S P H E A R

THE GREATEST SCI-FI/HORROR/ACTION ROLEPLAYING GAME OF ALL TIME.

"YOU PLAY A GOOD GAME BOY,
BUT THE GAME IS FINISHED,
NOW YOU DIE."

- THE TALL MAN

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Introduction

Characters in this roleplaying game are everyday folks forced to deal with a very unusual situation: invaders from another world (perhaps another dimension altogether) have settled in the town. Their malevolent intent: to steal human corpses and use them as slave labor on the invaders' home world.

Your job is to fight back and save the town…or at least, get revenge on those alien bastards.

Setting Notes

The time is 1979, the place is an unassuming community in small-town America.* Cars are large gas guzzlers from the factories of Detroit. Trucks are especially popular in this rural environment. Dirtbikes, BMX bikes, skateboards and 10-speed bikes are the useful forms of transportation for kids. Shaggy hair and sideburns are still in style, as are terrible fashions such as wide labels, flared pants and leisure suits. Men wear button down shirts and ties or coveralls (depending on their lines of work) and women wear pant suits or knee-length skirts. Phones are big rotary-dialed clunkers, 8-track tapes and drive-in theaters are popular sources of entertainment and the Internet is just a government project that nobody has heard of yet. Popular music consists of anemic rock n' roll or disco. Punk and country are also alternatives, as is classical music and music from the fifties and sixties, big band, blues and jazz. The cities are progressive and modern, the country is less so...with locals casting a quizzical and suspicious eye on any "foreigners" that wander into town.

*Although you're free to set your game in a big city, another country or during another time, it's recommended that you stick with the default setting).

Character Creation

The main characters are residents of the town. Players make create a character from any background and of any age (though you'll want to shy away from exceptionally old or young characters and stay within the 15-65 range).

Each character receives 120 points with which to buy their skills. The rating in each skill starts at the character's age. The caveat is that the character must purchase a minimum number of skill points equal to their age before spending leftover points.

Older* characters cannot have Fight, Move or Sneak scores higher than 50. Younger* characters cannot have Search, Speak or Think scores higher than 50.

For example: Reggie is 27 years old. He must place 27 skill points in as many skills as he possibly can before spending any leftover points. For all intents and purposes, he is considered to be "Younger" and is limited to Search, Speak and Think scores of 50 or less

*The author hesitates to declare exactly what constitutes "Older" or "Younger" as this game was written as part of a contest and the judge is getting on in years…

Dice

All rolls are made by rolling two ten-sided dice and reading the result as a percentile (a roll of 00 equals "100"). If a roll is equal to or less than the desired number, the action is a success. If the roll is over the desired number, the action fails. A roll of "00" is always a catastrophic failure.

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If a character rolls her exact age on the dice, a special effect occurs: not only does the roll succeed (even if it would normally fail), but the player may introduce a new Tie into the game or restore a Tie that had previously been lost (the individual in question is discovered alive and relatively unharmed). Note that Ties that have obviously met their ends cannot be restored in this manner. See Community Ties, featured later in the game).

Skills

There are six Basic Skills that characters may use to accomplish tasks (each skill is a composed of a single verb that describes the action in question). There are three other "levels" of skills that are used when the character's motives for action change.

Fight	(using fists, clubs. knives, firearms)
Move	(running, driving, jumping, climbing, swimming)
Sneak	(hiding, stealth, picking locks, and stealing things)
Search	(vision, hearing, sense of smell, intuition)
Speak	(persuasion, intimidation, seduction, deceit)
Think	(repair things, know about a subject, remain calm)

Survival Skills are used to avoid personal injury or misfortune. A Survival Skill is rolled when the character faces danger.

Fight	(fend of an attacker)
Move	(escape an attacker in an open environment)
Sneak	(hide from an attacker in a closed environment)
Search	(sense danger before it happens)
Speak	(talk your way out of a jam)
Think	(solve a problem that you face)

Heroic Skills are used to help other people and rescue them from harm. A Heroic Skill is used to safeguard one of the character's Ties or another character in danger.

