



SEARCH/DESTROY

A GAME BY JOHN WILSON



"HERE'S YOUR MAN, MARSHAL. THE WARRANT SAID DEAD OR ALIVE."

I DUMP THE CORPSE OF MY QUARRY IN FRONT OF THE MARSHAL'S DESK. THE MARSHAL RECOILS IN SHOCK, BUT RECOVERS QUICKLY. HE REACHES INTO THE DESK AND PULLS OUT A STACK OF CREDITS AS THICK AS THE POWERPACK ON MY BLASTER.

"THERE Y'ARE. 20,000 CREDITS BLOOD MONEY, MUTIE."

I TIP MY HAT TO HIM AS I WALK OUT INTO THE HARSH ACTINIC LIGHT OF THE TWIN SUNS. A WOMAN HIDES HER CHILDREN BEHIND HER AS I WALK PAST. SOMEONE SPITS AT MY SHADOW.

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHO THEY THINK ARE WORSE. THE BOUNTIES, OR THE HUNTERS?

STILL ... IT'S A JOB.

INTRODUCTION

IT IS THE FAR FUTURE. A SERIES OF DEVASTATING WARS HAS FORCED MANKIND TO LEAVE EARTH AND SETTLE THE STARS. HOWEVER, THE RULE OF LAW DOES NOT QUITE REACH AS FAR AS MAN'S GRASP. THE FRONTIER IS OFTEN LAWLESS, AND SETTLERS ARE OFTEN PREY TO VICIOUS THUGS, SCHEMING CRIMINALS AND FIERCE ALIENS.

EARTH, HOWEVER, HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HER CHILDREN. WHERE THE LAW DOES NOT REACH, MONEY BRINGS THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENT. THESE ARE NOT MEN. INSTEAD, THEY ARE THE BASTARD CHILDREN OF EARTH'S WARS - MUTANTS. THEY ROAM THE COLONIES, TRACKING DOWN CRIMINALS WITH A PRICE ON THEIR HEADS AND EXACTING REVENGE.

WHEREVER THEY GO, THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENTS ARE FEARED AND HATED. THEIR MUTATIONS MARK THEM OUT FROM OTHER MEN, AND THEY ARE SHUNNED FOR THEIR PROFESSION. SOME ARE CRUEL, SOME ARE NOBLE. ALL OF THEM WILL KILL YOU FOR A CREDIT.

CHARACTERS

IN SEARCH/DESTROY, THE PLAYERS TAKE THE PART OF MUTANT BOUNTY HUNTERS. THEIR JOB IS SIMPLE: FIND CRIMINALS AND COLLECT THE REWARD.

CHARACTERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING ABILITIES:

TRAITS - THESE ARE WHAT DESCRIBE THE CHARACTER'S ABILITIES. A CHARACTER MAY HAVE ANY NUMBER OF TRAITS PROVIDED THEY HAVE AT LEAST ONE POINT IN EVERY TRAIT. TRAITS SHOULD BE NEITHER TOO NARROW, NOR TOO WIDE. ULTIMATELY, THE REFEREE DECIDES THE EXTENT OF A TRAIT. THE SCORE ASSIGNED TO A TRAIT INDICATES HOW GOOD IT IS.

DRAWBACKS - WHEREAS TRAITS ARE

GENERALLY POSITIVE, DRAWBACKS ARE NEGATIVE. A DRAWBACK MUST HAVE A SCORE, LIKE A TRAIT. THE SCORE INDICATES HOW BADLY THE DRAWBACK AFFECTS THE CHARACTER. AGAIN, THE REFEREE IS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY ON THE EXTENT OF A DRAWBACK.

POWERS - SOME MUTANTS HAVE BEEN GRANTED STRANGE ABILITIES AS A RESULT OF THE CHANGES TO THEIR DNA. PLAYERS ARE ALLOWED TO SELECT A POWER FOR THEIR CHARACTER IF THEY WISH. POWERS ALSO HAVE A SCORE ASSOCIATED WITH THEM, JUST LIKE TRAITS AND DRAWBACKS.

PLAYERS HAVE 15 POINTS WITH WHICH TO CREATE CHARACTERS. THESE POINTS SHOULD BE ASSIGNED TO TRAITS AND POWERS, WITH POWERS COSTING DOUBLE (IE, TRAITS ARE BOUGHT 1 FOR 1, POWERS ARE BOUGHT 1 FOR 2). IF A PLAYER DECIDES TO CREATE A CHARACTER WITH DRAWBACKS, THEY RECEIVE EXTRA POINTS EQUAL TO THE NUMBER OF POINTS THEY HAVE IN DRAWBACKS.

