AGENTS OF OBLIVION

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SPECIAL THANKS
Erica Balsley & Ed Wetterman who helped me piece together fragments of files thought lost forever. -RSP

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FOR THE AGENT

FOR THE DIRECTOR

OBLIVION CALLING

So here's the thing: I'm a pulp writer. As far as I'm concerned, our characters should be running through burning alien fortresses, guns blazing, pausing only to say something heartbreaking and witty and true, and then more things blow up. This is why Savage Worlds tends to be my gaming system of choice.

On the other hand, there are roleplayers who want to play slow, emotional, character-y games. Games where a simple stroll down the rain-soaked streets of Your Imaginary City of Choice is packed with as much RPG goodness as my Evil Zeppelin Duel.

The spy genre is particularly challenging. Play a Western, and we all usually agree on what cowboy sounds like. Play a WW II game, and we all know what cable show we're going to borrow from. But the spy genre can legitimately claim everything from James Bond (Connery) to OUR MAN FLINT to Jason Bourne to THE SANDBAGGERS to James Bond (Moore). Add the supernatural influences, be they X-FILES or MEN IN BLACK or ULTRAVIOLET (the Brit TV show, not the movie), and you have a mix of playstyles that would stretch any gaming system to its breaking point.

But here comes AGENTS OF OBLIVION. Although a mashup of supernatural conspiracy and hardcore spy tradecraft seems an unlikely pairing, it's actually on the cutting edge of modern horror writing. In one of his essays the great sci-fi writer Charlie Stross, the author of "The Laundry" series of thrillers, points out that Tales of Unspeakable Horrors and The Cold War have specific stylistic and structural parallels. Not to poach from Charlie too relentlessly (I am a giant fan), but both involve world-destroying, ultimately unknowable antagonists. Any good game setting that speaks to the HEART of the genre should be able to dial back and forth between these extremes.

What REALITY BLURS does, the really remarkable thing they do, is develop worlds where you can play multiple styles in a genre. Their REALMS OF CTHULHU setting dials seamlessly between "Indiana Jones vs. the Tentacle Monsters" and "Welcome to Madness, Population: You". Sean's IRON DYNASTY allows you to play anything from a no-magic recreation of the Samurai Age to a world of psychic ninjas vs. steampunk bamboo mecha. Note -- I have just typed the phrase "steampunk bamboo mecha." This makes me unreasonably happy.

Sean and his lads turned their attention to this world -- superspies -- and cracked it just as neatly as they've cracked the others. That's because they don't dither about figuring out every little stat on every little handgun. They listen to the heart of the source material, and figure out ways for you to play whatever tune you hear when you listen.

You have in your hands a rules set that lets you play anything from "Spellslinging Spy vs. Alien Brain Eater" to "Harry Palmer vs. That Unpleasant Fellow from Bulgaria." They haven't glossed over any of the little nuts and bolts you need to play a realistic spy game, if that's your desire - they've just streamlined it to be Fast, Furious, and Fun.

I'm going to use this setting to play a campaign set in Shanghai in the 30s, where there is no magic -- until suddenly, there is. That I can use one setting to play both those extremes is impressive as hell.

So pull on the black suit and tie, load up on the magic bullets, fly to Istanbul and crack an international conspiracy older than human speech. Be Bond, be Palmer, be the Brigadier from UNIT ("Five rounds rapid, gentlemen!), be the men and women who form the thin grey line between us and eternal night. I'll see you at the gaming table, thanks to REALITY BLURS.

Best,

John

John Rogers is a creative madman who is best known as the creator and executive producer of *Leverage*. Need we say more? I've had the pleasure of knowing John for quite a number of years thanks entirely to gaming and, more specifically, *Agents of Oblivion* from its earliest incarnations. I should probably pay John for this intro. Maybe one day he'll give up Hollywood and take his hobby more seriously.
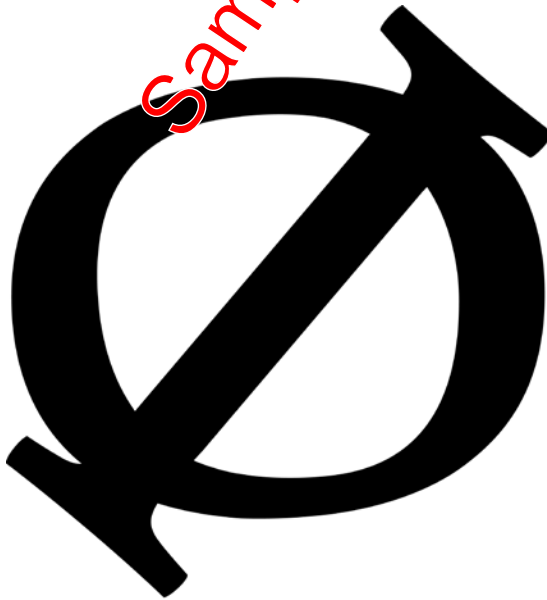
THE THIN GREY LINE

