's shop...

BTW, is Garon showing up, or does he keep out of sight?

He doesn't seem to be about; he'll probably catch up with you later.

I walk briskly towards the shop, slowing a little as I pass by.

Can I see them in there?

Yes. The man says a few things to the clerk, who then leads he and Darcy into a back room. (What an awkward sentence! Did that make sense?)

Is it a corner shop? Would it be possible to take a position so that it would be possible to watch both the front entrance and the back door. (I suppose there is one. Is there? If not, it's the first shop without a back door that I've encountered in 16 years of role-playing. :-))

Not a corner shop, but of course there's a backdoor :-) The store is in the middle of a line of shops, so just about the only place to view both front and back would be from the roof...

Ok, I watch the back of the store for a couple of minutes.

If nothing happens, I go in.

(Possibly the most stupid move I've made since I told my friends to start firing on the giant warbot that blocked our way to a fabulous treasure, but hey, nothing ventured, nothing gained.)

Do you go in the front or the back? (Or look for another way in?)

Is that a hint?

Ok, I'll use the back door if it's open, otherwise the front door.

The back door is locked, but it's pretty flimsy and you could easily force your way in.

Oh, just in case it isn't obvious, your danger sense is letting you know that entering the house is probably a bad thing...

Is there any other way to enter than the doors? Windows, a ladder lying there?

Nope, sorry.

Hmm, quickly back to the inn.

I have some questions to ask the guy I left sleeping in my room.

Garon is sitting patiently on the edge of the bed. "You certainly wrapped up your affairs sooner than I'd anticipated. Are you ready to go?"

"I am not ready. I am in need of further information."

Turning slightly towards the man I bumped on the head earlier, I continue, "he will provide me with a map of the house where they brought Darcy. I will also obtain more information about their relationship with her. I am afraid it may not be possible for me to accompany you for some time. Since you have found me once already, I assume that you will be able to do so again, with relative ease. Since the task ahead may involve some degree of personal risk, it might be best if we part company here, for awhile."

I am aware that I do not have all that much time. Someone will eventually try to find out why the goon didn't show up again. I intend to try to hypnotize him when he wakes up. If he tries to concentrate and focus his mind when he wakes up, and I provide a focus (burning candle, dangling key in chain, whatever), this might help my meager skills along.

If I manage to hypnotize him, I'll try to convince him that he has accomplished his mission and is being debriefed.

(I figure that with my lousy skill, I'll need every little advantage I can get.)

If hypnotism doesn't work, I might have to try something more painful, but I much rather would not.

All assuming the guy isn't dying from a broken skull of course...

"I'm afraid that will be impossible. It is my charge to bring you back unharmed. If indeed the task you speak of will be risky, I cannot allow you to undertake it."

He has subtly moved his staff into an offensive position. It would appear that if he cannot persuade you through words, he will attempt to do so through force...

I go **very** alert, but make no sudden moves.

"You have a problem then. If you try to use force, and win, I will certainly not be unharmed. If I win, your objective will be totally lost. If I am captured, I will not cooperate in any way, under any circumstances. Depending on your final objectives, you may loose again. It might be better for you to consider non-coercive alternatives."

"As you well know, Solomon, I have means at my disposal which would allow me to capture you without physically harming your present form. And, as I have indicated, it is not your physical form that we are interested in."

"I find your concern in the affairs of these humans quite troubling. It may become necessary to reprogram your identity matrix. So we really don't have the time for you to be running about due to some misplaced loyalty."

Hmm, the fastest and subtlest staff attacks are thrusts, and we are in somewhat cramped quarters, right? If he attacks, I'll try to sidestep, get in close, and counterattack, but I will **not** attack first.

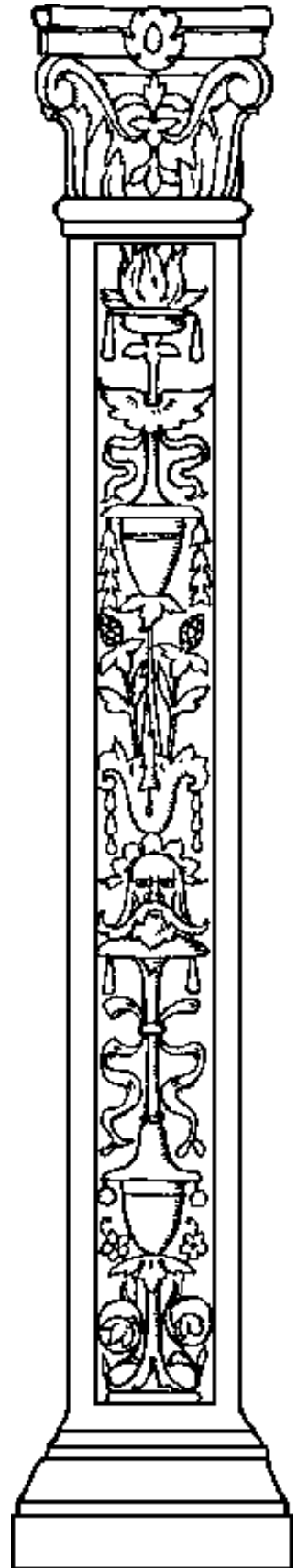
He makes no visible move to attack, but your danger sense starts going off like gangbusters...!

