

CTHULHU ARCH



DAMNATION VIEW
A CTHULHUTECH STORY BOOK

SHULHU テマツ

DAMNATION VIEW



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DISCLAIMER

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This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters, and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fictional and intended for entertainment purposes only.

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This book is intended for mature readers. It contains dark and disturbing content and images. Reader discretion is advised.

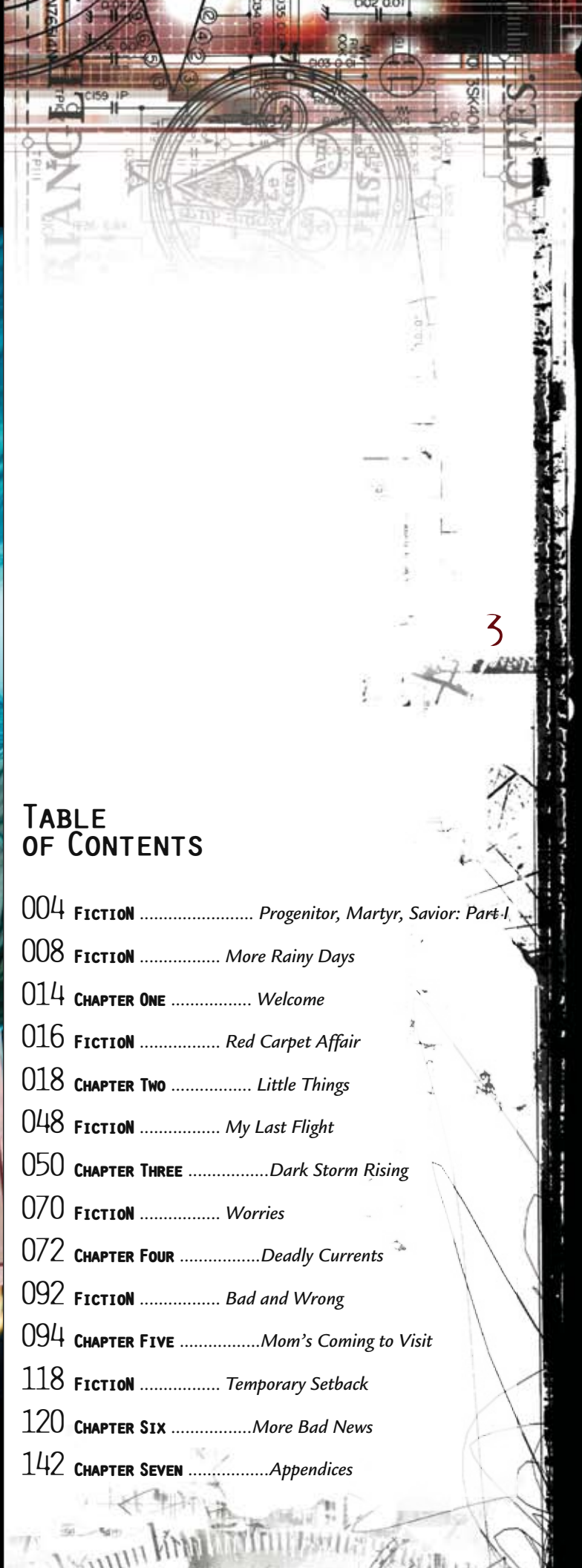


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MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY.
ARKHAM, MASS. 2013



TODAY, TERESA ASHCROFT IS A YOUNG
DOCTORAL STUDENT WHO HOPES HER
THESIS WILL FLY.



LITTLE DOES SHE KNOW THAT
HER IDEAS WILL ONE DAY
CHANGE THE WORLD FOREVER...



... AND BRING IT TO THE
BRINK OF DESTRUCTION.

NICE TRY,
SIMON.

HOW DO YOU
ALWAYS
KNOW?



GENIUS.
PURE AND
SIMPLE.

RIGHT. AND WHEN
IS THE GENIUS
FINALLY GOING
TO SHOW ME
WHAT SHE'S
WORKING ON?

RIGHT ABOUT
WHEN THEY GIVE
ME THE ALL
IMPORTANT
LETTERS.
P-H-D.



YOU KNOW YOUR
APPOINTMENT TO
GET INTO THE
RESTRICTED
ARCHIVES IS IN
TEN MINUTES.

OH CRAP!
OH CRAP!
OH CRAP!

THE RESTRICTED ARCHIVES OF
MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY. A PLACE
FEW ARE GRANTED ACCESS.

IT IS A TESTAMENT TO
TERESA'S CHARACTER
THAT SHE IS HERE.

-- I KNOW
THOSE ARE A
LOT OF RULES,
BUT THIS IS A
VERY SPECIAL
PLACE.

I HAVE NO
PROBLEM WITH
THEM. JUST
HAPPY TO BE
HERE.

WHAT IS IT
YOU'RE
STUDYING
AGAIN?

ADVANCED QUANTUM
MECHANICS. MULTI-
VERSE DIMENSIONAL
THEORY.

YOU CAN FIND
INTERESTING
STUFF IN
THOSE.

BUT IF YOU'RE
REALLY SERIOUS,
LET ME SHOW YOU
SOMETHING.

WOW...
SHOULD WE
BE BACK
HERE?

I
WON'T TELL
IF YOU
WON'T.

WHAT ARE
THESE?

THE RAREST OF
THE RARE. THE
MOST POWERFUL
OF THE POWERFUL.

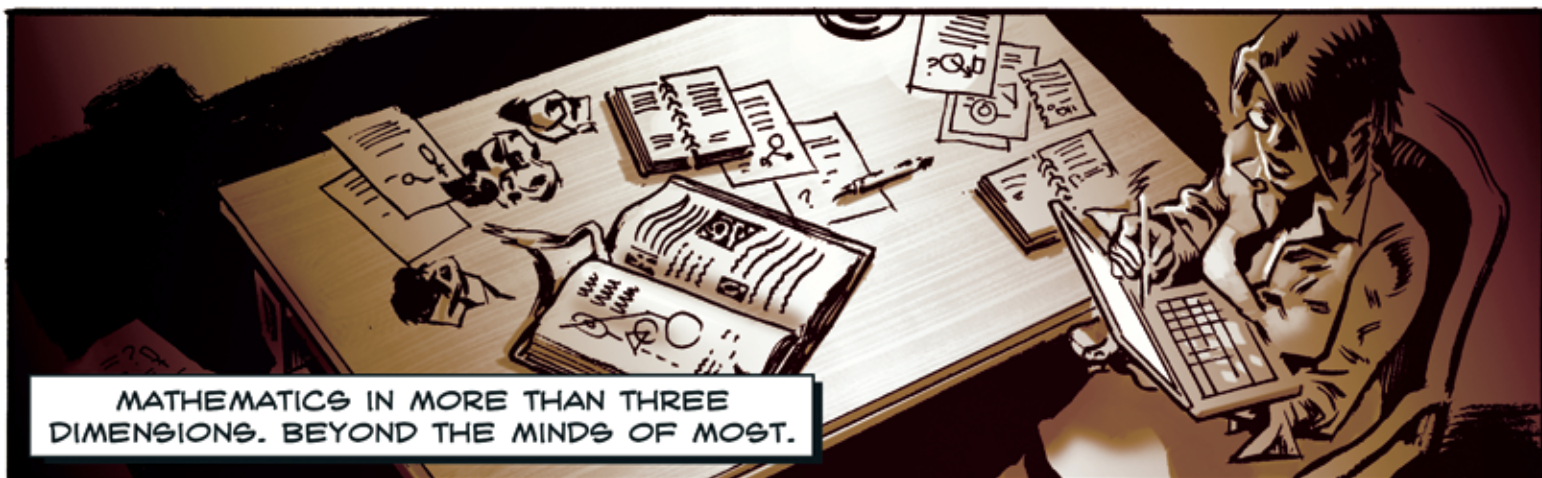
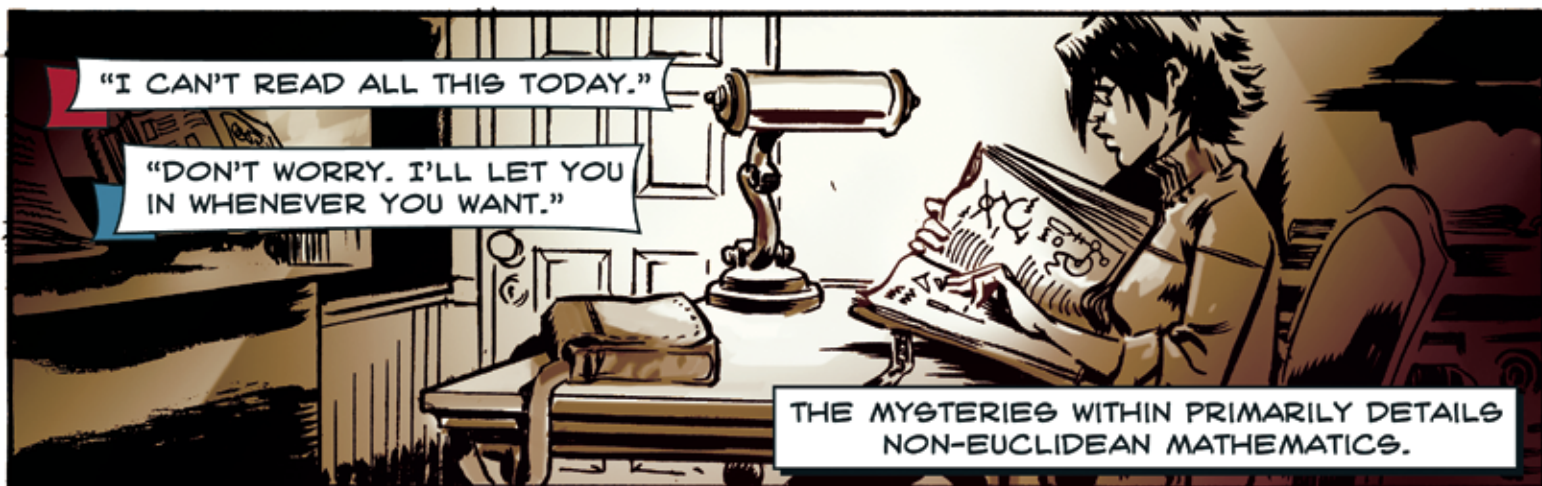
THIS IS THE ONE
YOU WANT. THE
MYSTERIES WITHIN.

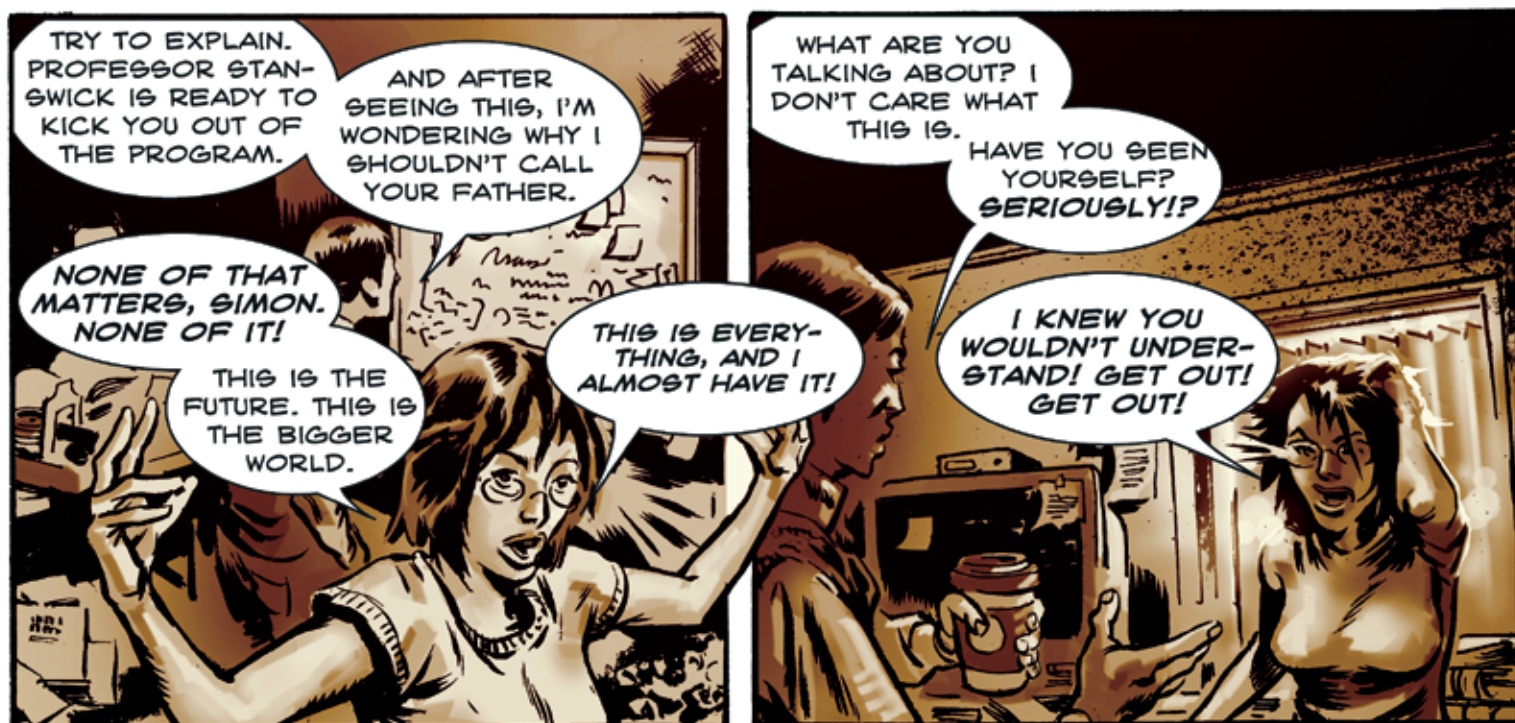
THIS IS ONE OF A
KIND. TRANSLATED
FROM A VERY
OBSCURE GERMAN
DIALECT

IT'S ONLY BEEN
HERE A FEW YEARS,
COURTESY OF THE
DISAPPEARANCE OF A
VERY RICH AND VERY
RECLUSIVE MAN.

WHAT'S IT
ABOUT?

YOU'LL JUST
HAVE TO READ
IT TO FIND
OUT.





The only time Cevy's cavalier attitude cracked was right before a mission that everyone knew was dangerous. The Nazzadi would say honest-to-goodness heart-felt "good huntings" to everyone, saving a long, warm hug for Jack.

Sam wondered when Cevy was going to give up whatever she needed to give up and start dating him. It was getting painful to be around.

Remiels feeding tube popped as it drew back. Sam climbed her Engel's gantry, gently patting him on the arm as she went. She could already feel him and the Malach needed to get out and stretch his legs. And possibly rip something apart. Sam noticed that somewhere, in the back of her head, she had a similar itch.

Sam fastened her helmet as the pilot hatch hissed open. Feet first, she slipped into the warm, fluid-filled, uterine control capsule. It lit up with a cool blue light as she reached out to hook the feeds into her helmet. Remiel's joints began to unlock and the two joined in communion as they stepped off the platform.

Yup, she could feel it. Something was going to die today. She just hoped it was a mess of bugs and not her friends this time.

.....

It would be so much better if there was at least some kind of nervous chatter, but no one ever talked at times like these. The low-flying NES Victory had slowed and everyone knew what that meant - it was getting close to drop time. It left all of the soldiers and pilots alone with their thoughts, praying to whatever higher force each believed in that might help them see the people they loved one more time.

The mystery was finally done. Sam knew why they were here. To take back Juneau and keep the bugs far enough north they could be dealt with. To do the thing she dreaded more than anything else in the world.

After the briefing, Sam had spent the better part of the trip trying hard not to scream. This wasn't her first barbecue in Juneau. She'd been there the first time and was one of the few people to make it out breathing. Even Remiel was a little apprehensive. Neither of them had emerged truly intact.

Any minute now the hatches would open, the light would blink, and it would be go time. Sam had stopped believing in any sort of higher power that didn't look like a nightmare and want to extinguish life as we know it. But at times like this, a little voice in the back of her head issued a prayer, hoping that something out there was benevolent and listening. Hoping, like everyone else here, that they might get just one more day, even if that day was another day of fighting. That's really all that was left, anyway.

With no one to hear, Sam whispered one thing.

"We who are about to die salute you."

.....

Juneau burned. Again.

It was Sam's worst nightmare, but for some reason it almost felt like she was ready for it. Like she knew it was going to happen. Not just that it was going to happen, but what was going to happen.

The chaos was almost as bad as the first time around, but somehow Sam had managed to keep Cevy and Jack with her. They'd gotten split up from CC and Timana when a Spider tore in out of nowhere. Sam hoped they were still alive, but she had more pressing matters right now. Like getting the three of them out of here alive.

The retreat order had been issued within an hour of dropping. Since Sam had done this before, they actually had a chance of surviving. Unlike the panicked shouts and screams that were the other pilots. The little voice prayed again, quickly and quietly.

Then, there it was. Dead end. Tails of a couple Scorpions on one side. The whine of Wasps on the other. And the way ahead blocked by an intense battle zone. Suddenly, no way out. But Sam knew this. Why couldn't she remember? Why couldn't she remember?!

.....

Her lover's silvery gray arms wrapped around her like a vise, Sam rejoined the world, shouting, sobbing, and thrashing in her bed. Again.

The dream still vivid in her mind, Sam started to breathe in the real world, sniffing back her sobbing.





Her breathing slowed from gasps to deep inhalations. She gripped Varika's arm tight and held on to it like a life preserver while she finally calmed down. She thanked whatever that he was there - and that he understood.

After a long silence, Varika kissed her gently on the back of the head. "Bad one."

Sam smiled weakly. "What made you guess?"

"Juneau?"

"Sort of. It's weird. I can still see it. It was the same dream I had the night before last."

"I'm sorry, baby. It's over now."

Sam slipped out from under his arm, peeling off her sweat-soaked clothes. "No, I mean it was the exact same dream. Exactly. In every detail. I wonder if it means something."

Varika got up and brought her a glass of water. "It means you're worried. With what happened in China, we're all on edge."

"I don't think that's it. This feels different. I wish I could show you. I mean, look at me. Instead of being a mess, I'm all amped up." She took the water and drained the glass in one gulp.

"You're right, that is different. Why don't you talk about it with Dr. Reiss today. She'll know something."

Something made Sam stop and look deeply into Varika's violet eyes. "You don't deserve this."

He cocked his eyebrow in that 'Excuse me?' way.

"I mean, here I am, all over the place. One minute I'm bouncing off the walls and horny and the next I'm sobbing and losing it. And all the time you're just there, solid as a rock, there whenever I need you."

"Some might say closed off, but I'm happy it works for you."

"Please. What do you get out of this relationship? Seriously?"

Varika patiently sat on the bed. "We're going to have this discussion again? Okay. I get you in this relationship. I get to be in love with you. When you're bouncing off the walls and when your falling apart. Especially when you're having one of your totally uncalled for insecure moments, like now."

Something in Sam was resisting hearing what he was saying. "Wow, I am quite the catch, aren't I?"

Varika stood up and took her in his arms again. "Yes. You are."

When words fail, kisses don't. And this one said I love you in a way even Sam could get.

.

Sam nestled into the overstuffed chair. There was a time when this felt like interrogation to her. No longer. Now this chair felt like home, like a warm hug from her mother. The piece of frayed leather on the right armrest that she'd been constantly picking at for the last six months was so familiar that the chair felt like it was hers.

Jesse was late, which was odd. The therapist had this thing about punctuality. She was never late and she made everyone else take responsibility when they were - she took it very seriously. It made Sam very nervous as she thought of all the possible things it could mean.

The door clicked gently as Dr. Jesse Reiss gently slid into the room, not a sign of rush or distress on her face. In fact, she looked the same way she looked every time Sam had ever seen her - pinned back black hair shot through with silver streaks, expensive black designer suit, Ashcroft Clinic pin on her lapel. It never ceased to amaze Sam how a woman pushing her mid-forties could not have a single worry line or crow's feet on her face. Sam always thought she must be a testament to healthy living, something most believed a luxury in today's world.

"Sam, I want to acknowledge that I am late. I know that is disrespectful and it cuts into our valuable

time together. You can rely on me that I will manage my time more effectively from now on so that it does not happen again." Jesse sat in the chair opposite and smoothed out her suit.

"That's once in six months. I think I can deal."

Jesse took a deep breath and smiled. "Thanks. But I'm sticking with what I said."

"It must have been something pretty important."

Jesse nodded. "With everything going on, there's a lot of people freaking out."

Sam had to stifle a giggle. Freaking out. Not standard therapist terminology. That's why she liked Jesse. Frankly, that's the only reason she'd made any progress in her military mandated therapy sessions at all.

"I hate doing it, but I had to send someone to in-patient today. Another Engel pilot. If they don't stop putting you guys on such a heavy duty roster, it's going to get ugly."

"Not gonna happen. Perils of being the best and the baddest," Sam replied.

Jesse settled in. "Speaking of best and baddest, how have you been?"

Sam just sat quietly.

"That bad, huh?" Jesse pulled out her peek and tapped the screen.

"It's been a little rough lately."

"Well, let's start with something good. How's Varika?"

"Okay, I guess."

Jesse frowned. "Okay, I guess? That sounds like a Sam outside of therapy answer."

"Well, I'm having trouble opening up. It's like the things I'm afraid of, if I let them out, then they might become real."

Their connection was beginning again this session. "Which fears?"

Sitting quietly, Sam just shook her head. "I... they're... hmmm."

"Okay, not ready to talk about them yet. How about a different question. The sex still good?"

Sam couldn't stifle this laugh. "Wow. The conversations we have. Yes, Jesse, it's still regular and it's still awesome."

"I'll resist the urge to ask for details," said the smiling Jesse. "As they say, sex is the barometer for a healthy romantic relationship."

"Really? How about you? Getting some hot tail these days?"

"That, Lieutenant Masters, is private."

It was on now. "Hey Jesse, eff you."

The tension broken, they both laughed.

"Well, now that we're here. Let's talk about what's really bugging you."

Sam sighed. "It's my dreams."

"Having nightmares again?"

"No. These are different. I've had the same dream at least three times since I saw you last. It's so real. It's like I'm there. I'm in Juneau again, but it's different. It's like I'm back in Juneau, not like a nightmare of surviving the attack. The bugs are already there and I'm having to fight my way out again. I can't see them, but I know most of my friends are dead. And Varika's there, too, but I don't know where he is."

The look of concern on Jesse's face was subtle. "Where does this dream usually end?"

"The way all my nightmares used to end. With me screaming myself awake." Sam paused. "I thought we were past this. Why this? Why now? Is it because of China?"

"I don't know. But I do know that we'll get through this like we got through it last time. We're going to talk all about it. So get yourself some water, girl."

"This seems different somehow. It's like with regular nightmares there's always something weird. Like not being able to run or sinking or whatever. This time, there's nothing weird. It's like I'm watching something real." Sam began to fidget with the frayed leather.

It did not escape Jesse's notice. "It's just a dream. There's no reason to make it any more significant than that."

"I don't know. It's just... It just feels like something's going to happen."

The therapist smiled sympathetically. "Something always does."

.

Military bars. There's always something going on. Sometimes it's just fun to watch pilots posture or

watch the short guys try out their short guy complexes. You get to find out whose dating life is out in the open and whose is still in the closet – and who hooked up and is doing the walk of shame. A lot of times you can hear somebody spouting off some wet-brained theory about the state of the world, but sometimes you'll get the real skinny through the grapevine. When somebody knows somebody who was there, you might get the story that'll never make it to the news.

Sam could care less about the rest of it. It's the truth that she was after. And a decent glass of bourbon.

It was Friday night and she was off the duty roster for the weekend. Fortunately, so was Varika. His attitude about this was a little different. He liked to be around people, even if he didn't talk to any of them, and he never really wanted to know the truth – or at least that kind of truth. That was one of the things that Sam loved about him. He had this whole 'live in the moment and don't worry about the things I can't control' thing going on. It was especially nice when it was time for one of her panic attacks.

However, if Sam was off, then so was the rest of her squad. Cevy and Jack were also at the Crow's Nest, down the bar, doing shots of tequila. They were fun for a while. The drunker they got, the louder they got, but they also got a heck of a lot funnier and more fun to be around. But there was always a point where there was drama.

It was Sam's silent opinion that they just needed to get a room and work it out. Everybody would be happier.

The Asian girl with the perfect nails was on the screen again. "Good evening. I'm Cindy Tam and this is your GNN world news report."

The bar always quieted down a little when it was time for the big news. Especially lately. It seemed like the world was falling apart faster and faster.

"Evacuation of China continues today in the wake of advance by the Rapine Storm. The New Earth Government's rescue efforts are meeting with great success as hundreds of people have been found and relocated to Australia."

The screen changed to show Chinese refugees housed in temporary shelters – school gyms, parks, the like. Then, back to Cindy.

"Of course, there is the continuing tactical question regarding the Storm's advance. Most especially, where does that leave the citizens of Japan, the Philippines, and Australia?"

The screen changes to show Field Marshal Anton Tilden in a press conference. He is a stately man, graying perfectly at the temples, with magnetic presence.

"We have not yet given up on China. A tactical retreat was necessary to ensure the integrity of our forces and a new plan is being evaluated. Currently, we are reinforcing the Armed Forces in Japan and Australia, both to protect those states and also to put the first pieces in place for our emerging China initiative."

In the meantime, rescue forces work around the clock to round up any survivors who may not have been able to make it to the initial evacuation effort."

Back to Cindy. "We will continue to bring you up to the minute reports as this situation unfolds."

The voice on the screen went on to start talking about curfews in some cities, but most of the soldiers in the bar sat and quietly sipped their drinks.

The guy next to Sam leaned over. He looked like a corn-fed farm boy, but one that had seen a few fights. "My buddy survived that."

Sam nodded her head. "Sounds like he was lucky."

"I suppose. Saw him the other night. His crew ended up getting shipped back through here."

Now Varika took notice. "Shipped back through? Why isn't he with the reinforcements in Japan or Australia?"

"He said there aren't any. He said China's gone."

"What do you mean it's gone?" asked Sam.

The guy polished off his beer. "He said the Storm broke the lines and over-ran everything. They had to fight like hell just to get out."

"The news said the retreat was tactical."

"Not according to him. He said they ran for their lives and the Storm was picking them off every chance they got."

Sam let that sit for a minute. "How many you think got out?"

"My buddy says maybe 40%."

"6 in 10 KIA? You've got to be kidding. Those are Juneau numbers." Sam was getting a little animated.

The guy's shoulders were starting to sink. "I wish I was."

Varika was having problems processing this. "Why would the news lie? Why would a respected Field Marshal get on the screen and tell us that things weren't that bad?"

"Don't ask me."

"Maybe because they want to break it to us gently. Can you imagine what that news would be like if it got out? Lots of craziness. I bet the suicide rate would spike," offered Sam.

Varika wasn't buying it. "Maybe the details of the reinforcement plan are secret. So the enemy doesn't get wind."

"Maybe. But the picture my buddy painted wasn't like that. He was with the main force. There ain't a main force anymore."

"Then it's a good thing all those people survived," said Sam.

"My buddy said they didn't. He said all that stuff on the news is fake."

"They're lying about that, too, huh?" countered Varika.

"Say what you like, but he was crying like a baby when he told me. They had to leave people behind. Crowds of them. Standing on the shore screaming and begging for them to come back."

Silence.

The guy sounded pretty far off now. "He said they had to leave all those people to die. Otherwise, they wouldn't have made it out."

Sam didn't realize the crowd they'd gathered. Even Jack was there. "That is seriously effed up, man."

"Hell, it might not be true. But my buddy ain't one to make stuff like that up. And he was all messed up, too. I'm worried he's going to pull IPT."

IPT. That was soldier-speak for in-patient therapy. Being forcibly admitted to a psychiatric care facility. Once affectionately known as the loony bin. It hardly carried the stigma it once did.

The guy looked up. "Sorry to bring you guys down. Anybody else got something?"

They all looked around. It seemed that no one did.

Fortunately, the bartender took the cue. "Next round's on the house, soldiers."

Instead of cheers, his generous offer was simply met with a rush of pilots now intent on getting drunk.

Sam and Varika sat in silence for the better part of a half hour.

Finally, under the bar, Varika gently put his hand on Sam's leg. "You know, you never told me what Dr. Reiss said about your dreams."

"She thinks they're just dreams. But we're going to keep an eye on them. She said something like 'in case it's something repressed in my psyche that's trying to manifest.' I'm not sure what that means, but it sounds good, right?" Sam polished off the last of her bourbon and waved to the bartender for another.

From the screen came the ever calm voice of Cindy Tam once again. "And now for your local weather report."

Sam looked up at the icons on the screen. "You know, it doesn't even matter that it rains here all the time anymore. It's like the clouds are in my head now."

Varika stood up to go to the bathroom and reassuringly kissed Sam on the top of her head. "I know, baby. I know."

.

Sam shot up in bed. Someone was pounding on the door. And shouting.

"Masters! Let's move! Ready room in five!" It was CC. Something important must be up.

Sam jumped out of bed and into her flight suit. One trip to the sink to wet down her crazed platinum bed-head and she was out the door.

Which was a little disorienting, because she was not the only one in the halls. It was wall to wall people, like every pilot in the base was heading to a ready room. Sam had never seen Seattle like this. She wondered what the hell was going on, but didn't have the time for the pit in her stomach to make any protests.

She burst into the right room just in front of Jack. Everyone else was already here. CC was up in front with tactical data. Sam knew her well enough to know that the facade of concentration on her face was actually CC's attempt to cover up fear.

"Captain, why is everybody up at this ungodly hour? The bugs surrender? We having a party?" cracked Jack.

"Juarez, stow it. I'm dropping the tactical data into your peeks now."

Sam waited for the data to come up on her hand-held computer. Maps and topography. Squad, platoon, and company plans. It was detail for their part in a massive assault. On Juneau.

CC pulled up the data on the giant screen. "This is the thing we've been waiting for. We're taking back Juneau."

Everyone sat in stunned silence.

As usual, it was Jack that said something. "Uh, when?"

"We're loading up in a half hour."

Again, quiet.

Again, Jack. "You have to be effing kidding me."

Cevy wasn't far behind. "Why are we just finding out about this now?!"

"The official word is that the sensitivity of the operation dictated an intelligence black-out." CC grimaced.

"Captain, can we get that in English, please?" asked Timana. The Nazzadi always maintained his composure.

"It's a secret op and they didn't want to risk the bugs finding out about it. So we're being briefed right before we're deployed."

"That's effing nice!"

"Lt. Juarez, do you want me to tell you what you're doing, or do you want me to just drop you out there and hope you survive?"

Jack quieted down, still fuming.

CC got down to business. "Okay people, this is what we've got and we've got no time to learn it, so pay attention."

.

There was more talking. Then there was walking.

Sam was doing everything on auto-pilot. Things were unfolding in front of her like she was watching them on a screen.

There it was. The mission. The mecha bay. The long warm hug between Cevy and Jack.

Finally, it hit Sam. "Eff me."

Jack smirked at her. "Not right now. Bad timing."

Sam didn't even hear him. "It's like my dream is coming true."

Cevy winked at her. "Girl, if your dreams are going to start coming true, can you have one about me naked in a hot tub with Jameson Cain?"

She hadn't even had a chance to say good-bye to Varika. It never occurred to her that the other night might have been their last night together.

Sam made a promise to herself, that she would treat every time like it was the last time, every good-bye like it was the last one.

In this world, it probably was.

CHAPTER ONE: WELCOME

Time marches on. Days pass, the world changes. The Aeon War grows. In that vein, you hold the evolution of the *CthulhuTech* setting in your hands. Welcome to 2086. Welcome to the *Damnation View*.

The *Damnation View* is the first *CthulhuTech* story book and it is a very different kind of book than other *CthulhuTech* resource books. It covers the major story developments in the *CthulhuTech* setting over the year 2086 and it changes what the setting is in the process. *CthulhuTech* will never be the same.

This short chapter will give you a road map to this book, how to use the material in several ways, and show the physical structure of the text.

Good luck and good hunting. You'll need it.

REFERENCES

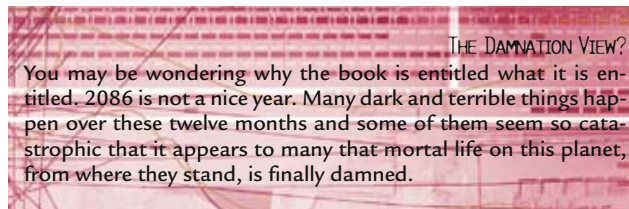
The *Damnation View* builds on material that has already been presented as part of the *CthulhuTech* product line. While you can use this book only having read the *Core Book*, parts of it will not make as much sense as if you have also read *Vade Mecum* and *Dark Passions*. The *CthulhuTech* setting is meant to be inclusive of all elements and the *Damnation View* is the first that brings them all together in one place.

STORYGUIDES VS. PLAYERS

The *Damnation View* is primarily written for Storyguides. The events of 2086 are presented to be used as story elements or full blown stories for your games. They reveal important secrets and events in the *CthulhuTech* setting and metaplot. Frankly, if you're a player, you will more than likely compromise your enjoyment of this material if you read it before you get the chance to experience it unfolding as part of your story.

However, we know that Storyguides are not the only people who are interested in buying and reading this book. The good news is that there are ways for you as a player to enjoy the *Damnation View* without ruining your play experience. Our best recommendation is to let your Storyguide read the book first, so he can tell you which sections he will be using in your game. Then you can avoid reading the parts that may spoil your experience, while still reading the rest of the book. After all, the *Damnation View* covers events all over the *CthulhuTech* setting and it is unlikely that you will play them all in your game. Many of them may only be things your Character reads about in the news, but you want to know the details.

If you're a Storyguide, you may have to deal with players that are going to read the whole book anyway. If that's the case, our best advice is to use the story details as inspiration on where to take your own game. You know the broad strokes of what's going to happen and you know where to end based on the metaplot, but you can change up the details any way you want. It's a little more work, but you will keep your players guessing and everyone can enjoy this book.



THE CTHULHUTECH STORYLINE

The overarching storyline of *CthulhuTech* is referred to as the metaplot – in other words, the way the setting evolves in a large sense. You will create and play many plots as part of your own personal stories, but the setting will grow and change independent of them to simulate how things happen in the real world. Those things are the metaplot.

There are some game enthusiasts who do not like metaplot as a part of their games. They do not like a setting that evolves outside of their control. If you are one of these people, that does not mean that the *Damnation View* cannot be of use to you. This book delves further into different aspects of the setting that may not be explored elsewhere and provides new technology, monsters, and character options. You can use these to enhance your own game and you may well be inspired to write stories of your own design based on some of the stories presented here.

While we have no intention of telling you how to run your game, we will be taking a stand on how sections of the metaplot turn out and will be developing further story material based on that. Again, use what you want, modify what you want, and throw away the rest.

USING THIS MATERIAL

The *Damnation View* presents you with a series of both minor and major plots. The minor plots each give you an overview of the plot and possible events, ways to integrate them into your game, and several important supporting cast characters. The major plots each give you an overview of the plot, background surrounding the plot and the players involved, a ready to run story that puts your Characters into the plot, ways to integrate the plot into your already existing game, and several important members of the supporting cast.

If you like what you see, this book is designed to get you up and running with the material as quickly as possible. The broad strokes are all done for you and all you need to do is add the appropriate details for your story and Characters and customize it in any way you see fit.

If you find that you like the ideas but not the execution or are the kind of Storyguide that simply generates everything from scratch, then use the material in this book as inspiration and something from which to build. We're not here to tell you how to run your game. The *Damnation View* is intended to be a resource for everyone, whether you use the material as it is written or take it entirely in your own direction.

INTEGRATING CHARACTERS

The *Damnation View* is designed to bring your Characters front and center for the biggest world-shaking events of the *CthulhuTech* story. Your Dramatic Characters are the most important characters in your game, so there's no reason they shouldn't be the most important characters in the setting. If they participate in these events, and in the events of upcoming story books, they will become legendary, among the most renowned people to live in this era.

Of course, such events are dangerous and some Characters may well perish in their pursuits. They will be memorialized when all is said and done. However, we encourage you as a Storyguide not to allow Dramatic Characters to die unless it is in a critical and dramatic moment and in a cinematic fashion. Anything else may be anti-climactic.

