

Project SHIVA

This secret governmental group is a notable example of why Dominic allows Asmodeus to conduct Renegade hunts without real interference. Simply put, it's a cult of genocidal nihilists -- and the brainchild of two Renegade demons: one of Death, and one of Infernal Fire. And yes, that's meant to be alarming.

Project SHIVA was, at the start, just another deniable black project started in the middle of the 1950s. Its purpose was macabre, but legitimate enough, in a horrid sort of way: as both the USA and USSR had begun stockpiling nuclear weapons, with the intent to use them if pushed to the brink, it would be advisable to work out how to use them best. After all, if one were forced to destroy the planet, the entire point of the exercise would be moot if said attempted destruction was incomplete. The project members were thus charged to analyze intelligence reports, geographical studies, statistical analyses -- in short, look through all the data on Russia (and later, China), the better to find an optimal way to blow the two countries to Hell.

Unfortunately, this sort of job is fairly rough on the average person's long-term sanity. Trying to find people who wouldn't crack under the strain was difficult, but eventually the government was able to refine their selection procedure. Alas, they ended up looking for well-adjusted but callous entities, and they succeeded beyond their wildest dreams: one of their analysts turned out to be Gregory, Renegade Balsegraph of Death.

Why Gregory went Renegade in the first place is actually a bit of a mystery: he certainly was committed to the service of Death. Possibly he was a bit **too** committed, or possibly Saminga just fudged the paperwork when Asmodeus started asking questions. At any rate, for a while Gregory was quite pleased to hide out and work out the perfect way to incinerate hundreds of millions of people outright, then slowly poison the rest. After a few years, though, he became impatient with waiting for the Bomb to drop passively. So Gregory decided to switch from planning to implementation.

The first step was to recruit the rest of the project. It was easy enough, particularly for a demonic Liar: most of them were by now subconsciously fascinated with the idea anyway, and could be easily brainwashed into compliance. The next step was to use his new converts to the worship

of Death to seek out key members of the US military and government who could be similarly corrupted. The plan was to wait until a time when tensions were high -- inevitable, given the international situation at the time -- then push things just enough to trigger a nuclear war.

Gregory had such high hopes for the Cuban Missile Crisis: it seemed a perfect scenario for his plans. In fact, it nearly was. If it wasn't for a couple of alert members of the National Security Council, a few broadminded members of the Central Intelligence Agency, and a whole lot of luck, his plan might have succeeded. Stopping the cabal required everything from assassinations to an armed assault on a nuclear missile silo: rooting out the conspirators took over a year, and a very nasty secret war.

Gregory himself was not killed until the very end, during an attempt to assassinate the Governor of Texas (one of the primary supporters of the investigators). Ironically, an unfortunate side effect of the botched operation was the assassination of John F. Kennedy (who wasn't even a target): this embarrassment, coupled with the sensitive nature of the situation, meant that the US government felt it necessary to completely suppress all facts in the case.

When various celestial groups on both sides of the War were belatedly made aware of the crisis, they conducted their own investigation -- an even more thorough one than the government's -- and managed to ferret out the Renegade's involvement. The most significant end result was a reaffirmation of Dominic's decision to permit Asmodeus to hunt down Renegades: for every demon that sincerely wanted Redemption, twenty or more were simply going to run amok. The risks weren't worth it.

Unfortunately, what none of the investigators (human or celestial) had discovered was that Gregory had a backup vessel stashed in a Body Bag. When he came out, he spent the next decade building up a suitable Role -- and started to insinuate himself into the US government *again*. This time, he had acquired an ally (Jerome, Renegade Habbalite of Infernal Fire), who would shape the new cult's development.

The two are, by now, very high placed government bureaucrats who have carefully vetted their pawns over thirty years of observation. The cult, for the most part, believes that they have been chosen by agents of God to bring about the Final War. Jerome is very ecumenical when it comes to what God he says he's serving: there are Project members from every faith that incorporates a belief

in the End Times. Very few Project members know of each other, and no one is certain about just how many co-conspirators there are. Nuclear annihilation is somewhat less likely now, what with the generally poor condition of most ICBMs, so Gregory and Jerome have branched out into biological research. They're sure that eventually they'll be able to get the talking monkeys to push the buttons.

Solving this will require the service of Revelations, Judgement or the Game (and this is one time where a PC just might be able to get away with using resources from the Other Side). Failing that, there are still a few people alive who remember the old Project SHIVA crisis: on second thought, the PCs should instead try getting the ones who are dead. The ones in Heaven will probably enjoy the chance to come back down and play on Earth again. The ones in Hell can't leave, of course, but that's not an issue if one has a spare demon handy to accept the new Ethereal Forces.

With their native guides, the PCs can then navigate the bureaucracy, no doubt uncovering all sorts of half-forgotten black projects along the way, until they can trace the head of the conspiracy. However, even with the two Renegades soul-dead, the Project might still continue:

it all depends on whether or not your players seem to be enjoying being the Celestials in Black...

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