

Chapter 17 Show Notes

SUMMARY

The Web has just one more warehouse to take out, but this is the big one. It holds enough explosives to turn half of the docks into a smoking crater, and somehow the crew have to bypass a small army of security guards and take the powder out without killing half the city. But never fear; the Spider has a cunning plan...

Links

Transcript:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/12Ahwo8ObPKXc9QN6_v5q2MrSeel2H6ZudUbGC1LdAtw/edit?usp=sharing

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Blades in the Dark: <https://www.evilhat.com/home/blades-in-the-dark/>

Alone in the Dark:

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/282013/Alone-in-the-Dark-Solo-Rules-for-Blades-in-the-Dark>

Solo Oracles:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J_GVM_dVe3YMYAQaP-KlqOC91vFk56y9HOPKMybY_sk/edit?usp=sharing

Faction clocks:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KWuAPc4iv7hEIXLepV0XTqVP9IRAdNsdqwD1wSDyAys/edit?usp=sharing>

Ironsworn: Starforged: <https://www.ironswornrpg.com/product-ironsworn-starforged>

Mechanics

INTRO SCENE: Campaign Elements Oracle

- Faction: The authorities

SIMPLE Q: Bluecoats? (50/50) Yes

SIMPLE Q: Known NPC? (50/50) No

PROGRESS CLOCK: Destroy the Unseen's supply lines 12/20

- The Shipping Company 4/4
- The Percheron 4/4
- Warehouse 1 4/4
- Warehouse 2 0/8

FLASHBACK: GATHER INFORMATION: Spider Consort to find access points into the Underpipes, Push, Crater Assists, Risky, Standard: 4d: 2,3,4,4 (Success with Consequence)

CONSEQUENCE: Worse Position: the entrance is guarded

DESCRIPTOR/ FOCUS: Immersed Machine: half-converted cultist

ACTION ROLL: Crater Skirmish, Desperate, Limited: 3d: 5,5,6 Success, 1XP

PROGRESS CLOCK: Neutralise Warehouse 2: 1/8

GROUP ACTION ROLL: Prowl, led by Sallow to infiltrate the Underpipes undetected, Risky, Limited: Critical Success (2 progress)

- Sallow: 2d: 6,1
- Trace: 3d: 2,3,3: 1 stress for Sallow
- Spider: 1d: 6
- Crater: 1d: 3: 1 stress for Sallow

PROGRESS CLOCK: Neutralise Warehouse 2: 3/8

SIMPLE Q: Who do they avoid? Cultists? No

SIMPLE Q: Known group? Yes

1-2 Piperunners: Yes

3-4 HydroClan

5-6 Topsiders

FRINGE GROUP: Raiders

FACTION PROJECT: Consolidate control of valuable commodity

ACTION ROLL: Trace Hunt, to find a route to the warehouse, Sallow Assists, Risky, Standard: 2,5,1 (Success with Consequence)

PROGRESS CLOCK: Neutralise Warehouse 2: 5/8

CONSEQUENCE: Things take Longer

COMPLEX Q: Why? 17, 28: Civilized Enclosure

SIMPLE Q: Machine Cultists? Yes

DERELICT SETTLEMENT ORACLE: 62: Operations: computer core, emergency lighting

ACTION ROLL: Spider Study, to identify appropriate piping, Sallow Assist, Risky, Limited: 3d: 4,3,2: (Success with Consequence)

PROGRESS CLOCK: Neutralise Warehouse 2: 6/8

CONSEQUENCE: Mark Clock Segment

DANGER CLOCK: Detected by Cultist patrols: 2/4

ACTION ROLL: Sallow Tinker, to reroute water pipes, Crater Assist, Desperate, Standard: 3d: 3,3,6: Success. 1XP.

PROGRESS CLOCK: Neutralise Warehouse 2: 8/8: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

CHAPTER 17 TO POINT THE TEMPEST

TEASER

Sergeant Jablonski of the Kyras Bluecoats stands behind his podium and casts his steely gaze over the men and women of Quay Street Precinct. They look anxious, rattled, even scared, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out why. Time to light a fire.

"We know the streets have descended into all-out war, and that we have been hit, and hard. But I'm going to remind you of something you'd do well to remember. Of all the gangs in this city we Bluecoats are known by any that cross us as the roughest, the meanest, the nastiest bunch o' bastards out there. That's the price of keeping order in a city like Kyras. We do what it takes.

It don't matter what's going on out there. Today's a day like any other. We hit the streets, and we do our jobs. And today the job is all about these scumbags."