I step diagonally forward and to the left, pushing his right arm away with my right hand, and attacking the side of his rib cage with my left. The blow is a short, vertical hook, curving upwards.

The idea is to maneuver so that he can't counterattack efficiently, or touch me with the staff.

Presumably, he has to point the staff at me, or at least concentrate a bit, to do whatever he is going to do, so I set a very high tempo, not giving him even a moment to regain his mental, or physical, balance.

I try to get in close, and give it everything I got. If I do not take him out quickly, I suspect I won't be able to do so at all.



Garon is no match for you physically. He does attempt some sort of mental attack on you, but with some effort you are able to shrug it off as you push towards him. With two or three swift blows, he falls into unconscious. Just before he passes out, he mutters: "Better than I thought..."

Ragmop

Planet Lucy Press

Media: Comic

In Short: Read This Comic!

This hilarious comic by Rob Walton is just the thing for those who enjoy a good conspiracy. Think of Illuminatus done by Chuck Jones and you'll begin to get a sense of what this comic is about. Only six issues in and the conspiracy is way too complicated to explain here, but it involves the Vatican, America's Secret Government, a group of renegade angels, talking dinosaurs who have traveled from the past in a time machine, and Alice "Don't Call Me Thrill Kitten" Hawkings, all searching for the elusive O-Ring, a cosmic device that controls the laws of nature. I guarantee that this is the only comic you're likely to read that manages to effectively satirize Drum Corps International competitions, shootings outside the White House, Hulk vs. Thor debates and Todd McFarlane's toys company within five pages.

I'll try to catch him as he falls, and let him slide gently to the ground.

Unfortunately, all this activity seems to be rousing the goon from his unconscious state. The guy you had come back to question is just starting to waken...

I quickly turn to the goon. As he struggles to awake, I will provide a focus for his thoughts. I'll use anything handy, a key on a chain, a glittering piece of glass, or if nothing else is handy, the tip of my index finger.

"Concentrate on the ...(well, whatever is handy)..., you are relaxed, calm. There is nothing to fear. Your mission was a success. You are, calm, breathe easy, and focus on the ...(whatever)..."

I try to bring the man into a hypnotic trance, convincing him that he is being debriefed after a successful mission. If this works, I'll pump him on information about the house where Darcy is kept, layout, defenses, how many people that are there, anything that might be useful in an attack, sneak or frontal assault.

Though the house appears like many of the others in the settlement, it in fact has been modified. It has various high-tech defenses, and can be hermetically sealed. There are silent alarms on all the doors, and tiny video camera's hidden in each room. Sneaking in will be a problem...

Chances are that Darcy is being held in the cellar. There are probably at least three other people there, and at the most two others.

The goon seems quite satisfied that Darcy is very safe within the house.

Are there any convenient man-sized air-ducts? Intakes on the roof, maybe? (Not likely, but I had to ask. There are always convenient air-ducts in the movies.)

*Nah, you don't think it'd be *that* easy, do you? :-)*

Maybe a convenient way *out* of the building, if normal exits happen to be unsuitable.

The building is also designed to be hard to break out of (the goon says something about it being the same sort of building that they used to capture Rorg, Sumner, The Major, and Cyrus a few months back...)

I make a mental note of that, and ask the goon if he knows if they replaced Sumner, or just reprogrammed him. (Implying of course, that I already know the answer, and is just checking on how much info the goon has.)

The goon thinks that Sumner is working for 'them' now.

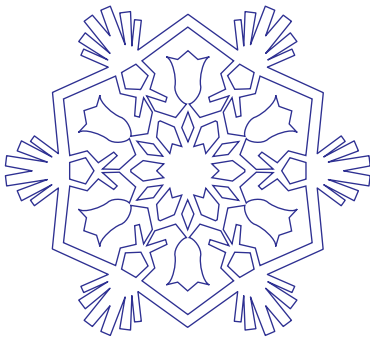
I have the man sketch a map while he is describing the place. I take particular note of how to open doors, and where the fuse boxes are. (For instance, if there is a handy red little push-button under a desk in the barbershop that opens a door to the more secret regions of the house, it's of interest to me. It would also be handy to know where keys are stored, etc.)

Sure; we'll just fake this part, if it's okay with you? I'll assume that you know everything about the building that the goon knows (assuming your mesmerism is working...)

Oh, yes, this is important: Is the building sound proofed? Would gun shots be heard from the street? Are there sound proof walls inside the building?

