



The Puzzle Box

(for Unknown Armies)

(Location unknown)

555-2121

Hours: Daily, 6 pm to 5 am.

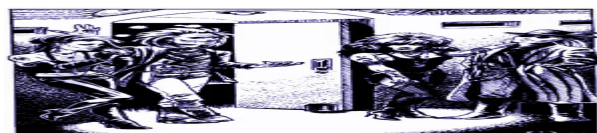
by Chad Underkoffler

Summary: Tucked away deep in a maze of downtown alleyways, the Puzzle Box is a ramshackle tavern that doesn't appear on any street map, has no postal delivery address, and doesn't advertise at all. It's an out-of-the-way meeting place for those types of people who desire privacy . . . and many of those people are at least somewhat clued-into the Occult Underground.

Unfortunately, it's also the haunt of poseurs, cranks, con men, and what can only be described as "magickal groupies." Down-and-out dukes come here to score ersatz-apprentices to squeeze for cash in return for teaching a few magick tricks, hire semi-clued muscle that won't rabbit at the first sight of a clockwork, trade scuttlebutt and rumors, and pick up partners for meaningless -- or in the case of Pornomancers, meaningful -- sex.

The Puzzle Box is *not* the hangout of the cream of the Occult Underground. You won't find the big boys of the scene (Angela Forsythe, Daphnee Lee, the Freak, Dirk Allen -- okay, maybe Dirk Allen) hanging out here. It's too low-rent, too greasy, too tawdry. It's a dive bar -- why would anyone with earth-shaking magickal powers hang out in a dive bar? It does serve as an introduction to the secret clubs, nightlife, and shops that exist below the surface of the everyday world. For the clueless thug or the new-minted apprentice, the Puzzle Box is a great place to "learn the ropes" in. For the dedicated but mundane occult researcher, there are a few grains of hard fact on magick and the Occult Underground to find, if one is willing to sort through mountains of chaff. For those more experienced in the Underground, it's the absolute last ditch, long shot sort of place to hunt for clues and rumors.

Detailed Description: The Puzzle Box is three rooms, plus a basement. The basement is used as storage space for the bar supplies; there is



also a small "root cellar" packed with Freaky Stuff. One corner of the basement is a grungy but well-appointed kitchenette with fridge, grill, and deep fryer for quick bar food. A dumbwaiter connects the basement with the back of the bar; it's large and powerful enough to lift a full beer keg to ground level.

The front room contains the bar and a dozen tables. An old Wurlitzer jukebox squats in the corner, loaded with odd and off-beat records: from heavy metal to Bach Requiems to spoken word to Dixie jazz to Gregorian chant. All of the recordings deal with religion, the supernatural, or magick. Hanging over the bar are a number of ring puzzles. These, along with the numerous Rubik's cube and similar puzzles, sit on shelves all around the back room. Whenever someone solves a puzzle, they get a free drink. However, if they break one of the puzzles, or substitute a pre-solved one of their own, they'll be thrown out and kept out until they make reparations to Peppy.



The back room has an ancient pinball machine that tilts whenever someone says the word "rubber" in its presence, a billiard table with blue felt, and a real cork dartboard, sans darts. A number of comfy vinyl couches and easy chairs line the walls of this room. A bulletin board with "For Sale" and "Wanted to Buy" sorts of notes hangs on the wall here. Some of the items being traded are a little odd -- a virgin's kiss, a dead bonsai, a monkey in a bottle, etc.

The last room is Peppy's Office, and it is tragically boring. It's the size of a broom closet, and the space is mostly taken up by a desk, office chair, filing cabinet, and a set of bookshelves. The most interesting thing in the room is the economy-size package of white pocket T-shirts, which are the only shirts Peppy wears.

GMCs Found Within or Nearby: Peppy Slade is the owner and bartender. Joachim Walker is the bouncer. The Puzzle Box goes through a weekly parade of bartenders, busboys, and grill cooks; either it's too freaky a place to be in, or something from the root cellar eats them. Peppy won't say which.

