

Interlude: Dinner and a Show

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A Modern Interlude

Interludes are short encounters, designed for modern d20 System games, in which the heroes find themselves in a situation all too common in everyday life: speeding tickets, rude waiters, long waits in the hospital emergency room, chance encounters at airport terminals, and so on. These brief encounters can be dropped into an evening's adventure to give the heroes a little "slice of real life" diversion from the main excitement—and maybe just a chance to shine, in situations that, for a change, don't involve enemy agents, serial killers, alien conspiracies, or any of the campaign's grander themes.

Interludes are opportunities for extraordinary people—the heroes—to tackle life's little problems in their own extraordinary way.

"Dinner and a Show" puts the heroes in an ordinary restaurant, and interrupts their meal with a loud and aggressive fellow patron who's had a few too many. Ideally, the hero should be at least 4th or 5th level. For combat-oriented characters, this encounter is a chance to teach an arrogant jerk a much-needed lesson. Characters less devoted to combat, on the other hand, might enjoy using diplomacy or subterfuge to defuse a potentially ugly situation. "Dinner and a Show" works equally well with male or female heroes.

The Setup

Even heroes have to eat sometime, and this time, the diner of choice is a nondescript restaurant in a relatively quiet part of town. The heroes have arrived at a slow time, and by the time they've finished their meal, the restaurant is less than half full. Most of the other patrons are quietly enjoying their meals, though there's one rather loud individual who looks over at the heroes' table from time to time. As the heroes are sitting around waiting for the check, read the following text aloud:

As you're waiting for the waitress to return, you catch the eye of a patron a few tables away—and he's staring back at you. With a loud curse, he suddenly stands up and strides over to loom at your table, with a pair of equally beefy friends in tow. "What are you looking at?" he demands angrily. "Every time I look over here you're staring at me! You got a problem?"

This individual is Jack Witt, a hardheaded local construction foreman who's used to bullying people with his size and bluster. He's had a few drinks, and has fixated on the hero who appears the most unusual (and "unusual," to Jack, can be anything from "ethnic" to something as mundane as "intel-

ligent"; Jack's a consummate bigot). As far as Jack is concerned, it's time for "The Jack Show": His friends are his audience, and tonight's guest victim is one of the heroes.

Developments

Jack is looking for a fight, but he avoids throwing the first punch. Like most bullies, Jack is a coward at heart, and while he'd dearly love to pummel someone senseless tonight, he knows that there are a lot of witnesses around. The last thing he needs is to go to jail for assault, and in his flawed logic, if he can get his victim to swing first, it's self-defense.

So Jack tries to goad the hero into attacking, by being as insulting as possible, and he even gets a little physical, pushing and shoving the hero, or knocking drinks or food onto the hero. (This is Jack's way of using his Intimidate skill.) If the hero doesn't rise to the occasion, Jack is content to chase him or her out of the restaurant, with a final witticism like "—and don't let me see you around here again!"

Of course, all bets are off if one of the heroes makes Jack look bad, such as successfully intimidating *him*, or perhaps just making a joke at Jack's expense. At that point, Jack's pride won't let him walk away without teaching his opponent a lesson—even if it means that Jack ends up taking a beating.

Jack's Friends: Treat Jack's two friends, Roy and Earl, as thugs (see Chapter 8: Friends and Foes, of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*); use low-level thugs for heroes whose average level is no greater than 6th, and mid-level thugs for heroes of 7th level or higher. However, these thugs are really little more than Jack's audience. They back him up when he confronts the heroes and encourage him not to back down, but if a fight starts, they don't get involved unless they're directly attacked (though see below). When it's clear that Jack is out of his league (physically or otherwise), they clear out; they don't really like Jack all that much, but they've learned from hard experience to make a good show of supporting him.

Roy and Earl might jump in if Jack's attacks aren't connecting (for example, if Jack has chosen a Fast hero to pick on). In that situation, they make an attempt to grapple the opponent and hold him while Jack does the hitting. (They won't use this strategy on a woman, though; that's where they draw the line.) Unlike Jack, though, Roy and Earl aren't here for a fight; they're just acting as moral support for Jack, and if it looks like things are going badly for him, they actually advise him to cut his losses.