If all this succeeds, I'll make him forget the "debriefing", and round off with a final touch:

"You are skillful and loyal, one of the very best in the field. This has been noticed. You have been chosen to help in an important mission. There are traitors among us. These must be exposed. We have an undercover



agent that is working to expose the traitors. His name is Samandi. When he tells you his name, Samandi, you must obey and protect him. If you do well, you will be promoted. You will forget this, until he reveals his name to you. You will now feel very sleepy. You will fall asleep, and when you awake, you will not remember your debriefing. You will not remember Samandi until he tells you his name. Then you will aid him. Do well, and there will be a promotion. Now you are so very sleepy, you are sleeping..."

I admit, my Hypnotism skill is lousy, but hey, it's worth a try. At least, it might buy me an extra second or two in a critical situation...

When all is done, I'll leave the goon on the floor, pick up Garon, his staff (without accidentally touching any knobs or protrusions,) and my belongings. Then I'll leave. I'll try to find someplace to stash Garon, I do not want him to be found by any more goons while he is defenseless. Wherever I dump him, I'll leave his staff with him.

Not wanting to be seen carrying a Vellnes body out of the inn, you stash him in one of the closets in the hallway.

Time to take a short equipment inventory:

Dr. Sumner's wrist-comp
A hypo with a strong sedative (also courtesy of Dr. Sumner)
Two sets of brainwave charts
A shotgun
Ammo for the shotgun (How much do I have?)
A knife (I think I had a knife. Please correct me if I'm wrong.)

10 shots easily carried on you, plenty more in with your equipment if you need it (Rorg was also a weapon smith...)

I check the gun thoroughly, so that it is ready for action. I will probably need some extra ammo, so I'll buy a belt pouch to carry it in.

And sure, you have a knife.

I put it somewhere where it is out of sight, but as accessible as possible. (One possibility is to put it on my back, between my shoulder blades. Another is to just keep it hanging from my waist, and just make a slit in my coat pocket to make the knife accessible even when the coat is closed. I choose whatever method is most suitable with regard to the size of the knife and my clothing.)

My next steps are:

1. Find something to eat and drink
2. Find somewhere safe to stash the wrist-comp and brainwave charts. Any safe deposit boxes available? :-)
3. Mayhem and violence

-

At first I considered a careful approach, but two days ago I saw Luc Besson's Leon, and I simply can't resist the temptation to try this Leon style. (If you haven't seen Leon yet, do it! It's probably the best action movie made for the past five years.)

A detailed plan of action will follow, if I manage 1. and 2. above without mishap.

Done. There's a bank nearby with safe deposit boxes.

Shall we just assume I find somewhere safe to put the key to the box?

Sure, if you don't want to carry it on your person...

I'm unfamiliar with Leon or Besson, so I look forward to seeing your plan of attack... I think...

It's not much of a plan, fact is, it's kind of stupid. It worked for Leon in the movie though, and I just can't resist trying...

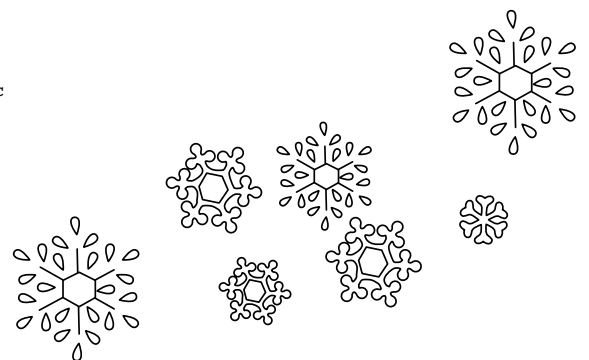
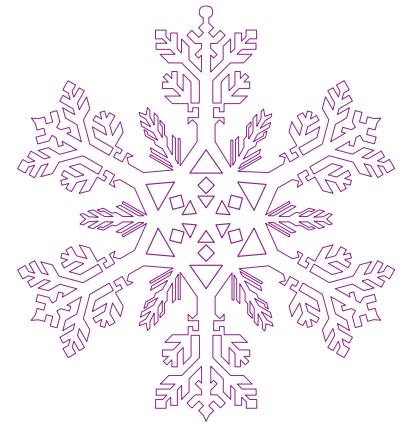
Raiders of the Lost Ark

Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

Media: Album

In Short: cool new release

DCC has re-released the soundtrack music from *Raiders*, adding in over half an hour of previously unreleased material. Hard to believe, but the original soundtrack album was so skimpy that it didn't even contain the main title music! With the restoration of several important musical cues and passages, this new soundtrack album is a much better representation of John Williams' music. The liner notes include comments by Williams and an analysis of the music by Lukas Kendall.