Adventure Seeds

- You find a city map in your mailbox. A back alley is circled in red, with the words "Tonight. 11 PM." scrawled next to the circle. When you visit the area marked on the map, you find the Puzzle Box. Who wants to meet you? Or was the map misdirected?
- Bulletin Board: "FOR SALE -- Six months of my life. \$2,000 or best offer. 555-2309 Ask for Bob."
- A "groupie" approaches a magickal PC and starts begging him to teach him/her magick. All the while, this groupie is making goo-goo eyes at the adept PC. Is it a real groupie, or a disguised enforcer?
- Bulletin Board: "I NEED: Six chestnuts, caught in midair as they fell from the tree. Chestnuts must not have touched the ground or human flesh. Call Emma, 555-4544, 6 pm to midnight."

- One of the local Dipsomancers mixes his vodka and Scotch and goes on a mean bender. Joachim is knocked out by a flying barstool in the first few seconds. Peppy asks for your help in tossing him out.
- Bulletin Board: "Looking for a way out of your Troubles? Join the New Inquisition! Good pay, interesting work, and a fresh start. Call Mr. Caine at 800-NEW-LIFE"

Peppy Slade

Personality: Paul Williams as Ernest Hemingway.

Summary: He's balding, blond, short, squat, and very strong—he loves to arm-wrestle with Joachim, and has been known to pitch in and help clear the bar of troublemakers. He's a self-educated man, having traveled the world as a younger man in the merchant marine. He's covered with tattoos, smokes like a chimney, and loves a good story. His favorite authors are Joseph Heller, Jack London, Robert Heinlein, Hunter S. Thompson, and Zane Grey. He enjoys puzzles. He's clued-in to the Occult Underground, and is enjoying putting the pieces together. He's a rumormonger.

Obsession: Knowing the occult "buzz."

Passions

Rage: People who bust up his stuff: puzzles, tables, chairs, etc.

Fear: (Helpless) He's afraid of dying without getting a good punch or two in.

Noble: Storytellers. Peppy will do anything for a good story or storyteller.

Wound Points: 85

Stats

Body: 85 (Powerhouse) Speed: 40 (F) (Slow to start) Mind: 45 (Curious) Soul: 55 (Gruff but Likable)

Skills

Body Skills: General Athletics 25%, Scrappin' (Struggle) 55%, Break Things 35%

Speed Skills: Drive 15%, Dodge 25%, Handgun 45%

Mind Skills: General Education 15%, Notice 30%, *Occult Buzz* 50%

Soul Skills: Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Aura Sight 20%, Hunches 25%, Minor Rituals 25%

Occult Buzz: This is the "word on the street" as far as the Occult Underground goes. Who's hot, who's not, who's just got whacked and why, etc.

Minor Rituals: Peppy knows each of the Minor Rituals (those available to non-adepts). His deep understanding of all of them is represented by this single skill.

Madness Meter (H/F)

Violence = 5H/2F

The Unnatural = 5H/2F

Helplessness = 2H/0F
 Isolation = 2H/0F
 Self = 2H/0F

Pick One

High Road: Affable and avuncular, Peppy always has a bit of info for his pals.

Middle Road: Peppy is strictly business: he'll provide information for information in return, or for cold hard cash.

Low Road: He's relentless in his need to be clued in. He has no problem with slipping someone a Mickey Finn, throwing him into the storeroom, and working them over with needle-nose pliers to pry out what they know.

Adventure Seeds

- After sizing the PCs up for a couple weeks, talking with them to find out if they're "good people," Peppy approaches them to help him decipher a new ritual he's discovered. It's the ritual of Lesser Correspondence (see UA, pg. 196). What happens when Mak Attax discovers someone else knows the recipe for their secret sauce?

Joachim Walker

Personality: The love-child of Mr. T and Mr. Rogers.

Summary: Joachim seems to be your average bouncer: big, strong, and intimidating. What most people don't realize is that he's possessed. Granted, the possession is by a benign demon -- Joachim's little brother Ricardo. When Joachim was a teenager, Ricky died of leukemia. Horrified by the unfairness of it all, Joachim prayed harder than he ever had before . . . and suddenly, little Ricky appeared inside him.



