

Shadow of Death

An Erebus Scenario by Daniel Bayn

In this scenario, a team of do-gooders investigates a gruesome murder, stumbles upon a rebel conspiracy, and finds themselves on the bad side of an unstoppable killing machine. Player-Characters are included, but if your players already have their own characters, see if they're interested in running a protection racket. If they're not, have Crashing Wave (see below) either befriend them or just ask for their help with an investigation. (He can't exactly afford to pay them.)

The game begins with a short prologue, where the players take on the roles of 4 soon-to-be murder victims. Their goal is to give your players a reason to fear the Big Bad without letting their real characters see it in action.

Oh, and just to be explicit, this scenario is written for Erebus, a systemless setting of gaslight fantasy and pulp action. It can be adapted to any RPG, but it runs best with Wushu: The Ancient Art of Action Role-Playing.

You can find them both at...

www.Bayn.org

Prologue

Describe the grimy, dark interior of a derelict warehouse in New Erebus: "Shadows envelope the place from the vaulted ceiling to the crate encrusted floor. A chill wind spills through the place, rocking a lantern that hangs over four individuals." Pass out the prologue characters and ask the players to act out the dialogue written on them, each reading the lines in **bold** on their sheet.

When that's done, Kelarin's shadow (see Non-Player Characters) picks one of them up and tears him into tiny, bloody pieces. Let the players try to fight/flee all they want, but there is no escape. In a matter of seconds, everyone's dead and the lantern light sputters out.

Then, let them pick out a *real* character...

*Benjamin Williams,
Philosopher*

Traits:

Natural Philosophy (5) Professional alchemist.

Educated (4) Knows a little bit about everything.

Shootin' (3) Not too bad with a handcannon.

Mystic Crap (1) Has no idea how Bethany's tricks work!

Stuff

Misc. Gadgets - Magnetic compass, alchemical tools, etc.

Reloader - A lever-action rifle that holds 8 rounds.

Bloodburn - Alchemical ammo that sets things on fire.

Notes:

It was your brilliant idea was to start a protection racket in the New City. You control the criminal elements in a few neighborhoods, and the residents pay you a regular fee. Your sister, a street mage, uses her criminal connections to keep you informed & her magic tricks to keep you one step ahead of your enemies. You've even hired a street predator for added muscle and sometimes work with a vigilantis who serves some of your clients. Last night, a couple of his people were killed. The families want justice, and you'll be more than happy to deliver it.

*Bethany Williams,
Cage Mage*

Traits:

Legerdemain (4) Illusions, sleight of hand, etc.

Mesmerism (4) Hypnotism via the spoken word.

Criminal (4) You know your way around the streets.

Violence (1) It's just never been your forte.

Stuff

Misc. Items - Can conjure small items "out of thin air."

Clothes - Loose robes with many hidden pockets.

Notes:

Cage Mages, so named because they spend a lot of time under arrest, are one part con artist and one part performance artist. Use illusions to steal & smuggle, mesmerism to loosen tongues & grease palms.

Your brother (he's an educated sort) had the great idea of starting a protection racket in New Erebus. You charge the locals a regular fee for running criminals out of the neighborhood. It's not a bad way to make a living. You've even hired a street predator for muscle and sometimes work with a vigilantis who lives in the area. And it looks like you'll be working together again, because two of his Wayfarer brothers were murdered last night...

Retribution,

Street Predator

Crashing Wave,

Vigilantus

Traits:

Killin' (5) Street Predators are masters of blades, fists, and feet, but they never use guns or dirty tricks.

Huntin' (4) Stealth and tracking are essential skills.

Healin' (4) Everyone gets hit, eventually.

Social Graces (1) Not good conversationalists.

Stuff

Fang - Your blade curves forward for extra choppin' power.

Render - A pair of short blades attached to the forearm.

Leather Armor - Actually, it's more costume than anything else, used for its intimidation value.

Black Bag - A portable pharmacy packed with the latest alchemical medicines and supplies.

Notes:

You work with an enterprising brother and sister team who've set up a protection racket in the New City. Folks pay you a regular fee and, in return, you keep the low lives off their backs. Last night, a couple of your clients were murdered in a gruesome fashion, and their families are howling for blood. It's your job to deliver it.

