

STABBING PAINS

OR

WHY WE LEFT JIM'S BEAR BEHIND

THE SRPG POST-SALUTE DOUBLE-EVENT

15th APRIL 2000

**".....And Lo! The rains did pour upon the earth, and much was covered by water, but on the 15th day, a group of chosen taggers did strike land in Sussex....."
- and it still bloody rained!**

This article is intended as a short review of what was meant to be a double-header held recently at the perennial site near deepest Hawkhurst. I shall confine my comments to the first game, for the simple reason that both players and site were too soaked (in my opinion) to make the second game feasible, for which I again apologise (more later).

David Harvey had managed to gather a group of die-hard associate- and full-members from as far afield as Lincolnshire and Hampshire, although with a few no-shows from other semi-regulars and SALUTE 'prospects' this put the numbers down in the 15-20 bracket - thin but not unsupportable. A couple of months back, I'd already volunteered to run something simple (hah!), although I hadn't reckoned with getting writers' block for three weeks before the event..... In the end, we had sufficient good equipment for one bash at the first game, and well worth it too - although it hasn't done my TAG reputation any favours, or enhanced my chances of getting within 5M of future players!

GAME THE FIRST

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This was one of those everyday stories of illegal genetic research gone wrong, with two primary teams - the 'official' one out to retrieve/cover-up the situation, and some 'loyal opposition' out to blow the gaff to the world. The setting was a small island off the (Baltic?) coast, with a few locals (farmers, fishermen etc.) out to find out what the massive explosion at the Research Centre was the night before, and why their animals are now acting 'funny'..... Add-in some itinerant Russian Mafia, and stir to taste. As a member of the latter group, the rest of this item is, of course, rather limited to our viewpoint.

Unfortunately, a regular light aircraft 'shuttle-service' of wholesale narcotics had developed engine trouble over the island (it blew up - very suspicious), ripping-open the special storage compartment as the plane broke-up and depositing the tough storage bags (10-12 of them) over the whole site area. Our glorious leader 'Mr Big' had therefore chosen us to get the stuff back - or else.....The team consisted of myself, Tim Atkinson, and Jim Cutler, so we were off to a good start..... In the few minutes grace before 'game on', being badly outnumbered we adopted a very, very old cover storey that Jim was a 'businessman' out here on a hunting trip (thus the semi-automatic rifle under his arm), for which I was the lightly armed guide (only a pistol and, oh yes - a knife.....). Tim's huge assault-rifle we decided to explain-away as the normal equipment for a personal security guard (as supplied by Jim's firm). With this sort of firepower the suggestion of "...duck hunting...." was rightly ignored (!), and in the end we settled on Bear hunting as something worthy of our attention (the chance of encountering large, ferocious creatures also help to put other players on edge, too).

As the rain began again we first swept the area know as 'The Hollows', successfully locating 2 or 3 of our caches - and some dodgy-looking electronics, plus canisters of some luminous fluid. We did debate these items (briefly), but decided to remain 'focused' on simply collecting the stuff which would

allow us to remain alive! We then moved up to the 'treehouse' area (it being on higher ground than the notorious lower path, an excellent spot for Somme Re-enactors). There we remained hidden for some time as we listened to two or three groups pass and interact with each other, all the time oblivious to our presence about 30M away. The desire to remain hidden was enhanced by (a) the size of these groups, and (b) the fact that several were dressed like some sort of police..... I think that this phase (of going into hiding) allowed a couple of other groups to get ahead of us and start collecting our bags, although as it turned out this proved to be of tremendous help!

Using the back-door approach to the famous central 'Tavern' site (nearest thing to a built-up area) simply proved that the ground was turning into a sponge - we certainly didn't find any more bags of 'stuff'. Rightly deducing that, as everyone seemed to have left via the lower path exit, they would by now be well ahead and hoovering-up any bags that-away, we eventually returned to the combined upper path and new river(!), and were rewarded with one more bag - 4 out of 10/12. Hmmmm, still not enough to ensure survival.....

Well, we met the good old Feds again (with an armed military escort - something VERY dodgy here), and they gave us the once-over. I'm not sure they believed the 'bear' storey, but fortunately one of them (Jim Harvey) then mentioned what THEY were after - ".....Well OF COURSE we'd seen something like that officer.....why didn't you SAY so.....WAY over the far end of the site" (which was true, by the way, although I'd have sent them there anyway)"No, we didn't touch anything..... did spot some locals nosing around though.....". You know the sort of thing. Anyway, they soon became very interested in this news of a 'find', losing interest in us at the same rate. We couldn't let them go, however, without warning them about the good old bear..... very pleased to notice those Feds only carrying pistols looking much more, ah, intently at the undergrowth ahead as they left!

