

The Dispossessed

By Damien Kelly, 2001

What the hell was all that about?

Okay, two years ago occultist and mentalist Jerome Samsara became aware of a hellish alternate world through his experimentation in astral projection, a world overrun with demon spirits. Some say his explorations brought their attention, others that they had been seeking an exit from their exhausted reality anyway, but it became quickly evident to Samsara that the spirits were planning to invade his own world and bring an end to life there. Samsara alerted the Hand of Isis, an occult brotherhood capable of meeting such a threat and so began a period of preparation for war. New magics were developed to meet the threat of these demons and at the heart of these preparations lay Jerome Samsara, who, with greater care this time, began to return astrally to the demon world to spy on it. Learning the natures and movements of the enemy became vital to our defence. Worth the risk.

The risk in question was that the enemy would discover Samsara and either destroy our one chance for an understanding of them, or worse, force him to reveal our position and current state of readiness to the enemy. He might even provide them with some idea of how to open their terrible gate to our existence. To reduce the risk of this happening a young but powerful psychic called Maria Gannon was located and taken into the fold to act as Samsara's debriefer and mental programmer. After each trip to the other side, Jerome would prepare a report of what he had learned from examining the enemy world, and then Maria would wipe his memory clean psychically; temporarily removing his knowledge of the Hand of Isis, the impending invasion etc. in preparation for his going back again. He would travel as an ignorant, and would not have his memories returned to him until he was safely back and had given over his information. In this way the chances of his leaking information to the enemy, should they attempt to read his mind, was reduced to an absolute minimal. Her ability was to be able to transfer his memory into solid objects, from which it could be extracted later and returned to him.

Of course it went wrong. Samsara drew the attention of a particularly cunning psychic demon called Ginsemoth, who figured a perfect route into our existence was simply to ride on Samsara's wandering mind, and so on Samsara's last visit he was taken over by Ginsemoth on arrival and when his mind returned to his body it was Ginsemoth who was conscious, aware and in charge. Cue a period of mad demon sultan plaguing the earth, killing innocents and conjuring up nasty oogly boogly minions to jibber and growl around his feet.

The Hand of Isis go into action, *yay the boyz!*, and they set a trap for Ginsemoth. They give him word of another mystic capable of projecting to the demon dimension is hiding in an old house, and wait for the demon sultan to come sniffing after it. The house is a trap, built on information learned from Samsara about the demon world. When Ginsemoth goes in, Hand of Isis mystics outside on the moorlands set off an impenetrable ward all round the house like a bubble, trapping the demon inside, a ward capable of contracting and crushing the house and all its contents down to a very small amount of powder and goo. Very powerful schtuff! It would seem to be the case that if Ginsemoth cannot maintain a physical form to inhabit in this world he will be forced to snap back into his own. All good. But there is another factor. The war is still imminent, the rest of the evil is still back there waiting for a way out, and when Ginsemoth comes tumbling back in he's gonna be very motivated towards getting back and getting even. They needed Samsara back if possible; his was the most comprehensive knowledge of the enemy, once his memory was restored to him, and was in himself, one of the group's most powerful and inventive mystics, all in all a very valuable ally.

So a plan was put in place, in addition to the trap, to try and save Samsara if possible. This was going to be very tricky, and could very well ruin the plan to get rid of Ginsemoth entirely if it went wrong. But the Hand of Isis leaders, being very poor at cost benefit analysis, thought it worth the risk.

Now, this is where it all gets rather complicated. You have a psychic demon that you wish to exorcise, but the expert knowledge in how best to affect such an outcome is trapped in the mind that the demon is

occupying. The Hand of Isis had Samsara's notes and reports, but it was a pale second to the contribution of the man himself. What was clear was this; Ginsemoth needed a physical connection to our reality, he needed a host. It was also clear from reports of his activities that his disembodied state reduced his ability to get close to the minds he met. He could not stretch himself so far as to allow Samsara's mind the chance to fight back and regain control; that seemed clear. So he would not be able to sense the minds of mages waiting inside the house until he was upon them, and could not possess them instead until he was closer to them. But it was also clear that he was quick and very adept in taking such a host at close quarters, and was himself a powerful sorcerer, with quite horrifying magics.

The Hand had a banishing rite of Egyptian origin which they felt gave the best hope of getting rid of the demon, the Five Handed Banishing, which, as the name implied, required the contribution of five individuals to complete. When the ward bubble went up the five would remain within and attempt to banish Ginsemoth. Presuming they succeeded, the need for the ward was gone and it could be dispelled and they and Samsara would be let out. If it failed then they would die with him when the house was destroyed. But their success might be difficult to gauge from without. The risk remained that their failure would give Ginsemoth the opportunity to leap from one to the other, possessing and learning the group's secrets and objectives, once he was in proximity and presuming he could overcome them. It was felt his level of magic made it a safe bet that he could. He could take control, force them to obey, and try to trick his way to freedom.

If they succeeded they would need to prove it, and be able to free themselves. To ensure that this was after a success, the spell to dispel the ward was worked so that it would require all six to participate, to include Samsara, and would only function if all six were free of spiritual possession. A key was fashioned from six crystals to be charged at focal points in the building, which would only respond to solitary entities; those with an aura of duality could not make the key function.

If they failed then the ward would in time handle things, but in the time between they could not be allowed to give Ginsemoth the means to escape. Even if they committed suicide the creature might be able to glean knowledge from their souls which would be trapped within the ward: after all it had to prevent him escaping in spirit – the only route out that had been worked in was a passage to the demon reality, the route they would send Ginsemoth down if they defeated him. They had to simply be unable to aid him. Therefore it would be necessary to take the same precautions with the operatives that had been taken with Samsara when he ventured up against the enemy – mind wipes. No knowledge of the Hand or the war with Ginsemoth, simply the knowledge of the rite and the certainty that it must be enacted against the individual who was coming to the house.

