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More Pulp Villains

By Gareth-Michael Skarka

Introduction

We first gave you Pulp Villains back in issue 46, and, given that we're celebrating August as Pulp Month, we decided that it was a fitting subject for Adamant Entertainment's final Modern Dispatch issue for us to give you more villains to throw at your stalwart pulp heroes!

In the pulps, there were dozens of villains for every hero. The villains were usually a never-ending supply of run-of-the-mill gangsters and crooks, ready to be defeated on a monthly basis, sandwiched between lurid, brightly-colored covers, and sold for a dime. On occasion, however, other villains appeared. Villains as fantastic as the heroes they confounded. Villains that were nearly equal to the heroes in power and in their uniqueness.

The hordes of cookie-cutter crooks fade into obscurity, but the arch-fiends remain. Sherlock Holmes needs his Moriarty, after all. Doc Savage had his John Sunlight, and the Shadow had Shiwan Khan. Some pulp magazines were focused on the villains, and the heroes were the disposable, cookie-cutter characters!

The player-characters in your own pulp-era campaigns should face such threats. Don't give them an enemy to fight....Give them a Nemesis.



About

THRILLING TALES

Thrilling Tales is Adamant Entertainment's critically-acclaimed line of pulp-genre gaming products for use with Modern D20. The line currently features Advanced Classes representing the major pulp hero archetypes, a Gamemaster's Guide (including a random pulp adventure generator), Adventures, and more.

About the Author

Gareth-Michael Skarka has been working in the adventure games industry since 1988. He is the designer of several role-playing games, including *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, *UnderWorld* and *Skull & Bones*. His company, Adamant Entertainment, is one of the top PDF publishing houses in the business, and produces the pulp d20 line *Thrilling Tales*, among others.

The villains that appear in these pages will give you a good start, and your players will curse you for it!

Vincenzo “Vinnie Five-Angels” Pentangeli

This character uses levels of the Mobster advanced class, available from Adamant Entertainment. Pertinent abilities are described below, so owning the class is not necessary.

Fast Hero 5/Mobster 5: CR 10; Medium-size humanoid; HD 5d8 +5d10-10; HP 38; Mas 8; Init +3; Spd 30 ft; Defense 21, touch 21, flatfooted 18 (+0 size, +3 Dex, +8 class); BAB +6; Grap +5; Atk +2 melee (1d4-1, brass knuckles), or +9 ranged (2d6 Tommy-Gun); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL The Mob; SV Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +2; AP 9; Rep +3; Str 9, Dex 17, Con 8, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 15.

Occupation: Criminal (Hide, Knowledge [Streetwise])

Skills: Balance +6, Demolitions +6, Diplomacy +4, Disable Device +5, Drive +10, Escape Artist +6, Forgery +4, Hide +10, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Current Events) +8, Knowledge (Streetwise) +9, Move Silently +8, Pilot +7, Profession +4, Read/Write Language +1 (Italian), Search +9, Sleight of Hand +7, Speak Language +1 (Italian), Spot +8, Tumble +6

Feats: Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Brawl, Combat Driving, Double Tap, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency

Talents (Fast Hero): Evasion, Opportunist, Uncanny Dodge 1 (Mobster): Affiliation, No

Stool Pigeon, Drive-By, Leg Breaking, Sweep, Seedy Favor, Safe House.

Wealth: +6

Mobster Ability Descriptions:

- **Affiliation:** Mobsters gain the benefit of their Affiliation's reputation (Vinnie's is +10) when dealing with others who would respect that Affiliation's reputation.
- **No Stool Pigeon:** Vinnie gains a +4 circumstance bonus to Will saves when being interrogated.
- **Drive-By Shooting:** Vinny has access to the Drive-By Attack feat.
- **Leg Breaking:** The Mobster can acquire information from reluctant sources through actual physical harm. While this method lacks finesse and sophistication, it is brutally effective. The Mobster adds a +2 circumstance bonus to his Intimidation check when using non-lethal force on a subject, or a +4 circumstance bonus if he uses lethal force.
- **Sweep:** A Mobster knows how to size up an area and get the lay of the land in a single sweep of his or her eyes. This sweep provides a +4 circumstance bonus on Spot checks.
- **Seedy Favor:** This class feature is similar to the Charismatic Hero's Favor talent.
- **Safe House:** Vinnie has a few secret locations around the city where he can lay low for a while if the heat is turned up on him. These “safe houses” often have money, guns, and ammunition stored in them. Anyone trying to find the Mobster



is assessed a +5 penalty to appropriate skill DCs. Should the Mobster be compromised in his safe house, he gains a +2 circumstance bonus on any skill checks that would directly or indirectly assist in his escape. He also gains a +2 defensive bonus while inside the Safe House.

