

# The Fabulous Introduction: and the Damned

Welcome to 1976. The nation's finest and foxiest are shimmying into discos and singles bars, snorting disco dust off mirrors and bumping their booties to earthshaking bass lines. Turtlenecked suburbanites spend their afternoons in group therapy and their evenings with the spouse next door—sometimes both of them. You'll find a lava lamp on every desk, a muscle car in every garage and a pet rock in every pocket.

But don't let the funky facade fool you. This isn't the year you remember. While the United States of Americo gets its bicentennial groove on, the foundations of the world are starting to crack—and unearthly forces are slipping in through the fissures.

The temperature is soaring. The ice caps are shearing apart, flooding the coastlines and wrecking the weather. Droughts and acid rain are turning farmland to ashes, leaving millions hungry and restless. The oil wells are down to their last drop. Even the bees are getting angry—and organized.

And that's just the respectable bad news. Tabloids and trashy television shows—the only outlets that seem to be paying attention—are filled with off-the-wall stories that get more plausible each passing day. Saucers swooping out of the midnight sky to snatch people from their beds. Hulking man-apes stomping through the deep forests on outsize feet. Dinosaurs haunting the nation's lakes. Devils forcing their way into people's heads—and turning them into monsters.

What the hell happened? Nobody who knows the truth is telling. But it all seemed to start two years ago—on August 9, 1974.

President Stanton Spobeck's dirty tricks had finally caught up with him, and he was about to resign before he could get booted from office in disgrace. Then a once-in-an-epoch earthquake snapped off the West Coast of Americo and plunged it into the ocean. Spobeck stayed in office in the interest of national stability, promising to face the music once the crisis was over (wink wink).

But over the next two years things just kept getting worse. The environment tanked. The monsters (or whatever they are) came out of the closet. And Spobeck put the entire Southwest of Americo under martial law. He claimed the area had been contaminated and was facing dangerous aftershocks from the quake. But everybody knows he's trying to keep something trapped in there. You can't turn on the news without seeing elliptical reports of massacres and riots across the farm belt. Something big and hungry is on the hunt. But what woke it up? And what does it want?

Nobody is taking this well. Americo's cold war enemies are striking while the country is distracted, sending invasion forces across their borders and gobbling up huge chunks of the free world. And of course, back at home, the nation is partying in deep denial, shaking their moneymakers in lavish BootyDome dance halls or cheering along to Omegaball, the blood sport that has become the fastest-growing pastime in the world. Others have taken refuge in secular cults promising everything from a peek at your past lives to a ticket on an ancient astronaut's flying saucer.

Just about the only people who aren't partying up a storm or making a power grab are you and your team of adventurous friends. Why? You know something everybody else doesn't. According to the prophecies of an obscure sixteenth-century

mystic named Abednego Trestle, the world as we know it is going to end at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1979—unless someone does something to stop it.

That's your job. Welcome to *Damnation Decade*.

## Inspiration Information

This game takes place in the same tragic universe as depicted in films like *Soylent Green*, *Rollerball* and *The Omega Man*: a world with a wrecked ecology and shattered polity, spiraling toward oblivion as its oceans bubble, disease turns people into zombies and powerful inhuman forces gather their strength for one mighty strike against mankind. But there's a key difference.

The great sci-fi movies of the 1970s show us a host of different tomorrows, but they all have one thing in common: the world as we know it has ended. The powers that were botched things up—whether through pollution or social injustice or atomic holocaust—and new ones have stepped in to restore order and remake the planet in their own image.

The lights go down, and we find ourselves in a time where our monuments are in ruins, our customs are forgotten, and alien forces are firmly in control. Supercomputers kill us when we turn thirty. Corporations buy and sell our souls, or mulch us into protein crackers. Fascist chimpanzees hose us down and herd us into zoos.

Actually, all these movies have two things in common. Not only has the world gone wrong, but anyone who challenges the status quo is doomed to fail. The planet is too wrecked for salvage, and the bad guys are too powerful to be overthrown. The most that the good guys can hope for is dying with a big, iconic gesture—flipping off the system before they make their fatal escape.