He turns to the board behind him and indicates the series of portrait sketches behind him.

"Alphonse Crabtree, aka Crater. Madeline Komara, aka Trace. Mordecai Kincaith, they call him Sallow. Tatiana Kamidev, Tatters. Valerian Shaw. And this individual, known only as the Spider. Taking down this crew, who call themselves the Web, is your highest priority. These are the criminal scum behind every damn thing going wrong out there. And it's the Blues what's going to put a stop to them, right?"

A ragged cheer goes up from the officers in the briefing room. Jablonski gives his officers a savage grin. "And remember; Let's do it to them before they do it to us!"

INTRO MUSIC/ VOICEOVER

Hello and welcome to The Lone Adventurer, an actual play solo RPG podcast with me, Carl White. I will be your narrator, your Game Master and your guide as we follow our heroes on their journey into the unknown. For this game I will be using the Blades in the Dark ruleset, as well as a variety of other systems, tools and tables, as they take my fancy.

A word of warning; the following scenes may contain mature themes and disturbing imagery. Listener discretion is advised.

The adventure continues.

RECAP

Last time, on the Lone Adventurer, the Web successfully infiltrated an Unseen supply depot and blew it sky high. Their war on the criminal shapeshifters' Infernal Powder supply network seems to be going well. But there's one last target on the Spider's hit list, and this is the big one. A depot holding hundreds of barrels of the deadly explosive powder, with the power to

turn the Docks crater into one huge, smoking crater. All the Web need to do now is take the site out without becoming mass-murderers in the process.

SCENE

“Focus on the target, people, and follow me.” The Spider leads her team back down the tower’s spiral stone staircase, talking as she goes. “We have a warehouse to take down, in case you’d forgotten. I said this job would need a delicate touch, and that is exactly what we are going to employ.”

If there’s one thing the Spider does well, it’s prepare. And she’s prepared now, thanks to a visit made several days ago. Her contact in the Kyras Municipal Services office had been quite clear; despite the not inconsiderable bribe, this was the last time they’d be doing business. The Spider and her crew were just too hot; half the city seemed to want their heads. In truth, they had probably given the Spider what she asked for to get rid of her as quickly as possible. Either that or Crater looming silently at the back of the room had had the desired effect.

But it had been a trade worth making. Access points into the city’s Underpipes, though numerous, are closely guarded secrets. But at least as far as the Docks were concerned, the Spider had been able to secure a map of all those entrances.

“I hope it will come as no surprise to you that I did not choose this vantage point at random” she says, coming to a heavy steel door in the tower’s basement, chained and padlocked shut. “Sallow, if you would do the honours?”

As Sallow deftly works at the lock the Spider continues; “You’re absolutely right, Crater; a frontal assault on that warehouse is suicide. And good as we are, with that level of security, even we are unlikely to be able to sneak in. No, this calls for something different.” Sallow pops the lock and the door is dragged open on rusty, protesting hinges. The Spider gestures at the steel steps, descending into darkness. “We are going below. Sallow, some light if you would be so kind. Crater, lead on.”

“Are you sure about this, Spider?” Trace scowls as they descend. “You’ve not visited the Underpipes before, have you? This place is lethal, and it’s a tangled maze on top of that. And even if we do locate the warehouse, and get inside, what then? I don’t imagine for a minute that the warehouse is any less well guarded on the inside than the out. And if by some miracle we deal with that issue, we still face the same problem: what do we do with 200 barrels of high explosives?”

The Spider smiles, though no-one sees it in the darkness. “Have faith, Trace. He who fails to plan is planning to fail, but when have you ever known me not to plan? Fear not, all will become clear.”

They come at last to the bottom of the stairs, finding themselves in a cramped, domed corridor lined with pipes and cables. Water drips from the ceiling. The air is close and stifling down here, and Crater in particular finds he has to duck repeatedly to avoid banging his

head. "You take us to the nicest places, Spider" he grumbles, holding up his lantern and peering into the gloom ahead. "Where do we go from here?"

An enormous masked figure, clad in black leather, and with glowing green eye lenses, steps out from the shadows, perhaps 20 feet ahead of them. Cables and mechanical parts seem to be fused into his flesh, and he grips a huge axe in one hand. Where the blade should be, green energy crackles. "Infiltrators!" he cries. "You will go no-where from here, save in your component parts!" You will all be disassembled and used for spares! Your fluids shall serve the Great Machine!"