Vincenzo Pentangeli, known on the street as “Vinnie Five-Angels”, is a highly-placed enforcer for the local Mafia in your campaign's main city.

His primary job for the Mob is as a Troubleshooter -- if there's trouble, Vinnie is sent, and he shoots it. He's very good at what he does, and this has made him a valuable member of the organization, and increased his power within it. He currently is the number two man, behind the Boss -- the old man who is the titular head of the family-- but whispers on the street are starting to say that Five-Angels is the real power behind the throne.

Adventure Hooks:

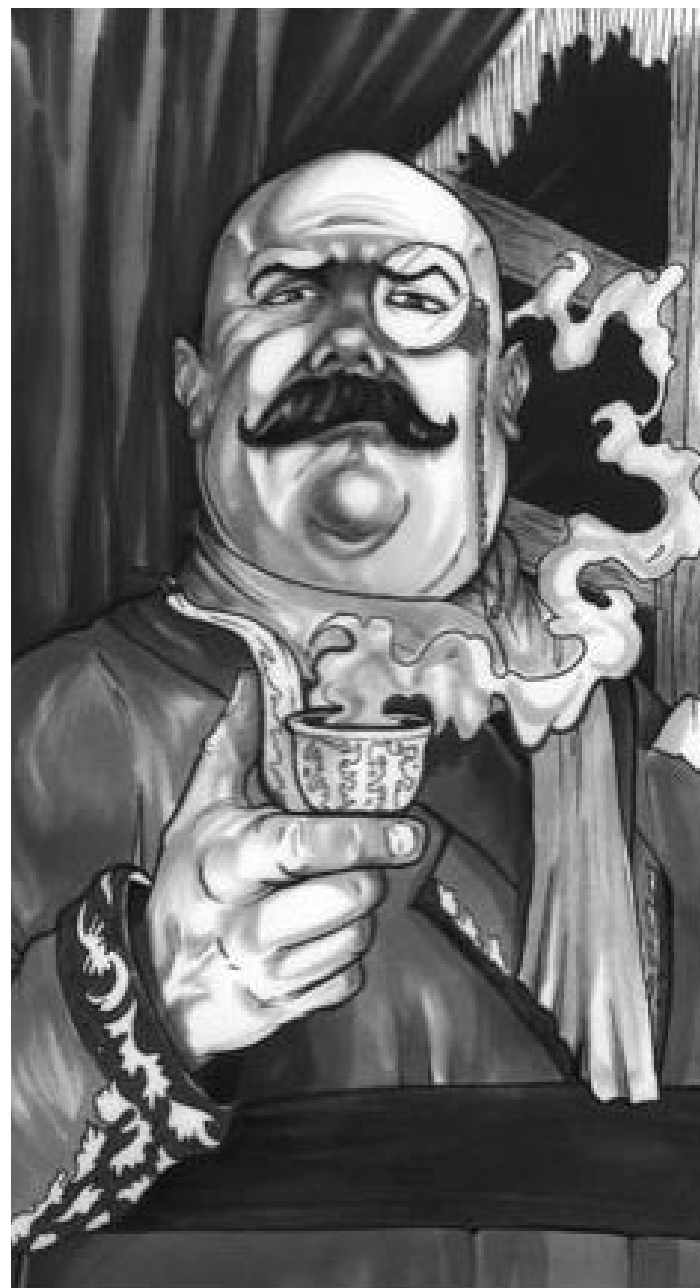
- A Mob War rages on the streets of the City, as two (or more) organized crime gangs battle for control of illicit business (smuggling, gambling, prostitution) in the area. Crime is on the rise, and this will naturally draw the attention of the Player Characters. After a few run-ins with mob-related crime, the PCs will be identified as a threat, and the family that Pentangeli works for will send him out to remove the threat.
- Criminal power in the city has been consolidated behind a single family-- the one with Vinnie as a member. Now the time has come to make his move. Pentangeli decides to stage a coup and take control of the Mob, leading to a "civil war" in the city's underworld, with gang bosses declaring their allegiance to one side or the other. Can the Player Characters take down the Mob before the city is torn apart?