The idea for this setting came to me when I was sitting about playing *Splinter Cell*—the first one—a number of years ago. I *was* Sam Fisher, superspy, sneaking about, applying chokeholds, sniping folks, and such and thought it'd be awfully neat if I could perform a Psylocke move, you know where you *manifest a katana with your mind*? That'd be something sort of special. I turned it around in my head, deciding what to do with it over the next handful of days, and I couldn't let go of it. If anything, the concept grew as I wondered what kind of world this psychic spy inhabited. What would a real government do with such power at its command? What if monsters were real? What if aliens had touched down ages ago? What if we got their technology? What if all the conspiracies you ever heard about existed in some form or fashion? If our hero inhabits a world where, essentially, everything is real, how dark is this world? If there is one spy group with access to such strange things, certainly there are others sprinkled around the globe. The mind boggles.

At this point, I'll add in I have a healthy love for spy, supernatural, and horror media of nearly every stripe, be they comics, graphic novels, video games, television shows, or movies, and I thought initially this world where our Agent—now capitalized, to stress his importance—resides should be an amalgamation of these things. Initially, the concept began as James Bond meets Cthulhu, but my friends rightly pointed out our dear Mr. Bond is a solo act, so I turned it around a bit, and decided, at its core, *Agents of Oblivion*, was more *Mission: Impossible* meets *The X-Files*. With that fleshed up as the concept, the proper work of the setting began.

Now our Agents needed a rival organization, just as G.I. Joe has Cobra, MI-6 has SMERSH, and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* has THRUSH, Oblivion has Pandora. I turned some things on their respective heads as I am wont to do, and our Agents' agendas are not always as clear-cut as they may seem on the surface. You'll notice this as you go on, and there are wonderfully grey spaces to be found within the bounds of moral ambiguity and organizational extremism.

One of the greatest challenges was to present this large world and share our vision while still giving you a sandbox setting where you could tweak it to play a variety of ways within this framework. Do you want to play a gritty spy game along the lines of *The Bourne Identity* or *Le Femme Nikita,* or do your tastes run more towards *The X-Files...*or do you want to take it all the way to the limit and have it more akin to *Supernatural* meets *Fringe* meets *Dark Skies*? You can (and we do).

Make of this what you will with only one hard and fast rule: have fun!

-Sean Preston
June 30, 2011

I remember the first time I learned of Sean Preston. I was a partner in 12 to Midnight, and we were the first licensees with Pinnacle for the *Savage Worlds* system. Shane Hensley opened the *Savage World*s system to a few other game companies and one of them was called Reality Blurs. I remember checking out his website. He was working on a project called *RunePunk*, but had lots of ideas for other projects including one called *Agents of Oblivion*. We traded a few courtesy emails, then spoke on the phone with increasing frequency until we had become "industry" friends. I did a soft edit for *RunePunk*, and Sean wrote a *Modern Dispatch* for us.

   We spoke often—sharing ideas and scenarios. We created an in-depth history of the universe for both the horror-campaign of *Pinebox* and *Agents of Oblivion*. I worked with him on several projects as an editor and wrote some of *Realms of Cthulhu.* We had become true friends.

   Sean had won a contest with Green Ronin to create *Agents of Oblivion* for the *True 20* game, and I did a soft edit on it for him. I had fallen in love with the setting and wanted to be a part of it. As Reality Blurs grew, Sean took on several more product lines. One day he called me and said, "Ed do you want to work on Agents with us?" I told him I needed to think about it and about a minute later said, "You bet!"

   The project was about two-thirds written, but needed a lot of editing, polishing, and additional materials to round it out, as well as a true Savage Conversion, though Sean had issued a free player's guide via pdf to whet gamers' appetites. Sean made me the line editor and told me I could delegate some of the writing responsibilities to others. I did. Some anyway. I've never been one for delegating, and before I knew it I had gone through the entire document, editing, rewriting, revising, and adding new content. Sean and I share the idea of a "big sandbox." Give gamers everything they need to do anything they want to play the games they want. *Agents of Oblivion* does this. If you want to play a true modern spy game, you can. If you want a cheesy '70s spy type game with lots of gizmos and gadgets, you can. If you want to play with horror and magic, you can. A*gents of Oblivion* is perfect for *Savage Worlds*. It can be gritty, timely, horror-laden, high tech, geo-political, and exciting for any spy game.

   Thanks to Sean for letting me come along for the journey. I hope you have as much fun playing *Agents of Oblivion* as I did in helping get it completed. May the immortal words "Stay on target," and "shaken, not stirred" be with y'all.

   Keep Gaming,

   Ed Wetterman
   July 7th, 2011