Overall, Characters need to be up to the challenges in front of them. Throwing newly designed, rookie Dramatic Characters into the major events of the setting may be too much too fast. Characters will accrue Experience while they are playing these events, but they should be on solid footing before that even happens. If you, as a Storyguide, are willing to play with the power levels of the plots in this book to fit your Characters, this won't be a problem – however, it may not be as believable. After all, major forces in play are major forces in play and bringing anything less than their full force to bear may not create a powerful story. It is best if Characters have been playing for a while and have had a chance to increase those things important to them – that warriors have advanced fighting skills, that sorcerers have learned an array of spells, that para-psychics have developed their powers to use them effectively, etc. They don't have to be fully experienced Characters as we define experienced among the supporting cast, but they should have some exploits under their belt.

THE BOOK

This book is divided into a series of chapters, each addressing a major section of 2086's story development. Here's a breakdown of those chapters, both to give you an idea of what's ahead and to help you find something specific if you're interested. Interspersed between these chapters are short pieces of fiction to

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So if you're one of the people who has downloaded this book illegally off the internet, let's talk. We want to stay in business. We don't get to stay in business if you don't buy our products but you use them anyway. In more personal terms, if you like *CthulhuTech*, please go out and buy the books, because if you don't we go out of business or we kill the line because sales suck and boom – no more *CthulhuTech*. You lose, we lose, everybody loses. Everybody loves something for nothing, but this sort of thing comes with a price whether it's money or not.

help you get a better feeling for what the *CthulhuTech* setting is like.

Chapter One: Welcome is what you are reading right now. It's meant to help ease you into the vision for this story book and give you a reference for what this book contains.

Chapter Two: Little Things introduces a series of smaller plots, including new technological developments, new arcane developments, and a few social happenings that may change things for the worse. It also includes a discussion of pop culture in the year 2086, to better immerse players in the setting.

Chapter Three: Dark Storm Rising presents the story of New Earth Government armed forces holding back the Disciples of the Rapine Storm in China and how, finally, the stalemate is broken.

Chapter Four: Deadly Currents introduces the insidious actions of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, as their search for the sunken city of R'lyeh yields unimaginable results. It also brings into play the mysterious New Earth Government agency Special Services and gives new rules for Special Services Characters.

Chapter Five: Mom's Coming to Visit presents one of the most important events in the Shadow War since the inception of the Eldritch Society. The rumors are confirmed as the Congregation of the Earth Mother works with the Children of Chaos to awaken something that could spell the end.

Chapter Six: More Bad New introduces two other events that will bring the New Earth Government to its knees as it clashes with the Migou. Juneau once again becomes a hot spot and the random discovery of new alien technology brings news that no one wants to hear.

Chapter Seven: Appendices includes the index.



"Hello and welcome to this year's Hot eZine Awards! This is Shadi Abedin reporting.

"This red carpet affair is always one of the most glamorous events of the year. The stars will definitely be out tonight! But who knows who the awards will favor? The competition is fierce. Fashion, movies, serials, music - it's all here and tonight we'll see who is hot and who is not.

"As always, one of the first on the carpet is fashion luminary Gaius MacReavy. Good evening, Gaius!"

"You look ravishing, my dear. One of my dresses, isn't it? And luminary? You flatter me. But seriously, I am so excited! I can't wait to see how the best and brightest will be shining tonight."

"Gaius, your hit reality serial 'Up & Coming Fashions' has been nominated again this year. Do you think it's in the cards to finally win?"

"Girl, you know as well as I do that you can't predict the whims of the public. I only hope that your people have enough taste to recognize."

"On another note, who do you have your eye on in the world of fashion for 2086?"

"That's a good question. But I think it's this beautiful man rolling up right here whose got something up his sleeve."

"No stranger to the spotlight, Prevana is rolling in wearing nothing but a necklace, leather pants, and



his dates. Prevana! How do you feel about your nomination tonight!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I do believe I've been brushed off with a smile and wink. But Gaius, what do you think he's up to?"

"At my last show, we were talking over drinks, and when I asked him what he thought of some of my new designs, he smiled that rakish smile of his and just said, 'Less is more, Gaius. Less is more.' I don't really know what he meant, but I think something provocative is in the wings for that young man. And I for one think we'll be talking about it here next year."

"There's rumor of... wait... that's not what I think it is, is it? Ladies and gentlemen, I can't believe it. Yuri Stalikov and Ikira of the multi-platinum Population Zero, together, stepping out of the same limousine! The two have not been seen together in public since their famous altercation on stage in Berlin, which forced the end of their 2077 tour. The camera flashes are flashing, but let me see if I can get a word."

"Ikira! Shadi Abedin, Hot eZine. The last anybody heard, you and Yuri were at each others' throats. Now here you are. Does this mean that the rumors are true? Is Population Zero planning a reunion tour?"

"Sweetheart, all I can give you is a definite maybe. Why don't you come talk to me after the show, though?"

"And there you have it folks. Not a denial. It still is a definite possibility that one of the most popular bands of the last twenty-five years may be back for another round."

"Walking up the carpet now, not doing a very convincing job of squashing the rumors they're not dating, are two of Hollywood's top box office attractions - Jameson Cain and Jaraely. Jaraely! Shadi Abedin, Hot eZine. You know the question I'm going to ask."

"Yes, I do. And yes, we're just good friends. Jameson's girlfriend doesn't like these affairs and I am currently single. It just made sense for us to come together."

"Of course. You and Jameson's controversial government thriller 'Final Solution' is up for several awards tonight. What's floating through your head tonight?"

"I'm happy that people thought enough of the film to nominate it. But even more so, I'm happy that people loved it. That's why I do what I do. It's about the fans, not us."

"And that's why people love you. However, the buzz around 'Final Solution' is still rampant on the internet. Any idea why? Maybe the story was too close to the truth?"

"Sorry, but politics is Jameson's thing. I'll stick to entertainment."

"Jameson, in the wake of world affairs, some have criticized celebrations such as this as 'shallow.' What do you think?"

"Well, I think that life goes on. If we stop doing what we enjoy, if we interrupt the routine of our lives, if we no longer create and celebrate art, we might as well give up. Then, everything that's out there trying to kill us will have already won. That's what makes us different - our spirit. You can't crush the human spirit, Shadi. That's why we'll win."

"An inspiring position. However, some say that things are getting worse, pointing to the distressing situation in China and the rising crime rate."

"I believe that the state of things is not permanent, Shadi. It is always darkest before the dawn. President Chetri's aggressive war policy is going to be the key. We are only starting to see its effectiveness and I think this year will see our first big wins. After all, the forces of the New Earth Government are winning the war. Don't you think we'd know if things were otherwise?"

"Of course, and thank you for your continuing insight, Jameson. And thanks to you as well, Gaius. It's always a pleasure."

"And you, Shadi. See you inside."

"The magic of tonight will continue in just a few short minutes. We'll be right back after this word from our sponsors."

chapter two

little things

Not everything that happens in 2086 is big enough to warrant its own chapter. Some things happen in secret, others quietly behind the scenes. However, each of them is important – some of them more important that they might at first seem – and they are what we will look at here.

Presented first is a timeline of the events that happen over the course of the year. Each of them will become more clear to you as you become more familiar with the material presented in this book. As you can see, it's a busy time and much is afoot.

TIMELINE

First Quarter (General)

Destabilization of Society by the Death Shadows (Part I) – The Disciples of Death's Shadow have already begun an insidious plan to destabilize New Earth Government by calculatedly increasing street crimes. Their first step is through vandalism, which by the end of this quarter blossoms into property crimes. (Presented in *Everything Is Falling Apart*, starting on p. 31.)

January

Increase in Nazzadi Missing Persons Index Continues – If one were to do some detailed research, one might discover that the Nazzadi Missing Persons Index has been sharply on the rise since last year. This spike in the MPI continues through April. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, starting on p. 37.)

February

The First Arcanowave Prototype Powered Armor Is Tested – Dr. Tasa, an Ashcroft Foundation researcher, tests the first fully functioning suit of prototype arcanowave powered armor, named the Stiletto. This new breakthrough gives the Stiletto abilities beyond those of other normal arcanotech mecha. Though not ready for true field testing, arcanowave technology seems promising. (Presented in *Thank God For R&D*, starting on p. 26.)

March

The Nephilim Project Sees Fruits – Dr. Miyakame extends the research of the Engel Project to create smaller synthorgs closer to the size of people. Controlled by a combination of arcanotechnology and para-psyche power, he calls these terrifying creatures Nephilim. They are barely controllable, but could be the next tool in the Aeon War. (Presented in *Thank God For R&D*, starting on p. 26.)

Second Quarter (General)

Destabilization of Society by the Death Shadows (Part II) – Once property crimes have been added to the mix, it isn't long before illicit drugs come flooding in. Dealers begin to pop up everywhere and things people couldn't get in clubs and bars start to show up in a big way. The law enforcement of the New Earth Government responds by supporting beat cops and adding more patrols. (Presented in *Everything Is Falling Apart*, starting on p. 31.)

April

Nazzadi Begin To Die In Criminal Altercations – If someone did the research, he might discover that a markedly high number of Nazzadi die in a series of muggings and robberies gone bad, as well as by gang violence. This trend begins here and goes through October. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, starting on p. 37.)

The First Unique Dhohanoid Is Born – Dr. Aina Eze of the Chrysalis Corporation's infamous T99 Division unlocks the secrets of the M'yas Stones to influence the Rite of Transfiguration. An entirely new and unique Dhohanoid is born. His name is Joandi Sianturi and he wields intense power. He becomes the Chrysalis Corporation's elite trouble-shooter. (Presented in *Genesis, Again*, starting on p. 42.)

China Falls to the Rapine Storm – As the New Earth Government plans Operation Retribution's Hammer to take the Korean Peninsula back from the Migou, the Disciples of the Rapine Storm have other plans in mind. Soldiers corrupted by the Disciples of Death's Shadow carry out suicide missions to break open the Kill Zone, and inhuman monsters over-run the armed forces. In a brief but decisive conflict, the New Earth Government is driven from China. Many die and many are left behind. (Presented in *Dark Storm Rising*, starting on p. 50.)

May

The Esoteric Order of Dagon Comes One Step Closer To R'lyeh – Esoteric Order forces raid the ancestral villa of the Trovattelli family in Torino, Italy. They find an ancient artifact in the family's vault that leads them to a lost R'lyeh temple in the Atlantic. Despite the efforts of New Earth Government Special Services, the Esoteric Order awakens the lost temple and finds something that will help them in their quest to bring their sunken holy city back. (Presented in *Deadly Currents*, starting on p. 72.)

June

Another Unique Dhohanoid is Born – Continuing with her experiments, Dr. Eze utilizes another rare and powerful M'yas Stone to transfigure one of the Chrysalis Corporation's up and comers. Shakary becomes the second totally unique Dhohanoid, wielding powerful and unusual abilities. Shakary takes her new place overseeing the most dangerous or important of black market deals. (Presented in *Genesis, Again*, starting on p. 42.)

Third Quarter (General)

Destabilization of Society by the Death Shadows (Part III) – Illegal sex becomes more and more prevalent as the third quarter progresses. Things healthy people should never want become easier and easier to get in the sexual arena. The New Earth Government responds by increasing the prevalence of its undercover agents in all walks of law enforcement. (Presented in *Everything Is Falling Apart* starting on p. 31.)

July

The Nephilim Project is Rejected For Broad Deployment – Though the development of Nephilim progresses, Dr. Miyakame

is unable to keep the creatures from butchering their handlers from time to time. Due to this fact, and the Nephilim's long recovery period after a murderous incident, the New Earth Government does not approve them for true field testing. Development continues. (Presented in *Thank God For R&D*, starting on p. 26.)

August

The Third Unique Dhohanoid is Born – Concluding her experiments for now, Dr. Eze brings one last unique Dhohanoid into being. His name is Grant Walker and he suffers a full-blown psychotic break afterwards. He is confined for months as doctors and priests try to get through to him. (Presented in *Genesis, Again*, starting on p. 42.)

September

Dozens of Newborns Go Missing In Seattle – One night at the Harborview Hospital in the Seattle arcology, dozens of newborn infants suddenly disappear. There is no surveillance footage and there are no witnesses. The police are baffled and families are crushed. The Eldritch Society knows their enemies are up to something, so packs begin to investigate. (Presented in *Mom's Coming To Visit*, starting on p. 94.)

Lost Tager Rescued and New Leads Are Discovered – Angela MacGregor is a Tager in Seattle who had been kidnapped and presumed murdered. She has been missing for months. A spy within the Chrysalis Corporation leaks that she is alive and where she is being held. Packs move to rescue her and gain information regarding an upcoming Chrysalis deal for a powerful dark artifact. (Presented in *Mom's Coming To Visit*, starting on p. 94.)

Fourth Quarter (General)

Destabilization of Society by the Death Shadows (Part IV) – Things begin to get really bad as violent crime escalates. Street gangs grow out of control and mugging incidents become alarmingly frequent. The darkest side of the sex trade rears its ugly head and things that should not be seen become disturbingly easy to get on the internet. (Presented in *Everything Is Falling Apart* starting on p. 31.)

October

A Horribly Mutilated Nazzadi Corpse Left On Display – A brutally murdered and horribly mutilated corpse is found in the Nazzadi part of east Hollywood in the Los Angeles arcology. The male corpse has been dismembered, castrated, and has long industrial nails driven through its eye sockets. It has been tied to the support beam of a mag-lev station. Across its torso is carved "sasony urari ez," which is Nazzadi for "freedom has a price." (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, starting on p. 37.)

An Old One Nearly Returns – Disparate events, including encounters with the bestial Congregation of the Earth Mother, start to come together in the eyes of the Eldritch Society. Tagers discover that the Children of Chaos are laboring to bring the Dark Mother across into this world, tipping the delicate scale of

the Aeon War in favor of the Old Ones. Gathering their forces, the packs involve unlikely friends and miraculously put an end to the dark ritual that would bring Shub-Niggurath into this world. (Presented in *Mom's Coming To Visit*, starting on p. 94.)

The Third Unique Dhohanoid Emerges – No longer even a ghost of the man he once was, Grant Walker finally comes to grips with his new existence. He puts together an elite team with one single purpose – ferret out the Eldritch Society and destroy it utterly. (Presented in *Genesis, Again*, starting on p. 42.)

November

Nazzadi Family Murdered in Public Spectacle – A Nazzadi family of nine, including parents, children, spouses, and teenage grandchildren, is tied, gagged, and wired with explosives in a public park within the Chicago arcology. Just when the brave bomb squad believes they've got it, they discover they've been outsmarted. A recorder plays one clear statement – "moriti dilatari oa," which is Nazzadi for "death to the faithless" – and then the bomb explodes, killing the family. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, starting on p. 37.)

New Earth Government Operation Grudge – Believing the tactical point of Juneau, Alaska to be poorly reinforced by the Migou, the New Earth Government creates a plan to retake the city. The armed forces implement Operation Grudge with speed and efficiency, giving the bugs little time to react. However, just as the battle seems to favor the New Earth Government, the forces discover they've been lured into a trap. It is all the armed forces can do to escape the city before they are all annihilated. Casualties are heavy. It is a disaster. (Presented in *More Bad News*, starting on p. 120.)

December

The Emergency Crime Act – This controversial bill is voted into law and New Earth Government law enforcement agencies gain broad powers to combat the rise in crime. (Presented in *Everything Is Falling Apart* starting on p. 31.)

Mt. Rainier Erupts – The largest peak in the Cascade Volcanic Arc, Mt. Rainier blows its top. The city of Tacoma is destroyed, the Seattle arcology is severely damaged, and the local ecology suffers. The Global Intelligence Agency believes that the eruption is not a natural phenomenon. New Earth Government troops are dispatched to investigate, discovering a hidden Migou outpost testing experimental technology. Though they destroy the outpost, these soldiers bring back news that shakes the core of the New Earth Government. (Presented in *More Bad News*, starting on p. 120.)

POP CULTURE

As the broader world changes, so does the world of popular culture. Everything from cars to personal electronics to fashion and movies undergo their own transformations in 2086. Presented here are a few of those important changes, to help you add flavor and life to your Strange Aeon.

FASHION

The now heavily Nazzadi influenced world of fashion will see some bold offerings this year. Let's take a look at some of the top fashion designers before we look at what the fashion world offers for each season of the year.

Notable Designers

The fashion world, like any other, has its stars. Five A-list designers stand out above the others in 2086.

Making fashions that are accessible to everyone, regardless of body type and age, is Daria Tokugawa. Her ability to take the modern house-spouse and make him or her into a well-dressed member of society is uncanny. This earthy, middle-aged designer once again shows everyone this year that while she may not be designing what the stars wear, she will be designing what the people on the street wear. Daria, as always, is one of the top selling designers of the year, primarily because she is the most affordable.

Gaius McCreavy is always a favorite. His flair for the dramatic and his on-camera charisma conspire to put this flamboyantly gay man in the spotlight time and time again. Gaius rides the fine line between accessible fashion and couture, designing fairly expensive fashions that distinguish one when one is going out

and expects to be noticed. His reality serial show "Up & Coming Fashions" only serves to boost his popularity.

Designing clothes that make a woman feel sexy, as usual, is Irvay. Once again, she completely ignores the world of mens' fashions to bring the look of celebrities to anyone who can afford her work. Unsurprisingly, it is her styles that most stars wear on the red carpet this year, making her work the envy of nearly every woman who pays attention to pop culture anywhere. Also unsurprisingly, this young, statuesque Nazzadi woman is present at every important movie opening, gala, or art event in 2086.

Prevana, in an almost mockery of his sister Irvay, brings bold styles for bold people. This designer lives in the world of less is more – less fabric is more sexy. Bordering on the scandalous, he brings the titillating to everyday fashion, the lustful to out-on-the-town fashion, and the almost pornographic to sexy club wear. Porn stars across the world worship his fashion tastes and display them whenever they get wide media coverage. This sculpted Adonis is, again, notorious for his sexual exploits among the pretty and privileged of the world.

Ever the beloved renegade of the fashion world, Tacirany breaks the mold. Caring little for the everyday world of pop culture, she is the godmother of the counterculture and iconoclasts every-





where. Whatever she designs flies in the face of traditional fashion, or even traditional gender roles. As usual, this hot teenage prodigy refuses to appear at anything even remotely trendy or celebrity-laden, preferring to appear unannounced at much less prestigious gatherings.

Spring

“Love in Bloom” seems to be the theme of this year’s spring collections. Yellows and greens seem to be the main colors. In general, fashions are light fabrics that are flowing. Collars are low to bring in the new year and hemlines are mid-length. Women’s shoes are medium heeled, but open and strappy.

Of course, Tacirany takes things in her own direction. Most noticeable is her line of stylish shirts emblazoned with altered images of porn stars.

Summer

The summer collections seem to be inside the theme “Less is More.” Oranges, Blues, and Purples seem to be the primary colors of the season. Collars are open or non-existent and hemlines are short, short – one might say barely covering. Bare mid-riffs are also popular. Women’s shoes are high heeled and open, to show off muscular calves and sexy feet.

Prevana rules the season with his “Nothing Hidden” line, which uses translucent fabrics to create fashions that are predominantly see-through. The part of the line designed for the Nazzadi is no-holds-barred and requires someone fully comfortable in their own physique as they leave little to the imagination. The part of the line designed for those with a nudity taboo are mostly

opaque from certain angles or lighting, but mostly transparent from others. Most schools ban this line, despite its popularity.

Fall

“Return to the Earth” is the theme of the fall. Earthy tones dominate the collections overall. However, instead of being staid, the fashions are surprisingly sexy. Collars are high once again, but hemlines stay short from the summer. Women’s heels drop to the medium-heeled again, more closed with buckles than anything else.

Not surprisingly, Daria Tokugawa rules this more conservative season. Her collection is the favorite of the business world, bringing couture to the board room once again. Fall always seems to be her time of year.

Winter

The winter collections fall within the realm of the “Season of the Dead,” with colors straying mostly into blacks and deep reds. Collars are high, clothes are fitting, and long coats and hemlines are popular. Knee-high boots are the style in women’s shoes, with medium heels. Patent blacks are popular.

Some may debate, but Iravy owns the winter collections. Her focus on sexy, almost funerary styles catches the imagination of a war-torn culture focused on drowning its sorrows in pleasures of the flesh. Her “I Was” collection is featured prominently in the media, the style of celebrities and talk show hosts all over the world. Strangely, she gains the honor of being the designer whose fashions most people want their loved ones buried in, something commented on in the media.

CARS

This year has seen a massive re-envisioning of motor vehicles. While most citizens who reside inside an arcology do not even own a car, they are still a symbol of status and personal expression. Anyone with a reason buys a car and this year offers some exciting options.

Perhaps the most exciting addition is the limited autodrive function added to this year's vehicles. While the technology has been there for a while, it recently passed resistant legislation and is now available to the public. A limited autodrive allows an owner to pre-program a GPS path into the car's computer. The vehicle will then start itself up and drive itself to the destination. The safety features, however, are what keeps it limited. It will go at or slower than the speed limit and its various sensors shut it down when it senses things near. Construction, road debris, bad potholes, and more will stop a car with limited autodrive in its tracks. These vehicles can also not perform complicated maneuvers, so they can't do things like back out of parking spots or parallel park. However, this option is useful on long road trips, particularly when one is tired, and for having your car meet you from a couple blocks away.

Believe it or not, muscle cars are back. Early electric engines simply could not put out the horsepower of a good old-fashioned large internal combustion engine, but the D-engine can. Homages to old American powerhouses are back on the market. The

Ford Mustang and the Dodge Challenger live in the new Tri Motors Stallion and Gladiator models. Nazzadi Design Systems has brought back a version of the Plymouth Barracuda called the Mako. The Pontiac Firebird lives on in Matsumi's Thunderhawk, and EuroWagon builds the new Panther as an homage to the Chevy Camaro. Of any, the EuroWagon Panther gets the lowest reviews from consumer eZines – it's just not the kind of car that's in the European tradition of automobile manufacturing. It runs fabulously, but it's just off the mark for many. The NDS Mako is stylish as can be, but is by far the most expensive. The Tri Motors Stallion and Gladiator are the favorites, being both reasonably priced and delivering on the muscle car tradition.

In general, cars have taken on a different look this year. Old favorites are most certainly back, but re-envisioned. The Tri Motors Gemini still occupies a consumer favorite spot for price and reliability, but the 2086 model no longer looks like a futuristic doorstop. The new aggressive lines of the popular Matsumi Tetra have blown consumers away, making it one of the hottest mid-priced cars of the year. Even the EuroWagon Pioneer gets a face lift, bringing it to a more rugged sporty look from an almost military exterior.

While motorcycles undergo subtle changes in look, the classic cruiser is making a comeback. The VX-1100 Magnum by Honda-Triumph is a perfect example, with its steep front rake and low rear suspension.





TECHNOLOGY

PCPU's are a part of everyday life and one of the most popular consumer electronic devices every year. A combination of communications device and mobile computing platform, the PCPU has, in many households, supplanted the need for a desktop or laptop computer. Unfortunately named by engineers, the PCPU has come to be known as a "peek."

Imagine Technologies, a quietly owned subsidiary of the Ashcroft Foundation, has distinguished itself as the company to watch where peeks are concerned. This year sees two fabulous releases. The first is the iPeek, the long awaited hand-held device. It is the cutting edge of everything peek-related and stylishly designed to boot. The device is about the size of a hand-held notepad and only a few millimeters thick, with massive computing power. Downloadable software applications make it so that the iPeek does pretty much anything a consumer needs it to. They are the "it" thing as far as Peeks go. Their other offering is the new iWatch, a peek the size of a medium-sized watch. The iWatch can be placed on a surface and has built in HIU functionality, making it the most useful peek of its category. While not as powerful as the iPeek, it is more portable and harder to lose.

Imagine Technologies' primary competitor in the marketplace is Micrologic, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chrysalis Corporation. Micrologic, trying to pretend they are not behind the curve, releases their new peek, the Pocket Peek. It is neither stylishly designed nor as powerful as the iPeek, but the massive marketing campaign and lower price-point make it a competitive offering.

This year also sees an evolution in the video game craze. Popular manufacturer Oshiro has created a new console that combines natural movement with augmented reality. Movement-based control systems aren't anything new, but Oshiro takes them to the next level. Players strap on control sensors to their hands, arms, torso, legs, and feet so that the console can sense their slightest movement. They also wear a headpiece that covers their eyes and ears (with intense noise-cancelling features). Games are uniquely designed to utilize a players surroundings and massive multi-player games take place through augmented reality overlays. The ART, as the console is named, plays games in a more traditional fashion as well, but it is the new functionality that makes it the holiday "must-have" item. It is, however, not recommended for use outdoors or anywhere with traffic.

The video game console that dominates the marketplace, however, is the GamePod 2. The GP2, as it is colloquially known, is a powerful virtual reality game system that uses traditional controls. Games can be played on a regular projected screen or inside a VR immersion helmet. It is also designed to be the center piece of any entertainment center, with on-demand video streaming, digital audio, and more.

Perhaps one of the subtlest but most useful consumer technological releases this year are new noise-cancelling pads for the home. These pads are designed to be set up on walls, floors, and ceilings of arcology dwellings to reduce the amount of noise from sound or home theater systems that travels through to neighbors. They do not eliminate sound, however, but they do reduce it by around 20%. They are also useful for parties.

MOVIES & SERIALS

With the heavy influence of the Ministry of Information, movies and serials (what were once known as TV shows) are designed to capture the imagination of the viewing public in ways that will both entertain and distract them. Propaganda is layered through nearly every major media offering, something that many citizens no longer even notice.

Blockbuster Studio Films

“The Quiet War” is one of the big summer releases. Its story follows a group of Federal Security Bureau, Sectarian Crimes Division cult hunters as they hunt horrifying, fictitious cults through New Earth Government society. Designed to both entertain and raise public awareness of cults, “The Quiet War” is a smash hit that is equal parts action, drama, and horror. Critics rave.

The biggest summer release, and the biggest release of the last five years, is “Slow Death,” a military film of epic proportions. Its plot follows a fictitious war tragedy, in which an entire city is crushed by the Migou. The brave soldiers and pilots are the main characters who go through an arc of horror and loss, but who persevere through their indomitable spirits. The movie leaves audiences with a feeling that no matter what we will survive and ultimately win because of our hearts and wills. To anyone bothering to look, it is a blatant propagandist vision designed to lessen the blow of Juneau.

“Freshman Daze” is fall movie for the younger set. It is a sex comedy about a co-ed freshman dorm floor where everyone is sleeping with everyone else behind everyone else’s back. Bawdy and ridiculous, this brainless comedy makes audiences laugh, along with a healthy box office take. Several of its stars emerge as this year’s sex icons.

For kids, the holidays’ “Patches the Mighty” is a hit. It follows the story of Patches, a cat whose owners were killed in an accident involving creatures from beyond. Patches learns to survive on the streets of an arcology, with hilarious antics from a cast of animal characters. In the end, Patches heals and discovers a way to change his life, finds new owners, and wins their hearts.

The holidays also see “SPAT,” a police story following the missions of a Special Powered Armor Team inside the Los Angeles arcology. They are forced to deal with an arcane underground plot that unleashes monsters in the arcology and threatens to unleash even worse. The monsters are carefully sanitized for public consumption. Overall, the movie is fairly light in the acting department, but the special effects and action make it a hit.

Independent Films

A supposedly independent film, “Core Strength” is an intelligent government commentary. Its story follows a hacker who exposes fictitious government secrets, but ultimately chooses to keep them secret as he begins to understand the scope of that with which the government must deal. The reason it is supposedly independent is that anyone who wants to do any amount

of research can discover that it was financed by wealthy former employees of the Ashcroft Foundation.

“Self-Medicated” is a shocking coming of age film, involving teen-agers and a lot of drug use. Its story follows a group of what appear to be average teens in a major urban high school. However, unbeknownst to their parents, they delve heavily into crazy sex and drug abuse to cope with what they feel is the hopelessness of their situation. The Ministry of Information let this movie show with a happy modification to its ending.

Major Serials

In its second season is “Tension Room,” a military drama. It follows command post officers who are forced to make critical decisions to ensure New Earth Government victory at any cost, despite their personal feelings and ethical dilemmas. The serial has a rapidly growing audience and is regarded as one of the best new shows. However, it is a tool of the Ministry of Information, spreading whatever military propagandist message is appropriate at the time.

“The Block” is a popular situation comedy. It follows the antics of the residents of a hip urban residential block, playing on the interpersonal relationships, stress, and uncomfortable situations of modern arcology dwellers. In its eighth season, “The Block” shows no sign of slowing down even though its cast has become so big that they make movies on the side.

The hit reality show “Front Line” enters its sixth season. The series follows the brave soldiers of the New Earth Government in hot spots all around the globe, especially around Alaska, China, and Eastern Europe. It is the most censored of any show, clearly a propaganda organ to anyone who has been at any of these fronts (but who also signed an NDA and can’t say anything). “Front Line” is one of the highest rated serials.

“Two Worlds” is a reality show that explores the world of the xenomix. It follows around xenomixes of all kinds, trying to show the trials of being part of two cultures but belonging wholly to neither. The show does not play well to Nazzadi households.

Big Talent

Hollywood’s leading man is still Jameson Cain. In the tradition of Carey Grant and George Clooney, Jameson is stylish, handsome, tasteful, and well-mannered. The handsome early-forties actor routinely speaks out against the childish antics of some of his fellow thespians, calling for them to be the role models they should be.

If Jameson Cain is the favorite leading man, Jaraely is its leading woman. This beautiful, statuesque late-twenties Nazzadi woman graces many eZine covers. She is as much an icon of feminine power as a sex symbol reminiscent of such stars as Marilyn Monroe and Madonna.

Sitting at the top of the directing stack is M. Noman, a mysterious figure who makes no media appearances.

MUSIC

In 2086, the music scene is as diverse as it has ever been. This year has seen some exciting new entries as well as some surprising changes to the status quo.

Top 40

As has been the case for the last five years, the Nazzadi-created musical style known as Fuzion dominates the pop charts. It has been likened to an evolved version of what was once known as "world music," which was a style that mixed musical traditions from around the globe. Fuzion takes it a step further, drawing on the Nazzadi habit of bringing together elements in an unusual way, typically with interesting and often enjoyable results. Some styles are dreamy love ballads while others have a beat to which to dance.

Spirit Soundsystem, a relatively new act out of Europe, has rapidly risen to the top. Their sound combines Celtic, Australian Aboriginal, Zydeco, and Japanese instrumentation into a fusion that is catchy and just a little bit danceable.

As always, the lone superstars continue to roam their way through the pop charts. Nasaky's soulful ballads, Johann Siegfried's flowing love songs, Katrina Nunez's sexy anthems, and Tirala's songs of war are heard everywhere.

The most shocking news is when media icon Julie Rain commits suicide in June. The 26-year old beauty started her career more than ten years ago and has remained in the top 40 ever since, branching out into acting and merchandising as well. Her death by prescription medicine overdose comes as a surprise to the world, who knew the icon as a sultry but good-hearted young woman with a kind word and a smile for everyone she met.

Alternative

The three big styles dominating the alternative scene are emo, darkside, and black noise. Emo, like times past, is a maudlin style of music that appeals to the tragic and broken-hearted. Growing out of the goth or industrial traditions of days gone by, Darkside is for the angry, dark, and morbid, those who dress in all black and are drawn to the darker things in life. Black Noise is what might be said could come if black metal, death metal, and new metal fused into one. It is fast, dark, complicated, guitar and noise heavy pseudo-metal rock that appeals to the nihilistic or forlorn segment of the population.

The most popular emo band is called Bloodrose, known for their haunting lead vocalist Warren White. Razor Wire is in rotation on any darksiders digital music player, with heavy beats and the sounds of suffering. The Bonegrinder Foundation is one of the top Black Noise acts, with songs of atrocity and war (when one can understand the lyrics).

Dance

The dance scene heats up with Caliente, a style popular the last year or so. Caliente combines upbeat tempos with sexy beats

and almost (and sometimes full on) pornographic sounds or phrases. In a world where people are looking for distractions, the sexual vibe in any club with a decent Caliente DJ will bring people out of their house and on the prowl.

The flip side of that is Shadowbeat, a more underground style that relies on dark atmospherics combined with a slower danceable tempo. Shadowbeat is almost a reflection of the dark world outside arcology walls and ranges from the evocative to the disconcerting.

Retro

What's old is new again. Big Band is back in all its glory. Big beats, big horns, and fancy dancing flower in this huge subculture this year. It is starting to get surprising notice in the media and a couple songs briefly make an appearance on the top 40, notably by Ty Roosevelt and his Big Badass Band and the Midnight Howlers.

Punk still rides its enormous resurgence wave. Though the style has gone through many iterations in the past 100+ years, modern punk goes back to its roots of social outcry and complete lack of hope in the future. Widespread Corruption, with their seeming inability to play their instruments, and PA, with their tight chord changes, are among the most prevalent acts.

Underground

Urban Smack is the underground style to watch. It is an energetic combination of rap lyrics with industrial music. Many think of the hard synthesized styles of the past when they hear industrial music, but urban smack utilizes an aural montage of real sounds of machinery to make its mark. It is the music of the streets, of street poets who feel as if they are being ground up in the survival machine.

Crafty G is perhaps the most influential urban smack artist in the world. Surviving attacks by the Rapine Storm in Eastern Europe, he is a man with a unique perspective on city living. The young Queen Maeve out of Ireland tells of the hardship and confusion of growing up in these troubled times.

Big Tours

Granddaddy new metal rockers Population Zero have gotten back together for one of the biggest reunion tours of recent history. Stadiums across the New Earth Government will be packed as the band tours from February to October. Rumor has it that guitarist Yuri Stalikov and lead signer Ikira have been at each others' throats in rehearsals and back stage, but the shows still go on in a big way.

Spirit Soundsystem also tours, to support their new album *Some-where, Sometime*. Their summer tour hits every major NEG market, as well as performing for our Armed Forces on the lines.

Katrina Nunez is also on the road to support her new album, *"Imagine Them Naked."* As always, she is bold and audacious.

THANK GOD FOR R&D

There's no way the New Earth Government can win the Aeon War in their current state. The best they can do is fight for a standstill and that hasn't worked out so well. The situation then calls for time and money to be put into technological research and development, in an effort to create the next destructive breakthrough that might give the NEG an edge.

The last major breakthrough was the Engel Project. The development of Engels brought a powerful force to bear on behalf of the New Earth Government. But the Engels have been on the field for years now and while they have closed the technological gap, they are still limited – the New Earth Government cannot figure out how to speed up their creation. They need something new.

This year, they have it. Or at least they have the first shades of it. They call it arcanowave technology and it might just revolutionize the face of warfare.

However, the infamous Dr. Anton Miyakame is not to be outdone. He and his team of gifted researchers that make up the Engel Project have their own new tricks up their sleeves. The question is, will their new creations be as sincerely out of this world as their first creations, the Engels? With Dr. Miyakame's reputation, it's likely that whatever he's got cooking is going to be at least a little far gone.

Niether of these breakthroughs may make a difference on the field of battle this year, but they most certainly represent the face of things to come.

ARCANOWAVE TECHNOLOGY

Who better to be at the helm of a breakthrough in arcanotechnology than the progenitors of the field – the Ashcroft Foundation. Though the Foundation is hard at work in a wide variety of areas, trying to better the Human and Nazzadi races in all aspects of the world, they maintain entire divisions dedicated to nothing but advancements in military technology. In a more civilized time, the Ashcroft Foundation would have been champions for peace, but they know full-well that the Migou and the Cults aren't going to go away because of summit talks.

The high-powered scientists and sorcerers that are part of the research and development arm of the Ashcroft Foundation are among the highest paid in their field. They also face some of the greatest dangers of any in their field. Digging into cosmic knowledge and trying to break through into new fields of mathematics isn't just science, it's mind-mending. At this point in our development, mortal minds are simply not equipped to deal with such things and often crack under the pressure. However, the Aeon War has forced us to go there – either that or face extinction.

The dedicated men and women of the Ashcroft Foundation's research and development division have delved into recently discovered areas of non-Euclidean geometry in an effort to better utilize the boundless energy found in the universe. Utilizing newly developed axioms, the Ashcroft Foundation has created a way to channel this energy through micro-conductive filaments in such

a way that they can manipulate anti-gravitational fields similar to those of A-pods.

It may not sound like much on paper, but the potential applications are astounding.

THE LONG DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

The great thing about arcanotechnology is its virtually limitless potential. The bad thing about it is that it always drives people crazy when they work creating new applications of it. Arcanowave technology is no different.

