ON THE HUNT

Sixth World scholars have long hypothesized the cyclical nature of magic. For years corporations, collectors and other factions have spent fortunes hunting down surviving relics of this mythical age. The shadows whisper of lost lore and a secret history to the world. A privileged few have come into possession of ancient items of great power and mysterious purpose, artifacts from before recorded history. Now it's your turn...

Eighteen months ago, the Phaistos Disk was stolen from the Herakleion Museum in Athens. Now, Mr. Johnson needs you to find it and bring it back. The hunt will take the runners through the shadows of Europe, and lead to interactions with smugglers, art dealers, and archaeologists. If they survive Interpol, Aztechnology, and an eccentrically violent shadowrunner team, they may just learn who is behind the hunt and why.

Darkest Hour is the third chapter of the *Dawn of the Artifacts* storyline. This continuing storyline explores the secret history of *Shadowrun*, and offers clues to the true mastermind behind the hunt for the artifacts
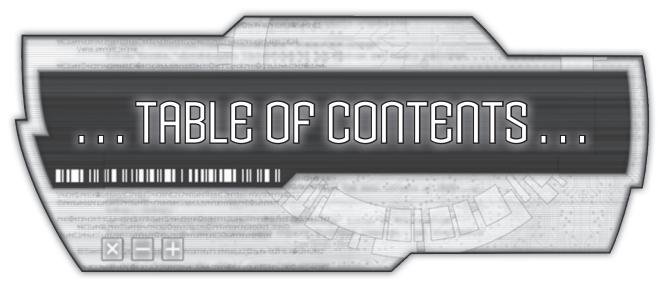
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fact stolen from mu

NINA

DARKEST HOUR

milk
juice mix
bread
detergent
sh fruit?

DON'T
FORGET
AMMO
THIS TIME!

CATALYST
game labs

. . . TABLE OF CONTENTS . . .

The door opened. There had been two sharp knocks, a brief pause, and then a sudden flood of light and noise and odor into Captain Herrera's office. There was a chopper heading west, thuds fading as it traveled toward the sun, and there was the smell that was everywhere. Herrera wasn't sure what the smell was, but she had heard men in her command refer to it as "blood and death," and that seemed apt enough.

The door closed, and some of the noise faded. The building was light, with thin walls, but it was made of high-strength polymers durable enough to stop small-arms fire and a fair amount of noise. It was also mobile—four men could pick it up by hand and move it as needed. Captain Herrera used it as both quarters and a command office.

The reason for the door's opening and closing, Lieutenant Ramirez, was now inside, standing at attention. He spoke without preamble.

"Captain, Lieutenant Ramirez reporting as requested. The perimeter has been secured. We have negotiated airspace control of the valley with the local forces and ensured that proper demarcation lines have been set."

The lieutenant then stood still and waited for a reply while Herrera stared at her virtual desktop and decided how long she should make him wait. She could work without worrying that Ramierz would see something he should not—over the last several months, she had taken to encrypting her AR feed so that the virtual desktop wasn't visible to her subordinates. She worked for several more minutes, moving AROs that only she could see.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ramirez becoming increasingly twitchy, clearly wondering how long he should stay there. Finally, he snapped a sharp salute and turned to leave.

"Lieutenant, has the research team made any headway yet?" Captain Herrera's voice was low and rough ever since her larynx was damaged in the Amazonian conflict. It stopped the junior officer in his tracks.

"Not yet, ma'am. Astral reconnaissance is slow because of the warding and solid earth. GPR came back with some images of the temples. The construction appears similar to our teocallis but on a vastly more intricate scale. They've sent drones in, but signal degradation and collapsed tunnels have stifled progress."

Herrera nodded—it was the same news provided by the Watch Log. If the research team was hiding their findings, they were being thorough. If he knew about it, the lieutenant would likely have mentioned any scuttlebutt that might have posed a threat to their operation.

"Very well," Herrera said. "Inform the research team that Command is looking into the linguistic analysis of the markings. A team of actives was sent to identify and secure other sources of the language. There can be no mistakes on this project. Notify me immediately if the situation changes. Dismissed."

She watched the lieutenant leave before turning her attention back to her reports. Intel reported that the language had been seen before—the DIMR had a map with identical markings and a group of hermetics found similar glyphs in the Karlsruhe administrative zone. Due to the obvious Awakened roots of the language, pressure to decipher the meaning of its inscriptions was coming from the highest levels.

Levels that went well past Internal Security and Herrera's pay grade all the way to the heart of the Smoking Mirror and the founding influences. Age-old secrets were primed to be revealed.

INTRODUCTION

Darkest Hour: *Dawn of the Artifacts 3* is the third in a series of adventures designed for *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*. Like the first two adventures, it is not designed specifically for the novice player, but can easily be tweaked to suit a wide variety of player experience levels.

Players and gamemasters who played through previous adventures in the *Dawn of the Artifacts* line will have met several of the main characters involved in the adventure series, and their actions in the previous adventures will undoubtedly color their interactions with characters in this adventure. Likewise, their actions in this adventure will have ramifications on future adventures in the series.