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I confess I was completely stumped at the end of the last session. It felt like I'd set myself and my crew an impossible problem to solve, and I had no idea what they or I could do to overcome it. The challenge was a PC-facing one: what were my characters going to do to neutralise the powder. As such, it didn't seem right to consult the oracle, which I tend to reserve for GM decisions only.

And so I did what I recommend anyone else do in similar circumstances: when faced with a mental brick wall that time and perseverance won't get you past, cheat.

One of the dangers of creating a solo narrative is the risk of getting locked into a pattern of thinking. In a group game we have the benefit of other perspectives to help us circumvent challenges in creative ways, but in a solo game it's just you. It's great that in a game like this your only limit is your imagination, but there is a downside; your limit may be your imagination.

And so, finding myself stuck, I cheated and reached out to my good friend Stefan. I posed the problem to him, and, unencumbered by my accumulated self-imposed constraints, he instantly came back with a whole range of ways the Web might tackle this neutralisation mission. So thank you Stefan, your help was invaluable, and I hope you are enjoying the way your suggestions are playing out.

I'd originally planned this entire supply chain takedown mission as a 16 segment clock, split evenly between investigating the Shipping Company, disabling the Percheron, and then taking down first warehouse 1, and then warehouse 2.

But now we come to it, I think warehouse 2 warrants more than a 4 segment clock. As previously mentioned, they have to neutralise a warehouse filled with enough explosives to destroy half a city district, whilst keeping collateral damage to a minimum. And, perhaps as a result of the Web's earlier work this night, the place is absolutely crawling with guards. This is a tough ask, almost a full mission by itself. So I've bumped this up to an 8 segment clock, which both more fairly represents the challenge, and also gives me some narrative space to describe the approach.

With that said, let's do a quick recap of the mechanics behind the story so far.

First off, that intro scene. I enjoyed writing the scene between Abbot Cadillius and the Lord Inquisitor last week, so I thought I'd do something similar this week. To completely randomise the topic I turned to my Campaign Elements oracle and rolled a faction, which turned out to be the authorities, and allowed me to pop in an easter egg for the oldies in the audience. I did consider using Sergeant Esterhous, and his catchphrase "Let's be careful out there", but Jablonski seemed to fit the mood better.

After that I kicked things off for my crew with a flashback gather information roll for Spider, assisted by Crater, intended to identify access points into the Underpipes. That was a success with a consequence, the consequence being that the entrance turned out to be defended. A couple of descriptive oracle rolls gave me the nature of that defence. That Gather Info roll doesn't advance my mission clock, but it does allow subsequent action rolls to get the clock ticking. Let's see how that works out.

SCENE

The huge machine cultist tosses the axe from hand to hand, spinning it skillfully around his head in a blur of green arcanicity. With a mildly frustrated grunt Crater draws his pistol and shoots the cultist clean through his left eye lens. In these narrow confines the pistol report near-deafens them all. As the giant collapses behind him he turns back to the Spider and says "Well? D'you know where we're going, or are we going to stand around here all day?"

Trace looks ready to spring at the big man. "You cretin!" she hisses, the echoes of the gunshot still rolling down the passageways. "These are the Underpipes! You make a noise like that down here and you'll have Fove knows what down on our heads in a heartbeat! Are you trying to get us all killed?"

Crater, reloading his pistol, shrugs. "Let 'em come. Don't seem so tough to me."

The Spider steps in before things go sideways. "Trace is right, we've got a job to do and we don't need unwanted attention. Sallow, take point. Hand signals only."

The crew move out, slipping silently through the forking twisting tunnels of the Underpipes. They move with certainty and precision, Sallow bringing the team to a halt on more than one occasion when movement is detected up ahead. At one point he raises a fist and the team freeze, melting into the shadows as a group of perhaps 14 heavily armed figures pass them by, all wearing black oilskins and riveted, hexagonal helmets of metal and glass. They catch a snippet of the group's conversation as they pass, something about seizing back control of something important, and then they're gone.

Nobody moves until at last Sallow gestures them on. "Piperunners?" Crater grunts. "I'd heard the Cult had done all of them in." All three of the others signal to him furiously to shut up, and their journey continues in silence.

At last Sallow brings them to a halt and confers in whispers with Trace and the Spider. "I've been trying to guide us with this," he says, tapping a brass compass. "But something's

making it play up. Look.” The tiny dial seems to be swinging randomly one way and then the other.

“Let me see that map of entrances again Spider,” Trace says. “By my reckoning we’ve come in sort of a loop this way, which should put us roughly under the meat packing district. We need to head down there, perhaps another few hundred yards at most, assuming we can find a tunnel that will lead us in a straight line for a change.”

