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[Muse] "The Man That's Been Erased" Play Summary


Demiurge

November 2011 edited November 2011

Hi,

For those of you that are interested, here's a [Muse](#) actual play report from the session I ran on Nov. 14th at my home in Montreal. There were 3 players, Jonathan (myself), Susie and Charles. Thanks Susie and Charles for making the game such a success! I've been excited to try out this Story Seed for a while.

For this session I tried out a few rules tweaks that I proposed after my last play session described in [this thread](#). They worked out really well as I'll describe after I show you the Story Sheet we came up with and story we ended up telling.

Comments


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Story Sheet

Story Seed: A man wakes up naked in a forest clearing. He doesn't know who he is, and no-one in the nearby town of Gold Creek knows him either. However, he knows who *they* are. Has the man been erased from everyone's memory, including his own?

Character: The man, "John Doe", who's in great physical shape and bald.

- Goal: To find out who he is.
- Relationship: Has a military-style dog tag necklace around his neck, which has the name "Rebecca White" inscribed on it.

Character: Agent Jack Cobbler, an Interpol agent, who is officially on vacation to the town of Gold Creek.

- Goal: To get a hold of John Doe.
- Relationship: Competing with MI5 (the British intelligence service).

Character: Professor Boulanger, a retired professor of Anthropology who is not French (despite her name).

- Goal: To use John Doe to get a great job.
- Relationship: Used to work for Interpol.

Scene: The Gold Creek village square, which has a market and a fountain with a statue.

Scene: A bookstore, "Boulanger's Bookporium," owned and operated by Professor Boulanger.

Scene: A cave in the forest near Gold Creek, which opens into a clearing.

Threat: MI5 agents are arriving into town.

Crisis Question: Will John Doe find out his real identity? [Yes]

Question: Will Professor Boulanger figure out how John Doe was erased? [Yes]

Question: Will Agent Cobbler arrive at the Cliffside Inn? [No]

Question: Will Agent Cobbler be killed? [No]

Question: Will Agent Cobbler's brain be extracted? [No]

Question: Will Professor Boulanger get killed before she can talk? [No]


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The Story

The story begins with John Doe waking up naked in the forest. He has no memory of who he is or what he's like. It's after nightfall, cold, and he finds himself in a forest clearing with a cave nearby. Disoriented, he starts walking around. Soon, he realizes where he is and starts walking toward the nearby town of Gold Creek. He steals some clothes from Granny Jammer's clothesline and goes to the town square.

Agent Cobbler has arrived to Gold Creek by train. He's come here on vacation to pursue a case that his superiors have refused to investigate officially. Agent Cobbler has a very strange photo in his pocket: an old photo of himself with his arm around someone else--except the someone else appears to be invisible. On the back of the photo it's written "Gold Creek, Yukon, 1983." Now in Gold Creek, Agent Cobbler asks the station master, Mr. Foulson, for the nearest hotel. Mr. Foulson calls him a taxi and suggests the only hotel in town: the Cliffside Inn. After entering the taxi, Agent Cobbler soon realizes that something is very wrong when the taxi driver starts driving off into the countryside instead of going into town. Cobbler asks him where he's being taken, and the driver only responds, "I'm taking you for a ride, Agent Cobbler."

Professor Boulanger is making some last-minute purchases in Gold Creek when she runs into John Doe in the town square. She is surprised at the appearance of this stranger in the middle of her small town. She starts talking to him, and she finds the mystery of his predicament to be a fascinating anthropological riddle. Boulanger offers to help John Doe and invites him back to her bookstore.

Finding himself trapped inside the cab, Agent Cobbler tries to kill the taxi driver with his service revolver, but the barrier separating him from the driver turns out to be bulletproof. Suddenly, the car is struck from the side by another vehicle and goes careening into a ditch. Cobbler and the driver struggle to be the first to get out of the totaled car when another person, presumably the driver of the car that hit them, knocks out the driver with a chloroform handkerchief. Cobbler, still shaken up from the crash, is unable to get a look at the interloper. The mysterious man warns Cobbler that the driver was an MI5 agent and that there are more on the way, and then leaves the scene before Cobbler can free himself from the taxi.