Small Gods

by Terry Pratchett

Media: Novel

In Short: the best Discworld yet

Terry Pratchett writes some of the best openings for novels in the business. Usually the first few opening pages are classics, and the next 100 or so pages of set-up are funny as well, but when he starts getting around to dealing with the plot, things don't seem to go as well and the book starts to drag a bit. Not so with *Small Gods*, which is great from cover to cover. The plot, which involves a minor god and his chosen disciple trying to convince his worshipers to actually worship him and not their idea of him, is engaging and is told with a near perfect mixture of humor and drama. Pratchett has some important things to say about religion and worship, and effectively uses the time honored tradition of turning situations on their head to make his point. While I'm sure that the forthcoming *GURPS Discworld* will make for good humorous role-playing, I hope that there's also a little room for a dollop or two of seriousness as well.



Ah, nothing like pure frontal assaults. By all rights this plan should not have worked, but it was so ballsy and made such good drama that I decided to let it succeed. Mostly.

Since there seem to be little chance of sneaking in, the idea is not to try. Instead I will go in fast, shoot everything that moves (except Darcy), pick up Darcy, and leave, hopefully before reinforcements arrive.

I will not even try to get to Darcy before everyone in the building is incapacitated. - No use getting shot in the back when I stand fiddling with a lock in the cell door.

The plan is, as follows:

1. Make sure there are no customers, and then enter the barbershop.
2. Without any preliminaries, use the hypo on the man in the store, and knock out or kill anyone else that happens to be there. The element of surprise will be utilized to the fullest, i.e. it's full speed from second one.
3. Open the door, using the secret push-button, barbers keys or whatever. (I assume the goon has told me how the doors are opened.)
4. Clean up the building, i.e. shooting anything that moves, and cutting phone and electrical wiring, putting a bullet in the fuse box, etc.
5. Pick up a laser or blaster if possible. Otherwise the shotgun will have to do all the way.
6. Go to the cellar, blast the door locks with the shotgun, and free Darcy.
7. Get out of there, quick as greased lightning.

There are of course a number of holes in the plan. For instance, if there are any locks I will not be able to force using the shotgun, it will of course not work.

I expect taking damage, of course, but will trust my ability to repair any physical damage to take care of that. I will use meditation, and prepare myself with auto hypnosis to lessen the effects of shock and blood loss, and to cleanse my mind so that my reflexes are brought to their hair-trigger best.

When I am inside the house, everyone I meet, except Darcy, will be considered an enemy. The only evaluation I will make before attacking is

(Darcy)? (No attack):(Attack);

Attacks will not necessarily be to kill, but they will be to incapacitate as efficiently as possible. There will be no regard for physical pain, my own, or someone else's.

Of course, if I can't attack immediately for some reason, my normal cognitive processes will kick in (I hope), but if Garon should suddenly pop into view close by, or within range of the shotgun, he'd better have his life insurance policy paid.

Based on what I know about the building and its occupants, could the plan possibly succeed?

Now, why would I want to let Solomon do something silly and almost certainly unworkable like this?

Well, as I wrote last time, I liked the movie, and want to try something similar at least once. (Nothing like a kamikaze mission to get the adrenaline flowing.)

The success of the plan will factor largely on the building's automatic defense systems, if anyone in the building realizes what's going on and is able to activate the defense systems, you are probably toast.

Another possible thorn in the plan would be if Darcy doesn't want to be rescued, or is freely working with her 'captors'.

Let me if'n you want to still go through with the plan.

Against my better judgment, yes, I do!

The smartest thing to do would probably be to lie low, but in the long run I won't make it if I always stay on the defensive. Besides, I do have an obligation to Darcy. As long as there is anything left to try, I must, even if the odds are a bit long...

Okay... To make a long battle short:

You wait until the shop is empty of customers and enter with guns blazing. You take a flesh wound to the leg but are able to effectively block the pain and keep moving. You handle the automatic defense systems, but when it becomes obvious that you have the upper hand, they activate the knock-out gas. Luckily, you knew about the gas from the goon you interviewed and used your body control ahead of time to prepare for it and can regulate the gas-to-blood flow in your lungs so that the gas has a very slow effect on you.

When you get to the room where Darcy is held, you blow away the lock and surprise her two guards, both wearing gas masks but obviously not ready for you to come crashing through without one! Darcy is unconscious (But otherwise fine and not tied up or anything) so you toss her over your shoulder and head back out.

A fire has managed to start up on the ground level, but you just ignore the searing heat and run through it. The door is locked and sealed, so you use your gun to shatter the big plate glass window and jump through it out on the street.

A crowd has started to gather outside, and you hear sirens off in the distance. A couple of people rush forward to help you and, sensing that you are out of immediate danger, your body moves out of 'combat mode' and you go into shock...

You wake up in what is most likely a hospital room. You can feel your body already healing your burns and your leg wound, and the smoke and gas are being effectively purged from your bloodstream. Darcy is laying in a bed next to you, unconscious with a gas tube in her nose and an IV in her arm (you have an IV too).