So how is *Damnation Decade* different? Simple. You can win.

The game gives you a fighting chance to battle off the bad guys—by turning back the clock. *Damnation Decade* doesn't take place in a postapocalyptic world of domes, robots and jewels in the palm. Instead, you're adventuring during the age of cataclysms that brings the corporations, chimpanzees or supercomputers to power. You'll follow the clues the bad guys leave as they begin their shadowy rise to world domination, figure out their hidden goals—and battle them into submission before they put their boot on the face of the human race.

This book is divided into two sections: **We Can Be Heroes and Principalities and Powers**. The first of these, aimed at players, offers a more detailed look at the game world, as well as new starting occupations, advanced classes, skills, feats and equipment. The second section, designed for GMs, includes background on the enemies your players will be facing and dozens of adventure hooks for bringing them into your campaign—as well as a look at how to defeat them and stop the doomsday clock. Players be warned: if you read all of that stuff, you'll spoil the game's mysteries!



# The Players' Section: We Can Be Heroes

Undoubtedly something is about to happen.

Or is it that something has stopped happening?

Is it that God has at last removed his blessing from the U.S.A. and what we feel now is just the clank of the old historical machinery, the sudden jerking ahead of the roller coaster cars as the chain catches hold and carries us back into history with its ordinary catastrophes, carries us out and up toward the brink from that felicitous and privileged siding where even unbelievers admitted that if it was not God who had blessed the U.S.A., then at least some great good luck had befallen us, and that now the blessing or the luck is over, the machinery clanks, the chain catches hold, and the cars jerk forward?

—Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*

The Ice Age is coming, the sun's zooming in

Engines stop running, the wheat is growing thin

A nuclear error—but I have no fear

'Cause London is drowning, and I—I live by the river

—The Clash, "London Calling"

# Chapter One: The Day the Music Died

For centuries, events in the *Damnation Decade* world closely mirrored our own. History saw the same parade of pharaohs and madmen, revolutionaries and zealots; nurtured the same physics, faiths and arts; suffered through the same plagues and crusades. You wouldn't recognize the names, and you'd squint at the faces, but within a sentence you'd know the stories.

Then, on August 9, 1974, history took a sharp turn. An earthquake of incalculable strength struck the West Coast of Americo, rending the edge of the continent and sending it into the Elatic Ocean. The aftershocks hurled tidal waves thousands of miles to the west, swallowing archipelagoes and swamping coastlines.

Millions lost their lives, but there wasn't time to mourn. Seconds after the quake, scientists picked up huge spikes in the ambient temperature worldwide. Within hours, the polar ice caps began to shear apart and the oceans rose. This played havoc with weather systems, plunging tropical areas into permanent monsoon seasons and reducing huge swaths of northern farmland to dust.

Just as the climate was going haywire, nuclear power plants around the world began to melt down, poisoning the surrounding environment for hundreds of miles. The pollution quickly seeped into the ground water, or got drawn into the sky as acid rain, and spread the devastation even further. It seemed like things couldn't get worse. But then, as cities or even whole countries were struggling for ways to restore power, the price of energy went through the roof.

Why? On August 9, when the sky started falling, revolutionary strongman Fedo Malese saw an opportunity. With a series of lightning invasions and arm-twisting diplomacy, he seized control of the Consortium oil syndicate and turned the cartel from a commercial confederation into a political one: a millennial empire, with himself at the head, stretching across the desert lands of Maddamar. Then he announced a round of devastating price hikes that would empty treasuries across the world.

Everyone knows why Malese needs the money: the oil is drying up, and his long-oppressed people will revolt if the petrodollars run out. And it doesn't take a genius to realize that he's building a war chest for an invasion of Aleph, the nearby nation whose people have a tangled cultural and religious history with the Maddamarans. The Consortium nations have laid siege to Aleph before, and have been repulsed in humiliating routs. But this time Malese seems to have something up his sleeve—and he's definitely lunatic enough to push the world to the brink of nuclear war to get what he wants.