Cobbler walks all the way to Gold Creek and gets to the Cliffside Inn just in time for it to explode into flames. The explosion simultaneously destroys the nearby communications tower, which cuts off all landline, mobile phone and police radio traffic in the town. Spooked by the suspicious blast, Cobbler hides behind a nearby escarpment.

It's around this time that five MI5 agents arrive into Gold Creek via the night's last train. They split up and spread out into the area.

Firemen and police rush onto the scene of the Cliffside Inn fire and try to put out the blaze. Many townspeople also arrive to the town square to help. The previous explosion and subsequent commotion also cause Professor Boulanger and John Doe to investigate. As they arrive, another naked man--an apparent twin to John Doe--arrives at the town square. John Doe and his twin stare at each other in shock. An MI5 agent shoots the twin in cold blood, causing him to fall into the fountain. The agent leaves the scene immediately as townspeople approach.

What with the fire and now a dead person in their fountain, the townspeople are outraged. They call for John Doe and Professor Boulanger to be arrested. The two of them run for it. John Doe is too fast and escapes, but Boulanger is caught and thrown into jail.

From his hiding place, Agent Cobbler witnesses the whole commotion with the murder and the arrest. He leaves the scene and on a hunch follows a faint trail into the forest. He arrives at a clearing with a cave at its edge. He sees what appear to be 5 shallow graves in the clearing. Cobbler digs them up. The fresher bodies appear to be more twins of John Doe, with the less fresh ones still matching his height and build. Cobbler decides to enter the cave, which he discovers is a secret underground lab. In the front entrance area he encounters the mysterious person that had saved him from the MI5 taxi driver agent. The man reveals himself to be Xavier, whom Cobbler recognizes as an Interpol agent that was recently fired for insubordination. Xavier shows Cobbler that he also has a strange picture with an invisible person in it, and they agree to help each other. However, before Xavier can be of any help he is shot dead. Cobbler is disarmed and captured. The assailant is none other than Mr. Foulson, who was supposed to be an ordinary station master. Foulson admits to being behind the explosion at the Cliffside Inn, and then tranquilizes Cobbler. Cobbler wakes up in a surgery room, where he is strapped down to an operating table. Nearby, he can see many brains in jars, each connected to machinery. Foulson prepares to extract Cobbler's brain.

Meanwhile, Professor Boulanger is trapped in jail. She uses her old Interpol skills to escape from the jail. Given the general confusion and radio blackout, the police are not able to mount a search for her. Boulanger returns to her bookstore, where she connects to the Interpol database via the Internet using her old security credentials--which

miraculously still work. She manages to uncover Interpol's file on a secret MI5 project called Blank Slate. It involves creating perfect spies by imprinting clones with memories from people that live in the locations where the spies will be operating. It's at this point that Interpol's network security intervenes and cuts her connection to the database. Boulanger deduces that the cave near town would be a likely base of operations for the project, and starts off toward it. However, on her way out she encounters John Doe--except that it's actually one of his naked clones. This clone seems very out of sorts and just collapses on the ground. Boulanger continues on her way.

John Doe, after fleeing the mob and running for a long time, returns to the bookstore via the back door. He is unable to find Professor Boulanger inside. He exits by the front door and finds his clone prone on the ground. He revives the clone, which seems to be in a very suggestible state, and orders it to take him to where it came from. The clone leads him to the forest clearing where John had first regained consciousness and from there to the entrance of the cavern lab complex.

Agent Cobbler, still strapped to Foulson's operating table, attempts to commit suicide by biting into his cyanide tooth. Unfortunately, the attempt fails because Foulson had removed the cyanide while Cobbler was unconscious. A John Doe clone enters the room, and using a command word Foulson instructs the clone to go to sleep. Foulson complains about some recent glitches in the cloning machinery that has resulted in many escaped clones. Foulson begins shaving Cobbler's head in preparation for the surgery. Cobbler yells out an attack command to the clone in the hope that the command will be recognized. It works, and the clone attacks the only armed person in the room: Foulson. The clone quickly overpowers and kills Foulson. Cobbler manages to free himself.