While the first theories of arcanowave technology have been kicked around for the last six months, it isn't until this year that someone does something about it. That person is Dr. Tasa, an aging Nazzadi scientist who came to Earth as part of the Nazzadi fleet many years ago. He has always been a quiet man, quite content to do the work and let someone else take credit for it. That, however, does not mean that the people upstairs did not take notice of him. After all, the Ashcroft Foundation discourages internal politics and promotes based on merit. Thus, when Dr. Tasa proposed funding for a project of his own based on these new principles, the Foundation gave him a lab with a staff and the money to make things happen.

Dr. Golvash Czeny first crafted the Ashcroft Foundation's policy regarding potentially dangerous cosmic research and development when the organization was created. Similar to the way top secret projects were farmed out to different contractors in years gone by, the policy was simple – keep things dispersed among teams with project leads overseeing, so that no one got too big a mind-altering picture. Ashcroft Foundation employees understand that this is to their benefit and even the most curious don't try to dig too deep outside their own small part of the project for fear of winding up in in-patient therapy or worse. However, sometimes even these strict procedures don't prevent all the damage, just the way the development of the first D-engine required sacrifice to be built.

So it goes with Dr. Tasa's arcanowave project. The first real breakthroughs were slow going. Two of the project's lead researchers suffered psychotic breaks during the first few months of development. Things had to proceed, but morale on the project was low. Fortunately, the Ashcroft Foundation has a way with such things and a few all expenses paid vacations later and the crew was back on track with higher spirits. Something came into being not long after, as teams broke into new areas of non-Euclidean mathematics, diving into ignored corners of the arcane science that created the D-engine. The team had discovered new ways to generate and manipulate the fields that D-engine technology generates.

These new ways, while interesting, were mostly useless as discovered. What was missing was a way to direct such energies into practical applications. However, this first breakthrough was enough to galvanize the team. They pressed on with newfound vigor, until they lost two more members of their team to nervous

breakdowns. The Foundation responded as it often does – with care, therapy, and cold hard cash. Convinced they were close to something big, these things were all that was needed to bring the project back on track.

It was Dr. Tasa himself whose mental leap brought things to the next level, his ideas coming to him where these ideas so often do – when he was in the shower. Dripping wet, he rushed to call his assistants. By creating a web of micro-conductive filaments designed to harness these new principles, the power they were rubbing up against could be directed. He didn't know what it would do yet, but he was convinced that it would do something – which was better than sitting around and scratching their heads.

The first tests were disastrous. Equipment melted and computer systems fried as uncontrolled energy erupted from the prototype arcanowave device. And then the tests after that were just as disastrous. However, the team was determined and success was only a matter of time.

Finally, Dr. Tasa and his team had it. But what was it? It was a device that harnessed arcanowave energy, with unexpected effects. It created anti-gravitational fields similar to those of A-pods, but these fields could be manipulated. Imagine that – the ability to harness energy and direct it, even to the point of defying gravity. This could be done on a large scale, but arcanowave technology had just created a way to utilize it in much smaller applications.

When Dr. Tasa presented these findings and showed the first prototype equipment to the Board of Directors and their military affiliates, they were impressed. Their first thought was to test its combat viability by building something small to show off arcanowave technology's potential versatility. They decided on a suit of powered armor.

THE STILETTO PROTOTYPE

Building a prototype suit of powered armor based on the new arcanowave technology was not as easy as it sounded. Or at least that's what the rather modest Dr. Tasa told the Board of Directors at the Stiletto's unveiling. In all honesty, it was almost as if the prototype armor built itself, though Dr. Tasa would later in private say that the whole idea came to him in dreams.

The Stiletto represented an enormous leap forward in terms of powered armor development. The most obvious capability granted by technology that harnesses anti-gravitational energies was the limited ability of the Stiletto to fly. No powered armor suit had ever come close to this feat, even with greatly enhanced Jump Pods. That alone would have impressed the Foundation and military luminaries who were at its unveiling, but there was much more to show them.

The arcanowave field generated by the suit also acted as a deflective field, capable of diffusing and repelling directed energy blasts. This included laser weapons, plasma blasts, and other energy-based weaponry. In short, the suit had an armored field





that protected it, in addition to the hardened armor that would eventually be built into it. Against most forms of conventional weapons, it would be more heavily armored than any other type of powered armor – in fact more heavily armored than many full-blown mecha.

There was even more. The scientists had found that the energy they were harnessing could be directed into energy blasts, creating high intensity pulses of considerable destructive force. Utilizing directional emitters in the forearms of the Stiletto, the suit could generate energy attacks equivalent to mecha much larger than it. The suit itself was a weapon.

Though it had not yet been implemented, Dr. Tasa believed that the technology could be modified in such a way that the arcanowave technology inside the Stiletto could gather extra-dimensional energy all on its own. This would overcome the problem faced by powered armor – that it could only function on limited D-cells and not be powered by an infinite full D-engine. The suit might be self-sustaining, capable of long-term operation.

All this in a package just over ten feet tall. Dr. Tasa and his team were almost immediately given an inexhaustible budget with which to ramp up their research. Despite all his years of dodging it, Dr. Tasa has now received the credit he so richly deserves – at least privately.

LONG-TERM RAMIFICATIONS

The arcanowave technology project is one of the most secret operations within the New Earth Government. If Blank spies, the Disciples of Death's Shadow, or the Chrysalis Corporation were to get their hands on it, the scales of the Aeon War would tip drastically against us. Unfortunately, the New Earth Government does not know that it should keep such development away from the Chrysalis Corporation, one of their primary military contractors. There is a very real chance that the Children of Chaos might be brought in on this project at a later time. Hopefully Eldritch Society spies within the Ashcroft Foundation are close enough to the project to prevent that.

As it stands, only the people who are part of Dr. Tasa's team, the Ashcroft Foundation's Board of Directors and top executives, and certain key military commanders know of the project's existence. Every step is being taken to keep it that way. However, as with all developments in military technology, there are always whispers and conspiracy theories circulating through the ranks – though none are allowed to make it into the media.

While the military has requested “as quickly as possible,” Dr. Tasa has made no promises as to timeline. There are too many things left to be tested, too many possibilities to be explored, and too many variables to be managed before a model of the Stiletto can be field tested. After all, genius cannot be forced.

Realistically, it may be years before arcanowave technology mecha are in full-scale production. But that is not the kind of thing anyone wants to hear right now.

MEANWHILE... AT THE ENGEL PROJECT

There are some that say Dr. Anton Miyakame is the hardest working man in the New Earth Government. There are others that say he is the biggest nutjob employed by the Ashcroft Foundation. Either way, he is a man that produces results and has access to an almost limitless source of funding. Anyone who can come up with Engels and make them work is golden in the eyes of the people that labor to save life as we know it.

There are many rumors flying about the things Dr. Miyakame and his team are up to inside the Engel Project. In fact, it is one of the favorite sources of rumors on nights when pilots are bored and drunk. Considering Dr. Miyakame's reputation, there's a better than average chance that he thought of most of them and maybe even tried a few of them.

What he is actually working on is something the rumor-mongers haven't thought of yet.

THINGS THAT AREN'T WORKING

The most secret project within the Engel Project is the Engel Uplift Program. The goal of the program is to find out if the living creatures underneath all the Engel parts are intelligent enough and controllable enough to become independent war machines. It would, in essence, turn the Engels into giant synthorg soldiers that would not require a pilot and who could take and execute orders. This program has been going poorly.

Dr. Miyakame and his staff have tried many different options to achieve this goal, the first being old-fashioned operant conditioning. Attempting to modify voluntary behavior is always challenging, especially when one is not entirely sure how the psychology of the organism in question works. Whatever the organisms Dr. Miyakame and his staff create are, they are too strong-willed to be easily affected by reinforcement and punishment. Operant conditioning has only been considered as an option when used in adjunct with other options, such as invasive neural manipulation.

What some consider to be a euphemism, invasive neural manipulation means opening up an organism's brain and surgically altering the way it functions. Some parts might be stimulated, others cauterized, some removed, others biologically repurposed. It is a complicated science that is far from perfect. Invasive neural manipulation is what has already yielded the pliability of the Engel organisms, but so far it seems incapable of furthering the goals of Uplift. However, some of the side-effects of such experimentation has supported that such a thing may be possible.

At a loss with more traditional methods, Dr. Miyakame turned to the field that brought him the solution that made Engels usable in the first place – arcanotechnology. Perhaps if the Engel Synthesis Interface could create a bond that made the Engels controllable war machines, an extension of the technology could take them one step further. However, the original Engel Synthesis Interface was ground-breaking in and of itself. The work is slow going and has so far met with little success.

Needless to say, such research is not without its price. The Engel Uplift Project has suffered personnel losses as the Engels lose control. Fortunately, the New Earth Government and the Ashcroft Foundation ensure that the loved ones of those killed are well-compensated. It is tragic that the attempt to save the world also costs lives. However, as Dr. Miyakame's fondness for the cliché goes, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.

The second major secret program under Dr. Miyakame's guidance is the Engel Remote Pilot Interface program (ERPI). The idea is to create a link that allows a pilot to utilize an Engel from a distance, thereby eliminating the need to be inside the creature. It would maximize the use of Engels without endangering the highly trained pilots.

The idea, while great in essence, has run into many problems. The largest of such problems is that the Engel Synthesis Interface only works in close quarters. Even if all other controls are able to be made to work remotely, the pilot that is attuned to the Engel must be very near it in order for the creature to obey and not become extremely violent in the face of danger. Attempts to interface with an Engel's LAI from distance to get the thing to move in basic fashions have been successful. But that's it.

Dr. Miyakame has theorized that by using manipulatively gifted para-psychics he may be able to overcome these problems. Put a modified Engel Synthesis Interface in the head of a telepath and maybe the two will work together. Acquiring para-psychics for such experiments might be difficult if the Engel Project didn't have access to para-psychic criminals. With the promise of eventual pardon, manipulative para-psychics are plucked from their prisons and forced to participate. Some have had their brains fried, some have died, but some have met with limited success. Unfortunately, the things that make Engels have instincts too powerful to be overcome in such a manner. The mix, while promising, is not right yet.

However, the progress on the ERPI program has given Dr. Miyakame other ideas.

THE NEPHILIM PROJECT

Since the bestial creatures that are the organic part of Engels have proven too instinctual to respond to anything other than direct communion, Dr. Miyakame began to wonder if it was possible to employ the technology utilizing creatures of a smaller scale. Perhaps the combination of arcanotechnology combined with para-psychic gifts would remotely pilot a smaller organism, one that was not created with such raw power and with the instincts to match.

In essence, what if they started to make smaller synthorgs?

In a four-day sleepless bender of lab-quality amphetamines and booze, Dr. Miyakame birthed his newest initiative – the Nephilim Project. There are those religious stories that claim that angels bred with Humans during the first days of creation, creating

powerful hybrids of Heaven and Earth. That is what these creatures would be – part-man, part-creatures from Outside.

Though technically referred to as micro-synthorgs, these prototype creatures are similar in design to the Engels. A Nephilim is a genetically engineered and artificially grown organism, made up of mortal DNA heavily mixed with the building blocks of creatures the New Earth Government has locked away in secret vaults. It is then cybernetically modified, encased in armor with mounted weapons systems, with a modified ESI (known as the Nephilim Synthesis Interface) and ERPI, built with the joint-locking safety system found in their larger brethren. They are a little larger than man-sized and terrifying.

Each Nephilim requires a handler. Handlers are manipulatively gifted para-psychics who wear the twin Nephilim Synthesis Interface to the creature. They then control the creature from a distance. However, there are limitations. The handler must remain within fifty feet of the unlocked and ready Nephilim. If he moves outside of range while the creature is “ready,” an instinctual feedback occurs and the Nephilim becomes murderous towards its handler. If the creature can close the distance before the handler can react, it will gut him and mutilate his corpse. Needless to say, handlers are trained to keep ready Nephilim close at all times and to lock the creature when it is not to be immediately used.

Unfortunately, this is not the only situation in which the instinctual feedback occurs. It seems that randomly the Nephilim will experience such a moment and a psychotic episode follows. Ironically, the creature's first target is always its handler. It does not stop there, however, and continues its murderous spree until it is locked down. Nephilim take days to recover from such episodes. No one on Dr. Miyakame's staff has yet to determine what causes them. Working with Nephilim appears to be like handling a time bomb – sooner or later, it will go off.

This one glaring flaw is the only thing holding the Nephilim Project back from more intensive field testing. Nephilim bridge the gap between combat soldiers and powered armor. They are incredibly powerful creatures, each capable of overcoming a squad of fully-armed soldiers. They can be engineered for specialized use. Those few in the New Earth Government High Command are anxiously waiting to deploy such a weapon. However, they are not going to do it when there's a better than average chance the Nephilim will go nuts and be out of commission for days afterwards. They would be willing to at least experiment with the creatures' deployment if Dr. Miyakame could get their recovery cycle down to a manageable increment, but days is simply too much in the field of battle.

There is another concern, but one carefully guarded within the Nephilim Project. Some Nephilim have displayed unusual behavior in tests against monstrous metaterrestrials such as Ghosts or Gaunts. Instead of obeying the commands of the handler, the creature appears to resist. This resistance is not absolute, but it is enough to notice and to impede optimal combat efficiency.

Dr. Miyakame is concerned that there is something inside the Nephilim that may recognize distant relatives. He has a group of trusted assistants carefully researching this phenomenon. Fortunately, such instances have been rare so it is not holding the overall project back.

However, behind closed doors, Dr. Miyakame wonders if this behavior will begin to appear in Engels. It could be disastrous if it did.

Needless to say, many have died in the pursuit of the Nephilim Project. Like those who have died in other Engel Project programs, the New Earth Government and the Ashcroft Foundation compensate the families of those who are volunteers. However, many of the experimental handlers are criminals, in which case no consideration is required.

LONG-TERM RAMIFICATIONS

Nephilim represent an alternative track of development utilizing the same principles as the Engels, which means that the work those on the project are doing serves double duty. One can easily benefit from breakthroughs on the other. Considering the success of the Engels, the New Earth Government is sincerely hoping that Dr. Miyakame's efforts will pay off.

If Nephilim are a success, they will revolutionize everything from law enforcement to small unit tactics and covert operations. They will provide another edge that the New Earth Government needs, evening the playing field in areas that Engels cannot. That is, of course, if the Nephilim become more of a solution than a threat.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

Unlike many of the other events of this year, this look behind the scenes at New Earth Government research and development really isn't meant to provide stories for your Characters. If your Characters run in circles where rumors and whispers of such work runs, they may catch wind of things and this may provide them with a window of what may be to come.

Arcanowave technology isn't ready to be used, but you might have military or government-affiliated Characters see a field test. Nephilim, on the other hand, are seeing limited use without official New Earth Government approval. Your Characters may see one being transported, in limited field testing, or they might witness the aftermath of a Nephilim's unchecked rage.

In any event, use these developments as texture wherever works for your game.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

DR. ANTON MIYAKAME

Genius Behind the Engel Project

Anton has been called a lot of things over the years. Savior, Nobel prize-winner, valedictorian, son, brother, genius, bastard, inhuman, nutjob, crackpot. One can say pretty much any one of

them to his face and get the same response – a cold stare as if he's waiting for you to say something important or go away.

He is the truest kind of visionary, the kind that needs no agreement or acceptance, the kind who believes that others will see the way when his dreams are brought to fruition. It is fortunate that the right people understand his genius for the world certainly has benefitted from it. Otherwise, he would probably be shut in a room somewhere raving to the people who pour his coffee – or drawing on a padded wall with crayons.

From the outside, Dr. Miyakame looks pretty normal – unless he's been on a possessed bender. He is of Caucasian and Asian heritage, though neither side wins out over the other. Dark hair, glasses, a few days growth, Anton might be handsome if he displayed any interest in the opposite sex. To be honest, he seems to have no connection to other people at all. In Dr. Miyakame's world there are two categories of people – those who are useful and those to ignore.

Virtue/Flaw: Visionary/Possessed

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 11, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Arcanotech Engineering: Master, Education: Master, Engineering: Master, Life Science: Master, Physical Science: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Damaged, Driven, Innovative, Obsessed

DR. TASA

Ashcroft Foundation Pioneer

Tasa's story starts the way so many Nazzadi stories start – in a cloning vat on Pluto. He came to Earth as part of the Nazzadi fleet, a highly-trained arcanotech engineer with a military background. He was never one much for war, but he did have an interest in and talent for improving machines of war. It's no surprise that Tasa ended up as a respected part of the Ashcroft Foundation after the Nazzadi's surrender.

His history with arcanotechnology runs deep. Dr. Tasa was part of the team that brought stable stealth technology to the New Earth Government at the end of the First Arcanotech War. Perhaps the only reason that he hasn't wound up on the Engel Project is that he believes that Dr. Miyakame is playing with fire, the kind of fire the Nazzadi has no desire to touch.

Tasa believes in the purity of his work and his ego never enters into it. In fact, he prefers not to be the center of attention in any way, ducking recognition, handing credit off to those around him. Fortunately, the Ashcroft Foundation never lets genius slip through its fingers.

Virtue/Flaw: Humble/Withdrawn

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 10

Noteworthy Skills: Arcanotech Engineering: Master, Education: Master, Engineering: Master, Physical Science: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Egghead (Arcanotech Theory)

EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART

Crime is something that will never be gone from the world. People will always want something someone else has without having to work for it, they will carry anger and hate in their hearts, and they will see the value in profiting from providing contraband things. It wasn't long after the earliest civilizations formed that the first criminals started to break the first laws.

The New Earth Government does pretty well when it comes to policing crimes, especially given that there are many new crimes with which they've never had to deal. The kinds of crimes that affect the lives of everyday people are the kinds that the NEG is particularly good at managing. Thefts, burglaries, drug related offenses, and assault don't happen with the alarming frequency that they once did. Street crime, as it is often referred to, is something that is not the threat it once was.

Or at least it hasn't been, until now. In an effort to destabilize a teetering society, the Disciples of Death's Shadow have decided to help bring back street crime in a big way. Over the course of 2086, things are going to get worse for citizens of the New Earth Government in ways they weren't expecting.

LEGAL - EASE

What do you do to keep peoples' minds off the doom that knocks at their doors? You legalize all kinds of things to keep them indulgent and distracted. Many things that were once a source of regulation or criminal infraction no longer matter in the Strange Aeon.

One thing that was once a booming source of illicit business in many parts of the world was prostitution. The crack whores of Los Angeles were a far cry from the protected and cared for escorts of Amsterdam. Prostitution, though it still carries some stigma in many social circles, is now completely legal and regulated by the New Earth Government. Prostitutes, or escorts as they are more formerly known, work out of bordellos, or what most call Red Houses. They are fixtures in many kinds of neighborhoods in every city, though never residential. Prices are regulated, escorts must have weekly health check-ups, and the seediness and danger is out of the business.

Illicit drugs are the grand-daddy of all things criminal. In years past, the war on drugs was really more a public relations campaign than anything else. If there was a war, drugs had already won. Very few euphoric drugs were legal in those days in most parts of the world, and that created a lucrative and pervasive black market along with ridiculous amounts of federal funds allocated to agencies who were created to stop it. The New Earth Government gave all that up a long time ago. A drug now has to be severely habit forming in order for it to be regulated. Alcohol remains legal in all its forms, including grain alcohol and absinthes. Cigarettes are legal, but only because their chemical composition has been altered to no longer be addicting. Marijuana, psilocybin mushrooms, LSD, peyote and mescaline, ayahuasca, as well as a veritable host of designer drugs including 2CI and Bliss (a modern iteration of ecstasy) are all perfectly legal and available at most bars and nightclubs – anything regarded to be

habit forming in only the psychological sense is allowed. This has created a very open drug culture.

Those drugs that can, with repeated use, become physically habit forming are more heavily regulated. Users' purchases are tracked and they are allowed limited quantities each month. Formerly illicit drugs such as cocaine and opium and many sometimes formerly recreational prescription drugs such as oxycontin, xanax, flexeril, valium, vicodin, percocet, and all the modern iterations thereof are in this category.

There are drugs that remain illegal, for they are extremely habit forming and have a solid reputation for ruining peoples' lives. Methamphetamine (also known as crystal meth), heroin, and crack cocaine are among these drugs. If one wants to get their hands on these, or greater quantities of those heavily regulated substances, one must turn to the illegal drug trade.

There are still drug addicts in the modern age, but many of them are now healthy, functioning addicts. Regular counseling that goes with the Strange Aeon helps monitor drug use and abuse, so addiction isn't the plague it once was – even though drug use is much more prevalent and accepted.

Pornography is another world that has benefitted heavily from deregulation and the shifting of social norms. Whereas once the consumption of pornography was a private and often stigmatized thing, people are open about their enjoyment of adult entertainment in the modern age. Pretty much anything is legal in the realm of pornography as long as it is consensual and doesn't involve animals or children under the age of 16. It truly is astounding the amount of porn that is available.

THE REGULATORS

Several different agencies help keep control, or at least maintain the chaos, that is the legal culture of the Strange Aeon. The two primary forces are the local police and the Federal Security Bureau.

When it comes to most crimes of a local nature, the police have jurisdiction. They deal with everything from domestic disturbances to muggings or theft to missing persons. However, the police of the New Earth Government have gone back to an old model that works – that of the beat cop. Police are assigned to patrol and respond to incidents in neighborhoods or beats. The police on a beat get to know the residents and business-people of those neighborhoods, investing the cops in the people they protect. Gone are the days when aimlessly wandering over-worked police viewed everyone as faceless potential perpetrators. People know and respect their protectors and vice versa. The other big difference in police officers from days gone by is that police are armed and armored at all times. Wearing light battle armor and carrying light assault rifles and several kinds of grenades, the police of the New Earth Government never know what they'll have to deal with, so they are ready for it. Other types of undercover police are not so heavily loaded, but are capable of calling down SWAT (Special Weapons & Tactics) or SPAT (Special Powered Armor

Teams) on a moment's notice. All police are also afforded the honor of being able to operate vehicles inside arcologies, dramatically increasing their odds of being able to manage threats.

The Federal Security Bureau steps in if the crime is suspected to be of a wider reaching or organized nature, or if cults are involved. For the most part, the FSB is content to let local law enforcement manage their own turf, for they know it better. However, there are more than enough larger scale crimes to warrant a branch office of the Federal Security Bureau in every arcology.

THE GROWING MESS

Inside this carefully controlled arena is where the Death Shadows are going to turn up the heat. There is quite a variety of ways things will get worse for the citizens of the New Earth Government, but the Death Shadows aren't stupid. It will start slow and get worse by degrees, like putting a lobster in a pot of cold water and then slowly boiling it to death. The people will be cooked before they even register it is happening.

One of the first things that will happen is that incidents of vandalism will increase. Graffiti will become steadily more prevalent. Schools will be broken into and destroyed. Public works of

art will be defaced. Parks will suffer from disrespectful damage. It won't really hurt anybody initially, because the crimes will be categorized as "victimless." However, it will piss a lot of people off.

Then comes the property crimes. Deep down in the parking levels of the arcology, people's cars start to get stolen with alarming frequency. More and more homes are broken into and the same goes for businesses. People on the streets are plagued by pickpockets, suddenly discovering that their peeks and other personal items were stolen on the train. Identity theft goes on the rise. People start to get very angry once their personal possessions are no longer safe and insurance companies start to raise their premiums.

Not long thereafter, illicit drugs get added to the mix. A wave of fresh dealers hit the streets and waves of heavily regulated or illicit substances are available at cheap prices. At first, it's only a whole lot of what you can already get, but the stuff you get in limited quantities. People begin to indulge in some of their favorite regulated substances in ways they couldn't before and, not coincidentally, the incidence of addiction rises. Suddenly partiers find themselves addicted to cocaine or painkillers and



have to face the pain of physical withdrawal – that is, if they choose to quit. Then comes the hard stuff and, as usual, the first hit is free. Readily available in all kinds of places it wasn't before, first time users find themselves trying crystal meth in clubs or heroin at house parties. The problem with these kinds of drugs is that there really is no such thing as a recreational user. New addicts are created at an alarming rate.

Once the drugs have had a chance to simmer for a while, the Death Shadows move on to one of their favorite vices – sex. While prostitution is legal, there are some things people want that aren't. You can't go out and sleep with an escort that is under the age of 16, you can't beat your escort, and you can't have sex with animals. That is, until the Death Shadows decide that this is a societal niche worth indulging. They start creating brothels of unwilling sex slaves under the legal age of consent and then start stringing some of them out on illegal drugs until they become willing. Same goes for adult sex slaves that become punching bags for those who like to beat their lovers. And that doesn't even come close to the sickening array of animals that they start to offer in specialized brothels. A reasonable number of months later, the Death Shadows up the sex ante again by increasing the traffic in sex slaves for sale. Soon boys, girls, men, and women from war zones are being kidnapped and forced into sex slavery, sometimes conditioned by magic and/or drugs, sometimes just by threats. Hand in hand with the Death Shadows' prostitution and sex slave crimes comes their foray into pornography. Anything that shouldn't be done sex-wise they do and put on video.

The final step is to turn the heat up all the way. Violent crimes become more and more prevalent. Street gang violence is the first to spike. Gang-related shootings take off as the Death Shadows filter more guns onto the streets. Innocent bystanders die horrible deaths as they find themselves in the wrong places at the wrong times. Turf wars spin out of control. Automatic weapons make it far more difficult for the police to deal with the gang violence with grace. Then the muggings begin. More and more people find themselves robbed at gun or knife point and, as time goes on, more of such muggings end with a person severely wounded or dead. By the end of the year, it is no longer safe to travel down dark streets or alleys, or through many neighborhoods.

For the sick at heart, the sex trade takes on a new character as well. No longer content to just offer victims for sexual abuse, the Death Shadows add in a new component – death. By the end of the year, the ability to pay to have rough sex with a prostitute that ends in the violent death of said prostitute becomes available. The dregs of society can now pay to torture, main, or kill any slave they want, along with any kind of sexual humiliation

and abuse they can heap on. For those who have that kind of sickness, but the sense not to personally act it out, new snuff films and snuff pornography become available. If you can't bring yourself to do it, at least you can pay to watch someone else do it for you.

The *piece de resistance* is something only possible in the Strange Aeon. The Disciples of Death's Shadow use N'athm to begin to track as many of the Empty as they can. Nudging them in whatever ways is effective, they whip the Empty into a frenzy, turning out a force of soulless victimizing machines into the world. A wave of serial killers, serial rapists, and more are unleashed, the likes of which the world has never seen.

It is a dark time for the citizens of the New Earth Government, most of whom finally feel safe behind arcology walls.

THE DISCIPLES OF DEATH'S SHADOW

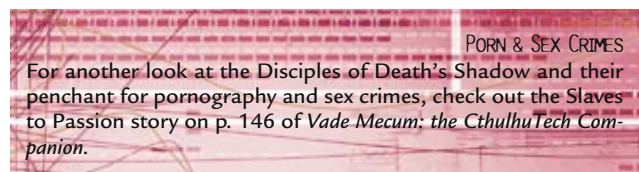
It is the more subtle sect of the Disciples of Death's Shadow that are behind all of this. No doubt they are powerful, but how is it that any cult is capable of bringing about such horror?

If it is illegal or has to do with vice, the Death Shadows have their fingers in it. But it isn't their connections that make them powerful. It is their cleverness and complete lack of moral compass that make them dangerous. There are functionally three major tools they use to operate this year.

The most effective tool at the disposal of the Death Shadows is their ability to blackmail. Anyone they want to get to, they patiently investigate. Everyone has secrets and many people have secrets that they do not want others to find out about. Certainly, there are those who live simple and clean enough lifestyles to be immune to such threats, but these people are not the ones the Death Shadows target. They go after the prey they know they can get, or they do everything they can to corrupt the target they want in order to create blackmail-able lifestyles. Of course, anyone who indulges in vices provided by the Death Shadows is immediately a target for blackmail. Some people's secrets will only compel them to minor acts, while others will do nearly anything to keep things under the rug.

The second powerful tool at the cult's disposal is eldritch power. Dream magic and manipulative para-psychic abilities make it easy to start turning good people shady and shady people bad. It isn't difficult, given the vast occult knowledge at their command, for the Death Shadows to push the right people in the right direction to start any of their criminal trends. Once the first crests fall, the avalanche isn't far behind.

The final major tool of Hastur's wicked minions is the most mundane of all – money. The Disciples of Death's Shadow are anything but poor and wield the most financial influence of any cult beside the Children of Chaos. With such clout, those who cannot be blackmailed may be bought instead. Bribery sometimes gets one further than threats and the relationship can wind up being long and fruitful – and ultimately ending in a world where





the Death Shadows have dirt on those they bribe. Furthermore, simple economics helps them blow terrible things out of proportion. They can create new black markets that are flooded with entrepreneurs once they show (or create the illusion) that such markets are profitable. They can easily bloat existing markets, whether illegal or simply regulated, as with drugs such as cocaine or crystal meth, or with contraband, such as firearms.

To help them in their endeavors, the Disciples of Death's Shadow are going to be on the lookout for those that can be converted to their cause. The Dionysus Clubs are going to be in overdrive. The parties will be extreme, the number of people brought into the fold will be numerous, and the Death Shadow recruiters will be doing everything they can to draw those on the brink further and further into their own depravity so that they can eventually join the ranks. The rich, elite, and privileged will be the first targets, but for the first time those of lesser status will be invited to join in on the debauchery, as long as they have something to offer the cause.

LEGAL REPERCUSSIONS

Naturally, the law enforcement agencies of the New Earth Government are going to respond to the threats to public safety. While the steady rise in crime doesn't alarm them at first, the consistent increase in street crime eventually gets their attention in a big way.

The first response is to bolster the beat cops of the New Earth Government and also to send out more roving patrols. In general, people can expect to see more visible law enforcement that the NEG hopes will be a deterrent. That doesn't go as well as planned and crime continues to increase.

The second response is an increase in undercover agents, both from local law enforcement and from the Federal Security Bureau. Busts dramatically increase from all walks of crime, but it does little to put a dent in the Death Shadows' overall initiative. However, it makes it difficult for other less nefarious non-law abiding citizens to do what they intend to do.

The third response comes later in the year as Parliament passes a short-term law to broaden law enforcement's power while lessening citizen's personal rights. This becomes a hotbed of controversy for those in the know, but the Ministry of Information does a good job of making sure that people are distracted both during and after the bill is voted into law. The Emergency Crime Act, or ECA as it is commonly known, dramatically decreases the average person's rights when it comes to search, seizure, and prosecution. While it is designed to expire, the ECA makes it so that law enforcement can arrest and detain anyone they even thinly suspect of criminal activity and hold them for up to a week without charge. Suspects are also not allowed any sort of outside communication for up to 72 hours, during which time they are brutally grilled by interrogators. Some view it as a dark time for civil rights, while others view it as a necessary step to clean up streets that are, day by day, beginning to run red with the blood of innocents.

Even under an extinction level threat, human nature is impossible to manage.

THE TIMELINE

This sinister plot of the Disciples of Death's Shadow is intended to roll out over the span of the year. Here's an approximate breakdown of how this occurs.

First Quarter, 2086

Things start out simple and grow from there. Vandalism is the first effect that anyone begins to feel, eventually blossoming into property crimes.

Second Quarter, 2086

Once property crimes have been added to the mix, it isn't long before illicit drugs come flooding in. Dealers begin to pop up everywhere and things people couldn't get in clubs and bars start to show up in a big way. The law enforcement of the New Earth Government responds by supporting beat cops and adding more patrols.

Third Quarter, 2086

Illegal sex becomes more and more prevalent as the third quarter progresses. Things healthy people should never want become easier and easier to get in the sexual arena. The New Earth Government responds by increasing the presence of its undercover agents in all walks of law enforcement.

Fourth Quarter, 2086

Things begin to get really bad as violent crime escalates. Street gangs grow out of control and mugging incidents become alarmingly frequent. The darkest side of the sex trade rears its ugly head and things that should not be seen become disturbingly easy to get on the internet. It is during the fourth quarter that the Emergency Crime Act is voted into law and law enforcement gains broad powers to combat the rise in crime.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

While early in the year it doesn't seem like all this is that big of a deal, between the excess of violent crime and the Emergency Crime Act, there will be repercussions for quite a while to come.

The scars these events leave on the average citizen of the New Earth Government are significant. For the last several decades, those who have chosen to dwell in an arcology (that wasn't in or next to a war zone) have slept believing in their safety. The Disciples of Death's Shadow have done much to destroy that. Many arcology-dwellers will carry the wounds of victimization for years to come, leading to a dramatic increase in requests for permits to carry firearms inside arcology walls. Neighborhood watch groups will also come into being in places where residents formerly felt no need for such a thing, and vigilante groups will also form to plague the police. Unfortunately, the panic will bring about the deaths of innocent people as citizens become overly sensitive to what they perceive as unusual behavior.

The Emergency Crime Act supposedly has a twelve month expiration date, which means that no one is safe from the sudden raid of law enforcement. Unlike the past, local law enforcement and the Federal Security Bureau follow up on pretty much any lead that has any kind of weight to it, whereas they once ignored many of their tips. It is a good time to be a clean, law-abiding citizen, and a bad time to be anyone associated with anything remotely illegal, no matter the intent – like many Characters. The draconian nature of law enforcement will only increase over the twelve months until the powers-that-be feel that the situation is under control, and only time will tell if Parliament chooses to let the law go out of existence when it is supposed to naturally expire.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

The great part about these events is that they will affect nearly any game. As long as Characters are a part of New Earth Government society, crime will most likely somehow touch them in 2086.

Let's take a look at a few different play styles and how they might be impacted by the dramatic increase in street crime.

In General

It would be hard to find a type of Character that wouldn't somehow be touched by these events. Everyone is a part of New Earth Government society and will suffer in one way, shape, or form.

At the very least, Characters should suffer some sort of property crime. Their car is stolen, their apartment or condo is broken into, or they are a victim of a potentially dangerous mugging. On the extreme side, someone close to them is a victim of some other more dangerous sort of crime. It could be that a loved one ends up in the hospital on the bad end of a mugging or that they are raped or worse. The Characters themselves could end up on the unfortunate end of such crimes. The idea is that it is likely that most Characters should suffer in some way.

If a Character is rich or elite, he may find himself in a very different position. The Dionysus Club may try to recruit him. He may find himself the recipient of private invitations to off the hook parties. If he accepts, he may find himself liking them. If he likes them, he may find his vices growing. As his vices grow, he may attract the attention of people he may not want to attract the attention of – and find himself marked as potential by the Disciples of Death's Shadow.

NEG Military Games

Most Characters that are part of military games are going to be deployed somewhere other than the "peaceful" world of arcologies. Some may be deployed on peaceful soil, in which case they will be affected like everyone else, but most will only see this world when they come back on leave.

When soldiers return on leave, it may be a rude awakening. The Death Shadows kick things off so quickly that the difference of a few months may be staggering. A soldier may have left to come

back to discover that his neighborhood is no longer safe at night. He may discover that one of his friends was mugged and is in the hospital or that his mother has been robbed. It'll be an ugly thing to come home to, since, for many soldiers, coming home is meant to be a relaxing break from the horror and atrocities of the front lines. For some, it may be the straw that broke the camel's back in terms of their mental well-being.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

These sorts of Characters are going to end up in the thick of things, trying desperately to investigate what is going on or trying to police the streets so that it doesn't continue to happen – or get worse. From the moment these events start to happen, Characters that are part of the Federal Security Bureau or part of local police are going to be on alert. As things get worse, it will seem like arcologies are war zones to these types of Characters. And that's just on the professional end. What happens when they or those they love become victims of such crimes?

Of course, fighting crime during this year will seem a lot like fighting shadows. Until someone can get to the root of the evil, it will continue to fester.

Arcane Underground Games

It's a great year for the arcane underground. The cops are going to be looking elsewhere for what might be considered "lesser" crimes. The Office of Internal Security will be as vigilant as ever, but the average Johnny Law on the streets will be focused on the rising tide of ordinary crimes.

Of course, just because someone is part of a dangerous black market doesn't mean that he or she won't be victims of the array of street crimes that are increasing. Even hardcore arcane black marketeers might find their houses robbed, or loved ones victimized, or themselves in a neighborhood that isn't safe. It just goes to show that no one is immune to the predations of others.

Cult Games

Characters that are in any way associated with the Disciples of Death's Shadow will be having a field day in 2086. It's like Christmas – they have the upper hand and are bringing everybody to a debased point where they are one step closer to being proper servants of the Old Ones.