Players should note that only gamemasters should read beyond this point. The following text reveals secrets and plots that, if read prior to the adventure, could impact their enjoyment of the adventure (and the surprises in store for them).

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Darkest Hour can be run with only the *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition* rulebook. Many of the characters presented in this adventure draw from the additional core supplements, however, such as *Arsenal*, *Augmentation*, *Unwired*, and *Runner's Companion*. All rules in this adventure are assumed to follow the core rules presented in *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*. A gamemaster can, of course, use any of the optional rules as best fits his or her game.

This adventure takes the runners on a grand tour, visiting several prime cities in Europe and traveling into a hotbed of violence and near-war. The first stop, Hamburg, is a featured location in *Runner Havens*. The second city, Europort, is a featured location in *Corporate Enclaves*. The final stop is Sarajevo, detailed in *Feral Cities*. Gamemasters and players will find a wealth of information, contacts, and additional plot hooks in those core location books. For players who have not read *Runner Havens, Corporate Enclaves*, or *Feral Cities,* player handouts included in this adventure provide a broad overview of the three cities. Gamemasters may wish to provide these to their players prior to the adventure, or alternatively, provide them as player characters research the city or interact with the various factions.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

The runners meet up with Jane "Frosty" Foster yet again in "Once More." Her employer has identified an artifact that he wants to add to his collection. The only catch is that it has already been stolen, so they need to find the thief and steal it back. Unlike their previous expeditions to Lagos (*Dusk*) and Chicago (*Midnight*), this job should keep the runners entirely in civilized regions and away from feral cities—or so they're told. The downside is that the thief has covered his tracks well and will need to be dug out of the shadows. They will make a tour across the shadows of Europe and travel from smuggler havens to enclaves of capitalism.

Multiple paths are provided for the players to progress through each scene. Due to the knack players have of coming up with innovative solutions to problems, certain scenes may be skipped as the runners cut through the web of lies and intrigue. The adventure path can be as direct or circuitous as the players choose. Each scene contains some gamemaster hints for keeping players on track, or, alternatively, for expanding on the tangents they may take.

MAIN SECTIONS

This book is divided into several sections designed to assist you in bringing the adventure presented herein to your table:

- **Preparing to Play:** A plot synopsis, necessary background information, and other useful details and data.
- **Adventure Scenes:** The adventure itself, broken down into individual scenes.
- **Legwork:** Summaries of information and data the player characters might find during their research.
- **Cast of Shadows:** Profiles of the primary NPCs with whom the player characters will interact during the adventure.
- **Player Handouts:** Information designed for players.

ADVENTURE SCENES

The adventure itself plays out over a series of sequential scenes. Each scene contains some, or all, of the following subsections:

- **Scan This:** A brief summary of the events in the scene.
- **Tell It To Them Straight:** A text selection that can be read directly to the players or paraphrased when the player characters reach specific points in the scene.
- **Hooks:** Descriptions of ways that characters might be encouraged to play a scene.
- **Behind the Scenes:** he mechanics behind each scene, including NPC motivations and any secrets or special instructions.
- **Subplots:** Secondary adventures—or red herrings—that offer avenues for gamemasters to develop to make the adventure less linear for players.
- **Pushing the Envelope:** Suggestions for gamemasters on altering the scene to challenge more experienced players or more powerful player characters.
- **Debugging:** Suggestions for getting the adventure back on track if the shadowrunners' actions derail it.
- **Places of Interest:** Locations featured in the scene, including descriptions and ratings for security systems and Matrix systems.
- **Grunts and Moving Targets:** NPCs in that particular scene. NPCs that are featured in multiple scenes are found in the *Cast of Shadows*.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Non-player characters (NPCs) are essential to bringing any adventure to life; they include the allies, enemies, and contacts with whom the characters interact during the shadowrun. Important NPCs have relevant profiles, including stats, in the *Grunts and Moving Targets* section for each scene. Major NPCs who appear in multiple scenes are listed in the *Cast of Shadows* section at the end of this book. Some of the major NPCs are recurring characters from previous adventures in the *Dawn of the Artifacts* line; they have additional background provided that reveals more of their motivations. Gamemasters can and should tweak the NPCs to make them more or less challenging opponents (see *Prime Runners*, p. 284–285, *SR4A*). NPCs in groups benefit from Group Edge (p. 281, *SR4A),* while individual NPCs in this adventure possess their own Edge stat to use.

PHAISTOS
DISC

SIZE
OF OBJECT:
APPROX
15CM
/ 5.4 INCH
DIAMETER

MATERIAL:
FIRED CLAY

- FOUND IN THE MINOAN
PALACE OF PHAISTOS
- MANUFACTURED IN THE
2ND MILLENIUM BC
- SHOWS 241 DIFFERENT
SYMBOLS

ENTRY NO. 24834/1129.003