Our penultimate encounter was with another small, armed group (Ros Day, Jasper Hedger and Mike Beswick) purporting to be innocent locals? Pull the other one! Out to check on damage to their greenhouses and crops? Hah!..... Alas for them, they were actually telling the truth (well how was I supposed to recognise that - it's been so long.....). After some discussion and rather sheepishly following them down the lower path (for lack of anywhere else to go, rather than any evil intent), we did manage to purchase one bag which they said they'd found (the story had been 'enhanced' so that the bags now contained a new secret 'bear pheromone' which would attract anything for miles). Tim, who was unusually acting VERY aggressive for once, was all in favour of simply blowing them away, but Jim and I erred on the side of caution - for now. Unfortunately (again for them), as they walked away well satisfied with their 'bonus', Tim pointed-out the large bulges in Jasper Hedgers' pockets (ooh-er, missus), which could well be further bags of illegal substances (I certainly hoped so, given their size.....and shape). Perhaps they were holding out on us, waiting to 'up' the price round each bend? This would never do.....

We caught up with them again at the lower entrance to the Tavern clearing, chatting to another local. Soon, however, Ros & Jasper left Mike alone with us (I think he was offered/cadging a cigarette from 'friend' Jim Cutler). This was too good an opportunity to miss! Brandishing the enormous plastic knife I like to carry on such occasions, on getting the nod from Tim & Jim I think the last words Mike heard were Jim saying ".....After all, everyone deserves a last cigarette....." as I crept up silently behind him and tapped him on the shoulder, at the same time touching his neck with the blade!! One down, several to go.....

We now had to move fast to retain the initiative and keep the others off balance long enough to allay their suspicions and finish the job..... The next thing Ros & Jasper heard, therefore, were the three of us running up the path and PAST them, yelling 'help' etc., and telling of an horrific encounter with a mutant bear - which of course had taken poor Mike..... Our two 'targets' now holed-up in the

Tavern itself, not an easy place to assault, especially on more or less even terms. Hmmmm. There now ensued a few minutes of yelling for Mike and myself concentrating attention on the (empty) path and (non-existent) bear, while Jim shouted fake orders to where Tim was supposed to be..... He meanwhile was actually working his way around to the back window, but was taking so long that R & J were getting restless, if nothing else than to check on Mike. Jim & I therefore went along with the idea of a 'probe' down the path, and all were more than happy for me to take the lead (thanks guys); so all were now nicely 'sandwiched' on a narrow path. I've certainly seen better ambushes, as Jim got-off only one burst before his rifle failed (water leakage), but fortunately for us 'Machine-Gun Atkinson' finally appeared and hosed-down the entire clearing in very short order - I didn't even have to time to draw a weapon. Of course, taking out Jim as well was NOT one of our primary objectives.....

While Jim was recovering, we searched the bodies for all those extra bags Tim had suspected - nothing! Oooops..... I have to say, 'apologising' to a citizen you've just filled full of AK47 rounds is a little inadequate, I feel. This of course also meant that, unless we'd missed something very obvious, the only others who could have found things were..... the Feds - oh-oh! (We'd forgotten about the Eco-Group completely). With time pressing we began to make our way back to the pick-up point and discussed the problem of only having 4 out of 10/12 bags (plus which way up we'd like to be hung by 'Mr Big'). On reaching the 'Hollows', therefore, we adopted Tim's risky but more than typical 'game-end' plan (like 'last move madness' on a wargames table) to ambush the six feds and then search them - easy!

Pausing only to gun-down passing eco-terrorist David Harvey (why?), as veteran combat-taggers we quickly adopted good inter-locking positions to cover the trails heading south (where Tim had spotted movement). I was in the right-rear, ready to put in flanking fire when their attack entered the killing ground at the main entrance. Several minutes of extreme pre-combat tension then ensued, which was only broken when a voice from BEHIND me said ".....Excuse me sir, but why are you waiting in the bushes with a gun?.....". Yes, the Feds were in fact past our position (god knows what Tim saw)! I must admit that I'll remember that moment of near-speechlessness for many years to come.....

Well, 'fast talking' is one of the bits I enjoy most about role-playing (indoors or out), and so I did some quick thinking (you have to get your storey in first to grab the initiative). I therefore began to excitedly describe being ambushed by those so-called locals who were even now out there stalking us, and so the Feds should take cover..... As I explained this, I was putting my own relatively useless pistol away and was pleased to see them relax (no threat there), all the while LOUDLY protesting and shouting warnings to take cover. This was of course for Tim & Jim's benefit up on the mound, who were still facing 180 degrees the wrong way!