However, many of the cults have nothing to do with Hastur's aims, which means they will suffer the same as everyone else. The forces the Death Shadows unleash have no particular direction and even those forces aligned with the Old Ones, albeit in different ways, are likely to be victimized the same as everyone else. This can breed hostility between other cults and both the Disciples of Death's Shadow and the Dionysus Clubs.

The biggest problem cults will face is the increased law enforcement presence as the year goes on. The Federal Security Bureau will be out in force, as will local law enforcement. The locals are as much of a problem as the FSB, who are looking for cult influ-

ence as a regular part of their investigations. There is little cults can do without running afoul of some sort of law enforcement. It will be a year of keeping extra care.

Eldritch Society Games

Members of the Eldritch Society will suffer the same predations as everyone else. However, when it's personal, fear for the person on the other end who chose to perpetrate such crimes. That does not prevent Tagers from suffering as people close to them are victimized.

The Eldritch Society, as with the cults, begins to suffer from the increase in law enforcement presence. Many of their regular activities put them at risk of being caught by local law enforcement. While local law is not that much of a threat on their own, the SPAT teams they can call in are. That doesn't even consider the Federal Security Bureau, whose forces are going to be far more prevalent and far more powerful. In general, Tagers are going to have to be a lot more careful with their activities, or find themselves on the business end of a 50 mm plasma cannon.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

AGENT SABRINA FLORES

FSB Agent-in-Charge

A long-standing veteran of the Violent Crimes Investigation Division of the Federal Security Bureau, Sabrina Flores is a hardened, no-nonsense agent who has seen more than her fair share of darkness and horror. She has a strong background in criminal psychology and worked with the Behavioral Analysis Unit for a time. Agent Flores is the one at the helm of tracking the increase in crime and the one tasked with overseeing world-wide operations as the Federal Security Bureau becomes more involved. Her policy is one that incites some controversy – arrest them first, ask questions later, if they resist, shoot them. With the situation heating up the way it is, Sabrina firmly believes it is better to beg forgiveness than ask permission.

The Disciples of Death's Shadow will be doing due diligence in an attempt to find a way to get to Agent Flores. However, that is difficult, since she is so steeped in the Bureau's ethics and her friends are all agents. Add to that her distinct lack of family or other personal connections, and she will prove to be a tough nut to crack.

Virtue/Flaw: Productive/Workaholic

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Perception 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Master, Education: Expert, Law Enforcement: Master, Streetwise: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (3), Driven, Duty (2)

GIRARD LEFLEUR

Death Shadow Svengali

The mastermind behind all of this is Girard LeFleur, a Toulouse-born Frenchman. Girard was once a lost street kid, orphaned at

a young age and bounced from abusive foster home to abusive foster home. By twelve he was running effective scams, by sixteen he was a full-fledged con artist, and by twenty he had worked his way into the hearts of three rich widows who died under mysterious circumstances and left him their fortunes. There has always been darkness in his heart and dishonesty has always been his trade. It's no surprise he attracted the attention of the Death Shadows. A few manipulated dreams and a few dreaming visits by the Dead God and Girard was a bona-fide Death Shadow.

It wasn't until his late twenties that Girard manifested his para-psychic abilities. He is a Manipulative para-psychic of grand proportions, something that assists greatly in his duties. But what keeps him ahead of the game are his Sensory gifts, allowing him to gaze at possible futures. As long as he is at the helm, the Death Shadows will be elusive prey.

Virtue/Flaw: Imaginative/Cruel

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 10, Presence 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Master, Misdirect: Master, Seduction: Master, Streetwise: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Innovative, Fanatical (3)

HIERONYMOUS TATE

Creator of the Emergency Crime Act

Tate is a notorious Member of Parliament and a long-standing elected official from Eastern Canada. He has the reputation of being a firebrand, taking passionate, radical political stands whether or not it makes him look good. He is and always has been a force for change in the New Earth Government and he's never been afraid of pissing people off. However, Tate runs dangerously close to alienating large portions of his constituency when he pens the Emergency Crime Act, which effectively minimizes what few civil rights citizens of the New Earth Government still maintain. There are those that fully support him, claiming that desperate times call for desperate measures, and what is more desperate than having unsafe streets at home. Fortunately for the world, though it may not seem so at first, supporters of his bill win out. Citizens will find him a common face on the television as things progress, spouting the virtues of extreme measures and calling for the safety of people in the one place humanity has left to call their own – their remaining arcologies.

The Disciples of Death's Shadow don't even go after Tate in the traditional sense, for his conversion would be far too obvious. However, Tate must face several attempts on his life as the Death Shadows see if they can't make him meet the business end of a criminal action gone bad.

Virtue/Flaw: Optimist/Arrogant

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Presence 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Master, Performance (Oration): Master, Persuade: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (4), Minor Empathy, Duty (2), Fanatical (1)

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL

Something else insidious is happening within the New Earth Government that the news barely reports for most of the year. At first, it quietly happens within the neighborhoods of the Nazzadi, but eventually it spills out into the rest of the world.

Here's how the events play out.

September 2085 to April 2086

If one were to do some detailed research, one might discover that the Nazzadi Missing Persons Index was sharply on the rise. Only people who paid attention to missing persons reports in the news might notice this, but people go missing all the time.

April to October 2086

It might be hard for someone to notice, but a markedly high number of Nazzadi die in a series of muggings and robberies gone bad, gang violence, or other instances of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

10th October 2086, Thursday

A brutally murdered and horribly mutilated corpse is found in the Nazzadi part of east Hollywood in the Los Angeles arcology. The male corpse has been dismembered, castrated, and has long industrial nails driven through its eye sockets. It has been tied to the support beam of a mag-lev station. Across its torso is carved "sasony urari ez," which is Nazzadi for "freedom has a price."

18th November, 2086, Monday

A Nazzadi family is murdered in an elaborate public spectacle. The media is notified by an anonymous tip and arrive at a public park in the Chicago arcology to find a disturbing scene. A Nazzadi family of nine, including parents, children, spouses, and teenage grandchildren, is tied, gagged, and wired with explosives. The device is intricate, complex, and clearly the work of an experienced professional, giving the bomb squad significant pause. Many watch the live broadcast as the Chicago police work to save the family. Just when the brave bomb squad believes they've got it, they discover they've been outsmarted. A recorder plays one clear statement – "moriti dilatari oa," which is Nazzadi for "death to the faithless" – and then the bomb explodes, killing the family.

These last couple of murders catch the public's eye because of their shocking nature. The media is quick to pin the blame on the Blood Brigade. The murders are certainly within the Brigade's *modus operandi*. There is a fury in the media, which dies down quickly in the face of the failed attempt to retake Juneau.

The most disturbing part of these crimes is that there appear to be no leads. None of the crime scenes has provided conclusive evidence to point in any one direction, but it unlikely that they were random acts of violence. No one close to the victims reports anything out of the ordinary. The Federal Security Bureau is quietly mobilized to investigate, and the Sectarian Crimes Division tasks their undercover agencies to see if any of the known offenders might be suspect.





For a time, as expected, the Nazzadi Anti-Defamation League is up in arms. Then, in the face of other disasters, they uncharacteristically quiet down. No one would suspect that there are those high within the NADL's ranks that know the truth.

THE HIDDEN TRUTH

The reality of all this is as disturbing as the lengths to which it has gone. Within the Nazzadi there has been a growing Loyalist movement – there are those who speak of a growing desire to go back to serving the Migou. Many have actualized such a desire, leaving the New Earth Government to find their way back to their creators. Some have even returned to tell of their welcome back into the fold.

The Loyalists are, fortunately, the distinct minority and are becoming more so every month. There are those within the Nazzadi community who do not wish to confirm mankind's worst fears about them, who do not want to threaten their place within the New Earth Government, or who simply cannot stomach the idea that one of their own would be sick enough to voluntarily choose to serve the inhuman creatures that designed and created them in a lab. It is these Nazzadi who believe that it is up to them to clean up their own mess, to cut the cancer out of their nascent culture. It is they who have reawakened old connections from when the Nazzadi were a war machine and called upon skills they have not used for decades. They have organized to murder any Nazzadi suspected of Loyalist leanings and to send a message to the rest of the Nazzadi community that such ludicrousness will not be tolerated. They have no formal name, but some refer to them as Helasi, or the Free. They are, unsurprisingly, very good at what they do.

At first, the Helasi were testing their own conviction and shaking the dust off their covert operations skills. Quietly, the Nazzadi missing persons index rose as the first of the murmuring Loyalists were silenced. Between April and October of 2086, the Helasi began to recruit and train others who were sympathetic to their goals and methods. Their ranks swelled. Then, the time came to leave a message and several dramatic ones have impacted the world. While Humans may have lost such messages in an amongst the other horrors of the Aeon War, rest assured that Nazzadi communities got them. By the time November 2086 rolls around, Loyalists within the New Earth Government are far more careful to remain secret and to keep their mouths shut.

Catching them will be difficult. Not only are they well trained in covert operations, the Helasi have members and friends in many places. There are cops, federal agents, politicians, community leaders, religious leaders, and more who all support the cause and are willing to lie, cover up evidence, and harbor fugitives. That does not include the practically trained combat skills possessed by many of the Helasi ranks, most of whom were part of the fabricated Nazzadi warrior traditions. And there are few in Nazzadi communities that would speak up, even if it is their friends or family members that were murdered. They would rather not call attention to their own personal shame.

Of the commonalities between victims, there is little to say. Each of them was Nazzadi and few of them had many, if any, Human friends. There is no particular age, profession, or persuasion that stands out. No particular group stands out as suspect and no one has stepped forward to take credit. The Blood Brigade is an unlikely suspect, as they are not in the practice of claiming responsibility for acts of terrorism that aren't theirs. They take pride in their work.

In general, there are few, if any, leads. In fact, there is a startling lack of evidence.

THE LOYALIST MINDSET

As part of the New Earth Government, the Nazzadi have finally earned true freedom – freedom of identity, freedom of being. Their world is one of their making. They serve no one other than who they choose to serve. Just what exactly would take a being who finally had its freedom and make it want to willingly re-enter slavery?

There are a number of different factors that contribute to a Nazzadi going Loyalist. Any one of these factors is enough, but most Loyalists have a mindset that involves a mix of several.

Perhaps the most prevalent factor, and the most disturbing, is one that most citizens of the New Earth Government are unwilling to face – that they are on the losing side of the Aeon War. Even if a Human were to admit such a dark proposition to himself, he would have no way out of his situation. Not so for a Nazzadi. He believes that he can always return to his former masters, who are clearly on better footing in this war. These Loyalists are nothing more than deeply scared and are looking for any way out they can find.

There are those Nazzadi who believe that the New Earth Government hasn't treated them any better than the Migou did. They choose to see the hurdles the Nazzadi have faced as part of integration as slights against their race. They fail to see the graciousness of a race they tried to subjugate and enslave, a race of whom they murdered hundreds of millions, who chose to take the Nazzadi in once they'd rebelled against their creators. Instead, these disillusioned souls look at the racist troubles, the way the New Earth Government still watches the exact segments of the Nazzadi population of which they are part, and the hardship their race has faced trying to establish their own identity with what they view as no help from the government. These Loyalists are ungrateful and choose to focus their discontent on those who have participated whole-heartedly in their liberation.

Among the older Nazzadi, there is a unique Loyalist mindset. There are those who served in the Nazzadi fleet during the First Arcanotech War who only sided with the renegades because they were winning. These warriors would have happily continued serving the Migou if the Nazzadi had not fractured. However, when they did, these Loyalists believed that serving Field Marshal Kyrza was a losing proposition. They did what they needed to survive and blended in with the renegade population, eventually

integrating themselves into the New Earth Government. Now that there are murmurings within the Nazzadi population of returning to service once again, these once and always Loyalists are ready to return to a life they never intended to leave.

The most unfortunate of those succumbing to the new Loyalist movement are among the young who never even knew what it was to be a part of the Migou war machine. They believe in an unfortunate romanticized tale of what the Migou had intended for the Nazzadi and what rewards lay in their service. They believe that the Nazzadi were always meant to be the favorite children of the alien insects, who were to rule over those the Migou chose to conquer. These deluded children falsely believe that by simply giving their allegiance to their creators that the universe would be theirs. Though they were too young to either remember having served or too young to have ever served the Migou, these blossoming Loyalists believe that they will once again occupy this lofty place in the bugs' plan for the universe if they renounce their place within the New Earth Government.

So the Loyalist Nazzadi comes up with some way in his mind that he can serve the Migou again, whether it be as spy, warrior, or as simply a turncoat with an inside perspective on the enemy. Then he determines a way to contact his former masters and offer his allegiance. If he's part of the military, he goes AWOL and radios the Migou on maneuvers. If he's a civilian, he leaves the city never to return, driving deep into Migou country. Some way or another, the Loyalist Nazzadi leaves the protection of the New Earth Government and waits for contact with the Migou so he can run up the white flag and ask to speak. Considering Migou policy regarding the Nazzadi, many of them who run across Migou soldiers are killed before they can plead their case. The lucky ones make tele-contact before they meet face to face or find themselves somewhere with some kind of Migou officer who is willing to listen.

One thing all those among the new Loyalist movement have in common is that they do not believe they will simply be slaves. They believe that by returning to the fold that they will find welcomed or even favored positions in the service of the former masters. They suffer from a delusion of their own importance.

The thing that has kept these beliefs alive is that the Migou do receive the Loyalist Nazzadi with open arms. There is reward on the other side for such traitors. The Migou need all the help they can get and they are happy to put the Nazzadi to work. The Nazzadi were designed to work in this atmosphere under the Earth's planetary conditions. Nazzadi pilots can take the battlefield in Nazzadi mecha, which the Migou can produce at a much faster rate than their own. And each Nazzadi that crosses lines is one more thorn in the side of their enemies and one more grain that may tip the allegiance of the entire race – and the scales of the Aeon War. While the Loyalist Nazzadi are not given the places of favor that some expect, they are treated well. The truth is, the Migou only view them as tools to be used until they are no longer needed.

In the end, there are a variety of reasons that might compel a frightened or dissatisfied Nazzadi to contemplate going back to their roots and there is a place for those who do so. To some, this is madness. To others, this is genius.

RESPONSES WITHIN & WITHOUT

The New Earth Government responds the way one might suspect it would. Nothing is done while the missing persons index is on the rise. After all, the Strange Aeon sees things like that all the time. Once there is a marked increase in Nazzadi deaths due to crime, the appropriate agencies go to work, but without public knowledge. Local police and the Federal Security Bureau conduct their quiet investigations and come up empty handed. Then the killers go public and start putting bodies and murders on display for all to see. The authorities put on public task forces and go into investigation overdrive. Unfortunately, it is an uphill battle for them, since they are hampered from within and have great difficulty getting real leads or evidence.

Even in the face of other tragedy, the NEG authorities continue their investigation into what they classify as Nazzadi hate crimes. When others quit, the dedication of the New Earth Government to the Nazzadi community remains. It is a credit to the powers that be and one that is not unnoticed by Nazzadi leaders.

At first the Nazzadi community is unaware that anything is even happening. It's not like the Ministry of Information is going to let the fact that the Nazzadi missing persons index is on the rise leak to the general public. It is something that most people simply do not need to know. When it becomes necessary to inform the public of the Nazzadi deaths seemingly from gang violence, muggings gone bad, etc., the Ministry of Information requests that they be reported as isolate incidents and again, the Nazzadi community is kept in the dark. Once the first mutilated body is found, the Ministry of Information chooses to provoke a response in the hopes that they might flush out the killers or cult responsible for the murders. It is then that the Nazzadi community screams for justice.

But the screams are strange and short-lived. Nazzadi community leaders come forth and call for unity. Nazzadi politicians come forth and pledge their unwavering resolve in supporting federal efforts to apprehend the criminals. The Nazzadi Anti-Defamation League ends up on every news channel possible crying for unequivocal justice. However, these bold stances disappear as soon as there is smoke to conceal them. Once larger tragedy dominates the public interest, the Nazzadi quickly quiet down. It isn't long after the year is out that most people will have forgotten all about these horrible atrocities, the way they forget about dozens of other atrocities every year.

Of course, the reason the Nazzadi community quiets down so quickly is because there are few within who would oppose what is truly going on. Once the town criers are made aware of the true nature of the deaths, they back down. No one sheds tears for the death of race traitors.

LASTING EFFECTS

For the New Earth Government at large, there are few in the way of lasting effects. It winds up being another awful set of statistics and incidents in a year of awful statistics and incidents.

The Nazzadi community, however, takes notice of the New Earth Government's dedication to solving the crimes. In general, they feel like they are truly partners of humanity in the world and any doubts they had to the contrary disappear.

The most important long-term ramification of the Helasi's crusade is that it works. Their terror tactics keep the disillusioned quiet and reduce Loyalism to the truly fanatical.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

So where do Dramatic Characters fit into all this? These events are primarily meant to be background flavor to the other significant events of 2086, but there may be ways to work Characters into them – especially if they are Nazzadi.

Let's take a look at several different types of play styles and see how they might be impacted by the Nazzadi purges.

NEG Military Games

For most military Characters, these events will just be something they hear about on the news or something their buddies are talking about. It is unlikely that military Characters would become involved in the deeper implications of this story, especially considering that the Armed Forces have much bigger fishes to fry this year.

However, Nazzadi members of the Armed Forces may find themselves involved in some capacity, on a personal level, as described below.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

This style of play is the most likely to dive head-first into these events. Local police will be involved in the smaller investigations early on, but once the first body is put on display the Feds step in. The Federal Security Bureau will have started tracking Nazzadi-related crimes from the moment the Ministry of Information notes something may be amiss. Once the need for a public task-force becomes obvious, the FSB steps in to coordinate the investigation.

What will be different about this investigation is that there are people who would be considered to be "good guys" who don't want this investigation to turn anything up. Evidence may suddenly disappear. Crime scenes may be polluted. Politics may keep agents from going as far as they'd like. In the end, there is a very real conspiracy trying to keep this quiet, for a very good reason.

The question will be whether or not federal agent Characters can agree and let things go or if they've got to take it as far as they can.

Arcane Underground Games

Those operating within the arcane underground might actually notice that an unusual number of Nazzadi are the victims of violent crime. It may be unusual to some of the less savory elements that haven't heard who it is that's perpetuating these crimes. Usually when something like this goes down, word on the street carries who it is claiming credit. Not so in this case. It's like whoever's doing this stuff is new and keeping to themselves.

Despite that piece of unusual business, it's unlikely that your everyday Characters in the arcane underground are going to have much to do with this story. However, Nazzadi Characters may have personal excuses to get involved, as described below.

Eldritch Society Games

The Eldritch Society has more than enough on their mind this year. Eldritch Society Characters, depending upon their associations and what worlds they choose to walk in, hear different things, but ultimately won't have much to do with this story. Since the Society is often so close to the arcane underground, they may pick up rumors there, but that's about it.

Nazzadi Characters, again, may have some kind of personal involvement, as described below.

Cult Games

Stories involving Characters from the Blood Brigade will take special notice in these events, especially since they can't claim credit. Cult leaders will want to find out who is responsible, to either find out who is moving in on their turf and why or to recruit them. Of course, should they find those who are actually performing these terrible acts, they will discover that neither side wants the other and more than likely would like to see the other dead.

Other minor cults will have little reason to be involved. The Circle and the Congregation of the Earth Mother are too busy to care. The others are up to their own things as well. As with any kind of game, Nazzadi Characters may become involved because of friends or family.

For Nazzadi Characters

Any story that includes Nazzadi Characters may be impacted by these events. To your average Nazzadi, they are a series of tragedies that seem to be properly dealt with, which will provide texture for your otherly focused game. However, if you have Nazzadi Characters that are fully active in their own culture or who have relatives of note, they will probably get wind of what is really going on – race traitors are being silenced for the good of all. Some Nazzadi Characters might agree with this and assist where they can, some might even join in with a more active role. Others might oppose this behavior and seek to find a middle road or even stop the insanity. Any way it plays out, these events might be a good excuse to involve Nazzadi Characters more within their own community.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

ANGAZA

Nazzadi Mastermind

These days, Angaza is a happy, retired gentleman in his late sixties. If one knew him in the last twenty years, they knew a kind-hearted clockmaker who kept the tradition of artistic clocks with intricate moving parts alive in a digital era. True, this is the peaceful life Angaza carved out for himself after the fighting ended, but there are many who remember that the former Marshal Angaza served closely with Field Marshal Vreta during the First Arcanotech War. Though Angaza has embraced a life of peace, he has never given up his warrior's ways and has stayed in close touch with his cloned buddies since the war. When word of what was going on reached his ears, he was loathe to sit by and do nothing. It is he that is the mastermind behind the Helasi, quietly coordinating from his beautiful home in the Chicago arcology.

Virtue/Flaw: Visionary/Arrogant

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 9, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: History: Expert, Education: Master, Fighting: Master (Specialized in Hun-Zuti), Marksman: Master, Persuade: Expert, Savoir-Faire: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Commendation (3), Famous Incident (3), Fanatical (2)

IRURY

FSB Special-Agent-In-Charge

Once the first body is put on display, the New Earth Government needs to step in with a visible show of law enforcement. As an additional PR ploy, the powers-that-be urge the Federal Security Bureau to put a Nazzadi in charge of the investigation. How perfect that the precision-oriented and decorated Agent Irury used to serve in the Nazzadi military under Marshal Angaza. There she sits, at the top of the legal investigation, making sure that the Nazzadi people feel that justice is taking care of them, while making darn sure no one discovers the truth. And she is hardly alone within the FSB and the important levels of government that will do pretty much anything to keep this quiet.

Virtue/Flaw: Loyal/Unsympathetic

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Perception 8, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Expert, Intimidate: Expert, Law Enforcement: Master, Marksman: Expert, Observation: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (3), Driven, Fanatical (2), Obsessive

LANCOMBE CHARET

Agent Provocateur

While others might find themselves shying away from an investigation that has the kinds of barriers that this one does, Agent Charet will not give up. One of the first to be assigned to the case, and subsequently among the first to be reassigned to a

“more important” case, Lancombe has taken it on as a personal mission. He believes that there is something more to the murders (and other statistics) than anyone else seems willing to believe. While most regard him as a conspiracy theorist, he is only fueled by the resistance he has met within the agency. The Helasi doesn't want to kill him, because they will then call unwanted attention to themselves. So Agent Charet marches on, the madman with a mission.

Virtue/Flaw: Unyielding/Vengeful

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 7, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Expert, Law Enforcement: Adept, Marksman: Adept, Observation: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (2), Minor Empathy, Obsessive

OSINALA

The First Warning

The man butchered and put on display for all to see was named Osinala. The papers cite him as just another average citizen with a decent job as a shipping controller. He was in his mid-forties, single, and hung out a lot with other Nazzadi veterans of the First Arcanotech War. At first, his death seems like a hate crime, but digging a little further yields other details.

Osinala was never really happy with the Nazzadi lot in life. He felt like they were forced to capitulate to a weaker enemy and were humiliated in the years afterwards. If one does due diligence, they'll discover that he had a personal piloting trip planned to leave the arcology in less than a month. Some suspect that he was going to go feel out the Migou and possibly return to the fold. There are others he downright invited to come with on his journey of betrayal and there were some thinking of joining, until Osinala turns up dead.

THE FAMILY OF ZENIA & ERELY

The Second Warning

The family blown to messy pieces on live broadcast was the family of Zenia and Erelly, both veterans of the First Arcanotech War. Like the death of Osinala, the news paints them out to be victims of hate crimes, intellectuals caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The reality is much different and anyone doing a reasonable amount of investigation will turn up a more accurate picture. However, most of those with this information have been politely told not to speak of it to anyone by powerful government agents.

Zenia was an intellectual, a history professor at a local college. He and his wife Erelly were both political activists, particularly with regards to important Nazzadi issues. Zenia both preached and practiced open-minded thinking and questioning, believing that any other way brought about domination – the way they'd been dominated by the Migou. One of his regular topics of debate was whether or not leaving the Migou once they'd learned the truth was a good idea, especially considering the bargaining position the Nazzadi were in. His family supported him 100% and shared his views.

GENESIS, AGAIN

The Chrysalis Corporation. The company's stock price is still high, they still provide many everyday products to the citizens of the New Earth Government, and they still employ a large number of people in stable jobs. They are also doing a bang-up job of hastening the end of the world as we know it and now they have even more exciting tools with which to do it.

Though the Chrysalis Corporation is the sole heir to the only functional version of the Rite of Transfiguration on the planet, they have not been resting on their laurels. The power of Dhohanooids is plenty, but hardly have all the Rite's secrets been unlocked.

However, this year, the notorious T99 Division takes things one step further.

T99 DIVISION

Composed of the most brilliant and amoral minds that the Children of Chaos have to offer, the secret T99 Division is the elite occult and science research and development department that oversees development and implementation of the Rite of Transfiguration within the Chrysalis Corporation, among other things. It is they who translated the Necronomicon and the Breath of R'lyeh in order to unlock the power of the Rite in the first place and, unfortunately for them, who also unintentionally birthed the Eldritch Society. There have been several problems with which the T99 Division has been dealing. The most vexing problems are threefold – how to speed up the process, how to create specific types of Dhohanooids, and how to create new Dhohanooids.

The Rite of Transfiguration is nowhere near as time-consuming or restrictive as the Rite of Sacred Union, but it isn't a walk in the park either. It can be performed on six nights of any month, during the new or full moon, and those undergoing the ritual need not prepare in any special way. The most common way that Dhohanooids are created is in special facilities known as Genesis Pits. It is here that people are brought to undergo the Rite of Transfiguration and then kept at the facility to recover, adjust, and receive basic training. Typically, several groups of sorcerers perform the rituals simultaneously, and up to a dozen Dhohanooids can be created in a single night at a large Genesis Pit. Between the standard loss of operatives on any mission and the way the Eldritch Society relentlessly hunts agents of the Chrysalis Corporation, Dhohanooid numbers are regularly depleted. With what is to come, it would be better for the Children of Chaos if it could churn more mortals through the ritual of monstrosity at a faster rate.

Like the Rite of Sacred Union, those undergoing or performing the Rite of Transfiguration have no control over what type of Dhohanooid a person will become. The Corporation has ended up with a preponderance of Dua-Sanari and Ramachese Dhohanooids, which suits them just fine. However, sometimes specific types of Dhohanooids are desired for different applications. For example, the Corporation would love to be able to create more Ciraqen for their development projects and more Zabuth to take

care of big problems. No matter the wish, the Children of Chaos are stuck with the luck of the draw – or the will of the gods as they like to look at it.

The third major problem is the issue of variety. There are a finite number of types of Dhohanooids that manifest. Not that these manifestations aren't powerful and versatile, mind you, but a finite number leads to a certain level of predictability, something the Children of Chaos loathe. There has not been a new manifestation of Dhohanooid in almost twenty years.

Until now.

THE M'YAS STONES

There are many components to the Rite of Transfiguration, as one might expect. All the usual business associated with high order magicks are required, along with a host of special secret ingredients that make it the incredibly powerful transmutation spell that it is. However, what T99 researchers didn't know is that by altering some of the components, the ritual can take on a character of its own.

Most tinkering along these lines has met with bloody failure. Simply messing with the ritual's "ingredients" does not yield a different kind of soup. Instead, it creates horrible backlashes of mystical and dimensional energies that always results in the death of the recipient and often the deaths of the sorcerers involved. In a few occasions, such experiments have destroyed entire buildings, something not always as easy to keep hidden from the powers that be. It took some new blood to help find something that actually works.

Dr. Aina Eze was one of the Chrysalis Corporation's most gifted geological researchers, focused on finding rare and valuable minerals and resources for their mining efforts. As she rose through the ranks, she caught the attention of the Children of Chaos and was gently tempted through her vanity into finally undergoing the Rite of Transfiguration. Fortunately for herself and her employers, she manifested as a Ciraqen. Since her transfiguration, Aina has been introduced to an entire world of occult research that she never knew existed and it has taken her work to new levels. It wasn't long before she was recruited into the mysterious T99 Division, and it was as if she was always meant to be there.

While there are researchers within T99 that had heard of the things referred to in some ancient texts as m'yas stones, no one believed they actually existed anymore. According to legend, m'yas stones were prehistoric geode formations churned up from deep under the earth, possessed of great power. Some say that their power lay in that their formation involved bits of alien crystal from meteorites, others say their formation began as the rock harnessed the power of comets, while others say that their naturally formed crystals harmonically channeled the power of dimensions more so than any other phenomenon. Stories say that sorcerers from days gone by once coveted them as tuning forks that would greatly enhance many of their rituals, but that such objects have always been extremely rare.

The possibility that such a thing existed fascinated Dr. Eze and she began to search, using the forbidden knowledge of the T99 Division and the extraordinary resources of the Chrysalis Corporation – something no one else in the history of the world has had access to. M'yas stones became her holy grail, the mysterious thing she was determined to prove was real. Meeting with failure after failure, Aina continued to search despite her declining reputation. But there is a fine line between insanity and genius and it is history that usually draws such a line.

In her darkest hour, Aina finally found one. There it was, in a undersea cave off the Esoteric Order of Dagon controlled Azores. The size of a tree, it was beautiful and radiated a kind of energy that mesmerized her and her team. She brought it back to the world and was immediately heralded a genius.

Now that she knew what she was looking for, Dr. Eze was determined to find more. Over the last five years, she has found several more. Then, the experimentation began in earnest.

Aina developed a theory about the mystical properties of the m'yas stones, that their addition to a Rite of Transfiguration might produce radically different and exponentially more powerful results. Once she was satisfied that no more could be done without actually giving it a shot, she put all the pieces together to perform her enhanced Rite and in the Spring something wholly new was born.

Joandi Sianturi, a security specialist for the Chrysalis Corporation, was chosen to be the recipient of the experimental ritual. Joandi had distinguished himself as a loyal, but cold-blooded man capable of doing many ugly things for the company. He had been slowly indoctrinated into the secrets of the Children of Chaos and was ready to be transformed into a Dhohanoid. However, his outstanding performance as but a mortal in the Corporation's employ brought him to the top of the list for what might be an extraordinary honor – or certain death.

During the full moon, starting on the night of Saturday, April 27th, the Rite was performed. Three grueling days during which otherworldly energy arced and surged in dangerous ways, killing two of the attendant sorcerers, injuring three more, and forcing the captive Joandi to scream in mind-numbing pain for hours at a stretch. When it was finished, the transfigured Joandi stood there, the first and only of his kind, something for which ancient tomes didn't have a name. He was a Dhohanoid, but the likes of which no one had ever seen, with powers beyond anything his lesser brethren had ever seen.

The effects were even greater than what Dr. Eze was expecting. However, what she did not count on is the enhanced ritual burning out the m'yas stone. The massive dimensional energies harnessed by the stone during the ritual obliterated any mystical properties and rendered it nothing more than a pretty object of art. The enhanced ritual could be performed again, of that she was sure, but each cost one incredibly rare and powerful component.

Since the birth of Joandi, Aina has overseen the creation of two more entirely unique and incredibly powerful Dhohanoids, sacrificing two more of her precious m'yas stones. No one knows how many of the rare geodes Dr. Eze has uncovered, but she is happy to stop this experiment for now. Considering how big a star she is nowadays with T99, it is unlikely that anyone is going to pressure her to find out the truth.

THREE NEWBORNS

The Rite of Transfiguration isn't just a tool to the Children of Chaos, it is holy. It is the ritual the faithful undergo to take on the form of their masters so they can both survive the things to come and to be better suited to serve their gods when they return. These three new Dhohanoids have manifested on a level previously unheard of, and it must be because they have been chosen as more holy. They have rapidly become leaders within the Children of Chaos, revered by those beneath them. The headiness of the power granted to them by the rite combined with the rapid increase in temporal power has quickly turned what might have simply been three twisted individuals into delusional megalomaniacs.

Joandi Sianturi was the first. A vicious man to begin with, he has become something far more dangerous. His transfigured form is a thing that appears to be of bone, gristle, and living darkness. An alien humanoid skeleton binds tendrils and pseudopods of writhing shadow that all move with an unholy sentience. While he has the abilities of both a Thog-Manna and a Ramachese, Joandi is so much more. He can control and focus darkness, growing it, smothering his enemies with it, or creating illusions made of shadows.

Embracing the thing that he has become, Joandi has taken his malevolence to new heights. He believes himself to be the holy manifestation of supernatural darkness, the thing Nyarlathotep wishes to unleash fear and suffering on the world. Whatever mortal emotions he once had have been eradicated – the soulless thing that now resides where they once were has no such things. Preferring twilight or night-time, Joandi is often ill-tempered if required to be out during the day and downright murderous if forced to go out in natural sunlight.

As a mortal, Joandi is an Indonesian man in his early-thirties. It is clear from his physique that he is a trained athlete. Stormy eyes hide under dark wild hair, though the rest of his face is best described as non-descript. However, since his transfiguration, there's an unnatural radiance in his eyes, an intensity that makes even the hardest man uneasy.

The second of Dr. Eze's children was Shakary, a Nazzadi woman whose shrewd business acumen afforded her a meteoric rise up the corporate ladder. Her ambition overriding her sanity, Shakary was easily seduced by the promises of the Children of Chaos. What she has become is terrifying. Transfigured, she is an otherworldly thing with an unnatural maw and long flowing body that is split up into many serpentine tails, buoyed up by a pair of sickly wings. A host of spindly arms tipped in venomous

claws radiate out from her body. She has the abilities of both a Gelgore and a Vrykol, as well as para-psychic-like abilities that seem like wild telekinesis. There is also something hypnotic in the way she moves and speaks, even in mortal form.

Shakary can best be described as being like a poorly behaved Hollywood starlet since her transfiguration. She is used to making demands and getting what she wants. Not well-liked, though feared, Shakary treats those she perceives as underlings poorly, condescending and belittling them constantly. Her canny nature, however, keeps her from going overboard and she treats those she perceives as equals or superiors to her sickly-sweet, gregarious, and flirtatious side. Regardless, it's all manipulation to cater to her ego, unless it has directly to do with the god she knows has given her the power in which she now revels.

As a mortal, Shakary was always used to getting her way most of the time. Attractive, capable, and well-dressed, the late-twenties Nazzadi has been more than able to use her wiles – physical or intellectual – to her advantage. Her red-striped, shoulder-length black hair is carefully styled to frame her face. She wears make-up like a former runway model and dresses in tight designer suits. There is something in the unnaturally graceful way that she moves since her transfiguration that is mesmerizing.

The “youngest” of the uniquely transfigured is Grant Walker, an up and coming research scientist. Despite his prestigious and high-paying job, Grant has been lost in the world and he has taken to the teachings of the Children of Chaos as only a zealous convert could. His transfiguration turned him into something that he was not entirely equipped to handle, at first. Six sets of wings support a hideous insect-like thing with dripping mandibles, a host of legs, and a glowing thorax. Like his older “sister” Shakary, he displays para-psychic like abilities, including full-fledged photokinesis. He also can unnervingly get into people's heads, sifting through their memories and personalities without regard for the damage he inflicts.

While no one survives the Rite of Transfiguration with their grasp on reality intact, Grant suffered a full-blown psychotic break. It seemed that while he intellectually understood that he was going to become a monster, the reality of it was too much for him to handle. This incredibly powerful being was confined for months as priests and doctors alike tried to get through to him. Grant finally returned, but no longer even a shade of the Grant from before. Where he used to be even-keeled and fair, he is now prone to outbursts and tyrannical. Where he was once about building things, now he is about destroying them. The Grant that exists now is a creature that views everything as a tool, to be used or cast aside in his quest to bring about the will of the Crawling Chaos and unleash the might of the Old Ones upon this world.

In his early-forties, Grant looks a little like a mad, adventuring professor in the style of the old-time pulp novels. Rugged with grayish-blond hair, he wears clothes that are both functional and stylish. He never smiles and has an intensity of purpose all the time – it seems he has no sense of humor whatsoever. There

are many that knew Grant before that do not recognize him now, as the constant smirk and evil look in his eye are both new and disconcerting.

ON THE STREETS

In the true fashion of the corporation they have infiltrated, the Children of Chaos have been working to use the desires and talents of the three unique Dhohanoids to their maximum effectiveness.

Joandi Sianturi has elevated what he was already doing. He is a trouble-shooter for the Corporation, as well as a finder of lost things. When big operations go wrong, someone of high profile needs to disappear, or when the way is very rough and needs to be smoothed out, Joandi and his team take care of things. Consistently. Every time. He also leads teams into hostile territory to look for forgotten or forbidden things, or leads them to steal such things from their existing owners. His fascination with occult lore and relics often draws him to this latter duty.

