

Murder at the Sutro Baths
An Adventure Scenario for “Hive, Queen and Country”
By Terry Sofian

We had all been expecting a quiet rest after the rigors of aerial travel. A visit to the most modern and beautiful baths in The Civilized World seemed in order. Luckily our aerial liner made port at the new landing ground in San Francisco, California, United States of America, Earth. From there it was but a short cable car ride to Cliff House and the already famous Sutro Baths. After traveling a thousand miles we could not have guessed that the greatest terror visited upon us would be on our own home country and by men of our own race.

Introduction;

The Victorian era was one of great contrasts, tremendous advances in certain sciences and engineering, great conservatism in other areas. This adventure will illuminate some of the darker aspects of Victorian America, while at the same time providing an exciting and dangerous mystery for the characters to solve.

The events of the adventure will unfold within the environs of Surto heights, an area near San Francisco. The heights, just south of the city itself, over look the Pacific Ocean and the seal rocks sea lion rookery. In the early 1890's Adolph Sutro bought the area as a land development and began construction of an entertainment complex centered on a group of huge indoor swimming pools. Also included were several restaurants, theaters, dance halls and museums. A mirror maze and some amusement rides rounded out the facilities. All in all there was room for 25,000 people in the combined facilities. Price was 25 cents for bathers, a dime for spectators. The various salt and fresh

water pools compare favorably with facilities built one hundred years later, in the 1990s. A map of the facility has been provided for use with the adventure. Even to jaded worlds travelers the building, with its 100,000 panes of glass and neo-classical entrance ways will be impressive. When it was open it was truly the wonder of its age.

We were ill prepared for the magnificence of Sutro's imposing wonder, even by the marvels of ancient Mars that we had so recently quitted. I felt the stirring of pride that my race, frail Earthmen, could conceive and build such a complex and beautiful jewel as the one that my eyes beheld upon stepping from the cable car. As we stared in amazement, watching the bright late afternoon sunlight fractured and broken into rainbows by acres of glass, we did not know what Earthly horrors we would find within. It was there, upon the steps to that temple to Man's intellect, that we were to come, once again, face to face with the other side of the coin of man's nature. As my companions and I began to walk down the grand staircase to view this wonder of an age, we would find headed towards us an adventure not of our choosing, and one that, I doubt not, each of us would have walked away from gladly could we have but done so with good conscience and no loss of honor. We were to find, that once again, it was Man pettiness and hatred that will always be the most terrible things on this or any other world.

On The Path to Adventure.

The characters can be easily enticed to the Baths through any number of harmless and simple methods. They can be invited by a fellow traveler, who will wax rhapsodic about the merits of "Sutro's Coney Island". They may also have heard or read reports from other sources about the tremendous facilities present.

After being cooped up in an ether flyer for several days or weeks the ability to stretch ones legs on the huge promenades of the baths, enjoy a fine meal while watching the sun set over the Pacific Ocean or just to see some new faces may be understandable. Perhaps they have heard of the new exhibit in the Museum. Just this month a new collection of rare and previously unknown Venusian life, some of strange and menacing aspect, has been installed in the exhibiting hall. Any character with a vested interested in the study of alien life or a reputation as an adventurer to uphold may find the attraction of The Bath's impossible to resist.

The characters will have no trouble making their way to The Baths, for the tiny fare of one nickel a special cable car line goes right to the complex. They will disembark and, after gazing down at the huge building for a time, make their way through the replica temple entrance. As they proceed down the huge grand staircase they will be confronted my a great mob of people brandishing clubs and a noose. This mob will have in its custody a badly beaten man, of Chinese ethnicity. The mob is in the act of dragging their victim to the nearest suitable tree for a "neck tie party".

The characters may at this time seek to find out what is going on. Inquiries must be rapidly made, the mob is in no mood to waste time. a murder was committed in the baths last night. A murder of most violent and horrible details. The mob has seize upon their victim, one of the night cleaning staff as the criminal. Not wishing to waste the valuable time of the constabulary or the courts they have decided to take matters into their own hands. Only be immediate and forceful action can the lynching be prevented. The quick display of a revolver, perhaps with its discharge into the glass roof of the building, might have the desired calming influence. The effectiveness of other steps will be left up to the determination of players and referees. If the players can not stop the mob, or

choose not to try, the badly beaten victim will quickly be hanged from one of the large trees in the area.

If the players are able to calm the mob, even for a short time, the police will arrive. They will take the prisoner into custody. Although their handling of the suspect will be only slightly less brutal than that of the mob, the characters can be fairly certain that the man will at least live to see a trial. Just as the police arrive, either to take custody or to cut down the body, the suspect's wife, Mai-lin Chen, will arrive. She will be quite distraught, for good reason. Whether her husband, Po-han, is still alive at this point, is immaterial. She knows that unless something miraculous happens soon, either her husband will be convicted for murder, or if he has already been hung, his name will never be cleared. She begs the players to help.

The Scene of the Crime:

The characters will at this time become interested in the events that have lead up to the formation of a lynch mob. After a great deal of confusion, racial slurs and additional histrionics the basic facts of the past several hours will be found to be as follows.

One Prof. William Denkian was found this morning, dead within the museum building. His body will have been basically torn to shreds, as if by a heavy blade. He was so badly mutilated, his head being nearly severed as well as having been eviscerated, that his wife fainted at the sight of his body. She has now regained her consciousness, but not her sanity.

The only other person in the building last night was the Po-han, that unfortunate soul so badly treated by the mob.