Traits:

Art of War (5) A vigilantus never hesitates because he cares not for his own survival. He is utterly selfless.

Art of Vigilance (4) A vigilantus lives only in the present moment; they see all and hear all.

Wayfarer's Luck (3) Slips easily out of bonds & prisons.

Honest (1) A Wayfarer's word is his bond.

Stuff:

Deckblade - A traditional Wayfarer sword w/ a long hilt.

Rope - Every Wayfarer's best friend, on land or sea.

Notes:

The vigilanti are warrior-monks who act as the protectors, priests, and judges of Wayfarer society. They are famous for extraordinary acts of selfless bravery.

You serve a community in Erebus' New City; its members come to you to resolve disputes and support you with their charity. They also pay a trio of ruffians to protect them from gangs and criminals. You've worked with them on many occasions, always with great success. Last night, two of your people died in some kind of bizarre attack. The families are calling for justice, and you always deliver.

Scene One -

Investigation

The PCs are alerted to the murders by the heart-broken and outraged relatives of the two Wayfarer victims. They get to the crime scene well ahead of the iconoclasts, so the place is pretty much untouched. The carnage is almost unbelievable, and no trace of the warning note can be found (see the script at the end of this document).

One of the corpses is wearing a sword with a broken crown icon on the hilt. The Bethany will recognize this as the symbol of a group of western anti-monarchists called Fallen Legacy. They know one member, a wormy silver tongue named Marcus the Bastard.

They can track him down as he's leaving his New City apartment. He'll attempt to defend himself with some hypnosis, maybe putting them to sleep, but he'll crack under interrogation pretty damn quick. He knows that some of his cohorts were meeting with a Wayfarer last night to arrange the sale of a large amount of alchemical weapons, currently being kept in a hidden depot in the Outer City. He'll gladly give directions to the depot, and

even act as a guide, if you twist his arm.

Once the plot points are out in the open, a patrol of purifier thugs happens by and comes to Marcus' defense. (They know him well and have to pull legbreakers off of him on a regular basis.) They'll make a token effort at diplomacy, then draw their blades! This little mook fight is just for kicks, so let the thugs run off when beaten.

Scene Two -

Connections

The PCs make their way through the jungle with a modest amount of difficulty, unless they brought Marcus with as a guide. The first sign that they're getting close is an alchemical trap that springs without warning: Explosive charges of philosopher's stone transmute the trail and a good part of the surrounding jungle into quicksand! Everyone sinks up to their waists immediately, making it impossible to walk. They have less than a minute to think of a way out before they drown...

Unfortunately, the iconoclasts have also set up a few layers of alchemical alarms all around the place, so

they'll be waiting in ambush by the time the PCs arrive at the depot. If it looks like the PCs are going to discover the entrance, they open fire with repeaters, blood burn, and bolt throwers. The PCs will have to dive for cover, then root out the shooters and take 'em out hand-to-hand.

The depot is accessible through a door concealed beneath camouflage netting. It's about the size of a football field and filled to the brim with alchemical guns, armor, and explosives. There's a letter from Chiangko on a table littered with playing cards and toothpicks; it proposes a meeting tonight at the Den of the Hopping Ghost and advises the westerners to burn the letter immediately after reading it. (They should've taken the advice.) It concludes with, "After what happened last night, there can be no doubt that we are being watched."

Scene Three - Suspects

It's not too hard for the PCs to find the Den of the Hopping Ghost, a dilapidated New City establishment that specializes in combining hallucinogens and hypnotism. The decor is eastern, as is the staff and most of the clientele. It is obvious upon entering that the PCs are not particularly welcome. They'll have to do some fast talking to avoid getting kicked out by the bouncers.

If they go the stealthy route, let them overhear enough of the meeting before the bouncers jump 'em. If they try to make the meeting instead of (or possibly along with) the iconoclasts, they'll be escorted to a small room in a far corner of the building. Falu is waiting for them, seated behind a grimy table with the sole lantern at her back. She engages the PCs in small talk and tries to use her hypnotic skills to force one of them to reveal their true purpose. (She assumes they're enemy spies.)

If and when things go bad, a bunch of bouncers (mooks) burst into the room and proceed to beat them senseless. If they get their collective ass kicked, Chiangko and Falu (along with some more bouncers) join the fray. Hopefully, either the PCs will win the fight or think of something to say that will win the rebels' trust.