The Maddamaran wasn't the only dictator to take advantage of Americo's distraction on August 9. Most ruthless was Gogol Yobar, president-for-life of the collectivist empire known as the Bloc, and Americo's archenemy in a decades-long cold war. Ignoring the devastation his own people had suffered on the fateful August day, Yobar launched a drive deep into Esperanto—the birthplace of Western civilization and currently a cold war chessboard—and across the snowy deserts of Sina to his east. Leading his onslaught was the Purity Wall: a four-foot-thick barrier of black iron advancing on tank treads.

At the same time, Yobar's ostensible ally Dao Hong was making power grabs of his own. Hong, Beloved Chief Executive of the Sphere, a sprawling collectivist state that dominates the Far Eastern continent of Sina, quickly snapped up the democracies off his coast, the commercial powerhouses to his south and the divided nation to his north. Now Hong, like Gogol Yobar, has set his sights on a tiny country that has already seen more than its share of bloody intrigue: Mango.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the collectivist powers had backed the northern half of the country in a brutal campaign against the West-leaning south. Americo met this cold war challenge with gaffes and half-measures, and eventually abandoned the conflict in the face of mounting public opposition. Then the punishing tidal waves of August 9 exposed deep oil fields off Mango's coast, on the southeastern tip of Sina. Now, with oil drying up everywhere else, the collectivists are planning to kick out their puppet regime and invade Mango outright for its fuel supplies—and are openly daring Americo to do something about it.

Why hasn't the country responded firmly to these challenges? Americo has its hands full with political mischief—and incomprehensible horrors.

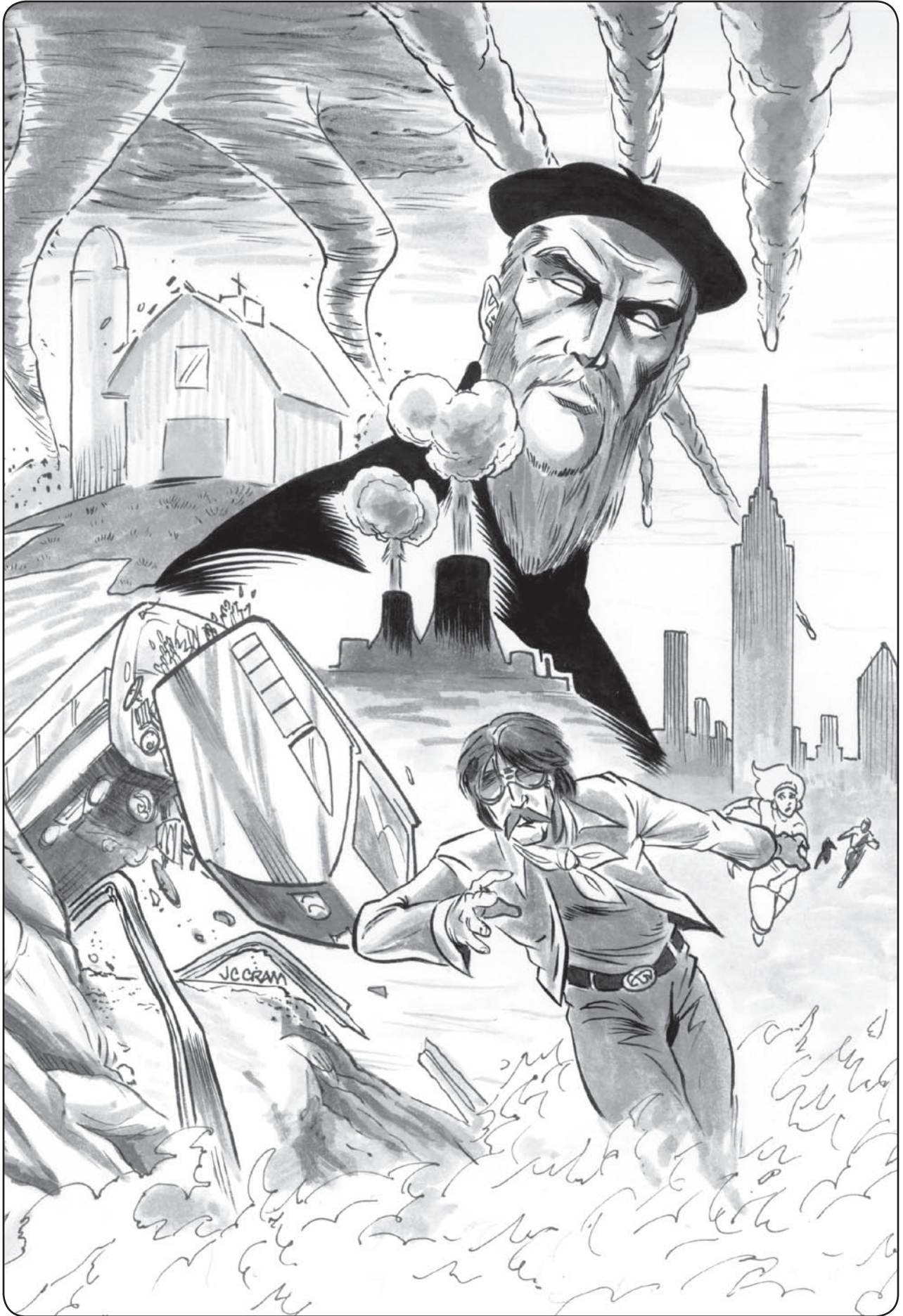
On August 9, 1974, President Stanton Morango Spobeck was preparing to announce his resignation to the world. Months earlier, a pair of enterprising reporters had linked Spobeck to a bungled break-in at his opponent's headquarters during the 1972 campaign—a verdict that Congress was just about to endorse. Spobeck's departure—it was widely hoped—would close the book not only on his own troubled presidency but on the social turmoil of the previous decade.