Several other persons do have keys to the building but their whereabouts have been satisfactorily explained to the authorities, lead by Inspector William O'Dell, San Francisco Police Department.

Inspector O'Dell SFPD stated that he wished to speak to the Po-han as soon as possible, and did in fact view him as the prime suspect. When the night man returned to work the mob seized him, and in a fit of over zealous civic duty became judge, jury, and, unless the players have already acted decisively, executioner.

At this point the Mai-lin will beseech the players to help her, to save her husband, or if that is already impossible to clear his name.

In Pursuit of The Truth:

If the players choose to help, and how can they ignore the pleas of the janitor's young wife, they will have some basic questions to find the answers to. If the Po-han did not kill the Dr., who did? How did the assailant get into the locked building? How did he get back out again without being spotted? Things will look grim indeed for the players' client. Astute observers will have noted that the alleged killer is almost 55 years old, weighs about 145lbs and is not remarkably strong for his size. How could he have so brutally murdered the Dr., a sizable man well hardened by his months of safari on Venus? Also the murder weapon seems to be missing. In addition to this another crucial piece of evidence can be found in the blood of the victim. When the morning manager opened the building at 6:00 AM he was cheerfully greeted by the night man. The Po-han showed no signs of agitation and presented his usual well-groomed appearance. How could he not have been covered with the blood of his victim?

At some point the players will ask about the place where the victim's body was found, and the circumstances surrounding its discovery. At 6:15 the Morning

Manager, Mr. Sutro's nephew, Paul, opened the doors to the museum and as he was approaching the Life of Venus exhibit noticed the body of the Dr. lying in a large pool of blood. Paul Sutro, understandably quite shaken, called for the police. By this time the night-man had already departed and, since his home was unknown to the Sutros, could not be contacted until he should return to work that evening. Inspector O'Dell intended to await for him and apprehend him should he return. Unfortunately events intervened and the hapless Po-han returned early, to face a racist and vengeful mob.

Blind Justice:

As the players should have figure out by now, all the evidence against the accused killer is circumstantial. This will be more than enough to get him hanged in Victorian America though. The players will have to find the real killer to clear the janitor of this charge. One clue will be in the blood on the museum floor. The corpse has long since been removed but the blood and some dark soil like material around the area has not been cleaned up yet. In addition to the many streaks left by an obviously violent struggle there will be a set of strange marks leading from the corpse to the Life on Venus exhibit, where they will become lost in the dark soil and odd stuffed animals and live plants brought back by the Doctor's party.

Should players go to the funeral home where Dr. Denkian is to be embalmed they will note that under his finger nails is a rich volcanic soil as well as a strange waxy material. Characters with knowledge of chemistry or botany will identify it as a plant produced material.

Midway through the players investigation one Dr. Fredrich Himmel will appear. He is a German Botanist from Heidelberg, and a well known and bitterly acrimonious rival to Dr. Denkian, a rival acknowledged to be one of the greatest

fencers in Germany. This will certainly give him both method and motive for killing Denkian. Accusations might fly, triggering threats of a duel. He will be taken in for questioning in this matter. He swears to take revenge upon anyone who has falsely accused him.

Too Many Facts:

As good referees, and players, may have by this time guessed the good doctor from Germany is a red herring. The real culprit is where it has been the entire time, in a five foot diameter clay pot full of rich soil from the Venusian lowlands. It will be difficult for players to be certain but the blood trail and the evidence under the deceased doctor's fingernails are good clues. The best way to be certain is to tie a small goat out in the center of the museum floor and wait for this night prowling ambulatory vegetable assassin to get hungry. This will require several nights as the flowery fiend has just feasted upon the best tidbits of Dr. Denkian. The plant is quite impressive as an opponent, it stands around eight feet tall and has tentacle like roots and powerful jaws. Its tough bark offers some moderate protection from melee weapons. Like all members of the vegetable kingdom Denkian's bane is vulnerable to fire. A couple of well placed shotgun blasts should also prove its undoing, without risking a conflagration in a building that cost more than one million dollars without contents. Several other members of the exhibit might also attract the possible suspicion of investigators, including some strange bivalved creatures of unknown lineage and outstanding size. The referee should feel free to confuse the issue with as many dangerous looking but innocuous creations, while leaving the somewhat non-descript and harmless seeming villain outside the light of suspicion.

If the players have acted quickly and with determination, thoughtfulness and intelligence throughout this adventure they will have cleared an innocent

man from the jaws of racism at its ugliest. If they have accused Himmel of Denkian's murder feel free to have the plant eat some other hapless NPC a few nights later. If Po-han has been released but Himmel is still in custody this will provide the mob with another opportunity to extract its misguided justice. It will also add the guilt of a lost innocent life to the characters' consciences. The players will gain renown points for solving the "murder" of Dr. Denkian. They will also have the opportunity to add to their reputations as investigators of the first water. On the down side they will have angered and embarrassed the police, and several prominent members of San Franciscan society who were involved with the lynch mob. While this might be quickly forgotten by most parties involved, if they have accused Himmel, or even failed to come to his defense in a strong manner they have made a powerful enemy for life. Himmel will not ever forget such a slight to his honor. Should he come across any of the characters anywhere a duel is even remotely legal, or possible, he will be calling for seconds and pulling his matched sabers from their walnut and silk case. The Chinese community of San Francisco will also have a long memory though. The characters will be honored for their deeds as long as any of Po-han's large and widespread family, or their friends, shall live.