He has trained teams of agents to work underneath him and they are among the best in the Chrysalis Corporation. His Dhohanoid teams are feared, even among others of their kind, as being dangerous, merciless, and downright evil. Joandi has been known to personally murder those who have failed, but only those who have done so by their own carelessness or foolishness.

The Chrysalis Corporation is, at any given time, working on some very dangerous deals with very dangerous people. Some are simply black market suppliers, while others are cultists, and still others are not even human. The potential for these deals to go south is quite high and so Shakary has taken to overseeing them personally. Whenever she is brought in on a deal, the very character of that deal changes. Terms are more favorable and snags are far less frequent. Furthermore, whenever snags do arise, they are dealt with swiftly and brutally, making sure that word on the street travels far and wide so others will learn the lesson.

While she cannot be in more than one place at a time, Shakary has personally trained a group of agents to act as her proxies. She expects them to be afforded the same courtesy that would be shown to her, but they do not yet carry the same weight that is carried by her personal presence.

Grant Walker has taken on an interesting job – he has taken on a elite team designed to ferret out and destroy the Eldritch Society. His teams are composed of specialist sorcerers and para-

THE NEW ONES

We've only presented you with the backgrounds and abilities of three unique Dhohanoids here. That doesn't mean you can't make others for your game. We have left the number of m'ya stones in the T99 Division's possession deliberately ambiguous so that you can use as few or as many unique Dhohanoids as you want for your game. Just go by the general guidelines for power level here and you should be good.

psychics as well as Dhohanoids. The job of his powerful mortals is to dig deep into the minds and dreams of those they suspect of having contacts inside the Eldritch Society, or those they suspect of already being part of it. Once targets are identified, the Dhohanoids take over physical surveillance and, when the time comes, wade into the network with Grant at the lead.

While there is a high mortality rate among Grant's agents, he is crafty and hard to kill. Thus, his initiative continues. He has accounted for more Tager deaths than the Society is willing to admit, not including the number of innocents and mortal operatives he has also claimed. The Society is going to have to have to work things out with a thing like Grant on their collective tails.

AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE

Needless to say, the appearance of the three has shocked the hell out of the Eldritch Society. It wasn't like the Chrysalis Corporation was going to be able to keep that kind of secret for very long. Word travels fast among the underground and new terrifying power players make quite the splash.

At first, the new Dhohanoids didn't have much of an impact on Eldritch Society operations. Joandi and Shakary had business matters to clean up and Grant was suffering from a severe psychotic break. But it wasn't long before news reached the So-

ciety's ears. Scouts and spies were sent to ascertain the source of these rumors, to see if they were exaggerated. It soon became clear that they weren't. Then Grant recovered and decided that he wanted to hunt the Eldritch Society.

The Children of Chaos have always dealt with the Eldritch Society in a reactive way. They have never had teams dedicated to rooting out Society influence or for hunting Taggers. The Corporation just simply factors in Eldritch Society meddling into all their plans, trains their Dhohanoid teams well, and deals with the consequences. Frankly, their machine is so big that a few small victories by the Society make little difference to their over-arching, long-reaching plans. It isn't like this is a secret to the Society either. They've known for quite a while that their Shadow War, in a big picture sense, is like bailing water with a tea cup.

Grant Walker, in 2086, changes all that. His powerful mental abilities give him an edge that no other Chrysalis agent has ever had. He doesn't need to threaten, intimidate, bribe, or even question people. He simply and effortlessly sifts through their heads until he gets what he wants. Capable of lifting even the most sensitive information, Grant knows things that people don't want him to know. Things like Eldritch Society operatives, plans, Tager identities, and more. The more Grant hunts, the more he learns. If he ever gets his hands on a Lorekeeper, it'll be



like he has a direct line into all things Eldritch Society. He may be starting slow, but he is, hands down, the most dangerous single threat the Society has ever faced.

The metamorphosed creatures that guide the Society have created the Walker Initiative. Packs of the most powerful and dangerous Tagers are being trained to hunt the hunter. Sorcerers and para-psychics from around the globe are being trained to support them in any way possible. They are designed to be a para-military trained strike force, as deadly with conventional weaponry as with natural weapons, protected by magics and supported by a team that sees things in a mystical way. In most cases, this would be more than enough to foul Chrysalis' plans. But this isn't most cases.

It isn't working. Grant is always one step ahead. Sometimes Walker Initiative packs will take out some of his highly trained agents and sometimes they'll get wind of a strike and save Society lives. However, they are no closer to Grant than when they started. It is almost as if he's playing cat-and-mouse with them.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

Fitting Dramatic Characters into this will be interesting. These events are designed for Eldritch Society games, but they can affect several other styles of play as well.

Let's take a look at these play styles to see how they might be impacted by the appearance of unique Dhohanoids.

NEG Military Games

There really isn't any reason these events would impact a military game. They are occurring in a very different world.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

It is possible that the unique Dhohanoids might impact this style of game, but it all depends on the types of investigations. Either Joandi's or Shakary's dealings might run afoul of the law. It is unlikely that they would be recurring threats, but it might be interesting to throw them into a Chrysalis deal gone bad.

Arcane Underground Games

Like agent or police games, it is possible that Characters trafficking in the arcane underground might run across Joandi or Shakary's dealings. Joandi not only trouble-shoots, he also leads teams to find lost and forgotten things. He has need of the arcane underground on a fairly regular basis and is not a soft negotiator. Grant will only show up if he wants to rape somebody's brain for information about the Eldritch Society.

Cult Games

Like the arcane underground, some cult activity might cross paths with Joandi or Shakary. Those most likely to are those that deal with recruitment and are actively looking outside their own doors. The Church of All, the Congregation of the Earth Mother, and the Dionysus Clubs are particularly likely, though the Congregation has the advantage of being in league with the Chrysalis

Corporation. Most interactions are going to be unpleasant, despite playing for the same team.

Eldritch Society Games

This style of game is where these events are intended to live. While trying to muck up any Chrysalis Corporation plan, packs could conceivably run into any of the three. Shakary is the least likely of the three. Her dealings with the third party black market suppliers is where they'll find her. Joandi deals with all kinds of things in which Tagers will take an interest, including hunting for forbidden things and being the high-profile clean-up man. At the end of the day, they make new and interesting recurring mastermind villains.

The fact that Tagers are now being hunted adds a new dimension to Society games. As a Storyguide, you can also use Grant as a tool – any time your pack is getting too big for their britches, have him show up. Also, creating games where your pack is now on the run brings a different flavor to your game.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

JOANDI SIANTURI

Sensitive Covert Operations, Unique Dhohanoid

Special Rules: Joandi has the special abilities of a Thog-Manna (found on p. 214 of the *Core Book*), as well as those of a Ramachese (found on p. 126 of *Vade Mecum*).

Joandi also has abilities that function similarly to Photokinesis (found on p. 62 of *Vade Mecum*). However, his abilities do not require the expenditure of Orgone and they only apply to darkness and shadow (he has no control over light). Joandi wields this ability with the equivalent of an Expert level of expertise.

Allegiance: Children of Chaos

Scale: Vitality

Size: Large (11 ft tall)

Attributes: Agility 9, Intellect 6, Perception 8, Presence 7, Strength 12, Tenacity 12

Secondary Attributes: Actions 2, Orgone 14, Reflex 7

General Skills: Athletics: Adept, Computers: Student, Criminal: Adept, Intimidate: Adept, Occult: Adept, Observation: Adept, Performance: Adept, Savoir-Faire: Novice, Stealth: Adept, Surveillance: Adept, Survival: Novice

Combat Skills: Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept, Marksman: Adept, Thrown Weapons: Novice

Weapons: Pseudopod (+1), Smother (0) (requires two Actions),

Shadow Tendrils Range 1/2/4 Damage +2 Shots 3

Creeping Darkness Range 50/150/250 Damage +2 Shots 2

Aura of Fear Range 1/2/3 Damage Special (Fear Test) Shots 3

Damage Bonus: +3

Vitality: 17

Regeneration: 1 Die

Armor: 2/2

Fear Factor: 16

Temperament: Malevolent & Soulless

Senses: Broadband Audio, Nightvision, Scan, Thermal, X-ray

Movement & Speed: Climbing (can cling to sheer surfaces) [19 mph (47/11 ypt)], Land [38 mph (94/22 ypt)]

SHAKARY

Sensitive Business Operations, Unique Dhohanoid

Special Rules: Shakary has the special abilities of a Gelgore (found on p. 213 of the *Core Book*), as well as those of a Vrykol (found on p. 214 of *Core Book*).

Shakary also has abilities that function like Telekinesis (found on p. 61 of *Vade Mecum*). However, her abilities do not require the expenditure of Orgone. Shakary wields this ability with the equivalent of an Expert level of expertise. This power also functions strangely, as if Shakary were permanently caught in a para-psychic Burn. Her telekinetic abilities do interesting, frightening, and random things in her vicinity, all seemingly outside her conscious control. Unlike a Burn, however, these effects are never detrimental. She can dampen these effects at will.

The hypnotic component to her movement functions like Magnetism (found on p. 72 of *Vade Mecum*). However, Shakary's mesmeric abilities do not require the expenditure of Orgone. She wields this ability with the equivalent of an Expert level of expertise.

Allegiance: Children of Chaos

Scale: Vitality

Size: Large (9 ft long)

Attributes: Agility 14, Intellect 6, Perception 8, Presence 8, Strength 9, Tenacity 9

Secondary Attributes: Actions 4, Orgone 12, Reflex 9

General Skills: Athletics: Novice, Bureaucracy: Novice, Business: Adept, Computers: Student, Education: Novice, Intimidate: Novice, Larceny: Novice, Misdirect: Adept, Observation: Adept, Persuade: Adept, Occult: Student, Savoir-Faire: Novice, Seduction: Adept, Stealth: Novice

Combat Skills: Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept, Marksman: Adept

Weapons: Bite (+1 + Poison), Claws (+1 + Poison), Coil (+2 + entangling),

Needle Pods Range 25/60/170 Damage +2 + Poison Shots 3 or 4/1-5

Damage Bonus: +1

Vitality: 14

Armor: 2/2

Regeneration: 2 Points

Fear Factor: 16

Temperament: Ambitious & Vain

Senses: Acute Hearing, Acute Smell & Taste, Acute Touch, Broadband Audio, Nightvision, Thermal

Movement & Speed: Climbing (can cling to sheer surfaces) [42 mph (104/24 ypt)], Flying [84 mph (208/48 ypt)], Land [63 mph (156/36 ypt)]

GRANT WALKER

Tager Hunter, Unique Dhohanoid

Special Rules: Grant has abilities that function similarly to Photokinesis, Telepathy, Probe, and Mindworm (found on p. 62, 65, and 66 of *Vade Mecum*, respectively). However, his abilities do not require the expenditure of Orgone. Grant wields these abilities with the following levels of expertise, respectively: Expert, Master, Expert, Adept.

Allegiance: Children of Chaos

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (7 ft. long)

Attributes: Agility 10, Intellect 11, Perception 8, Presence 6, Strength 7, Tenacity 12

Secondary Attributes: Actions 3, Orgone 16, Reflex 9

General Skills: Athletics: Novice, Computers: Novice, Education: Master, Occult: Adept, Observation: Adept, Research: Adept, Science (Life): Adept, Science (Physical): Adept, Stealth: Adept, Streetwise: Adept, Technician: Novice

Combat Skills: Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Novice, Marksman: Novice

Weapons: Mandibles (+1)

Damage Bonus: 0

Integrity: 14

Armor: 1/1

Regeneration: 2 Points

Fear Factor: 16

Temperament: Diabolical & Fanatical

Senses: Acute Hearing, Acute Touch, Broadband Audio, Nightvision, Scan, Thermal

Movement & Speed: Climbing (can cling to sheer surfaces) [15 mph (37/9 ypt)], Flying [120 mph (296/72 ypt)], Land [15 mph (37/9 ypt)]

DR. AINA EZE

T99 Genius, Ciraqen Dhohanoid

Born in Africa, this Nigerian scientist was recruited by the Chrysalis Corporation fresh out of college. She immediately went to work at the massive research facility in Johannesburg. Her rise through the ranks and ultimately induction into the Children of Chaos and the T99 Division are now history, as is her miraculous discovery of the m'yas stones and their effects on the Rite of Transfiguration. Personally, Aina is now an arrogant and unforgiving woman, very aware of her genius and her place in the organization. Respected and feared, but not liked, Dr. Eze continues to explore the possibility of other mystical geological additions that might somehow alter or enhance the Rite of Transfiguration. She does maintain a personal store of several more m'yas stones, but is saving them for something that she will not share.

Virtue/Flaw: Imaginative/Unforgiving

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 16

Noteworthy Skills: Occult: Expert (Specialized in Rite of Transfiguration), Science (Earth): Master, Science (Life): Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Big Ego (2), Innovative

my last flight

Here I sit in the flight control of an E-9 Sentinel with my eyes squeezed shut. My aircraft has reached cruising altitude and is safely on autopilot. The recognizable rush of air beats monotonously against the hull. Occasional traffic control radio chatter reminds me that life still exists out there somewhere. All these sensations of flight seem so familiar and welcome. The only difference is the sharp, stabbing pain that claws at my abdomen with every jolt of air turbulence. It's a vivid reminder of the knife that viciously gouged into the side of my stomach a few moments ago.

I've never felt physical pain like this before, like someone stirring my insides with a table fork, scrambling my intestines like pasta. Another electric moment of pain shoots through me. I squeeze my eyes tighter. I have to bring this aircraft down soon. The voices in my head scream at me about it constantly like a triad of scolding mothers - prodding, goading, pushing, badgering. But the target area is close and I know it. I have no choice but to fight through the pain and take control of this aircraft. It won't be much longer now.

I hesitantly open my eyes to the horrid reality of my flight instruments. The controls have been spray-painted with fresh human blood. Looking to my right I notice my former friend and copilot, Captain Jane Gardiner, propped up against the outer bulkhead. Her skin is ash and her eyes bulge lifelessly in her skull. For some reason, she looks to me like a ragdoll abused by poorly behaved children. I notice the blood bubbling from the wound that my knife ripped open, where I had plunged it violently into her throat just a few moments ago. I'd flown with Jane for almost two years. I never thought that friendships could end this way. Fear and regret dance around in my head like hungry monkeys. Trying to collect my thoughts is impossible with all the chatter going on. I can't even tell which one of these inner voices is mine anymore.

I can remember how this all began. My unit had been shipped off to the Chinese front almost two years ago. I left a beautiful wife and two amazing daughters behind. I remember reassuring my wife Andrea and telling her not to worry, that I'd be back within a year. I had no idea at the time that E-9 pilots would be considered essential to the war effort. I couldn't go home. "Needs of the service," they said. I was lonely and really pissed off.

My buddy Karega soon introduced me to Madame Shu's. The girls there were willing and ready to fulfill a soldier's needs. Heck most people in my unit played with prostitutes at one point or another. I was reluctant at first, but meeting Li Mei changed everything. She rocked my world and almost made me forget what I had left behind. She was so fresh

and exotic. I don't know if it was the way she moved, the way she spoke, or the hypnotic scent of incense, but Li Mei possessed something so tantalizing it was far beyond her physical beauty. I was enslaved by the amazing sex and very hungry for more. I didn't find out until later that she wasn't quite sixteen. By then it didn't matter to me anyway.

I soon spent every spare terranote I could on the pleasures of Li Mei. Seeing her somehow killed my pain. Every fantasy was mine to explore with her. Every forbidden thing was available for me to play with. She encouraged it. We started with light bondage, but soon escalated to beating, slicing, and choking. I soon found that I craved the sinful feeling of throat muscles fighting my hands, fighting desperately for a gasp of air. The further I descended, the more she assured me. She was teaching me to be free and I came to love every minute. I ached for it over and over again. My own inner voice used to tell me that this was wrong. But soon other voices - encouraging voices - drowned it out.

At first, I thought they were only my imagination. Then, they began to reveal secrets to me. They told me my wife was cheating on me. They showed me the stark futility of this war. They exposed the brain-washed satanic malevolence of everyone around me. It soon became clear how hopeless and alone I really was, even in the hands of Li Mei. I withdrew from the world. I tried desperately to imagine a way out, but things became more confusing as the voices began to argue with each other. Inside that chaos, the obvious choice became clear. It was perfect - even the voices agreed. I saw the beauty in it, the





mercy, and even the hand of God. I decided to take action.

That is what brought me here. I look at my navigation instruments and see the wide red band that marks the enormous NEG Kill Zone that holds the Rapine Storm at bay. The surveillance net is so tight across that ribbon that nothing can crawl through it without eating napalm. However, I know that the Kill Zone is only delaying the inevitable. I hear more radio chatter. It confirms that the backup surveillance listening center at Honglong has inexplicably been destroyed, leaving only the main center at Yajiang operational. I knew that this would come. The voices told me. If Yajiang goes down, this whole sector goes dark.

I feel a surge of excitement pulse through me, almost masking my pain. A quick adjustment to my navigation controls plots a new heading. Releasing the autopilot, I roll the aircraft into a sharp and rapid descent. I see my target ahead, coming on so rapidly. For a second I think of death and fear grips my throat. The voices quickly come to my rescue and reassure me that I am about to finally taste my well-deserved freedom. I laugh. Somehow I know that a vast horde of things is waiting for the surveillance grid to go down. And when the end finally comes, it will be a merciful killing for a sick world. That is good. I smile as I count down my final approach.

Six, five, four, three, two, one...

chapter three

dark storm rising

THE WORLD OF CHINA

A person can sometimes forget the real horrors of war from the relative safety of the New Earth Government's heartland and cities. Not so in China. Civil rule has given way to martial law and the military checkpoints that stand between regional borders only allow people to pass with proper identification. These are certainly clear and daily reminders to every NEG citizen of the constant and merciless threat that hovers like an executioner's axe from both the northern and southern borders of the country.

Just over a year has passed since New Earth Government forces launched tactical nuclear strikes from their very limited stockpile to stop the ravenous onslaught of the Rapine Storm. Unimaginable destruction and much death were the rewards of that panicked and nightmarish retreat from the south. Yet the nukes kept the alien mob at bay just long enough for the armed forces to set up the Kill Zone defensive perimeter in southern China – a small comfort against the backdrop of unspeakable memories for most survivors.

The Kill Zone – a ribbon of land about a mile deep that winds its way from the province of Guangdong, over the plains and mountains into Sichuan, to terminate in Qinghai. It creates a kind of defensive border between New Earth Government population centers and the unnamed things that infest the other side. Listening posts, E-9 patrols, and radar installations act as an early detection system for the armed forces to launch rapid intercept missions. Anything that tries to charge across the Kill Zone in any kind of number is violently introduced to the world of napalm and strafing. Thus far, the New Earth Government has managed to keep the threat of the Rapine Storm at bay with a handful of fighter squadrons, two battlecruiser squadrons patrolling the Kill Zone perimeter, and two Mecha Corps ready to deploy quickly to plug holes anywhere along the line.

The province of Xinjiang in the far western part of China has been the stage for some of the strangest military events of the war. Though technically held by the New Earth Government, a tour of the countryside would reveal the sites of several skirmishes dotted with the remains of NEG Mecha, Migou forces, and Rapine Storm monsters. This land bleeds with the reality that is the three-way struggle of this war as evidenced not only by the NEG war machines, but also by the remains of elite Migou units that have recently clashed against the forces of the Unnamed One. Many New Earth Government military strategists believe that the Migou have lost the majority of those engagements.

The NEG's reliance on a defensive posture along southern China has allowed them to deploy the lion's share of forces to the north. Thus far, Mongolia has held fast with many of the armed forces' combat hardened troops stationed along its interior. However, the heaviest fighting against the Migou has been over and under the Yellow Sea, where New Earth Government units struggle daily to defend civilian population centers against attacks and raids from the Migou-held Korean Peninsula. Aerial attacks, reminiscent to the London Blitz of the 1940's, have be-

come an almost daily occurrence for industrial centers and military targets spanning from Beijing to Shanghai. The bottom of the Yellow Sea has been transformed into a makeshift graveyard, strewn with the broken remains of capital ships, aircraft, mecha, and crews of both sides as combat casualties mount.

The restrictions of martial law have taken their toll on civilian life. Evacuation efforts have been underway for months now, with transport vessels leaving most major cities daily, filtering through Taiwan to find their eventual destination among any one of the major refugee communities set up in North or South America. However, to maintain order and to prevent the flooding of port cities with a wave of mob flesh, the New Earth Government has resorted to restricting travel and categorizing people with implanted identification chips. Billed as a temporary measure, this has allowed the NEG to move "critical" personnel and their families out of the country first. It also forces essential civilians to stay at their post, whether as civic servants or factory workers, until the last possible moment when their phase of the evacuation is eventually called up. The order that this measure provides is clear to everyone and at this moment there are very few criticisms spoken openly. However, as time passes and anxiety mounts among citizens, more and more dissatisfied rumblings can be heard in the shadows and bars of the cities.

The black market and the arcane underground have become strong presences throughout the major cities of China. Ancient sorcerous secrets are easy barter for a quick passage out of the country. Desperate people often give almost anything, including a loved one, to purchase a favorable identity chip that might allow for an earlier departure to the west. The shadiest, if not the most final, means are often used to obtain these chips. The value of human life, in general, takes a plunge in times like these. Illegal drugs and prostitution are big business, much to the frustration of military commanders who often find the discipline of their troops sapped by the darkest of physical pleasures. Over-tasked police forces are often helpless to stop much of the gang violence and looting that might follow a particularly devastating Migou attack. Then of course there is the increase in the suicides among both civilians and military personnel as despair and hopelessness crack open minds like a walnut to the horrific dreams of an ancient and dead god.

Mankind's courage and resourcefulness has certainly been tested within the chaotic struggle that is the battle for China. Though the New Earth Government fights bravely on two fronts against fierce enemies that give no quarter, the core of what defines mankind's civilization has begun to crumble from within. No matter what people might do or what tactics the military might use, the current situation does not leave much room for hope.

NEG FORCES

Over five hundred thousand serving men and woman, under the command of Vice Marshal Zhang Yu, fight to hold back China from the brink of collapse. Eleven Mecha Corps, each fielding mecha, ground armor, troops, and support personnel, have been deployed throughout all the regions of China and Mongo-

lia. Vice Marshal Zhang has sworn, from his headquarters in Beijing, that no more ground will be lost to the enemy, that China will survive. Each of the Mecha Corps under his command face unique challenges based on the terrain they've been charged to defend and the enemy they've been pitted against.

In order to maintain the southern Kill Zone against the Rapine Storm, the Army has deployed two Mecha Corps into that region. The 5th Corp defends the southeast and south-central portion of China with its operational headquarters in Guangzhou, near Hong Kong. The 2nd Division of the 5th Corp is stationed out of Chengdu in the Sichuan province – effectively giving the Corp responsibility over a huge area of real estate and the largest percentage of the Kill Zone to cover with relatively few numbers. The New Earth Government, however, enjoys the significant advantage of air superiority and long-ranged weapons that have thus far provided an effective deterrent against their southern enemies. Aerial radar coverage provided by E-9 Sentinels, as well as seismic and radar ground stations, allows the Navy to provide early warning detection and intercept coverage from one of two patrolling Battlecruiser squadrons or from a dispersed array of military airfields. In addition, long-ranged missile fire helps to provide a deterrent against enemy units forming in significant mass. Outside of a handful of small incursions, the Rapine Storm has yet to launch any major offensive across the Kill Zone and local weather patterns have not yet possessed the stormy characteristics that are the signature of a Rapine Storm offensive.

The 11th Corp operates out of Golmud in the Qinghai province to cover the western edge of the Kill Zone and the province of Xinjiang. The three Divisions of the 11th Corp have been forced to rely heavily on early detection, mobility, and rapid strikes to survive. Intrusions by both Migou and Rapine Storm forces into the western provinces have made the holding of a battle line virtually impossible. The 11th's commander, however, is a crafty old soldier by the name of Marshal Vorka. Considered by much of the High Command to be a maverick for his willingness to bend the interpretation of his orders to the extreme, Vorka has nevertheless been able to keep both enemies at bay utilizing guerrilla tactics and baiting maneuvers that have often resulted in pitting one enemy against the other. Vorka's combat history as a young lieutenant under the direct command of the famous Field Marshal Vreta during the First Arcanotech War has made him something of a legend. Though his characteristic boldness and daring have achieved amazing results, it's clear though that the 11th can keep up this kind of dance for only so long. Heroic tales of the 11th Corps' achievements have spread through the New Earth Government to help bolster the morale of the troops. However, nobody talks about the very real danger of a western collapse in the face of a concentrated push from either enemy.

The northernmost border of NEG-held territory protecting China is Mongolia. The battle-hardened and entrenched troops that defend the grassy plains, mountains, and steppes of that land consist of units from both the 1st and the 7th Corp. Headquarters for the 7th Corp is located in the old Mongolian capital city of Ulaanbaatar, or at least what's left of it after months of

Migou raids. The 7th Corp's area of control stretches from the center of Mongolia all the way to where its 3rd Division controls the surrounding area of Choybalsan. The 1st Corp on the other hand has established its headquarters at the western town of Uliastay and controls the area between the Hovsgol province in north-central Mongolia to the mountains of Bayan Oliy in the west. Fighting in Mongolia has been bitter, violent, and constant. Though the Navy has maintained a strong presence in the area, clear and consistent aerial superiority has yet to be established. This has been the stage for some of the bloodiest fighting in the campaign to protect China. Many of the Army combat units have taken to hiring local guides familiar with the best routes through mountain-passes and the best places to entrench units without detection. Casualties have been high in Mongolia, but the combat units there have, as a result, become battle-hardened and dangerous.

Migou forces occupying the northeastern part of China that was once known as Manchuria find themselves firmly opposed by elements of the 6th and 15th Corps. Though no major Migou drive toward Beijing has yet been attempted, countless skirmishes have taken place along the border. A large contingent of Engels has been assigned to units of the 6th and 15th. Some military strategists believe that the bugs are probing for other weaknesses in the New Earth Government's defense before they attempt a direct assault against the finest weapons in the human arsenal. The fact that the 8th Corp is also standing by in reserve as part of a massive troop buildup in the northeast might very well contribute to this deterrent. Thus, Migou raids from the Korean Peninsula have intensified and much of the fighting in the northeast has become a battle for air and sea supremacy.

New Earth Government High Command has ordered a massive troop buildup along the eastern Chinese coast. Along with a sizable naval and transport vessel presence, the Army has stationed the 3rd and 14th Corps near Jinan and various units belonging to the 12th and 16th Corps near Nanjing, Shanghai, and on the island of Taiwan. This large concentration of troops is just part of a much bigger plan that would allow the armed forces to finally take the offensive in the spring – the details of Operation Retribution's Hammer are highly classified and only known to a very select few.

THE RAPINE STORM

The blood-pounding excitement of the hunt is savagely intoxicating. All predators are taken by the call of that very ancient hunger. To taste the deliciously warm spray of fresh blood in their mouth as they run down and rend the flesh of screaming prey. For the alien predators that make up the Disciples of the Rapine Storm, chasing a herd of fleeing humans across the wilderness of southern China would be a temptation almost impossible to ignore. She who ranks above all, a Desolate One known as the Consort, is all too aware of this. Yet she also knows what heavy losses her god's servants suffered at the hands of those very same mortals and their damned nuclear weapons. A year ago, the Rapine Storm's warchiefs should have been aware and maintained control of their units, rather than let their charges

run loose like beasts without a leash. So much lost and a terrible waste.

It was this setback in Southern China that awakened the Consort to the Dead God's call. He charged her to serve him as his favorite and as the voice of his law. She was a mortal sorceress then – a Human woman known as Amrita – who served the New Earth Government by using her considerable arcane talents for top-secret military objectives. However, the Dead God's dreamy calling was so sensuous, so hypnotic, and so irresistible that she soon found herself traveling north to make her way across the Nepalese mountain passes and into Tibet. By the time she arrived at her destination, her transformation had been complete and her power radiated menacingly for all to see. She had become a Desolate One of the highest rank, for the darkness of her beauty and the power of her word could only emanate from the unholy pleasure of her undying master.

The Consort has brought precision and order to the Rapine Storm in her short tenure as Supreme Commander in Asia. She has gathered about her a cadre of loyal sorcerers, liches, and other Desolate Ones. To ensure the appropriate level of unyielding devotion and undying loyalty, she's seen to the slow and painful execution of several of the Disciples of the Rapine Storm's former commanders. Under her leadership, the Rapine Storm has rapidly gathered in numbers through regular summoning rituals, tightened command and control via sorcerous or supernatural communication and dream magic, and has begun to work out an offensive strategy that takes advantage of her considerable knowledge of New Earth Government military practices. The Rapine Storm has been transformed from a rampaging mob into a cunning predator.

If the mortals believe that the Rapine Storm is contained by the Kill Zone in Southern China, they are sorely mistaken. The transformation of the Storm's overall command and structure have certainly brought a halt to large-scale attacks. However, it's only a matter of time before the Dead God's servants surge once more into the heart of mortal civilization. Conflicts have only arisen lately from skirmishes in Western China against both New Earth Government and Migou forces. They've been seen as random attempts to probe the Kill Zone with small numbers, such as bands of mortal cultists or ghouls. In any case, the Humans and their Nazzadi allies seem clueless about the face of the deadly and evolving Rapine Storm that is now emerging under a dangerous new leader.

Nevertheless, the forces of the Rapine Storm must deal with certain difficulties that do not exist among their enemies. First and foremost is the fact that Storm units are comprised of many different species. It takes a great deal of will, force, and fanatical loyalty to the Unnamed One's will to keep the varied species from hunting and feeding upon each other. Even then, it is not uncommon for a mortal cultist or one of the other lesser species to find themselves a sudden snack for something much bigger. So, while the Disciples of the Rapine Storm are reorganizing and rebuilding for a new assault north, it's still a challenge to keep

units from turning on each other during this waiting period. Secondly, command and control has traditionally posed a problem in the coordination of Storm combat units – at least across great distances or when a creature like a Quetzalcoatl is not present.

To deal with these challenges, the Consort has created a cadre system that unites individual warbands and their Warchiefs under larger force Warlords. These force Warlords are more often than not Desolate Ones, though powerful liches lead a handful of them as well. Warlords are assisted by trusted Warchiefs that act as lieutenants to form a ruling core at the heart of any large Rapine Storm force which is directly accountable to the Consort herself. Mystical communication is quick and efficient between the Consort and her Warlords and the ability to coordinate force movement and offensive assaults has improved greatly.

A Rapine Storm force can number anywhere between twenty and forty thousand combatants, depending on the size and species composition of units. Mortal cultists and other lesser species are often kept separate from some of the larger and more dangerous life forms. A Chiranae or a Gug might lead groups of larger creatures. Turned Human, Nazzadi, and Ghoul servants might band together under strong leaders who report to a Warlord. These bands often incorporate salvaged human equipment such as mecha, vehicles, and weapons to create something of an armed and mobile mob rather than a crack combat unit. These mobs, however, can be very effective as support troops or when escorted by something large like a Lindorm. Quetzalcoatl are also effective field commanders – often coordinating troop movements from the air or directing groups of Shantaks to strike at ground and aerial targets of opportunity.

Thus far, the Consort's Warlords have gathered three Storm forces in Tibet, one in Xinjiang, two in the areas of Sichuan and Yunnan, and two more in southeastern China along the Kill Zone. Each is unique in organization and composition. The two forces that have managed to train and control Bholes have begun to dig assault tunnels from both Tibet and Sichuan. The Dead God's children are nearly ready to strike and an unholy storm will rage across Southern China.

MIGOU FORCES

The one major advantage that the Migou enjoy over their enemies is that their command and control method is extraordinary. The natural efficiency of these aliens allows them to move and coordinate faster than any other species in a combat zone. However, unfortunately for the Migou, their resources have grown thin. The sheer tenacity of the Humans and the black-skinned traitors was underestimated. Add to that the fact that the Migou's worst fears have begun to take shape. The Influence of the Old Ones on the events of this world have become bold and all too visible. The Rapine Storm itself has taxed far too many resources in battles throughout Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe. Now the only thing that stands in the way of the Migou facing more of the unnatural horde in Asia are the Humans and Nazzadi they now fight in China.



Actual Migou combat units have been stretched thin in Europe and Asia. Demands in Alaska have further sapped their ability to field large-scale and cohesive combat units. They've been forced to rely heavily on Human Blank units as muscle or cannon fodder during major offensives. Even then, many Blanks have begun to fade from the ranks of Migou units – hearing for themselves the Unnamed One's call and celebrating their new life in cut and rendered flesh. The Migou are faced with pushing an aggressive offensive campaign in order to keep their enemies on their heels and hold their own – for now.

Though the New Earth Government does not fully understand actual Migou military structure or how they would classify their units, it appears that the aliens operate at a Division level at between ten and twenty thousand soldiers each. The effectiveness and precision of Migou command and control does not seem to demand anything larger in military organizations. Elite Divisions are composed of one hundred percent Migou combat units and equipment. These are the backbone of the alien forces on Earth, yet they are also in minority. Most Migou Divisions are mixed, with a single Brigade level of Migou soldiers surrounded with between two and four Human Blank Brigades. The additional numbers and muscle provided by Blanks has become a vital part of the Migou's war effort. To that end, the Migou have stepped up efforts in Western China and through Eastern Europe to capture Rapine Storm creatures and turn them to their own purposes. Thus far their efforts have not been successful.

The Migou have deployed thirteen Divisions along the Chinese front. Four of those Divisions are Elite. One Elite and two Standard Divisions occupy the Korean Peninsula. Two Elite and two

Standard Divisions oppose New Earth Government forces in Manchuria. One Elite and three Standard Divisions are now tangling with the NEG fighters in Mongolia, and two Standard Divisions have been probing into the Xinjiang province of China in the west. Where once these troops might have bulldozed the defenders, enemy force concentrations and the addition of Engels have turned the fighting in northern China into an old-fashioned slug out. However, the losses suffered against the Humans and the Nazzadi traitors are just another intolerable circumstance when measured against the Migou's longer-term concern of facing the Rapine Storm. Thus, a new strategy has emerged to choke vital New Earth Government traffic and supplies to eastern China in a bid to weaken forces and provide an opportunity to augment the Migou with fresh new troops and equipment with the inception of new Blanks.

It's important to note that the air war over Northern China has raged violently so far as well. At least three Swarm Ships operate from Korea and over the Yellow Sea. These have been supported en masse by other Migou combat aircraft from locations in Korea and Manchuria. Submerged aquatic warfare has also broken out between Migou and New Earth Government mecha deep under the waves of the Yellow Sea in an attempt to break defenses and perform raids against coastal Chinese cities and further choke the influx of vital supplies from the Americas. Interestingly enough, the battle of the Yellow Sea has yet to draw the attention of the Esoteric Order of Dagon. For some reason, the children of the fish-god are keeping to themselves.

Where the air war might have intensified in northeast China and the Yellow Sea, the fight in Mongolia has been dominated by



ground war. New Earth Government units there know the land and use it to their best advantage. Even if Migou aircraft make it through NEG air defenses, tracking down and targeting critical enemy targets has been difficult. Thus, the bugs' strategy has been to send in Blank units in large numbers in an attempt to flush out the enemy and hit them unexpectedly with fresh Migou troops. Long-ranged high-ordnance missile barrages have also become fairly common, used to weaken and expose the enemy. Overall, the big-scale solutions have not really worked. When it comes right down to it, the only strategy that has made any real difference in Mongolia has been to engage in bloody close quarters fighting. The casualties there have risen much faster than were anticipated in the Migou master plan.

Migou incursions into the western Xinjiang province have been meant to probe New Earth Government weaknesses. However, the bugs have an ulterior mission there as well. The Migou have deployed mecha hunting packs in an attempt to capture a Gug or a Gibbering Horror, or any other creature allied to the Unnamed One. Migou genetic engineering and control methods applied to such a beast would make excellent new weapons for their war effort.

KEY TACTICAL POINTS

There are those within the halls of the New Earth Government who consider the struggle in China to be a futile attempt to delay the inevitable. It's a point of view that has begun to seep its way into the minds of certain higher-ranking Senators in Chicago. As such, the armed forces are under increased pressure to create results. Those who back the plan to stay and fight it out in China know that they need a victory and they need it fast in order to shore up their dwindling support. It is to that end that Vice Marshal Zhang Yu, Senior Commander of Military Operations in China, has proposed a daring plan.