Then came the great quake, and Spobeck tore up his resignation. He made the announcement as smoothly as he'd done anything in his career, promising to face the music at a congressional hearing as soon as the survivors had been rescued and the damage contained. It didn't work. Even as troops and volunteers headed west, protestors flooded the streets and marched on the nation's capital, District One, accusing the president of exploiting the disaster—if not orchestrating it himself.

The angry voices got louder when, just a few days later, Spobeck declared martial law throughout the Southwest. He pointed to a string of unstable nuclear reactors and toxic spills in the area, and the dangers of aftershocks from the quake, but the protestors drew their own conclusions. Another smokescreen, they said—and a first step toward locking down the rest of the country.

But as the weeks wore on, it was obvious that something real—and dangerous—was going on behind the barricades. Something, perhaps, that not even Spobeck could understand or control.

Most ominously, the state of Alamo, which Spobeck's forces had entirely cordoned off, had gone silent. No phone calls, no radio signals, no vehicle traffic. And yet something seemed to



## The History Book On The Shelf Is Always Repeating Itself

For the most part, you can assume that anything that happened in our world up to August 9, 1974, also happened in the *Damnation Decade* universe. So you can rely on your knowledge of real-world history and culture as a guide to the back story of this game. At the same time, remember that some people and incidents have been compressed or eliminated in the interest of streamlining—or radically changed to serve a sci-fi storyline.

Also bear in mind that these aren't the 1970s you're used to. Aside from the supernatural horrors—which you'll find out about soon enough—culture and politics have been turned upside down. In the real world, the resignation of a certain widely despised president, and the end of a divisive war, seemed to signal that the upheavals of the 1960s were over and the nation could start to heal. In *Damnation Decade*, the president didn't leave, the war seems to be firing up again, and on top of everything else the world has started falling apart. Not only have the old wounds not closed, they look to be getting even redder and rawer.

Meanwhile, the motives behind the “Me Generation” are radically different. These self-involved pleasure seekers aren't trying to take a break after the punishing cultural conflicts of the 1960s, as in our world. Instead, with the Earth spiraling toward oblivion, they're whistling—better make that hustling—past the graveyard. These days, the only honest answer to “What's your sign?” is “Dead End.”