A doctor-type comes into the room and sees that you are awake. "Oh good, you've awoken," he says. "You have a quite remarkable constitution, Mr. Gutfriend. You and your wife were lucky to get out that inferno when you did. She'll be okay, we think, but her body is still trying to purge the poisons in her bloodstream

"Oh yes, there are a couple of friends here who will be glad to see that you're okay." And who should the doctor call in but Dr. Sumner and his assistant Rutledge...

Out of the fire, into the frying pan...

As for the Leon-stunt, it went better than expected, all things considered. Maybe Solomon wasn't built just for scouting after all...

"Oh, yes, Dr. Sumner, Rutledge, welcome! I have been expecting you to show up. I think we still have some unfinished business."

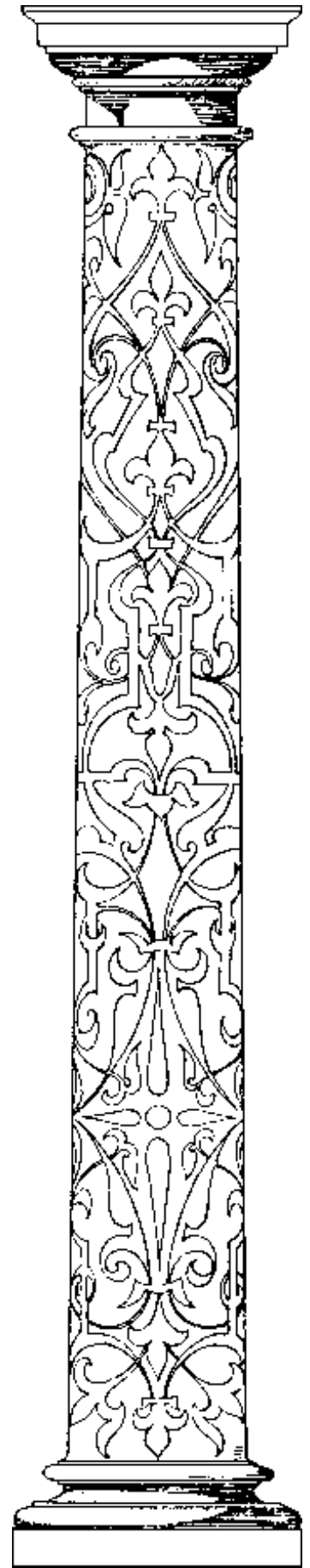
While talking, I try to sense more about the condition I am in, mobility, strength, would I be up to making any fast movements at the moment?

At the moment, I am prepared to go into action, but will not make the first move, unless my danger sense tells me they are going to take action.

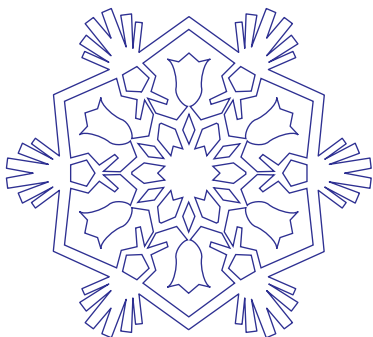
You estimate that you should be fairly mobile within the next hour or so, and back up to 95% efficiency within 24 hours. (If we were playing with dice, I'd say that a fast movement at this point would require a modified HT roll to pull off effectively.)

The doctor exits the room, leaving you alone with Sumner and Rutledge. (Well, Darcy's there too, but she's not saying much at the moment...)

"Indeed we do, Rorg; or perhaps you'd prefer Solomon?" Sumner says to you, rather menacingly. "You've proved to be quite difficult to control—seemingly beyond the rationality of your programming. So far



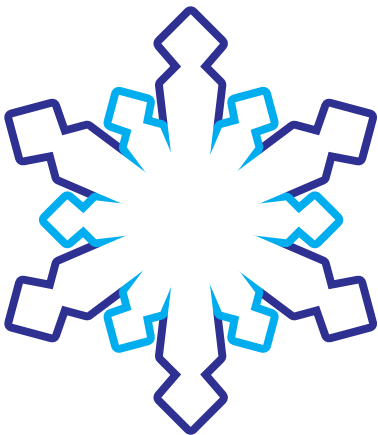
Sumner-clone's story is a bald-faced lie. The Cabal has no clue as to the origin of Solomon; they just want him. I decided to tell Henrik the truth (mostly) first and then have the lies pour in.



Tigers of Terra
Antarctic Press

Media: Comic
In Short: Interesting

Creator Ted Nomura is quite frank: he likes to draw motorcycles, aircraft, and women, and has created a comic book that allows him to do just that. Subtitled "Families of Altered Wars", the series follows the adventures of several families of female aviators through wars in the past, present and future of a world where history took a different path. I sometimes find it hard to follow what is going on in the future segments, though that may be because I haven't read many of the earlier issues, but I do enjoy many of the flashback stories.



we've managed to keep the authorities off your back, but we can't do that forever. So I'll lay it all out for you:

"You are an experimental artificial intelligence created by my employers.