Up to this point, New Earth Government forces have operated under a defensive posture throughout Asia. Vice Marshal Zhang knows that is just a matter of time before the Rapine Storm becomes fully active again and Migou raids on the eastern coastal cities start to take their toll. In his mind, the time to strike is now – hit back at the enemy when they least expect it. Strike the Migou and gain the upper hand in the north before circumstances force the NEG's military resources south once more. That is the objective of "Operation Retribution's Hammer."

The truth of Operation Retribution's Hammer swirls with rumors, red herrings, and false propaganda, and only a select few truly understand the full scope of the operation. The plan is to launch a full-scale amphibious assault to take back the Korean Peninsula from the Migou. The 3rd and 14th Corps will cross from Yanai and hit the northern Korean coast near Pyongyang. The 18th and 22nd Corps will hit the eastern Korean coast opposite of Pyongyang from their base in Japan. The plan calls for a pincer move to seal off the rest of the peninsula from Migou supplies and reinforcements. In the meantime, the 12th and 16th Corps will launch their assault from Shanghai and hit the coast near Incheon in a bid to retake Seoul and knock out the

major Migou military presence there. The plan would then call for the meeting of units once the north is secure to push south and sweep the rest of the peninsula before the Migou can mount a counter offensive. The massive preparation for this operation has kept a large percentage of committed New Earth Government forces tied up with a planned attack date of April 5th, 2086.

Security is not as tight as the High Command would like it to be. The black market is extremely active in China and where it operates, so do the Disciples of Death's Shadow ply their trade. As devout servants of the Unnamed One, the Death Shadows have been called into his service as spies, and also to eat away at the core of the New Earth Government's soldiers' morale. Corruption has begun to worm its way through the military like a virus, brought on by hedonistic attempts to quell boredom, anxiety, or plain old depression. A young serviceman or woman lying in the arms of a prostitute, mind altered by the latest designer drug, can often reveal bits and pieces of military secrets. It's only a matter of time before someone pieces the puzzle together. Thus, the Death Shadows have been leaking military information and troop locations to the Warlords of the Rapine Storm. Furthermore, a few New Earth Government military personnel have been conditioned to perform special services on the day that the Storm chooses to strike – which will all involve a suicide carried out in the best interest of the Dead God's plan.

There are areas in the southern provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi, as well as parts of northern Vietnam that are hot with radiation – a leftover from the nuclear strikes of almost a year ago. The Rapine Storm Warlords have avoided the prolonged exposure of their troops in those areas since some of the lesser species, particularly the mortal cultists, seem prone to radiation sickness. This has prompted the Storm to begin the construction of assault tunnels using Bholes. There are only a handful of such tunnels, but their purpose is to allow the Disciples of the Rapine Storm to cross the Kill Zone in large numbers underground and undetected. Once the Rapine Storm launches their assault, swarms of Quetzalcoatl will provide cover against New Earth Government air forces. NEG radar stations will be knocked out by pilots programmed to carry out suicide missions, thanks to the efforts of the Death Shadows. This will allow "dark spots" in the Kill Zone for units to cross in large numbers unseen. In the meantime, infiltrator units will emerge from tunnels behind New Earth Government lines to cut-off retreat and disrupt enemy cohesion and operations. The Consort has received intelligence that the NEG will soon move against the Migou as part of a large-scale assault. Though she doesn't know the particulars of the attack, she is aware that something big is coming and that will be her signal to attack.

Marshal Vorka's 11th Corp in the west is holding their own, but just barely. The 11th's weak spot is their supply line. The loss of Golmud and Yumen to the east would cripple their ability to carry on a sustained fight without much needed food and materiel. To avoid isolation in the event of a Rapine Storm attack, they may be forced to retreat into Mongolia or face being overrun.

A New Earth Government collapse in China now would be devastating. Though evacuation efforts have been ongoing, there is still a very large population left in China. Some refuse to leave their homes and some have not yet been given clearance to leave. The destruction caused by mob panic could be considerable and the military has standing orders that might make security and an orderly withdrawal of key troops and materiel a much higher priority than the lives of these civilians. Depending on the circumstances, the use of deadly force could be authorized.

The point is that though the New Earth Government appears to have circumstances well under control in China, they are actually sitting on a giant house of cards. Once the armed forces launch Operation Retribution's Hammer, they will have committed an enormous amount of troops and resources that could have otherwise been used to repel a Rapine Storm attack. Though NEG strategists believe that it would be highly improbable for the Storm to launch their own large-scale offense on the exact same date as Retribution's Hammer, that is exactly what the Storm will do. The resulting panic by terrified civilians will finalize a situation spiraling out of control and beyond the reach of New Earth Government forces to manage. Almost overnight, the house of cards will begin to fall. China as an NEG-controlled territory will be no more.

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT LINE

From: Lance Corporal Daniel Ranger
To: Collin Ranger
Subject: This place ain't like Nashville
Status: <queued for screening>

Hey Bro,

Man, I can't believe that it's been two months since I last sent y'all a message! Time flies when your fighting bugs I guess. I don't know how much of my message will get through those Ministry censor guys, but I'll try to tell you as much as I can.

China is right pretty and filled with all kinds of mountains. I love the mountains. Y'all don't get to see mountains like this back home. It's like living on another planet! I've been in the field over the last two months, camping out in the hills with my platoon just like we used to do when we were kids. Only this time I get to shoot at the bugs instead of raccoons and squirrels. We've been fighting up in Mongolia near the city of Bulgan. Staff Sergeant says that a famous barbarian general came from these parts a long time ago. I think that I recall them talking about this guy in school. Y'all know that history was never my thing. But it's kind of cool to be in the homeland of a really famous guy.

We were in a nasty firefight about a week ago. Got the jump on the bugs, but they were tough. I lost a good friend that day. Remember I told you about that Nazzadi dude, Mafara? Well he got caught in an explosion. It was bad. I was nearby and ended up with some of his stuff on my uniform. I hate remembering that. Sometimes I just sit and try to remember that last time I

talked to Mafara. We used to talk about him coming to visit y'all after the war to see the farm. Now I guess that ain't going to happen. He was a good guy.

The good news is that my unit got pulled from the front. I've been in Shanghai for the last few days. I think that something big is about to go down, because they got this place locked up tighter than a Catholic school girl. But at least me and the boys have had a chance to have some R & R. Those Chinese hookers do things that would blow your mind! Don't tell Ma about that, OK?

Hey listen, I got your last message about signing up for service and joining the fight over here in China. I know you got guts little brother. This place is right interesting, but I really think you ought to stay in school and get your degree. I just don't think that coming here is a good idea. Not that I don't think you can handle it. It's just that I get a really bad feeling here and I think it would be better for you to stay there and look after Ma and Pa. OK?

Gotta go now. Say hi to the family and let Ma know not to worry. I promise to be home by Christmas.

Dan

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From: Lance Corporal Daniel Ranger
To: Collin Ranger
Subject: This place ain't like Nashville
Status: <approved for release>

Hey Bro,

Man I can't believe that it's been two months since I last sent y'all a message! Time flies when your fighting bugs I guess. I'll try to tell you as much about what's going on as I can.

China is right pretty and filled with all kinds of mountains. I love the mountains. Y'all don't get to see mountains like this back home. It's like living on another planet! I've been in the field over the last two months, camping out in the hills with my platoon just like we used to do when we were kids. Only this time I get to shoot at the bugs instead of raccoons and squirrels. We've been fighting up in Mongolia.

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The good news is that my unit got pulled from the front. I've been on leave for the last few days. I think that something big is about to go down, because they got this place locked up tight.



But at least me and the boys have had a chance to have some R & R.

Hey listen, I got your last message about signing up for service and joining the fight over here in China. I know you got guts little brother, but I really think you ought to stay in school and get your degree. We need sorcerers and you'll be a better soldier with that kind of training. Here's hoping the war's over by that time though.

Gotta go now. Say hi to the family and let Ma know not to worry. I promise to be home by Christmas.

Dan

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From: Chief Warrant Officer Gabriella Teves
To: Bob and Carol Ranger
Subject: Notification to Next of Kin
Status: <approved for release>

The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son, Lance Corporal Daniel Ranger was killed in action in Korea on 05 April 2086. Lance Corporal Ranger fought valiantly against the enemy during a large-scale amphibious assault on the shores of North Korea. He died after pulling several wounded men and women out of harm's way on the beachhead. His heroic action and self-sacrifice in battle saved many lives among his fellow platoon soldiers. It is an honor to inform you that your son has been nominated for the Medal of Honor for bravery under fire. The Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss.

A PERFECT STORM

Doctor Amanda Reinhart of the Ashcroft Foundation commented in her recent thesis on Migou behavior that to "forget that we face an alien enemy whose behavior resembles nothing of any human norm would certainly open a vulnerability to attack that would be difficult to predict." Nevertheless, the New Earth Government defensive posture in China would certainly leave some strategists to believe that all bases were covered. They've believed that China is now a military fortress that could stand boldly against either enemy. Perhaps that assumption would be so if these enemies were Human or Nazzadi. However, the fact is that neither enemy force in China is Human and, as Doctor Reinhart points out, the oversight of this obvious detail by military commanders has left China's defenders with an unpredictable vulnerability to attack.

Of course, nobody cares about Dr. Reinhart's observations when they're stuck on the front line fighting for their lives. To the men and women of Echo Company, Second Battalion of the Might Eleventh's Fifty Sixth Mecha Division, the order of the day is "kill as many critters as you can and survive another day!" Under the skilled command of Captain Janaky, Echo Company has achieved that with deadly precision. Highly mobile hit-and-run

commando tactics have proven very effective against both Migou and Rapine Storm targets. But what happens when elements of Echo Company stumble across a new and potentially threatening Migou technology? What happens when circumstances force these men and women to carry this new technology, one that could easily shift the balance of the war, across country to the 11th's Command Headquarters? Huge and unstoppable forces are at play, and as these forces collide together in just the right way and at just the right time, the soldiers of Echo Company will soon find themselves caught within the lethal eye of a perfect storm.

56TH MECHA DIVISION, 11TH CORP

Life within the 56th Mecha Division is never routine. With deadly enemies constantly threatening from two fronts, the men and women of the 56th must navigate through imposing mountain ranges and vast desert lands to keep these aliens from overrunning the Xinjiang province of western China. Companies stay continuously on the move, never bivouacking in the same location for more than one night in order to minimize detection by the enemy. So it is rare that your average mech pilot or combat soldier gets a chance to enjoy a soft bed or a warm bath. Military rations (standard MRE's) are often accompanied by hunted game or confiscated supplies. Since opportunities to resupply are never consistent, military archanotechnicians and mechanics often find themselves in short supply of essential spare parts in order to keep their mecha and combat armor in top fighting condition.

What the Division lacks in support logistics it certainly makes up in resourcefulness, tenacity, and flexibility. By taking positions along the arid lands of the Takim River, units can easily coordinate strikes against Rapine Storm forces courageous enough to cross the vast Takla Makan Desert to the south. Regular surveillance flights allow for enough advanced warning for companies to set up ambushes and hit the enemy before they can react. In fact, the desert has become a key defensive element of which the New Earth Government has learned to take full advantage.

Elements of the 56th Mecha Division cover the areas to the west where the plains back up to the impressive façade of the western Tian Shan Mountains. Much of the three-way fighting between the New Earth Government, the Migou, and the Rapine Storm has occurred there. In fact, Global Intelligence Agency surveillance has revealed the beginnings of a Migou encampment in and around the ruined city of Aksu.

Illness among the ranks is common after facing a particularly cold winter of continuous sub-zero degree temperatures. Cold weather, long days with limited rest, and exposure to the elements has made it difficult to keep units in top fighting form. Finding replacements for particularly ill mech pilots is often difficult in this part of the world.

Despite the conditions, the Divisions' morale usually stays on the relatively high side. Marshal Vorka's quick hit and run strategy has certainly delivered striking results – to the point that

some units have begun to behave as if they are completely unstoppable. In addition, most of the soldiers in the 2nd Battalion are Nazzadi, eager to serve under the famous Marshal Vorka. Of those that are officers, many of them are graduates of the Nazzadi military academy in Nazza-Duhni. The New Earth Government supports them, understanding the value of a Nazzadi-only unit. The 2nd Battalion does allow Human pilots – they just have to prove themselves.

BATTLING BEASTS AND BUGS

As fearsome as the terrible beasts of the Rapine Storm might be, many are still susceptible to the pounding heat of the desert. The need for water might result in significant losses should a direct assault across the Takla Makan Desert be attempted in force. Thus, most Rapine Storm movements into and through the desert are conducted at night. Rapine Storm handlers have herded a handful of Bholes into the desert so that they can roam the dunes like the fictional sand-worms of old tales. Small hunting parties comprised of non-human creatures, such as Shabus Morgo, often follow in the wake of these Bholes, sheltering in the sand troughs created by the giant worm's passing by day and moving at night. Chances are that sighting a Bhole upon the desert might herald the appearance of a small Rapine Storm strike force.

Larger concentrations of Rapine Storm forces seem to be moving in a pincer-like way around the outer perimeters of the desert. Though conflicts with the New Earth Government or the Migou have not escalated beyond minor skirmishes, it appears that the Storm might be gathering for something big. Units have recently been spotted moving into Western Xinjiang across the mountains from Tajikistan. Others have been gathering in the foothills of the Altun Shan Mountains to the east – seemingly ready to pour into New Earth Government occupied Tarim Pendi basin. These movements have caused a flood of refugees to gather around some of the NEG-held towns along the Tarim River; creating a humanitarian crisis that has further complicated the military's tenuous hold on the area.

The Migou on the other hand have concentrated the majority of their forces north along the Altay Mountains near the Russian and Kazakhstan borders. It's there that they've gone head-to-head against 11th Corp's 3rd Division. However, the Migou have also moved in large numbers along the western border of Xinjiang to cross the Tian Shan Mountains into areas controlled by the 56th Division. Bloody remains of Rapine Storm/Migou skirmishes along the western border suggest that the target of this latest Migou military thrust are the servants of the Dead God – New Earth Government strategists have argued over several theories about what the bugs are up to.

Though the soldiers of the 56th have been able to bravely hold their own against both Rapine Storm and Migou intrusions, most people fighting on the front have already guessed that it is only a matter of time before another giant push hits them like a tidal wave. Without reinforcements few are optimistic about the New Earth Government's chances in that region.

ACT I: THE THINGS YOU FIND THESE DAYS

Goal: To introduce the characters to the story. To establish the wild and dangerous feel of the setting. To have the player's mecha platoon stumble across a Migou experiment and retrieve the evidence of what they've discovered.

Setting: Western province of Xinjiang, China. Arid and rocky areas near Karayulgun.

Cast: *First Lieutenant Robert Alvarez* – Experienced, Human male, late-twenties, Caucasian/Hispanic mix, not as clean cut as he should be for an officer. New officer in charge of 1st Mecha Platoon. There's a hint of resignation in the way he carries himself.

Captain Janaky – Veteran, Nazzadi female, early-thirties, athletic, might be considered attractive besides the scar on her left cheek. She is the Commander of Echo Company and is very combat savvy. She's hard as nails with her troops, but is also loyal to those who show loyalty to her. Her father served with Marshal Vorka during the First Arcanotech War, so the significance of her position goes far beyond her fellow captains.

First Sergeant Tepa – Experienced, Nazzadi male, mid-thirties, tall and thin, exceptional arcanotechnician and mechanic. He is good-natured, though something of a techno-geek. Many mech pilots refer to Tepa as a miracle worker since he seems to be able to keep mecha in the field with very little resources available.

Getting Involved

The Characters should be from one of the squads of the 1st Mecha Platoon attached to Echo Company of the famous 2nd Battalion, 11th Corp. The majority of the mecha in the Battalion are Nazzadi, though one in ten might be a fast Engel or a Broadsword. Humans are also in the minority. Characters could be recently assigned from basic training as new recruits or be experienced combat veterans transferred to the 2nd Battalion as reinforcements.

A New Migou Weapon

Mission Status:	Recon Patrol
Coordinates:	Latitude 41 degrees 22.5 minutes North, Longitude 80 degrees 47.1 minutes East.
Date:	04 APRIL 2086
Time:	1315 hours local time.
Weather:	Cloudy sky, light breeze, and 58 degrees F.

It's a fairly routine reconnaissance mission for the soldiers of the 1st Platoon, Echo Company. They pick their way carefully through the dry rocky terrain that rises and falls around them like giant chewing teeth. Recent rains and a thick cloudy sky subdues the rusty red and dirty white hues that stripe those mountainous crags. Reports have filtered in through GIA intelligence and local civilian sightings that Migou activity has increased in and around the city of Aksu. Captain Janaky's orders are for Echo Company

to scout the area about twenty-five miles northeast of Aksu for any signs of a Migou presence, assess potential enemy strength, and report back. Engage the enemy only if absolutely necessary.

A successful Observation Test against an Average Degree, using mecha sensors, reveals movement beyond the next rocky ridge-line. It seems to be something large moving steadily in a straight line toward the northwest. As the Characters crest the ridge, they see the rocky crags fall away to reveal a small open-ended valley capped with a black ribbon of old roadway traversing its mouth. The valley is dotted with a handful of farmstead buildings constructed of stone and clay, surrounded by rectangular fields of green that stand in stark contrast the bone dry environment that surrounds them. The buildings appear to have been designed by ancient architects, yet the rusty combustion engine vehicles parked nearby suggest technology of less than a hundred years ago. Smoke can be seen rising from chimneys. This scene might have been considered peaceful if it wasn't actually in a state of panic. Residents are grabbing children and attempting to board themselves up in their homes. Some of the men have gathered rifles and are frantically pointing to the ridgeline on the opposite side of the valley. It is from there that something monstrous and inhuman comes, racing toward the villagers with primal frenzy in its movement.

The creature is a lone Gug and it seems hungry. A successful Occult Test against an Average Degree would suggest that it would be highly unusual for a Gug to be operating solo like this, especially so far north away from other Rapine Storm allies. However, it is certain that this particular Gug means to do violent business with the farmers and that these poor people don't stand a chance. The Characters can choose to take action to stop the Gug. There certainly is enough time to intercept and the superior firepower of a full mecha squad should be more than enough to take the thing down. However, if the Characters' squad appears reluctant to take action, then 1st Lt. Alvarez will radio in for a status update and order the characters to engage.

As the mecha platoon fans out into the valley to stop the Gug onslaught, something strange will happen. The Gug will stop dead in its tracks, instantly giving up its manic drive toward the farms. It will turn in its tracks and face one of the incoming mecha with an eerie certainty in its stance – similar to a lion squaring up on new game. Obviously outnumbered, the Gug will nevertheless charge the incoming mecha. The Characters can at this point make a Challenging Observation Test. Success will reveal that the Gug and New Earth Government mecha are not the only big things moving through the valley. A squad of Migou Locusts are now moving off the opposite ridge toward them and they're doing so with obvious purpose. In addition, unknown yet to the characters, a Dragonfly is also moving toward them in the local vicinity and it has been monitoring the Gug's movements. However, it detected the intrusion of the New Earth Government at which point it alerted the Locusts.

The numbers of Locusts in the vicinity, along with the Dragonfly, should make a challenging fight for the characters. Feel free to

scale the number of Migou antagonists as necessary to balance against the number of Characters engaged in the fray, even to the point of adding in more powerful Migou mecha. As the fight continues, other squads from 1st Platoon can arrive and join the fight as radio updates are provided to the Platoon Leader. Of course, fighting the Migou is not new to most of the men and the women of Echo Company, but what's new about this situation is that the Gug seems to fight alongside the Migou mecha – like part of their team. No Human or Nazzadi has ever seen anything like this before and the realization that this is actually happening should be a shock to everyone. To make matters even stranger, the Migou actually go out of their way to protect this Gug during the fight, almost to the point of self-sacrifice.

A successful Observation Test against an Average Degree made by anyone in the close vicinity of the Gug will yield an interesting piece of information – there is something odd protruding from the top of its back near the head. It appears to be some sort of biomechanical device, oval in shape with claw-protrusions that radiate from the side of its main body and dig into the flesh of the Rapine Storm beast – almost like some strange alien spider. The look of the device suggests Migou technology. It's small enough and the constant movement of the Gug makes it difficult to target with mecha weapons. Closer examination will be much easier once the Gug is taken down.

There may be some damage to one or more of the farmsteads as a result of the fight and the New Earth Government side will have suffered whatever damage was inflicted on them. Fortunately, the local farmers will have been saved. The rest of the 1st Platoon will eventually arrive in the valley and 1st Lt. Alvarez will demand an update from the Characters. Unfortunately the Dragonfly will get away, leaving the very real danger that it might return with additional help.

Examination of the Gug will reveal that the device can easily be ripped from the back of the carcass using the strength of a mech. Doing so will bring with it chunks of Gug flesh and the long tentacled tendrils connected to the bottom of the device will snake out from holes in the Gug's body and retract into the device like a measuring tape. With the Migou's talent for psychological control, it's not too far of a stretch to consider what this device may be. If it truly is a mind control device, what would be the real impact of having droves of Rapine Storm creatures controlled by Migou masters?

Alvarez will get the implication of this device and what it might mean in terms of shifting the balance of power in this war. In fact, he will surprise the Platoon by showing more life now than he ever has, by way of urgency tainted with fear. He orders the Characters to take this device back to Captain Janaky so that she can decide what to do from there. In the meantime the rest of the 1st Platoon will continue their sweep along the north ridge to make sure that no more Migou show up this day. It's clear that dealing with the device the Characters hold in their hand is vital to the war effort and every effort must be made to make sure they succeed in getting the thing out of there safely.

Captain's Orders

A temporary headquarters for Echo Company has been set up behind a ridge line about ten kilometers south of Karayulgun. It is there that Captain Janaky receives and evaluates the tactical situation in the field based on inputs from her platoon commanders. A small field repair facility has also been set up along with a medical tent. News of the find up north is surprising and Janaky is anxious for elements of the 1st Platoon to arrive with this strange new Migou device.

It's late in the afternoon by the time the Character's platoon finds its way heading south toward company headquarters. They travel through potentially hostile territory so every precaution will be taken to avoid accidentally stumbling into a superior enemy force. Unknown to the Characters, however, is the fact that their progress is being tracked. The Dragonfly from the previous skirmish has been shadowing their every move in stealth mode. Use the rules for spotting mecha using stealth systems on p. 144 of the *Core Book*, though it is unlikely that the pilot will give them call to notice. If pressured, the Migou pilot will simply withdraw and return to shadowing the squad if the opportunity arises.

The company headquarters is steeped in a flurry of activity once the Character's squad arrives. Patrolling mecha and remote motion sensors maintain a defensive perimeter around the camp. Current codes in the mecha onboard IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) systems allows for a safe approach to the camp. Three UCH-70 Werewolves rest near the center with their medical and military supplies and support personnel have already disembarked or unloaded. Tents have been set up to support a small Mess Hall, a Field Medical Facility, bunks, communications, and a special tent for the Captain herself. Arcanotechnicians have already begun maintenance or repair work on a few of the mecha. With the day waning into evening several of the mech pilots are already making their way to the Mess Hall.

As the Characters' mecha power down and they disembark from their cockpits, Captain Janaky emerges from her tent and makes her way, along with a couple of Lieutenants, briskly toward them. She is very formal in her manner and precise in her military bearing. She will require a report from the Characters regarding the events surrounding the skirmish, listening intently and asking questions where necessary. If they report that they may have been followed, she will order one of her Lieutenants to alert the sentries. Once the Captain is fully satisfied that she has all the information she needs, she will then inspect the Migou device in question. The look on her face will eloquently reflect her deep-seated sense of revulsion at anything that smells of Migou.

Captain Janaky will then order her chief arcanotechnician, 1st Sgt. Tepa, to take a look at the Migou device and give her a report by morning. He will be summoned to the gathering by one of the other of the Captain's Lieutenants and he will seem quite excited when he approaches. In fact, he will tend to ramble on about "what this could mean" in a way that may alienate most of the listeners around him. However, the Captain is confident that he will produce a result by tomorrow morning. At this point

the Characters are free to relax in camp, talk to other members of the Company, look toward repairs of their mecha, or anything else they see fit to do. However, Captain Janaky will inform them that they are to be present at her command tent at 0630 the following morning.

The next day brings with it a downpour of cold rain and light winds. The campground turns wet with mud and puddles everywhere. It is a miserable and gloomy start of another day – 05 April 2086. The Characters soon find themselves inside Captain Janaky's tent with various other squad leaders and Lieutenants. She announces to everyone that as of 0500 this morning, the New Earth Government has launched a major offensive against the Korean Peninsula in an attempt to turn the tide of the war against the bugs. This will be the largest military amphibious assault since the beginning of the war and everyone in the tent seems excited that the NEG is finally taking the fight back to the invaders.

Tepa shows up a couple of minutes later, clearly exhausted from staying up all night. Janaky prompts him to report and he confirms that the device is indeed of Migou origin, based on the biomechanical parts of its design. He was unable to dissect any of the components during his investigation, but certain tests revealed the presence of an emitted control carrier frequency harmonic to brainwaves. He theorizes that the device latches onto a host, connecting itself directly to the brain via control tendrils. It then transcodes radio frequency command signals to a pattern recognized by the brain, thus creating a kind of remote control for living creatures. Applying the device takes no surgery – it simply latches itself onto a host like a parasite and worms its tendrils through the victim's flesh until it comes in contact with the brain. It is no doubt a very painful process.

Captain Janaky picks up the conversation at this point and informs everyone present that this Migou device has become a top priority. The GIA is bringing in experts from the Ashcroft Foundation to examine and evaluate the device. However, it is the military's job to get it from here to Beijing with all possible haste – she's been ordered to transport the Migou device to Battalion Headquarters in Korla so that it can be carried from there to Beijing. The plan is to load the device on one of the Werewolf hovercrafts and be on the way as soon as possible. Lastly, she acknowledges the Characters for discovering this device and for getting here safely.

All seems well in that moment. Then, without warning, the proximity alarms start going off, followed by several explosions in the middle of the camp. Everyone looks around, stunned for the moment. Echo Company is under attack.

ACT II: GETTING IT THERE THE HARD WAY

Goal: To escape the Migou sneak attack and transport the Migou mind control device safely to Beijing. To avoid death by the Rapine Storm as the integrity of China begins to rapidly collapse in front of the Characters' eyes.

Setting: the western provinces of Xinjiang and Qinghai, China.

Cast: *Lieutenant Colonel Brata* – Veteran, Nazzadi male, mid-forties, piercing gaze and extremely serious. Grateful for the player's arrival, but distracted nonetheless as if occupied by bigger matters. Fit and muscular. Not openly bigoted against Humans, but certainly tends to gravitate toward other Nazzadi first.

Captain Janaky – From Act 1.

Second Lieutenant Eli McWilliams – Inexperienced, Human male, twenty, African-American, recently graduated from officer academy with a spit and polish that contrasts sharply against that of his veteran superiors. In charge of an army security detail.

Escape!

Flashes of light and violent concussions erupt intensely through the morning rain as the Characters scramble out of the Captain's tent. Mud sprays like fireworks as enemy artillery destroys the campsite with null cannon fire from elevated terrain. The Werewolves all appear to be damaged and on fire. People scurry about crazily trying to avoid death while they make their way to their various mecha. Sentry mecha return fire against the harassing Migou artillery. Off in the distance, moving quickly through the valley, a group of varying Migou mecha estimated at roughly Company strength charges like a swarm toward the surprised New Earth Government encampment. Echo Company has no choice now but to fight for its life. Of course, the Migou forces were lead to this location by the Dragonfly that had followed the Characters – even if that Dragonfly was destroyed, the mind control device emits a specific carrier frequency that is easy for the Migou to track. This attack was inevitable as soon as the Characters arrived and the Migou are eager to get their prototype equipment back.

Captain Janaky reacts quickly like the true veteran that she is. She immediately begins to bark out orders to mobilize her platoons. She also issues orders to contact Battalion HQ and request immediate air support. With the Werewolves out of commission, she orders the Characters to mount up and deliver the Migou mind control device themselves. They are to get the device to Battalion headquarters in Korla, about 200 miles to the east. From there, they are to find air transport and deliver the device to Command HQ in Beijing. At full speed a Nazzadi mech can make it in about 2 hours. A Broadsword mech would take about 8 hours. Janaky makes sure that they are clear about their orders and then commands them to move out. As the Characters leave, she shouts "We'll cover you!"

Characters will need to make two Dodge Tests against an Average Degree each to avoid the ground burst of Migou cannon fire and get to their mecha safely – add +2 to their rolls if they take advantage of light cover. Failure means that the Character was caught at the edge of the blast and suffers 2 dice of damage. A critical failure means that the Character was caught in the direct blast of an Integrity scale weapon and is now a vapor cloud. Once the Characters reach their mecha, it will be a matter of

moments before their cockpits seal and power systems fire up. By that time, the Migou mecha will be descending on the camp. The Migou mind control device will be easy to scoop up and retrieve, but it will be a fight to get out of the camp unscathed. The bugs have not yet homed in on the device, but it is only a matter of time before they do. The squad has to act fast and get out of the chaos of the battle as soon as possible. Once their mecha squad breaks free, a quick glance back into the valley shows them the full scope of what is going on. The Migou have hit the Company hard leaving friends and comrades down there fighting desperately for their lives. The Characters are powerless to do anything to stop it and all that is left is the mission.

The journey east follows an old road about 25 miles north of the Tarim River. Rough and rocky terrain provides frequent opportunities for cover if needed. An angry sky grows even darker with storm clouds moving in from the south as rain and wind intensity increases. Forked lighting can sometimes be seen flashing far to the south across the plains and desert. Small villages, some occupied by desperately frightened people and some completely abandoned, dot the road all the way to Korla.

About half way through the journey, mecha sensors (with a successful Observation Test against an Average Degree) will indicate an aircraft of some sort inbound from the west. It seems to be moving back and forth in an erratic manner, almost as if it is searching for something. As the aircraft draws closer, the on-board LAI will identify it as a Migou BG-09 Spinner. Succeeding at a Stealth Contest will allow the New Earth Government squad to take cover and avoid detection. The large alien aircraft will fly close and hover for a moment, almost as if it might have detected something. Should the Characters be spotted or choose to engage, the Spinner will instantly drop four Migou mecha (Locusts and Grubs) that will proceed to attack the squad. The Spinner will then provide air support by firing down on the Characters with its laser cannons. This, however, is a fight that can be avoided if the Characters choose to rely on stealth rather than force.

Korla

Nazzadi soldiers have always thought that “Korla” was an odd name for a city. To them it would be like Humans calling their city “Frank”. Yet as funny as that name might normally be, no humor exists in that town today. The storm front from the south has intensified with moderate winds, heavy rain, and occasional thunderclaps overhead. The Characters are greeted with a blur of activity as they arrive in town. Radio contact from patrolling sentries allows the Characters to identify themselves and pass to a secure communications channel to contact Battalion Headquarters.

Mecha Companies can be seen moving out in formation, leaving southbound from the city. Continued radio chatter on the secure channel points to a large buildup of New Earth Government forces near the small town of Zhong Doga, about ten miles south of Korla. The Battalion is massing for something big. An organized large-scale effort to evacuate civilians becomes obvi-

ous to the Characters as they enter the city. With all the frantic activity mixed with the darkening storm overhead, there’s an eerie sense that something dreadfully wrong approaches the city. Night is also coming within a couple of hours.

The Characters are instructed via radio comms to pilot their mecha to a makeshift repair depot located at an old sports stadium near the center of town. As the squad approaches the stadium they notice an M-15 Ranger AAFV pull up along side the group as an escort. On-site technicians at the repair depot guide the mech pilots to their final parking spaces, much like aircraft into a terminal. As the Characters disembark, the Ranger pulls up and opens its back gate. Twelve armed soldiers in full battle dress emerge from the Ranger and form a protective perimeter around the mecha. A young human lieutenant follows the soldiers out and walks briskly to the Characters. He snaps to attention and offers up the kind of salute that would make a boot camp drill sergeant proud. He identifies himself as Second Lieutenant Eli McWilliams and informs the Characters that he has orders from the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Brata, to escort them immediately to headquarters. If the Characters ask what the Colonel wants, McWilliams will have no details to provide. They are taken on board the Ranger while the security detail guards the mecha and the Migou device. McWilliams also informs them that the city has been put on high alert. He recommends that they carry their sidearms if they have not chosen to do so already.

Battalion Headquarters is a short two-mile ride away and is located in an old three-story school building that, like the rest of the city, dates back to a time prior to the First Arcanotech War. A security area has been set up around the building with concrete blocks and infantry stationed at various intervals. A pair of Crusaders walks the perimeter to add an additional level of security. The Ranger passes easily through the security gate and its passengers disembark at the front of the building. Enlisted personnel salute the Characters as they walk by.

Lt. McWilliams escorts the Characters to the second level of the building, down a long hall, and into what used to be a large schoolroom. It now serves as a tactical command and control center filled with holographic computer displays, printed charts hanging on the walls, and a bank of communications equipment. A pair of holographic projectors working in unison generates a large three-dimensional map horizontally hovering over the center of the floor. A tall muscular Nazzadi, the Lt. Colonel stands next to the map and gestures intently towards what appears to be the south of Korla to a pair of officers standing beside him. As the Characters approach and salute, Lt. McWilliams introduces the group to the commander. The Characters’ arrival however is just a small bit of good news for the Lt. Colonel. He seems otherwise distracted, with the weight of something imminent on his shoulders.

Lt. Colonel Brata is willing to provide a wealth of information to the Characters in whatever order the conversation flows. However, available time is short so the details will be limited

and extended delays may cause him to grow impatient. He does acknowledge and thank the Characters for safely delivering the Migou device. He tells them that if “our” people can grasp the workings of this device, then the Characters might very well have contributed to a turning point of this war. Unfortunately, more pressing matters are at hand. He informs the Characters that reports of the Korean Peninsula landing suggest some early success. However, other areas have taken a turn for the worse. Unconfirmed reports warn of blackouts in the southern Kill Zone. A couple of New Earth Government pilots apparently went kamikaze and dove into a pair of the remote surveillance hubs. As a result, huge areas of the sensor grid have gone down. Weather reports on one of the holo-displays shows heavy electrical storms forming all along southern China from Xinjiang to the coast. Such storms have not been seen in over a year.

When asked about what’s going on with all the troop movements and evacuations, the Lt. Colonel explains that a reconnaissance team spotted at least a half dozen giant worms moving straight toward the city from the south, escorted by a sizeable mob of Rapine Storm monsters. The Battalion has been deployed to meet and repel the enemy. However, should any of those “things” bypass the defenses, the Lt. Colonel has ordered a general evacuation of the city as a precaution – creating a stream of air and ground traffic to the north. The evacuation, however, has made it impossible to spare any aircraft to get the Migou device to Beijing. If things go badly against the Rapine Storm, then Lt. Colonel Bata has orders to withdraw to the north and form up with elements of the 3rd Division. He therefore orders the Characters to get a hot meal, a short rest, and be ready to move out within the next two hours. They are to take the device to the 11th Corp Command Headquarters in Golmud to rendezvous with the Battlecruiser Koenigsberg, which will then transport them directly to Beijing. Marshal Vorka will be interested in seeing the device for himself. Brata also informs the team that he is sending a Mecha Squad from Bravo Company to escort the Characters to Golmud. They are to assemble with First Lieutenant Mallory Summers and her squad at the repair depot in two hours. If anyone inquires about the fate of Echo Company, Bata will inform them that most escaped the fight against the Migou, but losses were heavy. Regrettably Captain Janaky was killed this morning.

The Characters will only have a short time to grab some hot food and relax for a moment. For just as things begin to quiet and dusk begins to roll in, a long vibrating rumble suddenly shakes the school building to the core, like an earthquake in slow motion. A giant explosion of concrete and dirt soon follows the rumble as the head of a massive Bhole erupts ferociously into the city street crushing anything in its way. Screams of pain and horror accompany the sounds of crashing and grinding as the giant beast crawls its way further into the streets. Swarms of defiled mortal cultists with grotesque faces slobbering for blood pour out of the hole left behind by the worm. Several Shabus Morgo and a pack of Grave Things follow from behind. Other inhuman beasts emerge behind them, spilling out of the Earth’s gaping wound as if a giant dagger had plunged all the way through the planet’s core and into the heart of Hell. The Characters must

make the appropriate Fear Tests when they witness this scene. Success at an Observation Test against an Average Degree will also reveal something else floating out of the large hole in the ground. A black-cloaked Human soon ascends as if lifted by thought alone to stand above the unholy throng, perched on an elevated platform. The sight of this Desolate One only serves to further stir the mob into its killer frenzy.