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Fight   (save someone from an attacker)
Move   (reach someone in time)
Sneak   (hide someone from danger)
Search   (warn someone of danger)
Speak   (calm someone down)
Think   (provide a solution to someone facing danger)

Selfish Skills are used to benefit the player's character through immoral, illegal or unethical actions. They're used whenever characters performs actions that only benefits themselves and that isn't meant to avoid danger.

Fight   (physically assault someone weaker than you)
Move   (abandon another person in need)
Sneak   (steal something or break into a car or building)
Search   (snoop around where you don't belong)
Speak   (influence others to do what you want)
Think   (plan a scheme to further your goals)

Note that the skill scores are the same in each level. So if I have a Fight score of 25, it's 25 no matter what my motivation.

Equipment

Every player in the game starts with an amount of "play money" equal to $10 x their character's Age. As part of character creation, the group should go on a "shopping run" (either via the internet, magazine or actual window shopping). This is what the character personally owns. Note that in 1979, a dollar went a lot farther than it does today in 2005. To figure out approximate costs for 1979, multiply the current price by .35.

Any unused money is lost when play begins (characters are assumed to have enough cash on hand to buy a soda, fill up a 5 gallon tank with unleaded gas and see a movie at the local drive-in – around $10).

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Community Ties

Every character has up to ten Ties which they can use during the game to gain bonuses to their die rolls. Community Ties represent the inhabitants of the town where the characters reside.

Ties can be:
Personal Relationships: Family and friends, significant others
Professional Relationships: Co-workers, customers, clients, students
Other Relationships: Casual acquaintances, neighbors, strangers

Community Ties do not have skills of their own and must rely on the die rolls made by the players' characters. They may offer assistance to the player characters if the SPHEAR-MASTER deems it appropriate and they'll have equipment and capabilities appropriate to that kind of person (a teacher has keys to the school, a drifter has weed, the local sheriff has a shotgun).

Phase 1

The game starts in the town (or on its outskirts) with an opening scene that introduces each players' character. Every character must make a Selfish Skill roll before the invaders are discovered (either physically or through strange phenomena or disappearances). Keep track! Once all the characters have made a Selfish roll, all hell breaks lose…

Strange Disappearances

The SPHEAR-MASTER should write down each of the Community Ties listed on all the character sheets (along with a description of each if possible) and then number each, starting at 99 and counting backward all the way to 01 (although it's unlikely that the numbers will get any lower than forty or fifty).

The players' characters may be included in the list of Community Ties (for example: two characters might be brother and sister. Each character would list the other as a Personal Tie. Another example might be a character that picked up another character who was hitch-hiking, making them Other Ties to one another).

Players may introduce any of their characters' Ties into the game at any time (provided it makes dramatic sense). If a character has assistance from one of his Ties, the character may re-roll one die per roll (either the "tens" or "ones") in order to get a better result.

The downside…is that whenever the dice are rolled, the Tie belonging to that number is targeted by the invaders. If the characters are not there to intervene, that Tie is removed from play. If the Tie was killed, it's crossed off the character's list and the SPHEAR-MASTER's record sheet and replaced by the character's who possessed that Tie.

If the Tie's fate is ambiguous then cross its name off the character's sheet and put a checkmark next to its name on the SPHEAR-MASTER's sheet.. If a player ever rolls and the number which comes up belongs to another character then that's when the invaders strike at that character.

Ties may also be crossed off the list if a character fails to save that person in a crisis situation. If a Tie is crossed-off the character's list, the character who possessed that Tie gains +5 to any one skill.

Opposed Rolls

An Opposed Roll occurs whenever two opponents square off against one another (either in a fight, a chase or some other contest). Both participants roll the dice and the one that rolls higher without going over the relevant skill wins the contest.