When it becomes apparent that the PCs can help him, Chiangko will send his bouncers into the hall, close the door, and fill them in on a few important details:

- They are trying to start a popular uprising against the Order of the Moth.
- The Wayfarers were going to smuggle weapons and armor into the Forbidden Kingdom for them.
- They believe a Moth assassin is on to them. It's an invincible killing machine. The Moths' astral projection has a limited range, so it must be hiding in the city.
- A philosopher named Hanzoo is working on a device that kills the Moths' astral "shadows," but he disappeared late last night, before the murders took place.

Suddenly, Chiangko's body stiffens and splits open in an explosion of blood. Falu screams at the PCs to, "Get out! Find Hanzoo!" and puts the force of her mesmerism behind it, for good measure. Then, her body is thrown against the wall and torn to shreds. As the PCs race to the main exit, the shadow cuts a bloody swath through the den, exterminating the rebels.

Scene Four - Rescue

There are plenty of ways for the PCs to track down the missing philosopher, but the one I'll be working with is by tracking down Kelarin. (If the PCs think of something more creative, run with it!) They can find out about the visiting Moth dignitary by reading the Herald or questioning some of Bethany's street contacts. He's staying on his ship, which is anchored out in the harbor.

The hulking, flat-bottomed vessel's living spaces are all on the main deck, built into a three-tiered pyramid at the stern. (This is where Kelarin's quarters are located.) At any time, there may be dozens of bodyguards and sailors on deck. Kelarin is accompanied at all times by a team of four bodyguards.

Hanzoo is being held in chains below decks, in the cargo hold that runs the entire length of the ship. A single bodyguard keeps watch; he will attempt to deal with the PCs alone first, only sounding an alarm if beaten. (Canny players will have consulted an Augur concerning the precise location of the philosopher before heading out, but a little wandering around will turn him up easily enough.)

Hanzoo has obviously suffered a brutal interrogation. His eyes are swollen shut and the floor is stained

with his blood. Unable to move under his own power, he'll need a PC to carry him off the boat. Make sure they get attacked immediately upon leaving the cargo hold, so they have to fight their way out!

Scene Five - Justice

Hanzoo can rouse himself enough to direct the PCs into the Old City, through a narrow alley, and down a flight of stairs to the cellar of an office building. He flips a complex set of switches on the door and it opens to reveal his secret laboratory. They can all hide out here while Hanzoo tries to show Benjamin how to operate the shadow-killing device.

Once they've made any necessary preparations, it's time to administer some justice! The device has a very short range, so the shadow will have to be close to them when they turn it on. Since Kelarin already wants them dead, the simplest solution is to let the Moth know where they are, or to just head back to his boat. Let your players hatch whatever twisted battle plan they wish, though.

Wherever the PCs decide to stage their ambush, Kelarin will make sure to send a team of bodyguards in ahead of himself. He doesn't know exactly what Hanzoo

was building, but he knows it was a threat to him.

After they go a round or two with the bodyguards, the shadow arrives! It grabs the most dangerous looking PC (probably the Vigilantus or the Street Predator) and lifts them up into the air, strangling them. They can feel their skin starting to stretch over their bones... Give the Philosopher one chance to get the machine started before you start making the victim take damage (no defense).

When it activates, a ripple of blue light shoots out of the device and washes over the area, making the shadow's demonic outline visible for a brief moment... before it unravels into wisps of smoke and zooms back into Kelarin's meditation room. (Letting the PCs know where his body is, conveniently enough.) Then, it's all just a matter of fighting their way past the rest of the bodyguards (and back to the boat, if they're not already there) and slitting the throat of a thin, old man in flowing crimson robes.

And maybe burning down his boat.

Non-Player Characters

Markus the Bastard

Traits - Smooth (4) Contacts (4) Mesmerism (3)

Besides acting as a contact person for the Fallen Legacy, Marcus "the Bastard" is also an experienced con artist and notoriously incompetent gambler. He learned the art of mesmerism, not to more effectively con people, but as a means of self-defense against angry debt collectors. Still, he's never been one to let an advantage go unexploited. He'll only help the PCs find the hidden depot if they convince him they're not Crown spies.