PLAYING THE GAME

WHEN A PLAYER WANTS TO DO ANYTHING IN THE GAME THAT IS NOT AN AUTOMATIC SUCCESS, THEY JUST ROLL DICE. THE NUMBER OF DICE THEY HAVE TO ROLL IS EQUAL TO THE SCORE IN ANY TRAITS THAT ARE APPLICABLE.

THE TYPE OF DICE USED IS IMMATERIAL. AN EVEN SCORE INDICATES A SUCCESS, AN ODD SCORE IS A FAILURE. ONLY SUCCESSES ARE COUNTED.

THE REFEREE MUST SET A DIFFICULTY FOR EACH TASK. THE DIFFICULTY IS THE NUMBER OF SUCCESSES THAT ARE REQUIRED. A DIFFICULTY CAN RANGE FROM 1 (EASY) TO 6 (INSANELY DIFFICULT). ALTERNATIVELY, IF THE PLAYER IS BEING OPPOSED BY ANOTHER CHARACTER, THEY CAN ROLL THE APPLICABLE TRAITS, AND THE CHARACTER WITH THE MOST SUCCESSES WINS. IF A CHARACTER HAS ANY APPLICABLE DRAWBACKS, THESE INCREASE THE DIFFICULTY BY THE SCORE OF THE DRAWBACK,

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS TO USE THIS MECHANIC:

ONE-OFF ROLLS - ROLL AGAINST THE DIFFICULTY. EITHER THE ROLL SUCCEEDS OR IT AILS. USEFUL WHEN THE PLAYERS CAN ONLY HAVE ONE ATTEMPT.

TASK ROLLS - IF A PLAYER IS TRYING TO COMPLETE A LONG TERM TASK, THE PLAYER MAY ACCUMULATE SUCCESSES FROM EACH ROLL. ONCE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SUCCESSES BEATS THE DIFFICULTY, THE TASK HAS BEEN COMPLETED. THE INTERVAL BETWEEN ROLLS IS UP TO THE REFEREE.

COMBAT - IN COMBAT, THE NUMBER OF SUCCESSES SCORED AGAINST AN OPPONENT IS SUBTRACTED FROM THEIR TRAITS. ONCE ONE OF A CHARACTER'S TRAITS REACHES 0, THEY ARE OUT OF THE



COMBAT AND AT THE MERCY OF THEIR OPPONENT.

TOOLS - IF A CHARACTER HAS AN ITEM THAT MAY HELP THEM, THEN THEY CAN HAVE AN EXTRA DICE. SOME TRAITS WILL NEED TOOLS TO BE USED, SO IF THE CHARACTER DOES NOT HAVE THE REQUIRED TOOL, THE NUMBER OF DICE IS REDUCED.

COMBINING TRAITS - IF TWO CHARACTERS HAVE APPLICABLE TRAITS THAT ARE THE SAME VALUE, THEY MAY COMBINE THEM TO GAIN AN EXTRA DICE. FOR EXAMPLE, TWO CHARACTERS WITH A TRAIT AT 3 MAY COMBINE THEIR TRAITS TO ROLL 4 DICE. A THIRD CHARACTER WITH THE SAME TRAIT AT 3 WOULD NOT INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DICE ROLLED TO 5 (3 IS LESS THAN 4), BUT TWO MORE CHARACTERS WOULD!

ZERO TRAITS - THERE ARE SOME SKILLS THAT EVERYONE HAS, BUT WHICH MAY NOT HAVE AN APPLICABLE TRAIT. THESE ARE CALLED ZERO TRAITS. IF A CHARACTER USES A ZERO TRAIT IN A SKILL ROLL, THEY AUTOMATICALLY GET 1 DICE. THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK IS RAISED BY 1. ALTERNATIVELY, OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE CONTEST GET THEIR APPLICABLE TRAITS RAISED BY 1. THE ZERO TRAIT MECHANIC NEVER APPLIES TO POWERS. EITHER YOU HAVE A POWER, OR YOU DO NOT.

SETTING

THE UNIVERSE OF SEARCH/DESTROY IS DIVIDED. FIRST, THERE ARE HUMANITY'S CORE WORLDS. THESE ARE WORLDS THAT HAVE BEEN SETTLED FOR MANY YEARS AND WHERE THE CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN BENT TO MAN'S WHIM. THE CORE WORLDS ARE FULL OF HAPPY, RICH CITIZENS. THEIR CITIES ARE WELL POLICED, AND CRIME, WHILE IT EXISTS, IS QUICKLY DETECTED AND SOON DEALT WITH. PERSISTENT OFFENDERS ARE TREATED WITH SYMPATHY AND CARE, AND BROUGHT BACK INTO SOCIETY.