Crater grunts. “So it’s all right for you lot to stand around and have a natter, but when I say anything...”

The others, in unison, hiss “Shut up!”

They set off once more, this time with Sallow and Trace up front, but it doesn’t take long before they’re signalled to a halt once more. Trace beckons Crater and the Spider to join them, and points.

“Not sure what we’re seeing,” she whispers, “but whatever it is we’re going to have to go back, and around.”

Ahead of them the tunnel opens up to form a broad chamber, lit by lamps giving off a dull red glow. Elaborate pillars, twenty feet tall and covered in tubing, gauges and dials rise from the chamber floor. Clambering over these pillars multi-limbed automata can be seen, making continual tweaks and adjustments to these strange mechanisms. The metal constructs are not alone. Striding between the pillars, swinging censers and chanting prayers to their alien machine god, are a score or more cultists.

Even Crater grudgingly accepts Trace’s advice, but not without complaint. “I’m getting sick of these bloody tunnels,” he grumbles, then “Ow!” as he bangs his head on a low hanging pipe. “Really bloody sick!”

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I had a couple of options following the introduction of my big bad cultist. On the one hand I could have created a small clock and turned the encounter into an extended combat scene. But two things steered me away from that course and towards resolving the whole battle in a single skirmish roll.. Firstly, this seemed a pretty inconsequential battle, and one that didn’t really move the story forward in any significant way. It seemed more of a distraction than something really worth diving into. And secondly, by setting up a big bad guy and then easily dispatching him, it gave me the opportunity to steal the classic Indiana Jones “shoot the swordman” gag. Which obviously, I couldn’t resist.

To ensure there were some stakes and peril involved, I had Crater make his roll against a Desperate position. There was still the potential for things to go very badly wrong. But the dice gods were smiling, and Crater scored a straight success. That moved my Mission Clock up one tick, and on they went.

Next I had Sallow lead a group Prowl roll to move through the tunnels without being detected. That turned out to be a critical success, so I allowed my team to do some eavesdropping en route, getting the specifics from a number of Starforged faction oracles, including the Fringe group table, and the Faction project table.

Then I had Trace make a hunt roll to find a route to their target, assisted by Sallow, and she got a success with a consequence, which turned out to be Things take Longer. The obvious question was why? And so I asked, and was told Civilised Enclosure. Some sort of settlement or building perhaps? Starforged has got some great oracles to answer questions like these; I turned to the Derelict Settlement oracle, and discovered I was looking at a computer core, lit by emergency lighting. Some sort of weird node of the Great Machine.

This location doesn't have much impact in mechanical terms; my crew can just back away and take another route, but it does add an interesting bit of colour. As does that appearance of the Piperunners. I'm with Crater on this one; I too thought that their war with the Machine Cult had wiped them all out, but obviously there are survivors. Survivors with a plan in mind. When I rolled on the faction project table to find out what they were talking about, the oracle's response was "Consolidate control of a valuable commodity". Well, I can only think of one valuable commodity that the Piperunners are interested in. The same one that everyone else is busy fighting over. It would seem the Piperunners have not given up in their bid to take control of the Infernal Powder stockpile.

You know, now I think about it, there's every possibility that what we just saw was a Piperunner suicide squad, setting off on a mission to do what Jukti and her direct assault failed to do: to blow the Great Machine, and the whole damned city, to smithereens. Who can say? It's just another example of other events playing out in parallel to our main story thread, like the freezing of the Dominar's palace, or the trials of Abbot Cadilius, or the morning briefing over at Quay Street precinct. Events that may, at some future point, intersect with our tale, but may just as easily never feature again, serving only as colour, world building or context.

But enough sidetracks. Let's get back to the main event.

SCENE

It is more by trial, error and good fortune than any real sense of direction, but at long last the crew reach their destination, though it looks much like any other part of these interminable tunnels. The Spider smiles. "Up there, directly above our heads, is a warehouse full of enough explosives to level the Docks." She points up; high above them a tangle of thick pipes can just be made out, and leading up to them, a set of steel rungs.

Trace puts her hands on her hips. "Like I said, the way I see it, we still have the same problem. You said you had a plan, Spider. Better be a good one."

"Good enough, I think," The Spider replies, kneeling and spreading the map out on the black metal floor grating. "You see these blue lines on the map? The ones that run directly beneath this entrance? Those are the prime water main pipes that feed the entire Docks district." She points up again, angling her light to reveal a series of huge pipes far overhead, buried beneath the tangle of smaller conduits and branching pipework.