Restaurant Staff: The cooks, waitresses, and busboys have seen all this before, and they know that the smart thing is for them to just let Jack take out

his frustrations, and hope that nobody gets hurt too badly. They've seen what happens to people who try to stop Jack, and what happens if they call the police, so they've learned not to get involved. At most, if it looks like Jack is going to pummel the hero unconscious, the hero's waitress tries to stop the beating by pointing out that the hero hasn't paid yet.

Weapons are a slightly different matter. Once someone pulls a weapon other than a firearm (see sidebar), the staff begin haranguing Jack (or the hero) to "Take it outside!" They put up with Jack's bullying and the occasional bloody nose, but lethal weapons are bad for business. Jack, surprisingly, complies with such a request—he doesn't want to be refused service, after all—and invites the hero to "Step out back and finish this."

Other Patrons: Most of the other people in the restaurant are regulars, and they know Jack well enough to realize that it's a bad idea to get in his way when he's had a few. They won't try to leave, however, because if they do, and police show up afterward, Jack will assume they called the police on him, and then they'll have to suffer his wrath. However, if shots are fired, all of the patrons clear out; Jack's wrath notwithstanding, they're not going to hang around when lead starts flying.

Police: Even if they're called as soon as a fight starts, the police don't arrive for five minutes. When they do, it's a pair of officers (treat them as mid-level police officers, one male and one female, from Chapter 8: Friends and Foes, in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*), and unless shots have been fired, they're carrying only their sidearms and tonfas; their shotguns are in their patrol car.

Resolution

Depending on how the heroes react to Jack, several different things could happen.

The Hero Leaves: If the hero chooses to leave, Jack gets some validation of his lifestyle, but it's at no great cost to the hero. It might sting the hero's pride a bit, but that's as far as it goes. If the hero ever comes back, Jack probably won't even recognize him or her—though he may pull the same bully act again. Note that the wait staff won't let the hero leave without paying, and Jack won't stop them from paying the bill. He even insists that the hero leave a big tip!

Jack Leaves: If the hero intimidates Jack into leaving, or outwits Jack with Bluff or Diplomacy, the staff and some of the patrons are congratulatory, though guarded. "That's about the bravest thing I've ever seen. Of course, when he sobers up, he might come looking for you. I hope you can pull that trick

more than once." Let the hero make a Charisma check (DC 13) to have the staff tear up their check out of gratitude for getting rid of Jack without damaging the restaurant.

Jack Beats Up the Hero: It's ugly, but it's a possibility. Jack brutalizes the hero a bit, with a few kicks and such, but he's not a sadist, so he gets bored pretty quickly and leaves the restaurant. (He knows that the staff will call an ambulance, maybe even the police, and he wants to get out and establish an alibi somewhere else as soon as possible.)

If the hero used a weapon that looks like it might be valuable (Purchase DC 10 or better), Jack "confiscates" it before leaving. Give Jack a chance also at this time to spot any concealed weapons that the hero might be carrying; again, if they're valuable, Jack takes them with him. After he leaves, the restaurant staff come forward to give the hero first aid, and if it looks like the hero's in a really bad way, they call an ambulance—though they claim that nobody saw anything: "The guy came in looking like this." If the hero presses charges with the local police, give the hero a Charisma check (DC 16) to have the waitress admit what really happened.

The Hero Beats Up Jack: If Jack loses, Roy and Earl feel no particular compulsion to avenge him. They'll scrape him off the floor and put him in his truck (if the heroes let them), or they'll run for it (if the heroes make any move toward them). They're going to spend the next week with Jack taking out his frustration over the fight on them, and they're wise enough to know that it'll be easier to take without the added burden of bruised flesh and broken bones.