There will be more guides to the national mood, and recent history, throughout this section. The GM will get his own look at the state of play in part two of the book. If you get overwhelmed by all the new names, see the index at the end of this chapter.

### That Other Eden

Americo's staunchest ally in world affairs is Hardcastle, a stout-hearted island state off the Esperantan continent's northwestern coast. It has contributed troops to all of Americo's cold war adventures, and its daring secret service has foiled numerous collectivist plots. But Hardcastle's fighting spirit is in danger of cracking.

Youth gangs in bizarre stylized costumes rule the streets, murdering and raping with impunity. The state's economy is in constant danger of collapse under bloated social-welfare programs and endless labor strikes. Governments are voted out of office seemingly on a monthly basis, and none of them have been able to stop the enervating guerrilla war with the island nation to the west. The public has begun to see Americo as a threat rather than a friend and ally. It doesn't help that the face of Americo is Stanton Spobeck.

Hardcastle's former colonies have come to very different fates. The sprawling Sinan nation of Kish, which freed itself from Hardcastle decades ago, has transformed itself into a centrally planned democracy. Since August 9, Kish has been hard hit by floods, earthquakes and mudslides, and has suffered a terrible loss of life. Moreover, neighboring enemies have used the opportunity to stage forays across the border, raising the specter of all-out war—possibly nuclear.

Off the coast of Tang lies the city-state of Kontan, a thriving commercial empire that was overrun by the Sphere in the wake of the ecological disasters. Hardcastle has lodged numerous formal protests about the capture of its colony, to no avail. Now Hardcastle's government is split over the proper response: a sizable contingent of ministers is trying to persuade Americo to launch a joint invasion to free the island.

Far toward the South Pole lies the vast island nation of Agaland. Since August 9, the country has largely been cut off from the outside world, and in the face of material deprivation many of its people have fallen into savagery. Its sprawling deserts are home to semi-mutated road gangs who extort the surviving communities for gasoline and other essentials. The only thing keeping them in check is a handful of near-superhuman highway patrolmen (“the Bronze Squad”) who tear down the endless blacktop in nitro-burning V8 cruisers.

Meanwhile, melting ice caps have caused untold havoc in Stanard, another former Hardcastle colony that borders Americo to the north. Most of the great nation has been flooded and turned into a vast post-Arctic marshland. Refugees are pouring south, although many have decided to head to Hardcastle.

be spreading outward from there, something silent and sinister. Every night brought reports of National Guardsmen massacred in clashes with unseen enemies—or small towns that had to be rescued from bloodthirsty nocturnal armies—or bands of survivors who would rather kill themselves than tell their stories.

All of that was terrifying enough. But if you believed the stories circulating outside the respectable newspapers and television news programs, the horrors from Alamo were just the beginning. Americo seemed to be facing a rogue's gallery of otherworldly predators.

For instance, the papers said it was the gales of November that sank the *Gordon Lightfoot* and its twenty-six thousand tons of iron ore. But a bunch of local yokels told *Beyond the Barrier With Herman Purvis* that they had seen a long, snaking shadow gliding along the very same lake just hours before the ship went down.

Or consider those campers who got torn apart in the Barrier Mountains: it was bears, no question—if you believe the nightly news. But what about that backwoodsman with stories about giant ape-men hungry for human flesh?

Likewise, respectable scientists insisted the rise in animal attacks on people—killer bees, maniac rats, predatory sharks—was just a statistical blip. But everyone who survived those attacks told the press (or at least the tabloids) that the creatures seemed to have a cunning and malice that was almost human. And it goes without saying that all the lights racing across the rural sky were more than swamp gas and weather balloons. Did those cattle just mutilate themselves?

Most of Americo is ducking those kinds of questions—as well as the general specter of death and devastation—by funking itself into oblivion. Drug sales—illegal and over-the-counter

## Living For The City

As you've seen, the whole world is suffering through tough times. You'll have chances to go abroad and help out firsthand, but your meat-and-potatoes adventures will take place in Americo—the locus of paranormal activity on the planet (for reasons you'll discover as you get deeper into your campaign). You and your GM can choose any city you wish as a home base, provided it wasn't washed away in the great quake.