Otto Von Übel

Vampire Smart Hero 7: CR 9; Medium-size Undead; HD 7d12; HP 46; Mas 3; Init +5; Spd 30 ft; Defense 19, touch 13, flatfooted 18 (+0 size, +1 Dex, +2 class, +6 natural); BAB +3; Grap +7; Atk +8 melee (1d8+4, sword-cane), or +4 ranged ; FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ *blood drain, create spawn, domination* (DC 10 + 1/2 HD + cha mod), *energy drain, alternate form, children of the night, damage reduction 15/+1, fast healing 5, gaseous form, cold and electricity resistance 20, spider climb, +4 turn resistance, darkvision 60 ft., weaknesses*; AL none; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +8; AP 8; Rep +4; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 0, Int 21, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Occupation: Dilettante (Intimidate)

Skills: Bluff +10, Decipher Script +9, Demolitions +8, Diplomacy +4, Disable Device +11, Disguise +4, Drive +3, Escape Artist +3, Forgery +7, Gamble +4, Gather Information +4, Hide +10, Intimidate +6, Investigate +8, Knowledge (Arcane Lore) +20, Knowledge (Art) +9, Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) +8, Knowledge (Business) +13, Knowledge (Civics) +7, Knowledge (Current Events) +10, Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences) +11, Knowledge (History) +12,



Knowledge (Physical Sciences) +10, Knowledge (Popular Culture) +9, Knowledge (Streetwise) +11, Knowledge (Tactics) +9, Knowledge (Technology) +6, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +8, Listen +12, Move Silently +9, Navigate +9, Profession +7, Read/Write Language +5 (English, German, Latin, French, Italian), Repair +8, Research +6, Search +19, Sense Motive +10, Speak Language +5 (English, German, Latin, French, Italian), Spot +12

Feats: Agile Riposte, Alertness, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Educated (Knowledge [Arcane Lore], Knowledge [History]), Improved Damage Threshold, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Weapon Focus

Talents (Smart Hero): Savant (Knowledge [Arcane Lore]), Plan, Trick, Exploit Weakness

Wealth: +11

Otto Von Übel represents a surprise to throw at your characters -- a German villain who not only has no connection to the Nazis, but also turns out to be an honest-to-god vampire!

Von Übel was a Prussian noble who was wounded during the Napoleonic Wars, as he lay dying on the battlefield, he fell victim to the predations of a vampire. The vampire, whose name Von Übel never learned, was a weak creature, more content with scavenging

battlefields than in hunting his own prey -- Von Übel used his dying effort to kill the creature, but not before it had worked its terrible magic. Otto Von Übel rose again as a creature of the night.

Von Übel is interested in only one thing -- power and wealth. He rose in power in Germany as an industrialist, but when the Nazi regime began to nationalize industry, the vampire left Germany to pursue his wealth in the Brave New World of America.

He is a businessman without morals or scruples. He is not above blackmail or strong-arm tactics to get what he wants, and his company, International Holdings, Ltd., is weathering the Depression rather well as a result.

Players will most likely assume that Von Übel is one of the “Fat Cat Businessman” villains (those that don’t immediately assume that he’s a Nazi spy, of course). Von Übel has managed to avoid detection as a vampire for over 130 years so far -- his reputation is as an eccentric recluse. The PCs will certainly be surprised when the truth is revealed!

Von Übel is served by a group of lesser vampires that he has created. He recognized their use early on, and sends them on errands to procure him victims for feeding, or to do violence against his business opponents (He knows that the chances of them being traced back to him is negligible, as they turn to dust when destroyed!)