Your consciousness was implanted into the body of my friend Rorg, who volunteered to be a test subject. Something must have gone wrong; you followed your programming by coming here to Oppenheimer, but numerous other parameters have entered into your programming.

"We simply want to remove you from Rorg so that we can restore you to proper functionality and restore Rorg as well. If you will agree to come with us, we can lay this whole matter to rest."

"Why did you not identify yourself from the start?"

I do not want to seem too easy to convince. Unless you want too, we won't have to run through the whole discussion in detail. I will try to create the impression of being suspicious, but feeling a bit lonely, and *wanting* to be convinced. (Except for the wanting to be convinced part, it's true, so I'll just let some of my natural feelings show.)

I will question Sumner, pressing him on some of the inconsistencies in his story, but not so hard that he cannot lie his way out of it.

I will be prepared for action as best I can in my present condition, but the objective is to avoid any further violence, for the moment. I will of course be alert for any useful information that Sumner might slip. (Of course keeping in mind that any such information might be a counter play, if he doesn't buy my buying his story.)

Sumner weaves a story about how Darcy they had come in contact with Darcy, and she informed them of your instability. She had been unaware of the experiment, but Sumner was able to figure out what was going on.

Everything that Sumner lays out for you is fishy, but plausible. You figure that he must have been in league with the guys back in Heisenberg who were looking for you.

He doesn't adequately explain why he seemed so surprised upon his initial examination of you, nor why the people who 'captured' Darcy were so brutal. And no mention at all is made of the Vellnes who are interested in you (unless for some reason you decide to bring it up...)

Sumner does let slip something about having to take you back 'down south' if he cannot rectify things in his lab. Since all there are to the south of Oppenheimer are mountains, this seems a bit odd.

I let him "convince" me, finally agreeing that I should go south with him once I get better. I hope he will not realize how fast I regenerate.

I want to buy time so that I can recuperate, and to speak to Darcy. While I do not expect to make Sumner believe he has taken me in completely, he may overestimate himself, and underestimate me, enough to let me stall him a bit. Of course I remain alert to the fact that I might not fool him at all.

Wheels within wheels...

You don't know the half of it... ;-)

When Sumner and Rutledge finally leave the room, you suddenly notice that Garon (the Vellnes) is sitting patiently in a chair in the corner of the room. "Well now, Solomon, are you satisfied with the outcome of your little expedition? I hope so, because we really need to get going; if I can track you down, it's almost certain that the Banin will be coming to get you soon, and we really don't want that, do we?"

"I have not talked to Darcy yet, so I am not done here. Besides, from my point of view, there might not be much difference between you and the Banin. Neither of you seems inclined to recognize me as an independent sentient entity. Both of you wish to modify my personality matrix to suit your purposes."

I sit up a little bit straighter in the bed.

"It makes me wonder whether you are an independent entity yourself, or has *your* behavior been modified to ensure your loyalty?"

"I am not the artificial programmable entity here. Really, Solomon, your flights of fancy regarding free will are becoming quite tiresome.

"Anyway, if talking to the human female will speed things along, then I'll wake her." With that, he crosses the room and rests his staff on Darcy's forehead. A few unintelligible words (in what some forgotten part of your memory tells you must be Ancient Vellnes...) and some glowing energy moving from the staff to Darcy, and she awakens.

"What... Rorg? Where am I?" Darcy asks. "What happened?"

The funny thing is that if it hadn't been for Darcy, and Garon's talk about tightening the screws he thinks are loose in my head, I probably would have gone with him out of curiosity.

As it is, I am looking for a way out. I do not rule out violence (Any throwable bedpans nearby?) but would much, much rather have a peaceful solution. The problem is that I do not trust Garon any more than Dr. Sumner. Garon *may* be a nicer fellow, but going with him just to get lobotomized by a zombie ray at the destination, is a less than tantalizing prospect.

Yes, there are many throwable objects in the room.

Seems like you're stuck between a rock & a hard place. If you don't like the options available to you, perhaps it's time to come up with some options of your own...



This is where things ended; Henrik and I both became busy with other matters and let the campaign slide.

Where was the campaign going after this? I have no clue. Unlike the games with the other e-mail players, I had little idea where Solomon's story arc was going. It was quite enjoyable to just play things by ear as the situations presented themselves. The upcoming Vellnes war was a central or peripheral plot to several of the arcs I was running, and I'm sure that Solomon would eventually find himself embroiled in that war somehow.



Gamma Ray

(Ray Brinestone, M.D.)

ST: 9 **DX: 13**
IQ: 14 **HT: 18**

Speed: 7.75 Dodge: 7
Move: 7

Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Height: 5' 11" Weight: 170 lbs.