Iconoclasts

Traits - Guns (3) Stealth (4)

Stuff - Bolt-thrower or repeater w/ bloodburn ammo.

These guys are Fallen Legacy soldiers, assigned to guard a weapons depot in Outer Erebus. They've rigged the surrounding jungle with alarms and booby traps, but they don't see a whole lot of action. They're push-overs.

Chiangko

Traits - Martial Arts (4) Leader (4) Cunning (4)

Stuff - Tri-section staff, throwing spikes.

This consummate warrior has waged a futile war against the Order for most of his life. Now, he's moved his operation to Erebus in order to build up a real army, with cutting edge alchemical weapons, and maybe even develop a way to kill the Moths' deadly shadows. The closer he gets, the more perilous his position becomes.

Falu

Traits - Hypnotism (4) Augury (4) Martial Arts (4)

Chiangko's second-in-command is in charge of counter-intelligence (i.e. keeping them alive). She uses eastern numerology to predict future threats, hypnotism to pry secrets out of their enemies' minds, and martial arts to fight alongside her brothers and sisters in arms. She is methodical and cautious, but driven by a fierce desire to see her homeland freed from centuries of oppression.

Bodyguards

Traits - Martial Arts (4) Security (4)

Stuff - Martial arts weapons (swords, staves, chains, etc.)

These guys are martial arts masters dedicated to serving the Moths unto death. Their first duty is to protect Kelarin, especially when he's projecting (since his physical body, or "husk," is left in a sleeplike trance). Their second duty is to assist Kelarin in accomplishing his mission; this mostly involves interrogating suspects. They are fearless and fanatical enemies.

Hanzoo

Traits - None needed.

This philosopher is an exile from the east with some strange theories on how the Moths do their magic. The rebels have been funding his research in hopes of developing a device that repels or destroys the shadows, thus neutralizing the Moths' greatest weapon. Hanzoo was just about to test his first prototype when Kelarin's bodyguards abducted him; fortunately, they didn't find his lab or the device. Though beaten to within an inch of his life, the philosopher refused to answer their questions.

Kelarin

Traits - Martial Arts (3) Manhunter (5) Shrewd (4)

Kelarin's Shadow - In astral form, Kelarin can create a field of conflicting forces that literally tear a target apart. There is no relevant trait for this, and no possible defense. If he wants you dead, you die.

Though he claims to be a military diplomat when traveling, Kelarin's job within the Forbidden Kingdom is hunting down insurgents and eliminating them. He is exceptionally good at it. By the time he arrives in Erebus, his spies have already sniffed out an arms dealer (the Iconoclasts) looking to hire smugglers (the Wayfarers) for a mission into the Forbidden Kingdom. His plan is to stake out their meetings until the rebels reveal themselves, follow them back to their leaders, and kill them all. Unfortunately, the rebels catch wind of his presence and avoid the first meeting, so Kelarin kills the dealers and smugglers instead. Then, he follows the PCs in astral form until they lead him to the rebels.

Prologue Characters & Script

Iconoclast #1

Traits: Smart (4) Quick (4)

Stuff: Handcannon (single shot).

So, where are these mysterious friends a' yours? I thought we were gonna do business at two o'clock sharp.

Don't worry. They'll be here. They're just a cautious lot, not given to walking into places they've not checked out thoroughly. Chances are, they're listening to us right now.

[An arrow crashes through the window and hits a crate in the center of the room.]

Bleedin' hell! We're under attack!

Don't be theatrical. There's a note attached. "Get out now! You're being watched."

Iconoclast #2

Traits: Strong (4) Fast (4)

Stuff: Sword w/ broken crown on hilt.

So, where are these mysterious friends a' yours? I thought we were gonna do business at two o'clock sharp.

Don't worry. They'll be here. They're just a cautious lot, not given to walking into places they've not checked out thoroughly. Chances are, they're listening to us right now.

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Wayfarer #1

Traits: Cunning (4) Charming (4)

Stuff: Two short swords.

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Wayfarer #2

Traits: Tough (4) Vicious (4)

Stuff: Big Ass Machete

So, where are these mysterious friends a' yours? I thought we were gonna do business at two o'clock sharp.

Don't worry. They'll be here. They're just a cautious lot, not given to walking into places they've not checked out thoroughly. Chances are, they're listening to us right now.

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