Example statistics for one of his minions:

Vampire Strong Ordinary 2: CR 4; Medium-size Undead; HD 2d12; HP 13; Mas 0; Init +8; Spd 30 ft; Defense 22, touch 16, flatfooted 18 (+0 size, +4 Dex, +2 class, +6 natural); BAB +2; Grap +7; Atk +7 melee, or +6 ranged; FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ *blood drain, create spawn, domination* (DC 10 + 1/2 HD + cha mod), *energy drain, alternate form, children of the night, damage reduction 15/+1, fast healing 5, gaseous form, cold and electricity resistance 20, spider climb, +4 turn resistance, darkvision 60 ft., weaknesses*; AL Von Übel; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; AP 2; Rep +0; Str 21, Dex 18,



Con 0, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Occupation: Blue Collar (Climb, Drive, Intimidate)

Skills: Bluff +9, Climb +8, Drive +6, Hide +12, Intimidate +2, Jump +7, Knowledge (Current Events) +3, Knowledge (Streetwise) +5, Knowledge (Tactics) +3, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Profession +5, Repair +4, Search +11, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11, Survival +2, Swim +6

Feats: Alertness, Brawl, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency

Wealth: +5

A Note on Villain Survival

Villains like these are too good to waste on a single adventure. Taking a page from the pulps, Gamemasters should be prepared to bring a villain back, even when it seems impossible. If at all possible, make the villain's end have a bit of "wiggle-room": the body is never recovered, for example.

...and when the heroes ask "how did you survive that?" The villain should dismiss the question with a wave of his hand. "You cannot begin to comprehend the power at my disposal...."

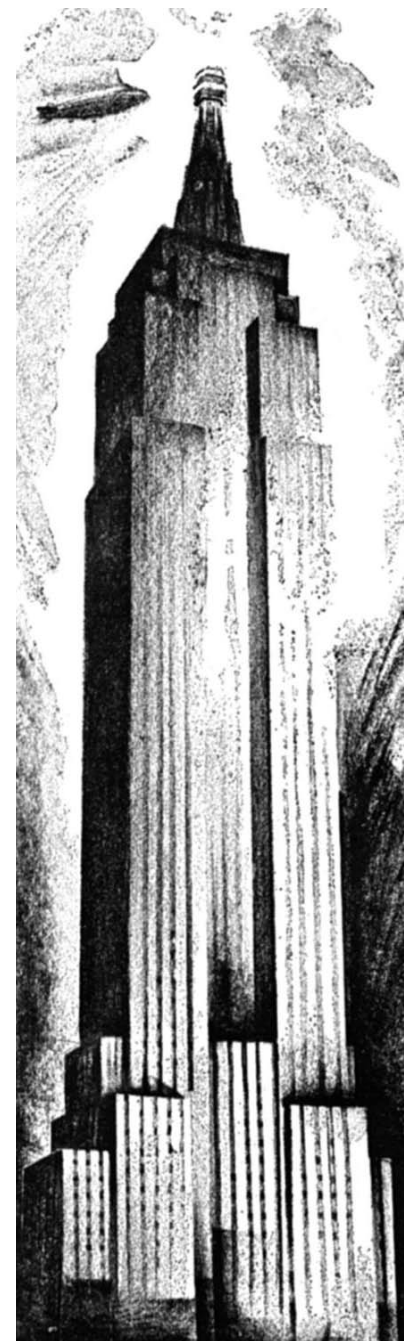
Adventure Hooks:

- Von Übel, as a prominent businessman of German descent, has come to the attention of the Nazis, who wish to bend him to their will and use his business as a Fifth Column operation within the United States. When he rebuffed their efforts, they decided to use stronger tactics.

The Player Characters are drawn into events when sabotage attacks occur at several International Holdings businesses. The PCs will unveil the Nazi plot, but will also begin to discover that the agents that they are uncovering are soon turning up dead, or disappearing under mysterious circumstances. The PCs will be caught between the Vampire and the Reich as the two sides battle each other!

- As a twist on the above, perhaps Von Übel has instead come to the attention of the United States Government....a wealthy German industrialist, with a reputation as a recluse? Sounds like a job for G-Men to investigate. Players expecting to uncover a dastardly Nazi plot instead have to contend with Evil from Beyond the Grave!

- The Player Characters become involved in a murder mystery -- terror has struck a construction site, as several workers have been killed. Each has apparently fallen to his death from the girders of the skyscraper while staying late...but there are oddities surrounding the events. First, each of the men killed was a vocal proponent of unionizing to negotiate better wages from their employers, International Holdings, Inc. Second, despite the trauma of falling from such great heights, there has been no blood found at the scene.



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