Maria Gannon became a member of the team. She would wipe all the minds, including her own, prior to the trap being sprung. But if they succeeded it meant that they would be without memory afterward, and would not know how to register their success, or free themselves from a ward they knew nothing about.

Here is where the elaborate puzzles, individually meaningful, and the issue of timing a tight window of opportunity came into play.

Presuming success, the group would need to be able to work out the means of escape without knowledge of what was going on, but from clues that could not be readily worked out by Ginsemoth without his having intimate knowledge of their minds. No information could come from without, since none of the Hand could trust that the team would be really themselves and free from duress. They had to work it out alone. And Samsara wouldn't be any help, since his mind was still wiped from before his last trip to the demon reality.

It was decided that a series of puzzles that could only be worked out by a single member of the team should be placed around the house, which would lead them to an understanding of what they should do to effect an escape. The reason for putting them in such distant locations was so that the team would be forced to move about the whole building and deal with any minions that may be trapped inside with them that could be harbouring Ginsemoth's mind. A clean up operation needed to be included in the planning to ensure the integrity of the house when it was re-opened.

Worst-case scenarios were postulated to test the plan:

Q. What if Ginsemoth isn't banished?

A. Then the ward crushes his host and all possible alternate hosts and he is shot out the only passage in the thing, snapping him back into his own reality.

Q. But we're going to delay the ward crushing effect while the team works out the spell to free themselves. What if he works out there's an escape route?

A. Then he needs all the team alive, un-possessed and participating in the spell to open the ward. He'll more likely kill them, especially if we stick in a couple of combat specialists to put up a fight of it, and a mage to counter his magic and attack him with their own. And they'll never agree to help a demon.

Q. But what if he doesn't kill them? Or, conversely, what if after success some of those abominations that follow him like lap dogs kill a team member after they're successful in getting rid of him? We have to allow the spell to work in such a way that ghost members can open the ward, so that even if a minion kills some, the rest have a chance at escape with their lives.

A. Oh yeah. Fair enough. Well, he still has to work out how to open the ward and for that he needs the contents of their heads and remember, if he's possessing one of them the spell won't work.

Q. Okay, what if he doesn't kill them, uses his magic to keep them at bay, possesses each in turn, overcomes the will of their individual minds to read their memories, uses this knowledge to work out the personal puzzles of each, finds all the portions of the key and works out how the spell is done, then uses one of his abomination minions as a temporary host and forces them in their confused state to obey him with threats or promises and gets them to open the ward for him while they are free of his spirit?

A. ...That's one huge "if".

Q. Yes, yes it is – but not an impossible "if".

A. But hugely improbable. The number of different things he'd have to control and account for, and with no prior knowledge of what he's facing. That's a bit of a stretch of circumstances don't you think? Nobody's that lucky.

Q. He's a demon from an alternate dimension with psychic powers. Let's not get smug.

A. Okay. Then we rely on him not having enough time for all those things he'd have to do. We reduce the delay to just three hours to have freed themselves, after which the ward crushes the lot.

Q. But what if –

A. **OH SHUT UP!** If he can do all that you think he can do, and keep control of the situation, and overcome them all with their various abilities and specialities, AND do it in less than three hours then he can have the bloody planet! OKAY? Unless you have any further suggestions?

Q. Can we have a priest?

And that was the plan. Yes it had holes but you couldn't account for every eventuality. Even when you included a priest on the team. It would take a mammoth effort on Ginsemoth's part to overcome the many twisted components of the trap and its escape route, and even if he could assemble them, the Hand were betting that he couldn't do it all in time. It was as much as they could do.

They were betting the team's lives, Samsara's life, their own lives and all of humanity's lives.

And luckily, they won. So that's all alright then, isn't it?

That's right. It all worked. No need for all that angst and convoluted preparation as it turned out. None at all.

Ginsemoth was banished on the first try. Walked straight in, didn't see the trap coming and was sent packing without so much as a by your leave. All to plan. Well almost. See, the thing was, his true form was so terrible as it left the body of Samsara that it struck unimaginable horror and insanity into the minds of the team. Maria, the psychic, in her terror did what any good psychic would do in the face of such glorious evil. She screamed in panic and let loose a surge of cleansing psychic anguish that made that bad image and all the bad memories go away. And knocked the team out cold as it turned out, freshly mind wiped (again!) with no memory of the face of the demon sultan as he was ripped back to his own dimension in exquisite fury. Yes, that was unexpected. It was presumed you would at least remember that you'd just *successfully* banished something.

Even so, one little hiccup doesn't spoil everything, and in the end there was nothing to worry about. Except that you had to work out the clues of course, and clean up a couple of piddly nasties (who were no real threat and you always knew where they were), and assemble the key and open the ward and do it all in under three hours. But you were free of evil influence and everyone could trust each other and you were all on the same side, and there was no foundation for any paranoia since everything had worked as it was planned and it was all okay. So I'm sure it was a piece of cake escaping and none of you were stressed in a situation so completely lacking in threat and no-one was crushed by the terrible ward into a space the size of a ping pong ball. Nice friendly mob like you, I'm sure you did it in no more than half an hour, which is exactly how long it took my playtest team, who did know the banishing had been a success.

Anyway, you have to admit, it was nice to play a con scenario for once where there was absolutely no nasty twist coming on the part of the writer and the GM, where everything was safe and clean and linear. Makes such a nice change from those games where you spend the whole time paranoid trying to be ready for the inevitable twist, the all too obvious double cross, and waste precious time jumping at completely innocuous shadows.

You're welcome I'm sure.

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