When you're devising the details of your home town, remember: this is a very different country than the one you're used to. Americo's cities are falling apart after years of riots and financial mismanagement. Businesses and middle-class residents are fleeing the urban core. The people who stay behind face a crumbling infrastructure, stratospheric crime levels and indifferent public officials. Meanwhile, in the farmlands, environmental catastrophes and supernatural horrors have turned huge chunks of the Middle West into a war zone, as farmers fight off pollution by day and hideous creatures by night.

alike—are through the roof, and the dance halls are packed every night, especially the new chain of BootyDome franchises. These towering, terraced discotheques are notorious for hosting not only the hottest acts but also scores of drug dealers; sometimes the clubs even spray atomized narcotics down onto the dancers. People who can't get through the velvet ropes occupy themselves with Omegaball, a no-holds-barred version of lacrosse that has captured worldwide attention, and only minor censure, for its unapologetic brutality.

Those with a spiritual bent—and who wouldn't lean that way in dire times?—have mostly abandoned mainstream religion for the easier answers of self-help cults. Hunker Obliterative Processing (HOP) promises to “tell you how to think for yourself” and find fulfillment through radical selfishness. Déjà You will cure what ails you by putting you in touch with your past lives. Man Last teaches you to reject human society and embrace all-nurturing Nature. And the Seed of Sirius will get you in good with the ancient astronauts who taught us everything worth knowing ten thousand years ago.

For Americo, the future looks bleak. Reports of the unexplained seem to be increasing, to the point of becoming an open secret in national conversation. The Bloc and the Sphere are still gaining ground, while Americo remains too distracted to check them—except perhaps in Aleph and Mango, which could easily turn into nuclear flash points. Stanton Spobeck, meanwhile, is up to his old tricks, using abstruse constitutional arguments to justify a run for a third term in office. If he wins, angry protestors may well tear the country apart. If he loses, the nation will be stuck with either Quantrill Biscuit, the Brand X governor of a southern state, or Door Number Three: Humboldt Suede, media magnate and founder of the notorious men's magazine *Bedfellows*, who has mounted an unexpectedly strong independent candidacy.

And then there's Abednego Trestle. This sixteenth-century mystic, who left behind a book of startlingly accurate, if maddeningly hard to decipher, predictions, has correctly called every major event since his death, from world wars to assassinations to royal abdications. But that's nothing compared to what he's predicted will be coming next.

Whether by chance or design, one of bad guys plaguing the planet will bring about the end of the world as we know it on December 31, 1979, at the stroke of midnight. Which one? Trestle isn't clear on the point—which means that even if one faction of malefactors falls down on the job, another might rise to take its place at the doomsday switch.

But Trestle leaves some room for hope. Unlike his other predictions, he says, these visions came swathed in a fog of uncertainty. Trestle has seen a band of righteous heroes who might—just might—be able to take on every last villain in turn and battle them into submission.

It will mean three years of the bloodiest battles in human history, and the heroes will have no margin for error. If they let even one enemy slip through the net, the world is lost. But if they win, they will deliver an epochal body blow to the forces of evil—and drive them into hiding for ages to come.

Sound groovy? Then get to work!

## Host Of Horrors



Lean and looming, with tar-black hair and a horsy face, Herman Purvis rose to fame portraying Tanko, the numinous alien counselor on the cult television series *The Sand Puppies*. Now Purvis has traded the blue pajamas of the Extra-Terran Expeditionary Force for a beige blazer, black turtleneck and tight checkered slacks—his uniform of choice for leading viewers *Beyond the Barrier* once a week. In a little under a season's worth of shows, Purvis has given audiences a glimpse of lost continents, lake monsters and size twenty-five footprints. For a team of adventurers battling the unseen enemies of mankind, Purvis's program is a solid—if not always reliable—roadmap to the unknown.