THE FRONTIER WORLDS ARE WILD AND UNTAMED. MANY OF THEM ARE SPARSELY POPULATED AND HAVE ONLY THE MOST PRIMITIVE AMENITIES. SOME OF THEM VERGE ON ALIEN SPACE. THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON THEM ARE TOUGH AND SELF-RELIANT. MANY OF THEM HAVE COME TO THESE WORLDS SEEKING NEW LIVES.

WHILE THESE WORLDS ARE HARSH, THE CRIMINALS WHO EXPLOIT THESE WORLDS ARE HARSHER STILL. IT IS ALL TOO EASY FOR A GANG TO SET THEMSELVES UP AS THE OVERLORDS OF A SMALL COLONY TOWN AND EXPLOIT THE INHABITANTS. THE LAW COMES FROM THE BARREL OF A GUN, AND THE SIDE WITH THE MOST HIRED GUNS OFTEN WINS.

THIS IS WHERE THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENTS COME IN. THEY ARE DEPUTISED BY THE AUTHORITIES ON EARTH TO GO TO THE COLONIES AND RID THEM OF THE PARASITES WHO FEED OFF THEIR CITIZENS. MANY OF THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENTS ARE LITTLE SHORT OF VIOLENT CRIMINALS THEMSELVES, BUT THEY HAVE THE LAW ON THEIR SIDE.

ALL OF THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENTS ARE MUTANTS. VERY FEW NORMAL MEN WANT THE JOB OF HUNTING DOWN THEIR FELLOWS, BUT THE MUTANTS ARE NOT NORMAL. MOST OF THEM ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF WARFARE AND POLLUTION ON EARTH. BOUNTY HUNTING IS THE ONLY

JOB THAT SOME OF THEM CAN DO - AND IT IS A NECESSARY JOB. EVEN SO, VERY FEW PEOPLE ARE GLAD TO SEE THEM ARRIVE. WHEREVER A SEARCH/DESTROY AGENT GOES, DEATH FOLLOWS IN THEIR SHADOW.

RUNNING THE GAME

SEARCH/DESTROY IS A SPAGHETTI WESTERN IN SPACE. IT IS A GAME WHERE THE HEROES ARE NOT CLEAN CUT, THE MORALS ARE AMBIGUOUS AND VIOLENT DEATH IS ALWAYS IN THE SHADOWS.

THE COLONY WORLDS ARE A STRANGE MIXTURE OF TECHNOLOGIES. ATOMIC STEAM ENGINES WEND BETWEEN TOWNS MADE FROM STEEL SHIPPING CONTAINERS AND CLAPBOARD VERANDAS. STRANGE ALIENS IN WEIRD FINERY MINGLE WITH HUMANS CLOTHED IN HANDMADE DRESSES MADE OF SPACE-AGE FABRIC.

ADVENTURES SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED TO THE SAME CYCLE OF LOCATE BOUNTY - KILL BOUNTY - GET PAID. INSTEAD, THE REFEREE SHOULD PLAY WITH THE MORALITY OF THE SITUATION. ARE THE CHARACTERS GOOD MEN, TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING? OR ARE THEY DEGENERATES WHO ARE ONLY ONE STEP REMOVED FROM THE CRIMINALS THEY HUNT DOWN? IS THEIR TARGET TRULY GUILTY OF THE CRIMES HE IS ACCUSED OF, OR IS HE ANOTHER VICTIM?

THE REFEREE SHOULD BRING HOME THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PLAYERS' ACTIONS. JUST BECAUSE THEY HAVE DEFEATED ONE GANG, DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEY ARE GOING TO BE LEFT ALONE. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE THERE TO CHALLENGE THEM AND PROVE THAT THEY ARE TOUGHER. AN WHAT ABOUT THE INNOCENT BYSTANDERS? HOW ARE THEIR LIVES AFFECTED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE SEARCH/DESTROY AGENTS?

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE LIMITED.

ANYONE INTENDING TO RUN SEARCH/DESTROY IS ADVISED TO MAKE THEMSELVES FAMILIAR WITH THE ORIGINAL SOURCE MATERIAL: THE COMIC STRIP STRONTIUM DOG. ALTHOUGH THE STRIP CURRENTLY APPEARS IN THE SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY COMIC, 2000AD, SEARCH/DESTROY IS BASED ON THE FIRST INCARNATION OF THAT STRIP, AS DRAWN BY CARLOS EZQUERRA. WHILE THESE COMICS ARE OUT OF PRINT, ANTHOLOGIES OF STRONTIUM DOG ARE AVAILABLE.

AT THE VERY LEAST, SIT DOWN AND WATCH SOME SPAGHETTI WESTERNS. ANYTHING BY SEGIO LEONE IS GOOD. I WOULD RECOMMEND "FOR A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS" AND "ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST". THE CLASSIC WESTERN "SHANE" IS ALSO WORTHWHILE DIGGING OUT, AS IS THE 70s TV SHOW "KUNG FU".

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