The Underpipes provide power, drainage, sanitation and plumbing for the entire city. And while there are no proper maps of the deep tunnels, or detailed schematics of the vast complex of interdependent systems that feed those services, the core infrastructure, particularly that closest to the surface, is mapped by the city's Municipal Services office. A fact which proved invaluable when the Spider studied the map for routes into the warehouse, and discovered a far more effective alternative.

Trace whistles through her teeth as she puts it together. "We're not going up into that warehouse, are we?"

The Spider's smile broadens into a grin. "I wouldn't recommend it unless you're a very strong swimmer. No, our work is going to be done down here. Sallow? You brought the tools I asked for? Now here's what I need you to do..."

The next hours are gruelling ones, hours of tracing and mapping correct routes, hoisting equipment, cutting, welding and rerouting. Although Sallow, held aloft in a custom rig by Crater, does the lion's share of the work, they all have a part to play, not least Trace, who as lookout saves them all from certain death when she spots an approaching patrol of cultists. They only barely avoid detection. By the time they are finished they are filthy, covered in grease and grime, and they are exhausted to boot. But despite the fatigue there is a growing sense of anticipation.

"All done Sallow? No final checks you want to run?" the Spider asks, though she's checked and rechecked the work herself umpteen times. "Well then," she says when the gangly saboteur shakes his head. "Would you do the honours?"

Grinning from ear to ear Sallow grips the long iron lever and pulls with all his might. It doesn't budge. Crater lends a hand, and together they pull the lever back. There's an alarming rumble from overhead, water squirting from between hastily assembled joints, and the metal grating beneath their feet begins to vibrate. The force of millions of gallons of highly

pressurised water is redirected, away from the mains pipes, and is instead forced upwards, into a score of connectors that have been hastily plumbed into to warehouse's existing water pipes, as well as its sewage, drainage, power and ventilation conduits.

The result is predictably explosive. Water roars into the warehouse from countless outlets with the force of a twenty gun salute. The multiple fountains burst out and upward, smashing through the warehouse roof in multiple places, and flooding the entire building in moments. Those few barrels that are not smashed to pieces by force of the eruptions are carried along on a raging tide of water, smashed apart as they slam into walls or out into the streets. The occupants of the building fare little better, by turns drowned or crushed in the maelstrom. In less than a minute the entire warehouse has collapsed, most of its occupants have been killed, and its deadly cargo has been utterly dispersed and destroyed.

Despite the incredible odds stacked against them, the Web has triumphed.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Well frankly that all went considerably more smoothly than anticipated. I'd expected things careening wildly off the rails at some point, but my team came good, and they've dealt their enemy a powerful blow. It remains to be seen if any of the Unseen we've met so far, Katari, Dex or Wade, were in the warehouse when it flooded, but the real win here is the destruction of so much of the explosive powder. I have to assume that's going to put a big dent in the assault plans on the League of Free States.

But before I get too carried away speculating about what might be, let's take a moment to play back what was.

We already knew that Trace had succeeded in finding a route to the warehouse from her Hunt roll, so next up was a Study roll from the Spider to identify the appropriate pipes, which she succeeded at with a consequence. The consequence was mark a clock segment, and as I had no appropriate danger clocks running to mark off, I created a new one: Detected by Cultist patrols. I gave it 4 segments, and marked off two, and described that in the fiction as Trace just about warning them in time before the patrol strolled past.

We were on 6 out of 8 segments marked on the mission clock, so this next roll had the potential to close out the mission. Sallow made a Tinker roll to reroute the water pipes, Crater assisted, and I set the position to desperate as the stakes and risks were so high. I rolled... and got a straight success. Mission accomplished. Warehouse taken out. Powder destroyed.

Once again, thank you to Stefan for suggesting this mission approach, I don't think it would ever have occurred to me to descend into the Underpipes and flood the warehouse from below. A cracking idea, and one I thoroughly enjoyed playing out.

So that leaves us at the end of this latest mission. Next time it will be time to run through downtime, take stock, and visit the various faction clocks to see what else has been going on in the city while the Web have been so hard at work.

I hope you'll join me.

OUTRO MUSIC

You have been listening to the Lone Adventurer, a solo RPG podcast, played, written and performed by me, Carl White.

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You can find shownotes for this episode and all the others at the loneadventurer.podbean.com, where I include any links mentioned in the episode, as well as mechanics information. I also include a link to a full episode transcript. The story will continue in the next episode of the Lone Adventurer.

Thank you for listening.