Events now moved quickly. Snipers etc. are something to which taggers can easily relate, so the Fed team began to shake down (very efficiently, damn it) into 'skirmish' mode to check out the area. At this stage I was thinking mainly of survival, but a fire-fight now erupted on top of the mound and things began to look more promising..... (I didn't know, fortunately, that Jim & Tim had also been surprised and taken-out quite quickly). As the Feds were now more spread-out, I suggested that a couple of us could flank the attackers, so Jim Harvey and Justin Crayton set-off to do just that. Warning them to watch out as the (fake) sniper had a long-range weapon, I slowly drew my combat knife..... As soon as we were out of sight of the mound, I spun round and took JimH by complete surprise. His gurgling warning came too late for Justin, as a long weapon at close range is a definite disadvantage, although he was still fast enough to take one of my two hits off me as he slid to the ground! And if you want to experience an adrenaline rush, try thinking about taking on four, well-armed people with only one hit left and no room for error.....

Returning to the top of the mound, shouting (fake) comments to the (now dead) officers on the right flank, I now had to split-up the remaining four..... Well two of them (Laura Dale and Jonathan Porch) looked more like technicians than guards, so I then passed-on the (fake) request from the (dead) right-flank people to conduct a pincer-attack on the (fake) sniper. Off went dutiful SimonB and <?>, and (as soon as they'd gone) down went Laura and Jonathan! I could now see that I was alone, as both Jim and Tim had definitely been shot - how seriously I couldn't tell yet, and this was no time to wait. Running on full adrenaline now, the last phase was pure farce..... Initially, the two remaining Feds were getting very nervous and took good covered positions out among the trees. I knew that it wouldn't be long before they'd start calling to their (dead) friends, so I had to get them into some heavier undergrowth - but how?

The opportunity arose as curiosity on their part got the better of tactical caution and they moved-off to check on a body (although to be fair they did not know at this stage that they were alone). I was perplexed at this, as we knew all the Feds and I hadn't killed anyone here - honest! It seems that our 'extra man' was in fact a humanoid alien of some sort, although I didn't discover this or how he'd got there (and died) until later. Anyway, joining on the end of their patrol line (no gun, you see), I saw SimonB look back once, move on a little, then look back again, move on, and then look back a third time not look too concerned that I seemed to have moved up a place.....Now whispering, I gestured to come closer as I wanted to say something quietly..... Bye-bye, Simon.

A quick check of Tim and Jim revealed them to be walking-wounded, so, with nothing else to stab and now with an extra 3 or 4 bags of 'stuff' courtesy of the Feds, we called game over to the surrounding bodies and made our way back to the car park, where I could collapse.....exit left humming "Mu-tant, mutant the bear....." (to the tune of 'Rupert...').

The debrief revealed that the Feds were trying to cover-up some illegal genetic research which had been going on and had screwed up, while the Eco-types had done best of all by obtaining loads of evidence etc. The villagers were quite bemused and we, the mafia, quite astounded to discover their TOTAL innocence! Unfortunately, I ended the game with an enhanced reputation for abject treachery, quite apart from the existing one for turning into 'creatures' - although few of the taggers now playing were around to remember these 'appy deys' of tag.

Finally, I must thank Craig Porch and an absent Paul Grosvenor (two FULL members only interested in tagging), for a fun game, and master role-player Ros Day for teaching me the value of a knife at close quarters in the excellent 'Hunter-Killer' game a while back. It was really good playing on such a small team with veterans TimA and JimC, and lastly I must also thank the members of the 'Pete The Ripper' club for being such good sports - and before anyone at home says 'ha-ha, what idiots', let me say it was VERY, VERY hard work getting such a militarily switched-on bunch on their own, as I had to use YEARS of 'bull-shitting' technique to build and keep the fake story going..... it all looks very different when you're out there, particularly when strange things are happening quickly.

GAME TWO - OR NOT

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Unfortunately, with players and ground now well soaked (a new RIVER had formed along the upper path), I was reluctant to run my game as, although the players had extra dry clothing, the ground was so wet (with heavy showers still falling), the props/info sheets may well not last the game. Plus, many of my incidents were pre-keyed to known lower-path locations and impossible to 'shift'. In the end therefore I decided to cancel - for only the second time in over 30 games (ye gods). We do at least have 'one in the bank', however, and I shall use the extra time to provide even more descriptions/incidents and briefing material. My apologies to all players.

Peter Merritt