Born: 1950

Advantages

Comfortable Wealth (10)

Disadvantages

Pacifism: Total non-violence (-30)

Honesty (-10)

Secret: Irradiation power (-5)

Super Advantages

Invulnerability: Radiation (75)

Penetrating Vision 4 lvls (40)

Knacks

Irradiate (Reduced fatigue: 400 pts: +800%, Not Magical +50%, Permanent +390%, Selective Effect: +50%) (455)

Quirks

Likes country music; Names his horses after prominent doctors

Skills

Irradiate-18; Agronomy-15; Diagnosis-16; Lasso-15; Mathematics-15; Nuclear Physics-14; Physician-17; Physics-15; Riding: Horses-16.

Background

Ray discovered his abilities while a student at Michigan State University. At the time there weren't any publically active Supers, and there was little in the way of heroics he could figure to do with his power anyway, so he switched from agriculture to pre-med and eventually attended medical school at Johns Hopkins, specializing in radiology. As a doctor, Ray secretly used his powers to selectively target radiation therapy against tumors.

J. PK Inst. 5(2), 1996



In the mid-1970s Ray's abilities were found out by The Brass Squadron, the secret arm of the U.S. military charged with protecting the populace from Supers threats. The Squadron's scientists were able to measure the limits Ray's abilities. The government thereafter kept a close eye on Ray and his activities, not wanting him to fall into the wrong hands. Ray became one of the Freedom Squads official physicians.

During the Alien occupation, Ray spent most of his time in a human enclave in the shadow of the Hive near Raleigh, North Carolina. His ability to spontaneously generate radiation proved to be instrumental in the final solution to poison the Earth to force the Aliens to leave.

His secret out, Ray became highly sought after by the Mega-Corps. Ray presently works for Advanced Metahuman Technologies, under the condition that they let him use the facilities to help treat people who were adversely medically affected by the final solution.

Ray's Powers

Ray's Irradiation knack uses the knack rules that Scott Maykrantz layed out in AotA #26. Note that with 400 fatigue freely available to him, Ray can irradiate a 1 hex area to a level of 4000 rads/hr within one second, enough to effectively kill a human being.

Gamma Ray is an 800 point character.

The Bouncing Bandit

(Harry Beliez)

ST: 11

DX: 16

IQ: 12

HT: 12

Speed: 7

Dodge: 7

Move: 7

Thrust: 1d-1

Swing: 1d+1

Height: 5' 8"

Weight: 150 lbs.

Born: 1960

Advantages

Double Jointed (5)

Charisma +4 (20)

Disadvantages

Impulsiveness (-10)

Villain's code of Honor (-10)

Super Powers

Anti-G 20 lvls (Touch only -20%) (48)

Bouncing 20 lvls (DR 20, PD 4) (Affects Others +40%;

Touch only -20%; No Super Jumping -25%) (228)

Quirks

Quotes Shakespeare; Mugs for cameras; Hates authority; Likes Jerry Lewis comedies.

Skills

Anti-G-17; Bouncing-17; Acrobatics-18; Bard-16; Brawling-18; Fast Talk-16; Free Fall-16; Literature-16.

Background

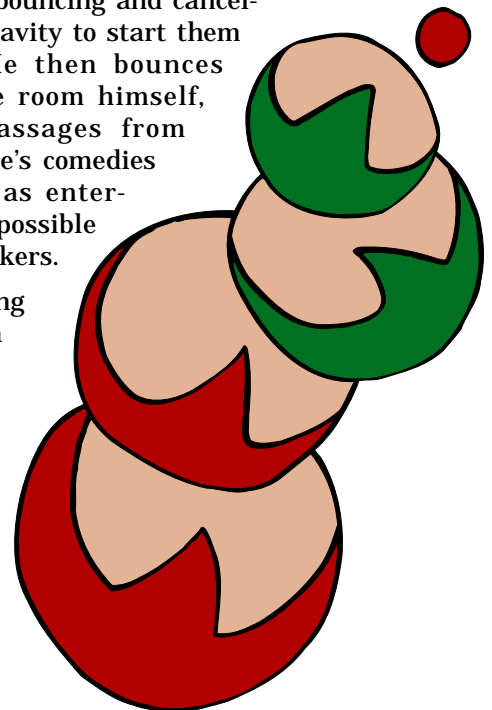
The Bouncing Bandit could care less about stealing things, he just likes to cause mayhem. The fact that criminal organizations were willing to pay him to cause distractions in places like museums and banks was just a bonus. For over a decade The Bandit was in and out of prison, and gleefully joined in Leader One's takeover of Washington. The Bandit now works as a freelance operative, taking every opportunity he can to annoy the Mega-Corps.



The Bandit's Powers

The Bandit's Anti-G power is high enough to achieve -1 G. His usual MO isto touch objects, imbuing them with bouncing and canceling their gravity to start them moving. He then bounces around the room himself, quoting passages from Shakespeare's comedies and being as entertaining as possible for all onlookers.

The Bouncing Bandit is a 500 point character.