The restaurant staff and the patrons, on the other hand, openly applaud the hero if Jack went down quickly and quietly. If the fight was pretty close, or involved a lot of property damage, they're less happy about it, but still congratulatory. "You're something else. Where'd you learn to fight like that?" The hero can make a Charisma check (DC 13, +5 if property damage was involved) to have the waitress tear up their check. But in any event, the staff says that they won't call the police to report the incident until the heroes have had time to clear

What About Guns?

If Jack's opponent produces a firearm, Jack changes his tactics. He's got his .38, of course, but he knows that he can't get it out of his boot before his victim gets a shot off. So Jack tries to convince the hero to fight him without the gun, using such reasoned arguments as "You're real tough when you've got a gun in your hand" and "What kind of wimp has to pull a gun to defend himself?" Of course, Jack has no compunctions about so disarming his opponent, then pulling his own gun.

Of course, as soon as *anyone* draws a gun, the restaurant staff calls the police (from the safety of the kitchen).

out. Conversely, if the fistfight turned into a firefight, the staff and patrons flee the first chance they get, and aren't the least bit grateful to the heroes.

The Police Show Up: If the heroes are still there when the police show up, the police are duty-bound to arrest anyone who was involved in the fighting, though the charge is really no more serious than "disturbing the peace." The real complication that can develop here is if the police find any weapons on the hero. As explained in Chapter 4: Equipment, in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, the police use their Search checks to pat down the heroes, and if the hero doesn't have the proper licenses for what he or she is carrying, they have to add on another charge: "carrying a concealed weapon" or "carrying a weapon without a permit." With a successful Diplomacy check (opposed by the arresting officer's), the hero can get the officers to merely confiscate the offending weapon, rather than press charges.

If weapons were used in the fight, however, the charge is "assault with a deadly weapon" (or "assault," if the weapons involved did not deal lethal damage, such as pepper spray or a sap). In this case, there's no chance of getting the charges reduced. And if there was a fatality involved, the charge is "homicide"—and someone's going to need a good lawyer. If the hero killed someone, they can't rely on the good graces of the patrons or restaurant staff. As much as they all disliked Jack Witt (and his buddies), they didn't want to see any of them dead, and give the police a full account of what they saw, including descriptions of the heroes involved.

Jack Witt, Urban Cowboy

Jack Witt is a foreman for a local construction company, and he imagines himself to be a modern day cowboy, "riding the range, kicking ass, and taking names." Most people dislike him, but he's arrogant

enough that he either doesn't notice or doesn't care. At heart, though, he's really a coward, and bullies people to keep his confidence up. Most of the time, he's just showing off for his pals Roy and Earl.

In a fight, Jack leads off with unarmed attacks, which his Streetfighting feat makes particularly effective. He only brings Power Attack into play if he's certain he can hit his opponent (such as when Roy and Earl are restraining his opponent). He keeps a folding lockblade knife in a leather case on his belt, and brings that out if his opponent produces a weapon. Jack also keeps a .38 revolver in his boot, but he resorts to that only in "emergencies," such as when he's outnumbered, or his opponent has a firearm as well.

Jack Witt: Human Strong Ordinary 4/Tough Ordinary 2; CR 5; Medium-size human; HD 4d8+8 plus 2d10+4; hp 41; Mas 14; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Def 16 (touch 16, flat-footed 15); Base Atk +5; Grap +8; Atk +10 melee (1d8+1d4+3, unarmed strike) or +8 melee (1d4+3/19-20, knife) or +4 ranged (2d6, Ruger Service-Six); Full Atk: Atk +10 melee (1d8+1d4+3, unarmed) or +8 melee (1d4+3/19-20, knife) or +4 ranged (2d6, Ruger Service-Six); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL None; AP 0; Rep 0; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 13.

Starting Occupation: Blue-collar (Class skills: Drive, Intimidate, and Repair)

Skills and Feats: Craft (structural) +3, Drive +3, Intimidate +9, Profession +4, Repair +2; Brawl, Improved Brawl, Power Attack, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Streetfighting.

Possessions: Knife, Ruger Service-Six (in boot), 6 rounds of ammunition, work boots, workman's jacket, \$460 cash, various gear and personal possessions.

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