Professor Boulanger finds Agent Cobbler in the operating room. After they ascertain that they're on the same side (Interpol), they agree to help each other and try to find a way to destroy the facility. They begin searching, and find the room where the clones are being manufactured. Many clone vats are empty, including one marked "Master Template." Boulanger and Cobbler manage to fend off an attack by two MI5 agents, and kill both of them--although Cobbler is injured in the gun battle.

Boulanger and Cobbler continue searching, and Boulanger starts mercy killing any clones they run into. Eventually they find a computer terminal with a panel marked, "Data Transfer and Self Destruct." A promising start, but they'd rather not help out MI5 by transferring the data the lab has managed to accumulate. They begin trying to hack the terminal.

John Doe arrives at the entrance to the cave, and in an attempt to blend in, removes his clothing so that he and the clone he's following now look identical. John Doe does keep the dog tags in his hand. He manages to find Agent Cobbler and Professor Boulanger. The latter kills the clone on sight, but stays her hand when John Doe asks her to stop. She realizes that he must be the missing "master template" for the rest of the clones, which might explain why he seems to be the only fully rational one.

Together, the trio hacks into the computer terminal and they discover that John Doe's identity was erased from world records by MI5 in order for them to ensure the project's future success. Agent Cobbler and Xavier's strange, digitally altered, photographs would appear to be hints left by a rogue MI5 agent that had followed the letter of the erasure order but not the spirit. John Doe learns his real name, and learns that Rebecca White (the woman whose name is on his dog tags) was an earlier master template in project Blank Slate and a friend of his. She died as part of the testing, unfortunately.

At this point an MI5 helicopter, full of armed agents, has almost arrived to Gold Creek. Since the secrecy of project Blank Slate has been compromised, the agents are to gather what data they can from the lab, destroy it, and relocate the lab to another Commonwealth country so that the project can continue...

THE END



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Designer's Notes on the Game

- Overall the game went fantastically; it had great pacing and fun revelations.
- One issue we encountered while playing was that we were finding good Questions hard to come up with on the fly... The ones we ended up creating were all rather violence oriented, but I guess they fit the story's life-is-cheap spy theme fairly well so it's not a bad thing. I think that in the Muse rules I may want to emphasise that Subplot Questions can especially be used to focus the action on specific obstacles in the path toward a main character's goal. I think that it's when we started thinking of them that way that we had an easier time coming up with new Questions.

- The Crisis Question's Showdown was really interesting. I owned the No Answer Sheet and had 3 Aces in my hand coming into the Showdown and thought I would win for sure. However, Charles played a pair of Jacks and Susie Supported with a pair of her own, giving them 4 Jacks total. Hence, that was a surprise win for the Yes Answer Sheet!
- Susie left the story on an interesting cliff-hanger, so there's definite potential for a follow-up session.
- The new rules worked out *really* well! I'll be including them in the upcoming Muse update.
- The Showdown changes made the card strategies crystal clear and more *fun* than ever. It also was easy to Support a side during the Showdown even if you didn't own a side to the Question.
- The rule that all story elements had to be checked off *before* players could give a bonus card for a great narration really helped ground the story and give it the detail it needed to take off in a unified direction. In other words, it worked exactly as I had hoped it would.

I look forward to hearing your questions or comments.

Sincerely,

--Jonathan



Paul_T

November 2011

Hey, Jon!

I'm glad to hear it went well: sounds like you had a fun game.

I'll be looking forward to the new version of the rules, let me know when they're up.



Demiurge

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Sure thing, Paul. I've been pretty busy with you-know-who, but I've got a chunk of the new rules already written and will hopefully finish the rest soon-ish.

--Jonathan

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