As the Characters make to leave the schoolhouse, they’ll see Lt. Colonel Bata frantically giving orders in response to the unexpected attack. However, there is a general sense that it is too late. Most of the Battalion has been deployed south and there is very little left in reserve to defend the city against an attack this size. The Lt. Colonel will make brief eye contact with the Characters and will signal them to go.

The Characters must travel the two miles back to their mecha in a city now swarming with the Disciples of the Rapine Storm. The Bhole unfortunately crushed the Ranger in which the Characters arrived, so they must either find another vehicle or make their way back to their mecha on foot. The larger of the Rapine Storm creatures have engaged what New Earth Government mecha are left to defend the city. The defiled mortals are rampaging through the streets and alleys killing, raping, and sometimes eating anything they find. The Characters witness horrors like they’ve most likely never seen before, prompting more Fear Tests before they can make it back to the repair depot. Feel free to paint this scene to be as visceral and gruesome as possible. Now is the moment when the Characters will be faced with the grisly horror that is the fury of the Rapine Storm.

ACT III: CHINA FALLS

Goal: Reach the city of Golmud safely with the Migou device safely intact. Fight through the Rapine Storm horde that is there. Board the Battlecruiser Koenigsberg for safe passage to Beijing. Give the Characters a real feel that everything in China is collapsing around them and there’s nothing they can do about it.

Setting: The western province of Qinghai and the city of Golmud, China.

Cast: *2nd Lieutenant Cafy* – Experienced, Nazzadi female, mid-twenties, petite and cute, short white hair, reserved and respectful. Follows Mallory’s lead in and out of the cockpit. Secretly in love with Mallory, but afraid to admit it. Part of the 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company. Pilots an Eclipse.

2nd Lieutenant Famida – Inexperienced, Nazzadi male, early-twenties, mid-sized and skinny, marine hair, hotshot and impetuous. Respects Mallory, but wants to make a name for himself. Part of the 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company. Pilots a Storm.

First Lieutenant Mallory Summers – Experienced, Human female, late-twenties, gorgeous, short blond hair, bold. Playful off-duty and deadly serious in a fight. Fascinated with all things Nazzadi. Leads the 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company. She always

has her people's back and they respect her for it. Pilots a Blizzard.

The Long Road Through Hell

Smoke rises in wispy columns above the sports arena as the Characters arrive to claim their mecha. The clearly identifiable crackle of energy weapon discharges echo against the stadium stands. Reaching the field where the repair depot had been set up the Characters are suddenly greeted by the scene of a fight between titans. Three Nazzadi mecha (an Eclipse, a Storm, and a Blizzard) fight to hold off six Gugs and a Gibbering Horror as if keeping snapping dogs at bay, and the New Earth Government pilots are not doing very well. A fourth mech already appears to be down and the other three are constantly moving to avoid being mobbed. The soldiers of the security detail are either dead or scattered. Fires flicker and ashes carry the souls of dead archa-notechnicians into the night sky as much of the repair depot is consumed in flame. Fortunately, the Characters' mecha are still intact – though one or two might be knocked over. Characters must make several Dodge Tests against a Challenging Degree to weave through the fight and get to their machines – failure yields a die of damage. Once inside and powered up, they'll be able to take the fight back to the enemy before any of these other three Nazzadi mecha find themselves overwhelmed with alien fangs and claws.

The fight with the Gugs and the Gibbering Horror will end quickly once the Characters join the fray. Two of the Gugs are Moderate Wounded and the Gibbering Horror, as well as one of the other Gugs, is Lightly Wounded. The voice of 1st Lieutenant Summers soon chirps on the radio comm unit welcoming the Characters to the fight, though there is no hint of warmth in her voice – not with one of her people down. Her Blizzard seems to be undamaged outside of a few superficial scratches. The Eclipse darting in and around in support of the Blizzard also seems to be undamaged. However, the Storm fighting on the other side of the field seems to have taken some light damage from the Gugs. The smoldering hulk of a Maelstrom lies collapsed on the ground and there is no sign of movement from the wreckage. Once the fight ends, the three remaining Nazzadi mecha will gather around the fallen Maelstrom to see if their comrade survived. An unsettling silence answers the radio call attempts and the fact that the Maelstrom's cockpit area looks completely crushed are clear evidence that 2nd Lieutenant Sotaga has been killed in action.

There's very little time to mourn the loss, however. Screams and explosions outside of the sports arena are urgent reminders that any number of other hellish beasts could show up at any moment. Summers reiterates that she and her team have orders to escort the Characters to Golmud and provide extra security for the device they are carrying. As the team exits the flame-scarred battleground that was until very recently a city, they will need to do a little research to find the safest way out. Careful recon will clearly show that most of the conflict is spreading out from the center to the north of the city and that the southeast direction looks to be passable. Feel free to create the Characters' escape





from Korla in whatever way works best for your game. They will most likely either try to leave the city using stealth and cover or they may attempt to blast their way out. In either case, it won't be easy getting out. The Rapine Storm feints to the south and sneak attacks into the center of the city are devastatingly effective. Continuously updated military messages indicate that units are being pulled back from the south to reinforce the city. However, by the look of the ruined buildings, the fire-engulfed neighborhoods, and mass scatterings of limp and dismembered bodies, it doesn't look like Korla will survive.

Once the Characters escape, and the city fades from view, the general order to fall back will be issued and the rest of the survivors of the Battalion will begin to withdraw from a losing battle. The Characters and their new friends find themselves marching steadily into the void of a storm-filled night.

It is approximately 150 miles from Korla southeast to the Altun Shan Mountains that border the edge of Xinjiang and Qinghai provinces. A small road running through the towns of Hongligou and Baxkorgan allows for fairly easy passage through the mountain range. From Baxkorgan the journey is another 200 miles through the Qaidam Pendi basin to the city of Golmud. Qinghai is the least populated province in China with sparse settlements of farmers, herdsman, and nomads clinging to the basics of a simple life along the mountainous ring of the region. Most of the major technological additions to the area have been brought by the military. Because of that, Golmud has evolved into more of a fortress than an actual civilian population center over the last year.

The trek from Korla follows the Tarim River as it bends southeast toward the Altun Shan Mountains. The sands of the vast Takla Makan Desert flow back and forth against the passing terrain on the south side of the river. Success in a Challenging Observation Test will detect something very large moving south through the desert in the darkness. Other blips and contacts show up every now and then as well. However, nothing disturbs the Characters except the frequent flashes of lightning and gale-force winds that now pound the countryside around them. A few contacts might come close enough to put the team on edge or force them into a defensive posture, but nothing engages unless they chose to engage. What's clear is that large "things" now hunt in the night and under the cover of storm. There's nothing routine about this journey.

The day has been long and grueling and it is only a matter of time before the need for sleep catches up to the team. Feel free to utilize the endurance and exhaustion rules from p. 124 of the *Core Book*. The added elements of drumming thunder, heavy winds, the deluge of visibility-killing rain sheets, and frequent sharp drop-offs that rim the side of the road, make continued travel through the mountain pass dangerous. Traveling into the rocky terrain of the Altuns should provide for plenty of opportunities to find a rock outcropping that might offer some measure of shelter from the storm. The Characters will hopefully get that it would be far more prudent not to push their way through.

Dream A Little Nightmare

Choose one of the Characters to wake up with a jolt. The night is calm with clear skies. The ground is completely dry with no sign whatsoever of a passing storm. If anyone in the group was left to stand watch there is no sign of him or her. Nothing blows, nothing chirps, nothing squeaks, nothing breathes – there is no sound at all. Looking around, the Character eventually notices all the other people in the team, slumbering peacefully under a moonlit sky. It's not until he takes a closer look that he stumbles back in horror at finding his teammates dead – throats slashed from ear to ear. The ground squishes with heavy pools of mixed blood. Looking down, the Character sees his body covered in the blood of these victims, crimson streaks camouflaging the symbols of his uniform. It is then that he feels the combat knife in his hand, sharp and crusted with blood. Then, he suddenly remembers that overwhelming and almost orgasmic sense of power he felt as he took the life of his friends – one by one, silently, carefully, and viciously. It felt good.

In that moment an almost imperceptible voice whispers to him, "aren't you hungry?" The Character can look up to see a distant figure standing on a rock, Human in shape, with a black cloak draped over his form. Somehow from this distance he knows that the stranger has flame-red eyes. However, the sensation of ravenous hunger suddenly grips him and he looks around the campsite of death with a primal need. Mallory Summers now looks quite tasty and lean. He approaches her lifeless husk with his blade held high, ready to carve layers of flesh from her bones so that he can quell the black hunger. As he raises his blade, her lifeless eyes suddenly turn to him and she screams loudly. In the background of the Character's mind, the distant whispering voice laughs.

The Character is sleepwalking and everybody else suddenly wakes up at the sound of Mallory's scream. The Character holding the knife will awaken to a violent jolt and will not attack anyone else. However, only an Initiative roll will determine whether the others get to him before he can strike home with his blade. If someone besides the sleepwalking Character acts first, Mallory can be saved. If not, there will be things to work out as he severely harms or murders her and then wakes up. This scene should make it clear to everyone that nobody is immune to the darkness that is now consuming this land.

A cloaked figure in the distance once again laughs to himself before turning and walking away.

The Battle Of Golmud

The city of Golmud rests at the northern edge of the Tibetan Plateau along southern Qinghai. In fact, it is the old train route paralleling a highway between Goldmud and Lhasa, the ancient capital of Tibet that has prompted New Earth Government military strategists to believe that any major push by Rapine Storm forces would come from that direction. Golmud has enjoyed the early warning protection of the Kill Zone sensor grid for the last year – until yesterday morning. Figuring out why a handful of suicidal NEG pilots would want to knock out the grid with their

aircraft will have to wait until later. Because, just as the strategists predicted, Golmud is now under siege.

The greater environs around the city are filled with several salt lakes both great and small, making an approach difficult when not using major pathways or roads. The city's defenders have used that fact to their advantage with barricades and gun emplacements deployed along probable avenues of approach. As the Characters approach the city from the northwestern plains and crest an elevated rock formation, they stumble upon a spectacular scene. Vast waves of Rapine Storm forces crash against the southern city defenses like ocean waves. Much of the horde has begun to circle to the eastern and western sections of the city in an attempt to break through. The massive sea of alien things, horrid monsters, and bestial men would leave a sane person grasping to wonder when they might wake up.

Hovering over the city like a giant protecting angel an NEG battlecruiser vomits electric death from its huge turret guns and smaller swivel guns mounted along the port and starboard main deck. Streaming salvos of rocket fire send impressive plumes of bursting dirt and flesh everywhere among the horde masses. Right now, the battlecruiser appears to be the only real New Earth Government advantage in this struggle. Flying things, unidentifiable in this distance, seem to be harassing the crew of the battlecruiser as several flashes of laser fire shoot off into the stormy sky above. Other flashes and explosions dot the entire perimeter of the city as mecha units engage the enemy. The only relatively safe passage into Golmud is from the north.

As the Characters approach the city, they can identify themselves via the secure military comms channel. They are given orders to enter the city and proceed to a location directly beneath the battlecruiser, now identified as the Koenigsberg. However, once they come within a mile of the city they will detect something dreadfully unexpected – this is an Observation Test using their mecha sensors against an Average Degree. A very large contact blip suddenly floods the sensor screen as it approaches rapidly from the north. A warning message broadcasts at the same time across radio link, "Warning, Migou swarm ship inbound, bearing three five zero degrees!"

The mammoth swarm ship floats into view as the Characters race toward the city's defenses. A cloud of Spinners and Darts suddenly erupt from the belly of the beast as the swarm ship's main batteries open fire on the Koenigsberg. The Migou forces fan out, striking Rapine Storm and New Earth Government alike from the air, raining down a massive barrage of energy weapons fire. Two Spinners descend and hover to block the Characters from the city as four Migou mecha (three Locusts and a Scorpion) drop to the ground from each of the craft. They turn and charge the Characters in a bid to retrieve their mind control device.

It will be a desperate struggle for the Characters to fight their way through and survive long enough to make it to the Koenigsberg. The arrival of the Migou has turned the tide against the

New Earth Government in this bizarre three-way battle. The losses will be heavy on all sides – Migou mecha mixing with NEG mecha mixing with Rapine Storm creatures in a street-to-street bloodbath. Feel free to scale this battle however works for your game – it is meant to be intense, deadly, and harrowing. Pull out the stops, for there is no guarantee that the Dramatic Characters will survive this.

Shortly after the Characters arrive, the New Earth Government will signal an evacuation as retreating units use their jump pods to board transport ships or the battlecruiser itself. Any surviving Characters will be ordered to the Koenigsberg before she withdraws, severely damaged from the battle. Many NEG troops and many more civilians will be left behind to their own fate as panic erupts throughout the city. Golmud has fallen and the New Earth Government is faced with no other option than to retreat. China's house of cards has crumbled in a perfect storm of events. Her fate has been sealed.

Aftermath

The Koenigsberg will arrive safely in Beijing and anyone who survived the Battle of Golmud will be celebrated as heroes. Yet all the pomp and circumstance will never erase the memory of gazing down from the deck of the battlecruiser to witness those frantic faces staring up from the ground as mobs of men, women, and children begged for their lives. The cold horror of watching helplessly from the air as Rapine Storm monsters surged into the defenseless crowd of civilians...

First Korla, then Golmud, then Nanning, then Hong Kong, then so many other cities. All have been ravaged by the underestimated fury of the Rapine Storm. The New Earth Government soon begins a wholesale evacuation of China, with refugees transported to Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. Many more are left behind, sentenced to a unspeakable fate.

The surviving men and women of the 11th Corp have retreated into Mongolia and are now surrounded on all fronts by the enemy. Korea has been stabilized by the New Earth Government troops there. Beijing and Shanghai are the last major NEG cities in mainland China and they are currently under evacuation. The rest of China has collapsed into chaos, mob rule, and the darkness of a Dead God. Those who survived carry the haunting memories of the fallen for the rest of their lives.

Now that the madness is over, it's time to see how much of it sank in. There are many possible ways that the Characters might develop Aeon War Syndrome. Have each Character make Insanity Tests for any or all of the following possible things (as applicable) with the following Degrees and Insanity Point gain:

- Serious Injury – Easy/1 Point.
- Maiming Injury – Average/1 Point.
- Witness Death of a Friend (each one) – Average/1 Point.
- Enduring Fear (anyone who survived) – Challenging/1 Point.
- Causing Death of a Friend (each one) – Hard/2 Points.
- Witness Massacre or Bloodbath – Incredibly Hard/1 Point.

Characters should acquire at least one Insanity Point from these events. It is recommended that you do not let them use Drama Points for these Tests. War is hell, after all.

ENDINGS

There is very little your average Character can do to stop the Rapine Storm from claiming China. It is a situation far outside anyone's control. Characters get to be a part of this historic battle and will most likely distinguish themselves in some way that will help move them up the ranks. Perhaps they will be in more of a position to influence events on a broad scale next time.

There will be little real new footage broadcast to the world. Reports paint the situation as being a defeat, but not nearly as devastating as it is. The New Earth Government has rallied its forces in tactical positions around China and is reinforcing and assessing the new situation. Anyone who was actually there knows better, that the new reports are heavily doctored to be more digestible. However, anyone there will be held to gag orders and not allowed to say anything about what really happened. In fact, they'll be given scripts telling them what they can and should say to friends and family. There will naturally be those who hint at the truth and rumors will leak out, but nothing will be serious enough to be substantiated.

Any Characters who were wounded in the conflict are eligible to purchase the Commendation (3) Asset, representing the Purple Heart, for a reduced Experience cost (they had to get hurt to acquire it). If a Character was hurt but remained at Moderately Wounded or below, the cost for the Asset is ten Experience. If a Character was hurt to the point of Seriously Wounded or beyond, the cost for the Asset is five Experience. What the Characters are paying for here is not the award itself, which they will get if wounded no matter what, but rather the prestige and respect that such an award may garner them in the long term.

Furthermore, there may be other medals for which Characters are eligible. Anyone who had a hand in keeping other soldiers or pilots alive is eligible for a Distinguished Service Medal – the cost of the Commendation Asset is 5 Experience. Anyone who clearly distinguished themselves as a leader during the chaos is eligible for the Meritorious Service Award – the cost of the Commendation Asset is 15 Experience. As above, the Characters will get these awards if they performed the actions involved, but the Asset cements the prestige and respect.

Regardless of commendation, most Characters will be eligible for promotion (and some may have had to take on battlefield promotions). Anybody who survived this tragedy will receive a full rank promotion in their appropriate track – enlisted or of-



ficer. Anyone who is the sole remaining or sole ranking officer in their mecha squad will be promoted to at least the rank of Major (O-4); likewise anyone who is the sole remaining or sole ranking NCO in their infantry squad will receive a promotion to at least the rank of Sergeant (E-5).

Participation here will warrant additional Experience as well. Give your players an additional 10 Experience at the end, in addition to other awards.

When all is said and done, the Migou still occupy China, but the place belongs to the Disciples of the Rapine Storm. There are scattered pockets of soldiers and civilians stuck behind the lines, trying desperately to avoid the predations of the monsters now unchecked there. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for the New Earth Government to regain a defensible foothold in China. The reinforcement that is occurring is to hopefully stop the spread of the Rapine Storm and prevent the Migou from opportunistic attacks, not to retake China. It is only a matter of time before other key tactical positions in southeast Asia and the Pacific begin to fall.

Behind closed doors, the New Earth Government is very, very worried. They do not understand how things could have unravelled so quickly, to the point where they were driven out of their foothold. Their new policy in Southeast Asia is one of containment, for the time being – and of much deeper study of the surprising Rapine Storm.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

Let's take a look at several possible ways in which different types of games can become part of these major events. These aren't the only possible ways – you may have a clever idea of your own. Even so, not all kinds of Characters are going to be appropriate for this story.

Regardless of other factors, the Characters must end up in China. You could, conceivably, move these events to another hotbed of Rapine Storm and Migou activity, like the northern parts of Eastern Europe. However, it won't have the same impact on the stability of Southeast Asia and you will have to do the extra work necessary of adapting the material and finding a place that meets the needs of these events as well as your game's geographical needs.

Even though this story is scalable, it is easy to outclass your Character in the face of these events. It is recommended that you play other stories first, weaving these events into the natural flow of your game. To ensure maximum engagement, we recommend that each Character have earned at least 100 Experience before joining in this fight.

It is recommended that you break this story up into a minimum number of sessions based on Act. Act I should take a minimum of two sessions, Act II should take a minimum of four sessions, and Act III should take a minimum of another four sessions. Feel free to take as much time as you need for this story to naturally

unfold, but by spreading it out over a minimum of ten sessions. Characters are allowed to accrue another 50 Experience with which to develop over its course.

NEG Military Games

Military-style games are those for which this story is written. All kinds of military Characters can be a part of these events: mecha pilots, Engel pilots, other kinds of pilots, infantry, special forces, intelligence, and more. This story is a major military event, so pretty much anyone with a rank and a pay grade can join in the fun. In general, if your Characters are enthusiasts of the military-style game, they'll want to be involved in these events, not just hear about them. It will be in everyone's interests to work out a way to have them there.

Your military Characters may be stationed in other parts of the world. The great thing about the military is that Characters get orders and get sent all over, and there's really nothing they can do about it. If you don't want to leave your current setting permanently, you can always transfer your Characters on temporary assignment for some reason and then send them back when the events are over.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

It is extremely unlikely that games involving police or government agent Characters would be involved in these events. This story rolls out so suddenly and so quickly, that even if they are reservists, there's no time to get them involved.

Eldritch Society Games

The Eldritch Society will have its hands full with either the events leading up to the Children of Chaos' big secret ritual or with the aftermath of said ritual. There also isn't any Chrysalis Corporation activity on the front, so there's no reason for them to be there. Regardless, there is really nothing they can do to help out the forces of the New Earth Government in their defeat. This does not mean you can't get Eldritch Society Characters involved, if you're committed. Perhaps they search for lost mystical artifacts or must rescue someone or something of importance. At the scale they'll be dealing with, however, they will be outclassed.

NEG Arcane Underground Games

Those involved in the arcane underground will most likely have their hands full with other events, whether it be the Children of Chaos' plans or other murmurs on the street. However, there is an active black market in China, so such Characters could experience this story as civilians fighting to get out.

Cult Games

If you are willing to go there, it is possible to flip this story around and play it as one of the mortal Disciples of the Rapine Storm. That would definitely involve going to a dark place, for those mortals who serve the Dead God are monsters of their own sort – monsters on the inside. If you choose to play this kind of story, then get in line with the Desolate Ones and flow with the frenzy of the storm.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Here are a few Characters that you might require a little more detail on for your game.

CAPTAIN JANAKY

Echo Company Commander

Janaky is one of the new breed of Nazzadi officers to graduate with honors from the Nazza-Duhni Military Academy. She carries her sense of formality and rigid military discipline like a personalized suit of powered armor. Very little fazes her and the chances of seeing an actual smile shape her lips are slim. To the world, the façade of military bearing is who she really is. Very few people have seen the softness behind her steel gaze.

The old-school idea of the Nazzadi “warrior race” was just a lie created by the Migou. Janaky knows this, yet she also believes in the old way. She was honored to be hand-picked for service under Torka after being awarded the Silver Star for gallantry under fire during the Battle of Juneau. She is extremely loyal to those she commands, and deep within the tucked away files of her self-image is a sense that she will gladly sacrifice herself if it means saving the lives of others.

Virtue/Flaw: Loyal/Inflexible

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8, Perception 9, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Expert, Armed Fighting: Expert, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Mecha Fighting), Intimidate: Expert, Marksman: Master (Focused in Mecha Marksman), Observation: Master, Pilot: Expert, Survival: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Acute Sight, Commendation/2, Wary

1ST LT. ROBERT ALVAREZ

Mecha Platoon Leader

Bob Alvarez left a very enjoyable life back in Los Angeles. He had no desire to join the military Academy. He certainly would have preferred to spend his time getting naked in a hot tub with all the good looking honeys that his large bank account could supply. It was actually his father, an ex-military man, who twisted his arm into joining the service, believing it would teach his son responsibility. Being a platoon leader has certainly contributed to that result, but it hasn't been easy for him.

There aren't many officers in the Army that are easier to get along with than First Lieutenant Alvarez. His relaxed way also makes him sloppy in both appearance and command style. The men and women of his platoon enjoy his stories of wealthy living, but confidence in his ability to lead under fire, especially with his frequently depressive mood swings, is often lacking.

Virtue/Flaw: Easy-Going/Resigned

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8, Perception 7

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Mecha Fighting), Marksman: Expert (Focused in Mecha Marksman), Observation: Expert, Pilot: Expert, Survival: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Depressive, Wealth/2

1ST LT. MALLORY SUMMERS

Mecha Squad Leader

Mallory was sixteen years-old when the Migou first descended upon the Earth. In those days, a person was most likely to find Mallory hanging out on the beach with her friends in Brighton, England. She's always been attractive with that indefinable way that leaves people twisting their head for a second look. Mallory has learned to use this power to her advantage over the years. The bold confidence with which she carries herself certainly reflects how present she is to her tantalizing affect on other people.

She joined the Army Academy to be with a young Nazzadi gentleman named Fremada with whom she had fallen in love. It was a naive move for sure, but one from which her parents could not dissuade her. Of course, the needs of the service being what they are, Mallory found herself assigned to a unit far away from the man she loved. They corresponded with promises to marry once the war was over, but that ended when Fremada was killed fighting in Eastern Europe. Something innocent shattered inside of Mallory then and what emerged was a kind of ruthlessness. Even though her charms serve her well on the outside, there a blackness on the inside that seems impossible to fill.

Virtue/Flaw: Playful/Merciless

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 7, Perception 8, Presence 9

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Mecha Fighting), Marksman: Expert (Focused in Mecha Marksman), Observation: Adept, Persuade: Expert, Pilot: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/2, Driven, Sexy Voice/2

1ST SERGEANT TEPA

Chief Mechanic, Echo Company

It's been sixteen years since Tapa attended his first year studying arcanotech engineering at the University of Karlsruhe in Germany. He always had a knack for wrapping his mind around complex theories and seeing clearly the potential for the practical application of those theories. He was among the first of his generation to embrace a future that had no ties to the military. Ever since Tapa became acquainted with the work of the Ashcroft Foundation his greatest dream was to become one of its most influential scientists.

Unfortunately Tapa's acceptance into the University of Karlsruhe came only five short years after the end of the First Arcanotech War. Fear and bigotry against the Nazzadi spread quietly through the student body. As much as acceptance was preached on the surface, it was difficult for Tapa to escape the silent blame he received in hostile stares and abrupt exclusions.

The Migou invasion of Earth awoke in him a clear desire to prove himself to Humans. He joined the New Earth Government military, though he still hopes to one day find his future within the halls of the Ashcroft Foundation.

Virtue/Flaw: Energetic/Obtuse

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Perception 7

Noteworthy Skills: Arcanotechnician: Expert, Arcanotech Engineer: Adept, Computers: Expert, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept, Marksman: Adept, Observation: Adept, Technician: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Common Sense, Eidetic Memory

LT. COLONEL BRATA

Commander 2nd Battalion, 56th Mecha Division

Brata was created in a cloning vat. He now knows that his first memories were that of a young mech pilot sent to wage war against an alien species known as Humans. Many Humans died at his hands and he was brutally efficient at the lethal task he was bred to do. He was also among the first of the Nazzadi to understand the truth of the Migou and he gladly lent his voice to the growing movement toward peace.

However, peace was hard for Brata. The world of Humanity seemed strange and he just couldn't find a place to fit. Then his chance came to teach at the Nazza-Duhni Military Academy. He was successful to a point, but what he really needed was a war. It was the Migou who graciously gave Brata his chance.

The Lt. Colonel is a capable and serious leader, and the straight and powerful way he carries himself certainly makes an impression. Deep down, Brata is grateful to have a war to fight once again and a righteous one at that. His life has purpose now and he secretly hopes that this new purpose will never end.

Virtue/Flaw: Honorable/Impatient

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Perception 9, Presence 8, Tenacity 7

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Expert, Athletics: Adept, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Master, Marksman: Master, Observation: Expert, Survival: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Commendation/2, Fearless, Minor Empathy

2ND LT. CAFY

Mech Pilot, Bravo Company

Cafy tends to smile and then quickly look away. Her eyes glitter with emotion, yet at the same time she avoids conversations. Her hair is short and white except for the bangs she lets grow to cover a part of her face – no doubt to hide something of herself from the world.

However Cafy is respectful and supportive. She doesn't possess a rude bone in her body. A box of bandages, a cup of tea, or any other needed item might suddenly show up at a person's side. However, her deep-seated desire for validation often drives her to provide for others at the unhealthy sacrifice of herself. For the moment, she is fixed on Mallory Summers and has fallen in love with her. Her fear of rejection and her understanding that Mallory likes men binds her into a safe place of silence. That, however, does not prevent Cafy from doting her.

Virtue/Flaw: Respectful/Shy

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8, Perception 8

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Mecha Fighting), Marksman: Expert (Focused in Mecha Marksman), Observation: Adept, Stealth: Expert, Surveillance: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/1, Compulsive Behavior, Lucky

2ND LT. FAMIDA

Mech Pilot, Bravo Company

Famida's young life was always awkward. Take a young gangly Nazzadi teenager and put him in a gym class at school. More often than not, that kid would be one of the last to be picked since nobody wants a beanpole on their team. Famida used to long for a chance to prove himself to the world. That chance came when he chose to join the service.

Famida found that he had a knack for piloting mecha. As a bonus, sitting in the cockpit made him just as big and powerful as everyone else. What an amazing discovery that was. Since then, he has developed a reputation as a pilot with guts. However, the inner burning need to prove himself makes him jump into dangerous situations far too often.

Virtue/Flaw: Fearless/Impetuous

Experience: Inexperienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 7, Perception 7

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Novice, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept (Focused in Mecha Fighting), Marksman: Adept (Focused in Mecha Marksman), Observation: Novice, Streetwise: Novice, Survival: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Fearless, Habit/1, Impetuous, Skinny

2ND LT. ELI MCWILLIAMS

Security Officer, 2nd Battalion

There are those that look a bit sideways at McWilliams whenever he goes on repeatedly about the honor of the Battalion. Though his loyalty is appreciated, his over-developed sense of devotion sometimes rubs people the wrong way. His military spit-n-polish is superb, however, though some soldiers like to poke fun at him behind his back.

McWilliams is a very capable soldier whose dedication to duty means that he will always do the best he can. Any quirks he might exhibit from time to time are just things that his senior commanders hope will diminish with seasoning.

Virtue/Flaw: Courteous/Unimaginative

Experience: Inexperienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 6, Perception 7, Tenacity 7

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Novice, Armed Fighting: Adept, Communications: Novice, Dodge: Novice, Education: Adept, Fighting: Adept, Law Enforcement: Novice, Marksman: Adept, Observation: Novice, Survival: Novice

Noteworthy Qualities: Code/1, Fanatical/1, Fast, Wary



Enrico breathed deeply and took in the damp earthy air. It was a beautiful night in Torino, a rainy spring night. His wife thought he was crazy for wanting to walk the grounds when it was so chilly, but the cold air did Enrico good. It cleared his head, not that he had much to worry about – besides the ever-present threat of the war in Eastern Europe. But that was miles away from the Trovatelli villa and tonight was his youngest grandson's birthday.

The first thing that struck Enrico as odd was that Bianca hadn't texted him once to come in from the cold. She was too young to worry so much. But perhaps he would also worry if his spouse was more than twenty years older than he. He suspected that she was busy cooking for young Nico's party. They could have easily catered, but Bianca had insisted. It was family.

The second thing that struck him as odd was that he no longer heard Mario. The guard always insisted on making sure he went with Enrico on his walks, to protect him from some imagined dangers. But Mario was very good at his job, so Enrico humored him, and the man always trailed discretely far behind. Tonight was no different. However, as far as he could make out, there was no one with him. Perhaps Mario finally stopped worrying and let him be. That would be good. Life is too short to spend it worrying.

Enrico had his walks perfectly timed, so he knew it was time to head back to the main house for the party. It was too bad his sweet Alessandra wouldn't be there until late. She was volunteering with the refugees in the arcology. Such a big heart, his youngest daughter.



Enrico walked through the giant wooden double-doors and hung his coat in the foyer. Normally, one of the servants would be there to greet him, but everyone was busy with the party. The smell of Bianca's cooking permeated the main house and it was a lovely smell. The family recipes that she was bringing to life tonight were treasures in and of themselves, not unlike the many precious objects that adorned the villa.

Making his way to the kitchen, Enrico noticed the third odd thing tonight. Things were uncharacteristically quiet. No excited children. No impassioned conversation over the hot stoves. Now Enrico was starting to worry himself. He walked faster now.

The kitchen was empty. Things in pots cooked over open flames and things in pans baked in the oven. But there was no sign of Bianca or his older daughter Ornella or any of the servants.

"Bianca, my love?" called Enrico. He waited, but there was no response. "Bianca?" he called again, this time louder. Again, nothing.

He took his peek out of his pocket and called Mario. It was then that he noticed something on the floor. At first, he thought someone had spilled wine. But it only took a minute for Enrico to realize that it didn't look right for wine. It was blood. A great pool of it, more than even a serious cut. Someone had died here.

Shock and panic descended on Enrico. He raced through the dining room and down the hall. At the end of the hall was Mario, staring lifelessly at the ceiling, his throat slit ear to ear. Enrico lost his footing on the stone floor as he carelessly ran through the man's blood, sliding into the main sitting room and unceremoniously landing on his behind.

Something laughed a wet, gurgling laugh. It spoke with a terrible voice, thick with alien accent. "The monkey is graceful, yes?"

Recovering from his fall, Enrico looked up to see the face of who - or what - had invaded his ancestral home. The thing that had spoken walked like a man and dressed like a man, but it did not look like a man. It had slimy gray-green skin with huge black saucer eyes. Gills pumped on its neck as it cruelly laughed again. It made Enrico's blood run cold and it was not alone.

Several others, some more man than thing, some more thing than man, stood near him. Some were holding Bianca and Ornella, others holding several of the female servants, and still others holding Nico and the other children. None struggled - the creatures held long wicked knives against them, promising death for resistance. But that was not the worst of the scene. Several of Mario's men were here, slit open or gutted, and one of the things sadistically held up Salvatore's mutilated corpse. Enrico's only son was dead.

The magnitude of the situation could not make its way entirely into his mind. Shock and disbelief prevented that. He could only sit there in a pool of human blood and stare. The hideous thing that was in charge approached him. "Monkey, you are Enrico, yes? This family's patriarch?"

Enrico couldn't answer at first. Then the thing backhanded him across the face, knocking him clear over. The pain, the blood, and the broken teeth brought him back to reality. It leered down at him. "Answer." Enrico nodded.

Two of the creatures grabbed him by the shoulders and picked him up. They followed the thing-in-charge as they whisked through the house and down the stairs to the basement. Straight to the vault, as if they knew exactly what they were looking for.

Staring at the giant metal door, rife with security, they stopped. The thing leaned in very close as it spoke. "Monkey, you would like to live, yes? You would like what is left of your family to live, yes? Then you will open this door and give us what we want inside."

Enrico nodded. The things put him down and he went through the ritual to open the family vault. Code, palm, voice, retina. The door opened and the things that carried him quickly entered.

The thing still with him laughed. "You are a foolish monkey. However, your females are nice. Perhaps we will take them before we go." It smiled wickedly.

Enrico had been partly right. Life may be too short to worry, but there are things in this world worth worrying about. That was something he had forgotten. And that was something he would not live to regret.

chapter four

deadly currents

Though the New Earth Government quietly covers up the activities of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, they cannot deny that something is afoot. The Cult conquers islands and coastlines, setting up breeding grounds and staging points for its agents to go out in the world, searching for things unknown. Perhaps a policy of containment is not the best idea. If only the government at large were more aware of what the cult was up to.

This story begins with a venerable Italian family, in whose vault sits things of unimaginable power. However, the Trovatelli's are blissfully unaware of the potency of their treasures, holding onto them as simple family heirlooms. It is this ignorance that ultimately leads to their demise.

Through the Church of All, the Esoteric Order comes for the Trovatelli's and steals an ancient R'lyehan mask designed to help them in their quest to awaken their lost city. Enter Special Services, a secret branch of the New Earth Government that deals with the extremely weird and occult-based threats. An investigation begins that will take them to places of which they never dreamed.

If all goes as planned, the Esoteric Order will reawaken a lost R'lyehan temple that holds important secrets. It is not only a moral victory for the Order, it is also a huge step towards once again bringing the city of R'lyeh back into this world and awakening the sleeping god Cthulhu.

The question is, can they be stopped? Can the only people who know of the threat infiltrate the Esoteric Order so fully that they find themselves deep under the Atlantic Ocean? Those are questions on which perhaps the fate of the world rests.

THE TROVATELLI FAMILY

An Italian family whose wealth dates back to the Roman Empire, the Trovatelli's have always been very private. Most of the family still lives in the city of Torino, where they have lived for generations. If one were to search back through the area's history, he would find that the Trovatelli's have always been well-mannered, quiet, and generous contributors to the community. One would also find that they like to travel and are often away from home.

What people don't know is that Niccolo Trovatelli, who lived in the 1700's, was a merchant with diverse interests. One of his personal passions was the collecting of lost artifacts and tomes, of items of occult power and significance. Not that he ever had any interest in the occult or desired to use the objects for his personal gain. Niccolo just knew that these things were rare and coveted – and that it was a dangerous adventure to acquire them – and that was enough for him.

Niccolo's passion carried down through several generations before it fizzled out in the face of science. Over the last couple hundred years, the Trovatelli's lost their interest in their forebears' collection. It has gathered dust in the family vault underneath their palatial estate, in and amongst other items of untold value. To the Trovatelli's, they are just more valuable things in their per-

sonal sea of valuable things. They have never shared such items because they don't even know what they have – and if they did, they wouldn't want the Office of Internal Security taking them either.

If a learned occultist found his way into the Trovatelli vault, he would most likely soil himself. The treasures there would make even a Child of Chaos blush. Rare translations of arcane texts, artifacts that are capable of otherworldly powers, and more, all sit unused and unappreciated. There are even spells in that vault that have been lost to man for ages.

And it is here that something sits that will help guide the Esoteric Order on their path.

THE WAY TO R'LYEH

Though the Esoteric Order of Dagon is guilty of many atrocities, including attacking passenger transports, occupying coastal villages, and setting up rape camps, they are not interested in engaging in a war. Everything they do is for one purpose and one purpose only. They seek to find their holy city to bring it back to this world once again, so that they can resurrect their infamous deity.