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If both of the rolls go over or they both win with the same die roll, the roll is repeated after "time passes" in the game world.

Example: Jody is pursued by a spheroid and runs into a cramped storage room to hide from the shiny orb of death. The spheroid's Search skill is 35. Jody's Hide skill is a mere 19. Both roll the dice and the results come up as a 36 for the spheroid and a 02 for Jody. Jody roll is lower but the spheroid's roll went over so Jody wins the contest and manages to evade discovery (for now). If the spheroid's roll was 35 or lower, Jody's hiding place would be found out.

Injury & Death

Characters cannot die until Phase II of the game. Until then, injuries are superficial or dramatic (if the SPHEAR-MASTER says that you have a broken leg then that could limit your choice of actions). If they're wounded, incapacitated or captured (there's always chance of escape), the player keeps fighting (sneaking, moving, whatever)…each roll has a chance of reducing the town's population.

It is possible to die during Phase II (see below) if you fail a skill roll and the nearest character within range fails to make a successful Heroic skill roll.

A Heroic Skill roll must be made to prevent a character's Tie from being eliminated (and only if the characters are there to save the Tie). The player must make a Survival Skill roll to prevent his character from being harmed.

Phase II

Phase II occurs when there are no Ties left except for the players' characters. At the point, the characters "bring it home" to the invaders (by finding a way onboard their ship, or gaining entry to the invaders' homeworld.

In Phase II, the characters' goal is to fight through the invaders on their homeworld and eventually reach the evil being masterminding the entire plot. If there are surviving townspeople on the homeworld, it's possible that the characters may find them. During Phase II, the rules for Community Ties are not used.

SPHEAR—MASTER SECTION (Spoilers!)

This game was obviously inspired by the Phantasm films by Don Coscerelli. First, see them…at least the first one. Yes, it's weird. Don't worry, they get weirder. You haven't truly lived until you've witnessed Reggie Bannister fending off killer dwarves in a balls-out chainsaw duel to the death.

Other films in this vein include the Lost Boys, 'Salem's Lot and Peter Jackson's first film, Bad Taste.

The Mastermind

The Mastermind is the chief villain. No matter the origin of the invasion, the Mastermind is the lynchpin that holds it all together. Note that while the Mastermind can be discovered or injured during Phase I, only his lackeys may be physically killed. When Phase II kicks into high gear, that's when the Mastermind can be targeted for destruction.

Masterminds typically have one goal: conquer the Earth. In Phantasm, the Mastermind is an alien called The Tall Man (played to great effect by the awesomely-named Angus Scrimm). He's masquerading as an undertaker in Our Heroes' Small Town USA and is using the mortuary as a base of operations. His plan is weirdly devious and simple: steal the bodies of the dead (and make some more if necessary), compress them to ½ size, reanimate them and ship them via dimensional portal to a high-gravity planet where they can be used for slave labor. I know, it's insane.

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Your Mastermind doesn't have to be the Tall Man but he/she/it should share the following characteristics:

1) The Mastermind must always appear human-like, albeit with strange habits or physical traits. A common feature is that the Mastermind has a true, alien or hideous form and the human-like appearance is a disguise of some kind.

2) The Mastermind must have at least three "giveaways" to clue in its otherworldly nature. These can be superhuman abilities, weird powers, a quirk or some concealed trait that marks him/her/it as not human.

3) The Mastermind must have some kind of plan involving the inhabitants of the town (food, labor, whatever).

4) The Mastermind must have an army of servants of varying degrees of danger (from popcorn-style cannon fodder to malevolent henchmen).

5) The Mastermind must have a base of operations…the bigger and scarier, the better.

The Mastermind should be built with between 200 and 300 skill points. When creating the Mastermind, ask yourself the following questions:

1) How does the Mastermind fight? Does it use weapons?
2) Is the Mastermind adept at stealth? How fast does it move?
3) What sense does the Mastermind rely upon?
4) Is the Mastermind an intelligent creature or just "king" of the monsters by virtue of its superior size and strength?
5) Does the Mastermind speak our language? Does it speak at all?
6) What special abilities does the Mastermind use?
7) What are the Mastermind's weaknesses, if any?