New Spells

Know Dead (Necromantic)

When cast on a set of remains, tells the caster the identity of the corpse. In the event of multiple personalities/identities, the identity that the subject believed him/herself to be at the time of death will be the one revealed. Spell can also be cast on a gravesite.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 2.

Time to Cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisite: Death Vision

Locate Remains (Necromantic)

Tells the caster the direction and relative distance to the remains of an individual. Use the modifiers given for familiarity in the description of the Telescan ability in GURPS Psionics (p. 26). If the remains have been atomized or scattered (such as ashes into an ocean) the caster will get a vague sense of area.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 4.

Time to Cast: 2 minutes.

Prerequisites: Seeker, Know Dead.

Item: Divining rod made from bone or sinew. Energy cost to create: 400.

Create Art (Illusion and Creation)

Turns raw materials into a work of art; must be used in conjunction with a skill roll from the caster for the appropriate art/craft skill.

Duration: Permanent

Cost: 3.

Time to Cast: One minute.

Prerequisites: Create Object, appropriate skill at 15+.

Item: an easel, kiln, spinning wheel, or other appropriate tool. The item will have the skill of the enchanter. Energy cost to create: 300.

Know Artist (Knowledge)

Reveals the identity of the creator of a work of art to the caster.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 1.

Time to cast: 30 seconds.

Prerequisite: Trace

Item: a pair of glasses. Energy cost to create: 200.

Iron Stomach (Body Control)

Allows the subject to consume any substance and derive

Information

substance from it. This affects the entire digestive system, including the ability to chew any material.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 3 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Create Food, Weaken.

Item: a liquid, when drunk will endow the consumer with Iron stomach for 1 hour. Energy cost to create: 100.

Sing (Sound)

Allows the subject to sing perfectly.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 2 to cast, 1 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Voices.

Item: a collar, choker or necklace. Energy cost to create: 100.

Regular

Information

Know Organization (Knowledge)

Tells the caster what system of organization is being used for a collection of items, and how well that organization has been applied.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 1 per 100 items.

Prerequisite: Measurement.

Information

Regular



Catalog Item (Knowledge)

Creates a catalog record for an item for a predefined cataloging system. To index a journal, the spell only need to be cast once for each volume.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 1.

Prerequisite: Know Organization.

Item: bookjacket. Energy cost to create: 100.

Regular

Shelve Items

(Movement)

Properly places items (books, CDs, scrolls, etc.) into a pre-defined organizational structure. Items must already be cataloged. Can also be cast on data records to properly place them in a database.

Duration: Permanent.

Base Cost: 1 for every 100 items.

Time to Cast: same as cost, in minutes.

Prerequisite: Know Organization, Apportation.

Item: a sheet, which must be draped over the items. Energy cost to create: 200.

Know Computer

(Technology)

Tells the character the precise system characteristics of a computer, including its peripherals and software. May be cast as an area spell to get information about a computer network.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 1.

Time to cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisite: Measurement.

Program Computer

(Technology)

Creates a program for a specific computer.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 1 per complexity of the program. Same to maintain.

Time to cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisites: Scribe, Know Computer, Computer Programming 15+.

Upgrade Computer

(Technology)

Changes the complexity of a computer to a higher level.

Duration: 15 minutes.

Cost: 2 per level of complexity. Same to maintain.

Time to cast: 30 seconds.

Prerequisites: Know Computer.

Print File

(Technology)

Creates a hard copy of a computer file.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 1 per kilobyte.

Prerequisites: Know Computer, Create Object.

Break Code

(Knowledge)

Allows the caster to read and understand an encoded message. May also be cast on a computer to allow it to access a specific encoded computer file.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 1 per kilobyte.

Prerequisites: See Secrets, Gift of Tongues.

Area

Connect to Network (VH)

(Technology)

Allows the subject to connect to a computer network without interface equipment. Skill is at -4 if the subject is not touching a network terminal.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 3 to cast, 1 to maintain.

Time to Cast: 30 seconds.

Prerequisites: Know Computer, Wizard Eye.

Disconnect Other

(Technology)

Forcibly disconnects a person from a computer. Subject may resist with IQ or computer operations skill.

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 2.

Prerequisites: Connect to Network.

Item: computer file. Energy Cost to create: 200.

Information

Regular

Regular

Regular

Knowledge

Regular

Know Avatar

(Technology)

Tells the caster the true identity of the operator of an avatar (or, on non cyberspace systems, a person performing/running a certain task/program).

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 1.

Prerequisites: Know Computer.

Item: computer file. Energy Cost to create: 100.

Find Avatar

(Technology)

Tells the caster where in cyberspace a particular user's avatar is. If the user is presently using multiple avatars, will give the location of the "closest".

Duration: Instant.

Cost: 2.

Prerequisites: Know Avatar, Know Location.

Item: computer file. Energy cost to create: 100.



Information

Information