DREAD EXPECTATIONS

By Bruce R. Cordell
revealed to Dread that the battle robot’s control module was being studied by scientists in the New York Science Institute. In their “incompetence” (to use Dread’s description), institute scientists failed to determine the module’s true significance. The Science Institute is well guarded because the scientists employed there study all sorts of dangerous technology, much of it taken from defeated supervillains and other threats, including the occasional alien invader like the Vreek. Superheroes are quick to respond to trouble at the Science Institute for the same reason, lest anything troublesome fall into the wrong hands.

Thus, Doctor Dread executes her plan as the adventure begins. She sends a squad of her Dread Corps commandos to attack the New York Museum of Art, putatively to acquire a 3,000-year-old mummy rumored to possess magical influence. But it’s just a diversion to lure the PCs to the museum while she steals the control module from the Science Institute. By the time the superheroes foil the Dread Corps (which should prove to be fairly easy), they learn about Dread’s attack on the Science Institute too late to respond. Once she has the control module, it doesn’t take her long to learn how to power up the robot and rouse it from the deeps.

The PCs must piece together Doctor Dread’s true goals after the Institute attack, try to stop her before she activates the battle robot, and, if all else fails, fight the alien battle robot to a standstill before it can destroy too much of New York.

The PCs are the elite superhero team of New York known as the “New York Sentinels.” Their base includes accommodations, a science and computer lab, and a communications hub that monitors police and military bands for trouble. Their helicar provides relatively quick transport around the city, having the range and maneuverability of a standard helicopter.

**BRIEF SUMMARY**
The player characters battle through diversions and waves of Doctor Dread’s henchmen—the Dread Corps—to stop her from activating a giant alien battle robot to destroy New York City, though they probably end up fighting the robot in the end.

**DETAILS**
Doctor Dread is renowned because she manipulates the media like a master puppeteer, constantly enhancing her reputation. To make people afraid appears to be her goal, and indeed, Doctor Dread has become the most feared terrorist on the planet. But she uses that fear as a tool, expertly applying the threat of what she might do to extort money and influence from corporations and governments. This means that Dread must occasionally follow through on her threats, demonstrating that she isn’t bluffing when she threatens to point a solar cannon at an east coast city or to freeze the mayor and his family by dipping them in liquid nitrogen.

In that vein, Doctor Dread has discovered a means to reactivate an alien battle robot. Thirty years ago, the alien Vreek were defeated by an earlier generation’s superhero host. The Vreek’s battle robots were destroyed, but a few remained unaccounted for. In the chaos, one fell unmarked into the New York harbor and sank. A few years ago, Doctor Dread found it. Since then, she’s attempted to reactivate it under her own control. After many false starts and partial successes, new research revealed to Dread that the battle robot’s control module was being studied by scientists in the New York Science Institute. In their “incompetence” (to use Dread’s description), institute scientists failed to determine the module’s true significance.

The Science Institute is well guarded because the scientists employed there study all sorts of dangerous technology, much of it taken from defeated supervillains and other threats, including the occasional alien invader like the Vreek. Superheroes are quick to respond to trouble at the Science Institute for the same reason, lest anything troublesome fall into the wrong hands.

Thus, Doctor Dread executes her plan as the adventure begins. She sends a squad of her Dread Corps commandos to attack the New York Museum of Art, putatively to acquire a 3,000-year-old mummy rumored to possess magical influence. But it’s just a diversion to lure the PCs to the museum while she steals the control module from the Science Institute. By the time the superheroes foil the Dread Corps (which should prove to be fairly easy), they learn about Dread’s attack on the Science Institute too late to respond. Once she has the control module, it doesn’t take her long to learn how to power up the robot and rouse it from the deeps.

The PCs must piece together Doctor Dread’s true goals after the Institute attack, try to stop her before she activates the battle robot, and, if all else fails, fight the alien battle robot to a standstill before it can destroy too much of New York.
DREAD EXPECTATIONS

The fight at the museum is fairly straightforward. The superpowered PCs far outclass the Dread Corps, but the GM can introduce a GM intrusion or two to increase the challenge. However, keep in mind that this is really just an opportunity for the players to get used to their characters and their powers. In the end, they're supposed to feel quite superior. In the aftermath of the fight, the PCs learn that the conflict was a diversion (see Museum Aftermath on the next page).

THE WRAP-UP

It’s unlikely that the PCs will be able to find and stop Doctor Dread before she can activate the gabriel; her diversion and months of preparation give her a significant head start. More likely, the characters finish the adventure when they take down Doctor Dread. They might be able to put an end to things then and there, but given her suit’s ability to teleport her to safety as an emergency measure, the characters may have to be satisfied with stopping Dread’s robot, not the supervillain herself. Such is the nature of supervillains.

KEYS

This scenario has two keys.

• Something that provides a clue to Doctor Dread’s location and/or what she’s up to.

• Something that weakens or controls the giant alien battle robot (the “gabriel”).

If an encounter has the potential to include a key but does not, it may have a few random cyphers instead, depending on the flow of the session. Overall, the entire scenario should offer the PCs approximately six to eight cyphers. If you want to save time, you can use the cyphers described under Cyphers As Inspirations.

SALIENT POINTS:

• The PCs are the New York Sentinels, the elite superhero team operating in New York City.

• The supervillain Doctor Dread sends henchmen (the Dread Corps) to attack the Museum of Art as a diversion while she focuses on her actual target: the Science Institute.

• Doctor Dread steals an alien artifact—a control module—from the Science Institute so that she can rouse and control an inoperative alien battle robot (a “gabriel”).

• Eager for her exploits to be broadcast across the world, Doctor Dread never does anything quietly if she can accomplish her goal in a spectacular manner, ideally one that results in as many casualties as possible.

• Doctor Dread works on rousing the alien battle robot even as the PCs chase down clues to discover her true location.

STARTING POINT

The PCs receive word of an attack by the Dread Corps on the Museum of Art, only a five-minute trip from their base by helicar. The characters know that today the museum is unveiling a new exhibit: a 3,000-year-old mummy. The mummy is Na-tarth, a pharaoh of Ancient Egypt still wearing a golden crown, that ancient people believed to confer magical powers that extended his reign to over two hundred years. Apparently Doctor Dread knows something about the crown that no one else does. The Dread Corps must be stopped before their commander gets her hands on it.

At the Museum of Art: Eight Dread Corps commandos, one rocketeer, and one captain assault the museum. Corps members wear red armored jackets and white masks, with Doctor Dread’s symbol on one arm. By the time the PCs arrive, the Dread Corps have infiltrated the exhibit, which features an entire floor set with a very lifelike backdrop of ancient ruins. Reveal Show ‘Em A (page 8) to the PCs. Just out of the scene depicted, a sarcophagus sits upright inside a level 5 clear plastic containment case. The sarcophagus contains a withered corpse and a nonmagical but very fetching golden crown.

GM Intrusions: A Dread Corps commando takes a hostage. An attack threatens a priceless museum exhibit.

Cyphers As Inspirations, page 6

The giant alien battle robots used by the Vreek were usually called “gabriels.”

One unique aspect of instant adventures is the keys. These are not necessarily literal keys—they are elements of the adventure that can be placed in different points in the scenario, depending on where the player characters go and what they do. For example, a key might be an object found in a cabinet or in an NPC’s pocket. If the PCs never look in the cabinet but do negotiate a trade with the NPC, then the GM simply decides that the object is with the NPC. This allows the adventure to continue even if the characters miss a clue or never visit a certain location.