Joachim has decided to live his life to the fullest, both for himself and for Ricky. He'll try anything once. Indeed, there are things that Ricky likes to do that Joachim isn't that fond of (drinking iced coffee, getting up early to watch Saturday Morning Cartoons, going dancing), but he'll do them to please his brother. Usually.

They share consciousness often, two minds in one body. Ricky has also left Joachim's body for short periods of time, usually after a spat, but sometimes to grab astral parasites to plop onto people he sees as Joachim's "enemies" . . . often without his brother's knowledge. Other than that, Ricky's a generally nice fourteen-year-old kid.

Ricky can perform minor telekinetic manipulations once per hour, and can do significant telekinetic actions once per day. In extreme circumstances, Ricky can lend strength and speed to his brother for periods of up to an hour, but this tucks him out, leaving him quiescent for a number of hours, sometimes days. This is represented by the split stats for Body and Speed, and

a flat +10% shift to any physical skill while "supercharged." Joachim always worries when Ricky "falls asleep," afraid that he will be gone for good . . .

Personality: (Gemini) I can dig that, but what about this . . . ?

Obsession: (General Athletics) Live life loudly; get out and have some fun!

Passions

Rage: People who waste the gifts God has given them.

Fear: (Helplessness) Losing his brother again.

Noble: Little children. Joachim -- the perfect big brother -- loves little kids, and if anything threatens them, he'll spare no effort to protect them.

Wound Points: 60/100

Stats

Body: 75/100 (Beefy/Superhuman)

Speed: 55/85 (F/S) (Quick/Like Lightning)

Mind: 40 (Enjoys Learning New things)

Soul: 60 (Child-like Nature)

Skills

Body Skills: *General Athletics* 45%, *Handle Troublemakers (Struggle)* 35%, *Large and Hard to Move* 40%, *Get Back Up* 60%, *Hits Harder* 30%

Speed Skills: *Drive* 20%, *Dodge* 45%, *Move Through Crowd Unimpeded* 25%

Mind Skills: *General Education* 20%, *Notice* 25%, *Demon Lore* 15%

Soul Skills: *Charm* 45%, *Lie* 15%, *Intimidate* 40%

Hits Harder: This skill is only applicable when Ricky is boosting Joachim's strength to superhuman levels. If Joachim rolls an attack under his Hits Harder level, add an additional die of damage. If a match is rolled, add a further die.

Madness Meter (H/F)

Violence = 3H/1F

The Unnatural = 4H/2F

Helplessness = 2H/1F

Isolation = 2H/1F

Self = 1H/1F

Pick One (Joachim)

High Road: A great guy who'll do anything to help out a friend.

Middle Road: He'll sometimes let people get away with stuff they shouldn't be doing in the Puzzle Box, if they pass him a couple bucks.

Low Road: Joachim will do anything for sufficient cash to let him indulge in "living life" both

for himself and Ricky.

Pick One (Ricardo)

High Road: Ricky's a good kid, even if he is dead; a teenage Casper.

Middle Road: Despite lacking glands and hormones, Ricky's a teenager, and suffering the same emotional swings and angst.

Low Road: Mean kid, bad seed. Jealous of Joachim's corporeality, he'll screw with his brother's life just for the fun of it.

Possessions: Lots of sports equipment, a beat-up pickup, and a small apartment near work.

Connections: Joachim becomes great friends with everyone he meets. He also does some volunteer work as a Big Brother. His Little Brother is named Jamal and lives across town.

Adventure Seeds

- Someone has discovered Joachim is possessed and likes it, and has threatened to exorcise Ricky unless Joachim pays up. Joachim approaches the PCs for help.
- The PCs see Joachim beat one of their dipsomancer buddies senseless. The boozehound tried to Soul Sip Ricky!
- Word on the street is that Joachim, the bouncer at the local dive bar, knows a way to ditch astral parasites! And all he asks is that you contribute a C-note to the local Youth Center . . . It's gotta be a scam, right?

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