

*The aristocratically dressed Balseraph surveyed the scene. Yesterday, this facility had been one of Vaputech's unheralded, mundane, and even **boring** enclaves on the corporeal plane. There were no baroque machines or bubbling vats here: just a set of chemistry stations, and an impressive amount of computer power. But it had done valuable work in adapting highly toxic chemicals for very slightly safer homeowner use, which made its current incarnation as a carmine-splashed shambles **particularly** frustrating to the Baron. His staff noted this frustration, and redoubled their preliminary investigation.*

*Determining the authors of the outrage was not difficult. The attackers had led their usual calling card all over the lab: a hundred wolf-like predators grinned manically at him from every flat surface. And a few concave ones, too. The ones branded into the foreheads of the deceased staffers were especially galling. The Balseraph's hands tightened on his walking stick (not an affectation, alas)...*

*Voices came behind him.*

*"**Ah** -" barked the first voice.*

*"- Baron Sparky -" purred the second voice.*

***"- we had hoped that you would have arrived by now,"***  
*spoke the two voices in unison.*

*Sparky was careful not to let any annoyance creep into his own voice as he turned to - emphatically not glare at the two neatly-dressed men standing behind him. He nodded politely to both.*

*"Mr. Alpu." The larger man touched his cap. "Mr. Beytu." The shorter man gave the appearance of a bow without actually bowing. "I must thank the Game for informing Vaputech so quickly of this outrage."*

***"But of course -"***

***"- for, after all -"***

***"- was it not your people -"***

***"- who had been the source -"***

***"- of such great iniquity?"***

*Sparky was very careful not to snarl. "We are the victims of the atrocity here, not its cause!" His stick waved over the charnel scene in an irritated arc. "You know that those who did this are Renegade! Vaputech has cast them out into the outer darkness! They are declared outlaws..."*

*The Balseraph had chosen this moment to dramatically smash the largest 'calling card' with the point of his cane. Unfortunately for all but three of the demons surveying the site, said dramatic moment was enhanced by the fifty pounds of explosive (and forty pounds of nails) set off by the pressure sensor mounted just underneath.*

*When the smoke cleared, Sparky and the representatives of Asmodeus were the only ones remaining standing (or alive, for that matter). The Baron had been protected by the activation of his personal, guaranteed bug-free force field: Mr. Alpu and Mr. Beytu... had obviously made their own arrangements.*

*Sparky ignored the sudden smoke and flames as he finished his sentence. "... to be dealt with as wolves are." The Baron wasn't sure, but there might have been grudging approval in the other two demons' eyes at the sang-froid as he limped to a new exit.*

*But behind him came one last shared comment, silken in its mockery.*

***"Or, at least -"***

***" - dealt with as coyotes are."***

*Sparky turned in barely restrained fury. Mr. Alpu and Mr. Beytu's neat, merciless smiles were unapologetic.*

**"Just our little joke."**

## **ACME**

Not everyone appreciates the job that Sparky does. Indeed, some Servitors of Technology consider the Balseraph's role as Vapula's keeper to be a calculated insult and intolerable imposition on the great and noble Genius Prince of Technology. Certain demons have recently leaped onward to the next obvious step, and formed a secret society to rectify the situation. This quietly worries a large number of the Horde. After all, only a madman could object to the idea of keeping any sort of brake on Vapula.

If only they were *incompetent* madmen!

### **Purpose and Goals**

Freeing the Genius Archangel from his numerous (and apparently unnoticed) restrictions. Personally destroying Sparky himself is also a popular goal, but not necessarily one that is universal. Some members of ACME think that

Vapula himself should be the one to finally dispose of the Baron.

Generally, there are two main 'factions' to ACME. One group wishes to solve the Matter of Vapula by destroying (loudly) anything that could be remotely considered a restriction of him; the second group is smaller, saner and reluctantly aware that most of the rest of Creation is vehemently and inexplicably against this sort of thing from ever, ever happening. The second group is possibly even more worrying than the first: instead of breaking Vapula's supposed chains, they try to engender situations where the aforementioned chains are obviously a hindrance.

This disagreement on tactics and strategy makes sitting on ACME hard, since there's no predictable behavior patterns. The two groups do not exactly talk to each other, either: Factions would love to add ACME to their spheres of influence, assuming of course that they haven't already.

## **Organization and Membership**

This is one organization that takes the cell system seriously: Sparky shows no reluctance whatsoever in ferreting out members of ACME by all means foul and well, fouler. As far as anyone knows, membership is usually limited to Servitors of Technology. Some demons

of other Words have been caught in ACME operations, but never in enough numbers to support any sort of collusion between ACME and other Hellish organizations.

ACME is devilishly hard to suppress, not least because many of its members are apparently members in goo -- sorry, 'favorable' -- standing with Technology. This being Hell, there is of course no such thing as 'being above suspicion;' but there certainly is the condition of 'being far too well connected to accuse without prior and incontrovertible proof'. Sparky and the Game keep netting a steady supply of low-level operatives, and sometimes a mid-level one, but the higher-ups remain elusive. The fact that Sparky is not himself an idiot, and thus is unwilling to give the Game full access to Vaputech, is probably not helping the situation, either.

## **Abilities and Resources**

Generally, ACME has access to whatever they can steal from Vaputech. This hardly cheers anyone up, given that nobody actually knows precisely just what Vaputech has available in the first place. It **does** mean that there is no such thing as uniformity in weapons, defenses and equipment among individual ACME cells, which is something. Whether this is something good or something

bad depends on whether a particular cell has the keys to the WMD locker.

## **Celestial Relationships**

### **Heaven**

Surely you jest. As a rule, the Host declines to metaphorically juggle with flaming chainsaws over a gasoline pit, which is what encouraging an organization that wants to make Vapula even *less* predictable would most likely accomplish. Even Michael has his limits in what he'd do to destabilize the Horde, and supporting ACME is nicely over the line.

Probably.

### **Hell**

See above. No rational demon (and many irrational ones) would want to aid ACME in their avowed task. Well, except for any Servitors of Dark Humor that would find the situation funny. Or any Servitors of Death interested on general principles in getting Tartarus to implode . Or

Servitors of Factions practicing their art, or Servitors of Theft looking to get access to the really fun toys, or Servitors of the War ditto, or Servitors of Fate just doing what they're told...

You get the idea.

It's certain, however, that the Game is very, *very* interested in shutting down this secret society. Unfortunately, Sparky can't quite trust them. The Baron knows damn well that the Game will try to use the opportunity to load yet more sleeper agents and blackmail gatherers into Technology: even if Vapula hasn't seemed to notice and/or care about ACME itself, he isn't **that** unworldly. Sparky has problems: if he lets the Game get in too deep, Vapula will notice and almost certainly go looking for a new administrative assistant. But if he doesn't, ACME may actually succeed in getting the Genius Archangel to really cut loose. In short, Sparky is balanced on a knife on this one.

As usual.

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