Here are two example Masterminds. The Tall Man and the Pale Lady.

The Tall Man (210 points)
Alien Undertaker who seeks to enhance his off-world mining operating by using reanimated bodies that have been compressed down to ½ their original size.

Giveaways	Very tall, strength of four men, greenish blood
Weaknesses	Dismemberment, fire
Headquarters	The Mortuary
Henchmen	Killer dwarves, flying spheres ("spheroids"), weird spider things

Fight	60	Exceptional strength.
Move	20	The Tall Man isn't too fast.
Sneak	20	He's not a sneaky creature.
Search	30	Perceptive, but relies on his lackeys.
Speak	20	He's a man of few (but humorous) words.
Think	60	The Tall Man is a Mastermind, after all.

The Pale Lady (250 points)
Vampire Queen who seeks to create an army of the undead to do her bidding as she sees fit.

Giveaways	Bad breath, no reflection, only seen at night
Weaknesses	Sunlight, garlic and holy water
Headquarters	The Old Potter House (now off the market)
Henchmen:	Wolves, human thralls, bats, undead henchmen

Fight	45	She's very fast, strong and has sharp fangs.
Move	45	She can turn into a bat!
Sneak	20	The Pale Lady isn't especially stealthy.
Search	45	Excellent night vision and hearing.
Speak	60	The Pale Lady is a mistress of seduction.
Think	35	The Pale Lady is clever and cunning.

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The Sequel Rule

Although the Mastermind can be defeated, this defeat is never permanent. The Mastermind will rise again, even if thoroughly beaten (if only to be in the sequel). Roll a d10 when creating the Mastermind and divide by 2. Keep this number secret! This is the amount of times that the Mastermind rises again from anything except utter destruction.

Henchmen

Henchmen are the lower echelon servants of the Mastermind. Some are powerful beings in their own right, others are minor obstacles to slow down the characters until Phase II occurs. Henchmen are usually based around one or two skills and have between 75 and 150 points. Henchmen should have some kind of weakness or disadvantage, even if it's just the standard "vulnerable to lead buckshot poisoning."

Spheroids (150 points)
Flying steel balls that hone in on warm-blooded targets and attack their craniums with a variety of buzzsaws, drills, blades and other nasty edged weapons. Very dangerous in large numbers.

Fight	45	Dangerous but small, armed with variety of drills, blades and other weapons
Move	55	Fast, small fliers
Sneak	10	They make a high pitched buzzing sound
Search	30	Perceptive little buggers with heat sense
Speak	0	Cannot speak or communicate
Think	10	Programmed to do simple, murderous tasks

Killer Dwarves (130 points)
Awkward and small creatures with powerful limbs, the dwarves are about the size of children. They wear dark cowled robes that conceal their hideous faces, barely recognizable as residents of the town.

Fight	35	Clumsy but strong
Move	15	Clumsy and slow due to short legs
Sneak	35	Quiet as the grave
Search	20	Fair ability to locate victims, more useful for menial tasks
Speak	10	Not capable of speech but are able to communicate with the Tall Man
Think	15	Sentient but not too intelligent

Spider Things (75 points)
The Spider Things are weird little alien bugs that creep me the hell out. Other than that, they're much less dangerous than the spheroids or killer dwarves.

Fight	15	Small and weak but poisonous
Move	25	Excellent at climbing up walls
Sneak	25	Very quiet and small
Search	10	Rudimentary senses
Speak	0	They're bugs. That's it.
Think	0	Not capable of creative thought

Note that a skill score of 0 means that the henchman is not capable of perform those actions.

Final Words

As the Tall Man is fond of saying, "Boooooooyyyy!!!" I hope you like SPHEAR. At least you made it to the end of this PDF. Nice! - Jared