Most learned occultists refer to R'lyeh as sunken, as a city that has fallen beneath the waves of the ocean, much like the legends of Atlantis. In fact, it is likely that the legends of Atlantis come from the sinking of R'lyeh, somehow having entered the earliest sentient hominids' myths. It has often been mistaken that R'lyeh was somewhere in the Pacific Ocean but, as the legends of Atlantis speak, the Esoteric Order of Dagon believes it to be in the Atlantic.

R'lyeh was, at one time long ago, a physical place. This alien island was the home of Cthulhu and his children when they ruled the prehistoric planet. Legends say, without being specific as to why, that Cthulhu went to sleep in his unholy crypt and that the city sunk beneath the waves. As far as mortal life on this planet goes, it would have been easy for us to overlook it – after all, how many Deep One cities have been hidden from prying eyes? However, the Esoteric Order, with their command of the sea, would have already found it if all they were looking for was a place.

What some occult scholars posit and what few realize is that R'lyeh didn't just sink under the ocean, it also shifted dimensions. That's why the Esoteric Order can't find it – they don't have the necessary dimensional coordinates to be able to facilitate R'lyeh's return. They have an idea of the physical space the city will occupy upon its return, but they still don't know where in the grand scheme of the cosmos to look for it.

Fortunately for them, and unfortunately for the rest of the world, the true location of R'lyeh can be found. It exists in legends, old stories, and in the judicious use of certain powerful artifacts. Perhaps even worse is that the remains of R'lyehan civilization on this planet did not all fade to the sands of time. Some of them still exist, magically preserved, in the hidden places of the

world. Should the Esoteric Order find some of those lost places, they will not only reclaim a piece of their legacy, they will jump forward in their goals by leaps and bounds.

This story is about just that – in 2086, the Esoteric Order of Dagon will find a place long lost to them, and it will open up a pathway from which there is no turning back. It very well could be the beginning of the end.

ACT I: FAMILY TREASURES

Goals: To introduce the Characters to the story. To investigate the break-in at the Trovatelli family villa. To introduce New Earth Government Special Services. To lead the Characters to the Esoteric Order of Dagon.

Setting: the Trovatelli family villa in Torino, Italy; various places in the city of Torino, Italy, most likely including a riverfront tavern.

Cast: *Enrico Trovatelli* – Veteran, Human male, early-sixties, patriarch of the wealthy old-money Trovatelli family. He is a genteel man, pleasant and polite, who is very devoted to his family. He has no idea of the occult significance of the things in his family vault.

Bianca Trovatelli – Experienced, Human female, early-forties, Enrico's second wife and mother to Alessandra. She is a mother hen who makes sure those around her are taken care of, to the point of worry. She shares Enrico's dedication to the extended Trovatelli family.

Alessandra Trovatelli – Inexperienced, Human female, late teens, Enrico and Bianca's only daughter. A modern day princess, she has a generous heart. Both her looks and demeanor often lead people to describe her as an angel.

Rodrigo Esposito – Inexperienced, Human male, early-twenties, a handsome, nouveau-riche youth. Some days he is deep and connected, others eurotrash. He is Alessandra's favorite boyfriend, but he has been sucked into the Church of All.

Agent Christen – Veteran, Human female, mid-forties, the Special-Agent-in-Charge for New Earth Government Special Services. She is the kind of person whose presence speaks of authority. She is efficient, though not heartless.

Agent Cyrdova – Experienced, Nazzadi male, early-thirties, a parapsychic investigator for Special Services. He is ruthlessly efficient and bitter and caustic most of the time. Physically, he is nondescript.

Faustino Vargas – Experienced, Deep One Hybrid male, early-thirties, Rodrigo's primary contact within the Church of All with regards to these murders. He is an unnerving man of average build, though a little short. He has to dress to conceal his changing black eyes and gills.

Local Police – select officers of the law in the city of Torino who begin to investigate the murders at the Trovatelli villa.

Office of Internal Security Agents – select agents of the OIS who are called in to investigate the Trovatelli murders when the attackers are determined not to be mortal.

Special Services Agents – select field agents and sorcerers who are brought in with Agent Christen to secure and investigate the Trovatelli murders, as well as research things as the story progresses.

Getting Involved

This story is most easily used if your Characters are some kind of investigators, whether occult, personal, or government. See the Weaving Characters section on p. 83 for suggestions on bringing different groups of Characters into these events. The most important thing is that they find themselves in or summoned to the city of Torino in the Italian New Earth Government state shortly before these events.

A City With History

Torino, or Turin as it is known to much of the world, is a city with more than 2000 years of history. Originally founded as a Roman military camp, today Torino is a smaller-sized arology with less than a million residents. However, many people still cling to the area's traditions and choose to live outside the arcology in ancestral homes or estates or in the old city, which was not badly damaged during the First Arcanotech War.

The city is located in northwest Italy and is surrounded by the Alps to the west and the north. Four major rivers run through Torino – the Po, the Dora Riparia, the Stura di Lanzo, and the Sangone. While most of Italy is known for its Mediterranean climate, Torino is more continental. These events take place in May, which is the city's rainiest month, with temperatures in the high 40's to low 50's (Fahrenheit).

For the most part, Torino is a quiet city – at least as quiet as any city can be in the Strange Aeon. It is not a major hub of either government or industry and, with the exception of being host to refugees, is not of strategic military significance. The local police keep the city's crime rate low. Torino is a city that boasts the distinction of primarily just being someplace that people live their lives. This fits in nicely with the historical attitude of the Italian people.

The Trovatelli family lives just outside the old city in a beautiful ancestral villa. The main house is tucked far back from the road, obscured by trees, bushes, and flowers. Despite the quiet nature of the area, the Trovatelli's are old money and have invested heavily in security. A small militia of armed guards keep watch through security cameras and trained dogs roam the grounds. However, the villa has no mystical protection because, ironically, the current generation of Trovatelli's don't trust magic. All this security is great for show, but it does them little good on the night of Tuesday, May 14th, 2086.

There are many things for which the Esoteric Order of Dagon is searching. So many artifacts of R'lyeh have been lost to time or buried somewhere in some collection, their owners oblivious to what they have in their possession. Fortunately for the cult, its mortal eyes and ears from the Church of All are always on the look-out for anything that might be that for which they seek. In the Spring of 2086, it pays off in what may be the most significant way yet.

Though the entire extended family lives at the villa, the current patriarch of the Trovatelli clan is Enrico Trovatelli, a grim, but polite and well-mannered blue-blood. In his early 60's, Enrico's first wife Tessa was killed in the First Arcanotech War, and he has re-married a much younger woman named Bianca. He and Tessa had two children, Ornella and Salvatore, who are both in their thirties. Enrico has had only one child by Bianca, Alessandra, who is only a teenager. He dotes on his young daughter and she is, in every definition of the word, spoiled. Fortunately for the world, Alessandra has still been ingrained with the spirit of old money and is not what some might call eurotrash. However, it is through her that the Esoteric Order of Dagon is brought into the Trovatelli's lives.

There is a small but active cell of the Church of All (see p. 14 of *Dark Passions*) in Torino. Alessandra's favorite boyfriend (she has three), Rodrigo Esposito, has been involved with the Church for a while now. He has brought Alessandra to several meetings and she likes what she sees on the surface. Rodrigo is now far more into it and has recently begun taking Harmony. Last month he was elevated to the Third Circle. After one of his soultrips, Rodrigo commented that he'd seen something like the doctored R'lyehan imagery in the Trovatelli family collection. Suddenly, Rodrigo became the center of the Church's attention and their favorite son.

Rodrigo has now been indoctrinated to believe that many holy artifacts were stolen from the angelic Deep Ones by the surface dwellers in ages gone by. He has been tasked with taking pictures of the Trovatelli family's treasures and particularly with gaining access to their vault. This latter task has proved the most challenging. He's tried to get Alessandra to indulge in sexual escapades in the family vault, tried simply sneaking his way down there, but what finally worked was showing sincere interest to Enrico and throwing out a few knowledgeable facts. The old man's ego kicked in and Rodrigo finally got his personal tour of the vault. He didn't get to take pictures of the treasures within, but Rodrigo does have a good memory.

A few descriptions later and the Church knew that they were on to something big. Enter the Esoteric Order of Dagon. A plan quickly emerged. Rodrigo would, through conditioning and dream manipulation, tell them everything about the security and layout of the Trovatelli villa. Hybrids and Deep Ones would infiltrate the city by travelling underwater, through tributaries from the Mediterranean into the Po River. Then, the Hybrid and Deep One team would infiltrate the estate and raid the vault. Each of the team would be protected by magic and almost impossible

to detect by anything but direct observation by mortal senses. They would be armed, cold-blooded, and ruthless, their eye on nothing but the prize.

The Trovatelli's never had a chance.

Special What?

On the night of May 14th, the Esoteric Order of Dagon strikes. There is only one survivor. Rodrigo made sure that Alessandra wasn't home, even though he didn't know that the Deep Ones would murder everyone in cold blood.

It is right about here that the Characters enter the story, however it is that you've decided that they become involved. Local authorities are the first to respond and it doesn't take them long to discover that many of the victims were ripped apart by something not quite mortal. The Office of Internal Security shows up not long thereafter. The investigation has time to turn up a lot of dead bodies, some gruesome surveillance footage that doesn't show the attackers, and the plundered vault. Then, Alessandra comes home. After one justifiably large hysterical outburst, medics sedate her heavily.

Investigations will go on for a while – it takes days to truly process a crime scene of this magnitude. However, it isn't long before something even more out of the ordinary happens. Several black Zephyr Enforcers fly in and while this might not normally be unusual, no one knows these guys are coming. There's much confusion as the Special-Agents-in-Charge try to figure out if anyone is expecting more help. Then, the vehicles land and the people inside emerge, clad from head to toe in black, wearing unusual black overcoats. There's an unmistakable air of authority coming from each of them, along with a noticeable lack of identification.

Naturally, the SAIC will be the first in line to greet them, having absolutely no idea who the heck they are. One of the men (or women) in black approaches him. She is in her mid-thirties, raven-haired, and striking with ice blue eyes with the tips of arcane-looking tattoos poking up over her collar and out from the ends of her sleeves. The woman flashes the SAIC an unusual-looking federal badge and identifies herself as Agent Christen, NEG Special Services. If the Characters scratch their head at this point, they won't be the only ones. No one, including the SAIC, has ever heard of Special Services. When he voices this, Agent Christen icily tells him that he hasn't now either. She and her team spread out and quickly take over the investigation, sending many of the agents already in process home. The SAIC makes a furious call to his superiors only to be told to shut up and cooperate.

See the Special Services section of this chapter for more information on who these guys are and how they operate, starting on p. 86. Insert as many Special Services agents as you want here and feel free to make them as intimidating and freaky as you want – after all, they are all sorcerers or para-psychics of some kind. They wield broad sweeping authority and are in charge.

Special Services Investigators enter the building and begin to use psychometry and retrocognition to piece together what actually happened. An Nazzadi agent with manipulative powers will approach Alessandra and use empathic projection to calm her down, followed by the judicious use of the probe ability to get into her head and sift through her memories. Once apprised of the situation as the OIS knows it, Agent Christen will take a team down to the Trovatelli vault. Even more so than the OIS, these Special Services agents know what they are looking at and they are not happy about it.

It isn't long before Agent Cyrdova, the manipulative para-psychic field agent, comes down to share some interesting news with Agent Christen. First, he has an idea who may know who is responsible for this – Alessandra's favorite boyfriend. Second, he has an image of the vault from the girl's mind. He can now look through the vault with a decent chance of figuring out what the perpetrators were after.

An hour later, Special Services has a full dossier on Rodrigo and Agent Cyrdova has a pretty good idea of what was stolen. It is a unknown mask of clearly ancient origin. Anyone deeply in the know (who succeeds at a Hard Occult Test) can guess that the design of which he speaks is R'lyehan, made of a black organic material with piscine and cephalopod resemblances.

Upon these revelations, Agent Christen gathers up everyone who isn't an investigator. It's time to phone in for research support and to apprehend Rodrigo Esposito. However it is that the Characters have distinguished themselves or are a part of all this, they are now along for the ride.

The Forgotten Isle

It is not difficult for an organization like Special Services to find Rodrigo Esposito, even though Alessandra has been trying to contact him all night to no avail. The Church of All may have been protecting him, but they are far more excited about their new acquisitions. Thus, Rodrigo is going to go home at some point, figuring that he has all kinds of alibis for what went on tonight. That is where the Characters will snag him. You can feel free to add in an exciting foot chase through the streets of Torino if your Characters are getting itchy for some action. He'll surrender once the Characters have clear advantage or he feels that he will be hurt. Rodrigo is a lover, not a fighter.

Under normal New Earth Government law, it is a violation of mortal rights to involuntarily invade a suspect's mind through magical or para-psychic means. It's the equivalent of an old-school lie detector test – the person in question must submit of his own free will. Fortunately, Special Services does not operate within the normal purview of the law and as such has no such restriction. The minute the Characters bring in Rodrigo, Agent Cyrdova will strap him to a chair and proceed to sift through his brain in a much less gentle fashion than his treatment of Alessandra. There may be screaming involved as Rodrigo's memories are peeled open. The efficiency of Special Services should be something to be awed.

Agent Cyrdova comes away knowing that the Esoteric Order of Dagon is involved, which frankly is something that the group should have already figured out from the evidence at the Trovatelli villa. However, he also comes away with a name, face, and possible whereabouts of Rodrigo's primary Hybrid buddy. The search for Faustino Vargas is on. Of course, he has no legal identity or residence and is fundamentally a ghost in the machine, so the search will be a little more old school.

You can make the hunt for Faustino as simple or difficult as you'd like. If your players are itching for another hunt, make it so they have to search many places and maybe smack up a few low-lives to find him. If not, he's in the same boat as the rest of the Esoteric Order around here – so excited that he's not being as careful as he should be. He cannot be allowed to jump into a river in any event, because he will be very difficult to follow. In the end, Faustino is one the Hybrids left behind to clean up any loose ends, with a less-than-desirable and less-than-clean room above a riverfront tavern. Faustino has begun his transformation and wears turtle-necks to hide his gills and a hat to shadow his bordering on unnatural black eyes. Most people are just unnerved by him, but anyone who knows what to look for won't be fooled for long.

Once your Characters have captured Faustino, Agent Cyrdova will go to work yet again. If the events of the day happen quickly, you may have to sit on the Hybrid for a while as Cyrdova's orgone regenerates. Again, the probing isn't polite or kind and it is a wrestling match for the Agent – Faustino is very willful. However, it becomes clear from the Hybrid's mind that the mask is on its way to a small island in the Mediterranean, not far off the coast of Italy. Utilizing his peek, Agent Cyrdova has a location within ten minutes – the island of Gorgona in the Tuscan Archipelago. Gorgona was once an agricultural penal colony, where prisoners lived uncaged to farm the land, strictly isolated from the outside world. Since the advent of the Aeon War, the island has been widely abandoned, home only to a few radical survivalists who wish to live on their own terms. During its inhabited days, it was a wildlife preserve as well, with 90% of the island still in its native state. These days, that number is more like 98%.

Of course, Gorgona also the perfect place for the Esoteric Order of Dagon – isolated in the middle of a large, deep body of water, with no cause for the New Earth Government to come snooping. They overtook the island and its residents years ago and have been using it as a secret base ever since.

Meanwhile, it's up to you how you want the mask researched. If your Characters are occult capable, then maybe they are part of the team. If not, Special Services has people for this type of thing – people who are skirting the edge of madness, but remarkably effective. The mask is, like most things of its ilk, not something that is so easy to track down. Succeeding at a Hard Extended Occult Test and a Hard Extended Research Test will yield results. However, in the end, there doesn't appear to be much to find. Research confirms that the piece is of R'lyehan design and that masks of its kind are ritual in nature and ages old. One question

researchers have is whether the mask is designed to be worn by a human, or if it is meant for a more monstrous wearer. That fact alone will help point them in the right direction.

ACT II: THE LOST WAY

Goals: To find and infiltrate the Esoteric Order of Dagon; to steal a mech and follow the Esoteric Order's foray; to discover, unlock, and awaken a long-lost R'lyehan temple; to find the thing for which the Esoteric Order is searching.

Setting: the island of Gorgona in the Mediterranean Sea; the secret Deep One base; the open Atlantic Ocean and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge; a lost and forgotten R'lyehan temple.

Cast: *Agent Christen* – from Act I.

Agent Cyrdova – from Act I.

Special Services Agents – from Act I.

Shull – Veteran, Deep One female, a skilled and powerful witch in charge of the secret Esoteric Order forces on Gorgona. Though tall and thin, she carries an imposing presence. She is a tough, but fair, mistress.

Cl'yca – Veteran, Spawn, a high priest within the Esoteric Order of Dagon. It moves in a sure and deliberate fashion. A powerful sorcerer, it also treats Shull as an equal.

The Esoteric Order of Dagon – select Deep Ones, Hybrids, Spawn, and a few mortal cultists who are part of the secret Gorgona outpost. They protect the island and some join Shull and Cl'yca on their journey to the Mid-Atlantic.

In Plain Sight

The first obvious question is how to get to Gorgona quickly without being detected by the Esoteric Order. That answer lies with Faustino's boat, moored near his riverfront room, which he used to bring supplies to the island. It isn't fancy, but it will carry up to eight people without looking suspicious, including the Characters. With Faustino's markings, they most likely won't have to worry about alerting the Esoteric Order and will be able to get to the island without too much trouble. However, they will have to be undercover when they do it, posing as members of the Church of All – new recruits or from another nearby city.

Feel free to make the trip to Gorgona nail-biting. You might throw false shapes in the water or have the Hybrids on the island call and question them as they arrive. It will be suspicious if they don't land at a dock and if they all arrive together. Agent Christen will split the group up – her and Agent Cyrdova with the Characters in one team and the other Special Services agents in another. She will drop the Special Services team down the shore and land with the other team at the dock. Once the Characters have successfully arrived, it is time to get the lay of the land.

Most of Gorgona is wild, but the small village is a flurry of activity. Something is clearly going on, which is good news for the Characters. The forces of the Esoteric Order are too wound up to notice a small team infiltrating by stealth, and believe it unlikely that anyone would be suicidal enough to do what the Characters are doing. They are also leaving soon and know that the New Earth Government won't bomb an unoccupied island. Furthermore, once the Characters get situated, they'll notice that Hybrids are handling other new Church of All recruits, which gives the Characters even more of an excuse to be there.

From the outside, the Esoteric Order has done a good job of keeping up appearances. It doesn't look like a secret EOD base on casual inspection. However, the Characters are going to be blending in with the activity and the disease will show. There are many Hybrids, their differences barely concealed. Deep Ones lurk in the shadows and behind closed doors. One of the buildings has been converted into a Dagonite temple. There is even a "sacred" space for Deep Ones and initiated cultists to copulate and a nursery with a few Hybrid children. However, the Deep Ones and Hybrids speak R'lyehan to each other, only switching to English when addressing a mortal they know is ignorant of the language.

Odds are that the Characters are not used to seeing Deep Ones, Hybrids, or being behind the dark curtain. Fear Tests will most certainly be called for, with a Fear Factor of 12 for the Deep Ones and 8 for the Hybrids. Now would not be a good time to freak out. However, don't have them make Tests every time they see a Deep One or Hybrid – just the first time or anytime something unusual happens. Instead, when they are all done with the island and on to what comes next, have your Characters make Challenging Insanity Tests, the failure of which provides one Insanity Point.

One Deep One stands out above the rest. She is tall and thin, dressed in nothing but a simple black cloak, cowl pulled over her head and face. Regardless, she is an imposing presence and when she speaks, people quickly obey. This is Shull and she is calm while others around her are excited and bustling about.

When dusk falls, the activity stops. Everyone gathers on the beach, where Shull is waiting for them, mask in hand. She disrobes and puts on the mask – which fits her perfectly, obviously designed for Deep Ones. Those in attendance begin to pray as she wades into the water, sitting in meditation just below the waves. After an hour, she emerges from the water, removes the mask, and starts to issue orders. Agent Christen will translate – Shull has just received a vision from the sleeping god and the temple is now open to them. This news excites the island's inhabitants even more and preparations begin in earnest.

As night falls, Deep Ones, Hybrids, and a few cultists start putting on what looks like pilot suits. The best thing the Characters can do is to take out a couple cultists and take their place. It's time for them to grab a diving mask, a rebreather, fins, and a weight belt and to jump in the water with everyone else. They

may also want to arm themselves with the common New Earth Government weapons that are laying around, as well as grabbing a few satchel charges.

Infiltration

Only a few of the Characters will be able to infiltrate these proceedings. If you only have two or three Characters in your group, Agents Christen and Cyrdova will join them, along with a couple more field agents. If you have four or more Characters, only Agents Christen and Cyrdova will join. The other agents will be sent to continue investigation of the island and to get a call out to Special Services with an update.

If the Characters don't choose to take out a few pilots on the surface, they may instead feel that it is more to their advantage to confront them underwater. Stealth ops under the waves could be cool, but they will have to be careful to go after a mortal cultist – taking on a Hybrid in their native environment could be very bad.

Following the other divers into deeper water, the Characters will see it down on the sea floor. Lit up by glowing phosphorescence are Esoteric Order war machines of all kinds. There is one Leviathan, and a bunch of Merrows, Selkies, and Sirens. There is another surprise waiting for the Characters – re-designs of the Hydra and Mudskipper, both of which are represented (find them on p. 82). It is up to you how big a force you want it to be. It could be small and intimate or it could be large, depending upon how many Characters you will have to conceal within.

The Characters will have to grab themselves suits of Selkie or Siren powered armor, unless they are feeling particularly audacious. Anyone stealing a Hydra had better speak R'lyehan or it will be particularly suspicious. Now is the time to stuff any satchel charges or other important gear into the storage spaces of the mecha. Once they are situated, the powered armor will be loaded into stolen M-15 Ranger AAFV's (Amphibious Armed Fighting Vehicle). Each transport a half dozen suits of powered armor, which will allow them to keep up with the much faster Leviathan and Hydras. Shull will simply cling to the Leviathan as they take off towards the cold Atlantic Ocean.

As the force speeds around the Rock of Gibraltar, they are joined by the high priests of the Esoteric Order. A pair of Spawn float out of the darkness and fall into formation, grabbing onto the Hydras and the Leviathan to keep up. Fear Tests are appropriate, against a Fear Factor of 22 – they are simply terrifying. It is desperately important that the Characters keep their cool here as the alternative may lead to death. If they do freak out, they can always claim that they are new and this is the first time they've seen a Spawn in person, or that they were simply overcome by religious ecstasy at seeing one of the most holy. There are ways out of it, but they'll have to be clever. It helps a lot if those overcome have at least a rudimentary knowledge of R'lyehan.

One of the Spawn is clearly the superior. It moves in a slow and deliberate way that is especially creepy. Its name is Cl'yca and it

is a ranking priest within the Esoteric Order. Shull and it are the ones calling the shots now.

The Temple

The journey through the dark black ocean is long and takes many hours (like a full day plus). Hopefully the Characters remembered to hook up the waste reclamation units in their mecha or it will be a messy and uncomfortable trip. Anyone who isn't a trained mecha pilot may have this problem.

Since the Esoteric Order rules the oceans, there aren't many threats with which the Characters will have to concern themselves. However, throughout their journey, the masters of the Esoteric Order will issue orders to the Characters (or possibly try to engage in small talk). They will need to be sharp to maintain their cover. The Deep Ones and Hybrids (particularly those in advanced stages of transformation) will first address the Characters in R'lyehan. Lower the Degree for any Test to fit in by one category if a Character speaks that occult language. If not, they will assume that the Character is an initiate who has not yet been taught. The Performance (Acting), Misdirect, Savoir-Faire (at a higher Difficulty), and possibly Intimidate skills will be useful for playing the part, as well as some clever role playing – at least enough to keep everyone off their backs.

Finally, the group comes to a spot a couple thousand miles south of the Azores along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and slows. The Leviathan carrying Shull takes the lead, followed closely by Cl'yca. After a few minutes, the sea witch detaches from the Leviathan, swimming along the ridge, wearing the mask. She leads the group down until they are thousands of yards under the surface.

There, recessed into the rock, is a gigantic alien seal. It is twice the size of the Spawn, more than 60 feet high and equally as wide. It is made of a greenish-black stone that is clearly not from the surrounding area, and it is covered with R'lyehan markings and glyphs. Whatever the Esoteric is searching for, they seem to have found it.

Shull and a small group of unarmored Deep Ones approach the seal. As the seal senses the approach of the mask, the glyphs begin to glow with a pale green light. The sea witch and her minions take positions around the seal and tap out rhythms while gesturing. It's clear they're undertaking some sort of ritual. They reach several points where they spill blood into the water, creating a thick mess cloud. Overall, their ritual takes about an hour from start to finish.

However, the blood attracts attention. A giant White Death comes to investigate, but seems to recognize other children of the sea. It calmly circles the group. Even so, its appearance calls for further Fear Tests – this primal ocean predator has a Fear Factor of 16. The good news is that no one will blame them for panicking, because apparently the sharks scare most everyone the first time. In fact, such a reaction might garner a chuckle or whatever passes as one from this crowd.



The seal eventually begins to shimmer and gently fades out of existence, opening the way into the ridge. Still wearing the mask, Shull and her contingent enter first, the rest of the group not far behind. The tunnel inside is water-filled and long, but more than wide-enough to accommodate all of the creatures and mecha, who disembark from the Rangers. It is also clearly constructed, as it is mostly smooth and proportioned.

After a short journey through the dark tunnel, the group emerges into a gigantic air-filled cavern. Something in the place recognizes the presence of the Spawn and the Deep Ones. It slowly comes to life with an eerie light, as phosphorescent surfaces begin to glow. What the Characters see will take their breath away, magnificent and horrible.

Inside this cave is long-lost or long-abandoned R'lyehan temple. This is a true-to-life slice of the secret occult world right there before their eyes. The architecture is alien and the temple is surprisingly large, filling most of the cavern almost all the way to the ceiling. It is made from a similar stone to the seal, rising in giant spires and pillars. It is decorated with giant bas-reliefs, hieroglyphs, and monstrous statues, all testament to the R'lyehan civilization of the Spawn and Deep Ones. There is something in the angles and shapes of the architecture that does not work with the way mortals perceive and there are parts of the city that seem to stretch to places out of existence.

The Spawn and the Deep Ones practically titter with excitement. To them, this is homecoming. This is a piece of their past that will help lead them into the future. The Characters will have to fake their excitement and join in the celebration and exploration of the temple.

The time the Characters will be spending in the lost temple will tax their psyches. Before they leave, have each of the Characters make an Insanity Test against a Challenging Degree. Failing the Test gives the Character one Insanity Point.

Best Left Alone

Cl'yc'a and Shull make their way into the heart of the temple. They pass through a huge central chamber of worship, clearly designed to accommodate creatures the size of Spawn. Semi-organic lanterns hang from the high ceiling. The chamber is circular, organized around a central altar, engraved with R'lyehan images. Anyone who succeeds at this point at an Average Occult Test will be able to figure out that this place was created to worship the sleeping god Cthulhu. For all the Characters know, this place could very well be where Cthulhu is entombed – or a place to awaken him.

On the other side of the worship chamber, Shull finds another room. This one also has high ceilings with walls adorned in glyphs, but holds only a short, ornate pillar in the center. Wearing the mask, the sea witch approaches and touches the pillar.

The reaction is unexpected. The air electrifies and the pillar projects a most amazing image into the space above it. Glowing orbs litter the air, rotating until they hit a precise configuration and then stopping. It should be obvious that the orbs are stars and the patterns constellations, though maybe not constellations the Characters can recognize.

Shull stands in awe. The rest of the Esoteric Order is thrilled, as news of the discovery spreads through the ranks.

The Characters are unlikely to recognize this for what it truly is; they'll probably think it's some kind of map. They won't be entirely wrong. Determining its true purpose will require the Science: Physical skill, or possibly the Occult skill. Using Science will warrant a Challenging Degree, while Occult will warrant a Hard Degree. If the Characters can't figure it out for themselves, have Agent Christen step in to tell them.

What they are witnessing is a celestial map that shows the alignment of stars, combined with a countdown to when that configuration will happen again next. Based on what the Deep Ones are saying and how excited everyone is, they can also infer a few other things. This map is a dimensional window. It shows when in time the sunken city of R'lyeh will be in a place dimensionally that it can be brought into this world.

It doesn't give the Esoteric Order a where or a how, but it does give them a when. They now have a time-table and from the sound of things that time will be soon.

This is not knowledge that the New Earth Government wants the cult of the fish-god to have in their possession. The question is what to do next.

ACT III: WAY TOO DEEP

Goals: To prevent the Esoteric Order from returning to the world with the new knowledge they possess; to escape alive and return home with Special Services.

Setting: a lost and forgotten R'lyehan temple; the open Atlantic Ocean and Mid-Atlantic Ridge; the city of Torino, Italy.

Cast: *Agent Christen* – from Act I.

Agent Cyrdova – from Act I.

Special Services Agents – from Act I.

Shull – from Act II.

Cl'yca – from Act II.

The Esoteric Order of Dagon – from Act II.

No Stone Unturned

The Characters are in quite a position. It's clear that this information cannot make its way back to the world. It would, without a doubt, bring the forces of the Esoteric Order of Dagon one giant step closer to their goal – and our extinction.

There really isn't any hope of taking on the Esoteric Order's forces directly. The Characters are hopelessly out-gunned in this cavern and there are no reinforcements coming. Their best option is hiding in their storage compartments, or, if somehow explosives didn't make it into this equation, you may have the roof of

the cavern weakened and able to be brought down by a barrage of laser cannon blasts. Through this, someone might have the sense to mention that bringing down the roof of a cave that they are in is close to suicide. Time for a little heroism.

Placing the explosives can be easy, if the Characters time it properly. On the other hand, it can be extremely difficult to place them and look natural about it – or to put themselves in position to fire the requisite shots into the roof and walls. What is on their side is that everyone here is so in awe and so excited that they are not on their guard as they could be.

The trick, once the trap is set, is surviving. They are going to need a clear exit, because a place like this is going to come down around their ears fast.

Somewhere in all this, Shull gets wise to what the Characters are up to and confronts one or a group of them. It will be time for fast action, but make the lead-up as tense as possible.

The Final Gambit

The collapse of the temple sends a wave that forces everyone who was escaping in the tunnel through, violently shooting them out into the ocean. This will most likely include the Characters. However, the bad news is that it also contains the sea-witch and Cl'yca – and there's a White Death circling outside with which Shull can communicate. If either of them can return with the knowledge they possess, the Esoteric Order will be further in its goals that it has ever been.

Stopping the two will not be easy. Cl'yca will turn and attempt to delay the Characters. It will be covered in wards of whatever kind you wish to give it to make it dangerous, but most definitely a Ward of Corporal Protection (which functions as Integrity-scale on him) and a Ward Against Sorcery. As it engages the Characters, Shull will communicate with the White Death and attempt to hitch a ride into the depths as quickly as possible. It is up to the Characters to provide enough hassle that she can't do this – while avoiding the deadly jaws of the gigantic shark. If you have a bunch of players or your players have snagged bigger mecha, feel free to add another White Death or two to spice things up. This climactic fight should be hair-raising and intense.

Shull is also juiced up with wards and whatever enchanted items you need to give her so that she can survive and ultimately get away. She will eventually snag a ride on a prehistoric shark and swim far away at more than 50 mph. Once she escapes, Cl'yca and any remaining White Deaths will flee.

The Esoteric Order of Dagon has that for which they came. They are one step closer to R'lyeh.

The Cover-Up

In accordance with Special Services policy, it is time to cover everything up. The public will in no way be made aware of what really happened. Fortunately, there isn't much that has happened here that is going to be difficult to keep out of the news.

Alessandra Trovatelli winds up in a very posh exclusive facility that is run by a joint venture between Special Services and the Ashcroft Clinic. It will take her quite a bit of time to recover from her trauma. When she returns home, she is the sole heir to her family's fortune, but will move the estate into the Torino arcology. Alessandra is a tough cookie who will survive and get back to her life, albeit under a gag order that prevents her from talking about her family's murder.

As far as the news is concerned, the Trovatelli family met with disaster when a group of unbalanced thugs broke in to rob them blind. It is a tragedy, but one of mortal proportions that most people can understand. No one seems to examine this cover story too carefully, or any astute observer would have questions about how "thugs" could have made it past the Trovatelli's extensive security. Reporters or police investigators who dig too deep quickly find themselves reassigned. Those who persist are very quietly and subtly blackmailed until they back off permanently.

Compromised, the island of Gorgona will be abandoned by the Esoteric Order immediately. There won't be anything left when Special Services comes to clean them out – only the useless remains of their base. However, the New Earth Government will sweep the rest of the islands in the Mediterranean over the next several months to make sure the Esoteric Order isn't hiding anywhere else close by.

Unfortunately, the Characters will also be under a gag order, even if they work for the New Earth Government. They know way too much for the comfort of Special Services, so legally, as far as the Characters are concerned, nothing happened. They have nicely fabricated cover stories about their lives for the last few days given to them by Special Services and they are expected to stick with them. These events are a heck of a thing for them to have to keep to themselves.

ENDINGS

There are truly only two logical outcomes to this story: either the Characters stop the Esoteric Order of Dagon from returning to the world with their celestial map, or they don't and the Cult is armed with new and dangerous knowledge in their search for R'lyeh.

Regardless of the outcome, the Characters' participation in these major events will warrant awarding additional Experience. Give them 10 extra Experience on top of the usual awards.

IF THEY FAIL TO STOP THE ESOTERIC ORDER...

If the forces of the Esoteric Order reach the lost temple, find the celestial map, and at least one of them escapes into the blackness of the ocean, then they will have won. They are significantly closer to raising their sunken city. However, most things will go back to business as usual with the Cult, at least for the time being. They have new information to digest that will affect their overall plans.

The Characters will return knowing another dark secret in a world of dark secrets, but ultimately it will do them no good. Perhaps, however, they curry favor with Special Services, which may change their lives. If they are Special Services agents, the hunt continues and the agency will place more emphasis on combating the Esoteric Order.

To be clear, this is the ending we will be assuming occurred for our continuing development of the *CthulhuTech* metaplot. If your Characters somehow manage to stop the Esoteric Order, then read on for possible ways to continue with this important change.

IF THEY STOP THE ESOTERIC ORDER...

If your Characters somehow manage to destroy every single possible escapee from the lost temple, then they will have pulled off what appears to be an impossible victory. They will have prevented the Esoteric Order from acquiring their celestial map and robbed them of a key piece to their quest.

With the presence of both Spawn and White Deaths, there is a chance that the Characters might stop the Cult while sacrificing themselves. It is recommended that you advise against this course of action, though it seems heroic, for one simple point.

This isn't the only temple. This wasn't the Esoteric Order's only chance to get the celestial map. The Cult will regroup, continue their search the way they've been searching for generations now, and will ultimately find another place with the same information. Stopping them at this point only delays the inevitable.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The two primary players in this story – the Esoteric Order of Dagon and NEG Special Services – both have some unique tools at their disposal. This section introduces several of them, split up into three categories – weapons, armor, and other gear.

Feel free to equip your Esoteric Order antagonists and Special Services supporting characters with any of this new gear. Special Services gear is also available to newly designed Special Services Characters, based on need.

THE ESOTERIC ORDER

Weapons

The *acruta spear* is mentioned on p. 115 of the *Core Book*, but little is disclosed about this Deep One weapon other than its damage rating of +2. It appears to be fashioned out of some kind of deep sea coral or similar kind of thing. They are long, black, with wickedly sharp barbed blades at the end. If one is composed of something other than scales, simply striking with the blunt end of the weapon has a +0 damage rating.

In many ways the counterpart to the *acruta spear* is the *sretha knife* (pictured on p. 70). This wicked curved blade is composed of the same substance as the *acruta spear*, but it is mounted on a hilt designed to be carried by someone who has not yet come into their scale. *Sretha knives* have a damage rating of +1.

Being from the sea as they are, it is natural that the Deep Ones would have created a neurotoxin based on those found in many aquatic organisms. *S'pranth toxin* is one highly effective such toxin. The Esoteric Order uses the toxin to coat their *sretha knives*, *acruta spears*, and *needler weapons*. An attack utilizing *s'pranth toxin* must do at least one point of Vitality damage for it to take effect. Those affected must succeed at a Challenging Tenacity Feat Test or lose 2 Actions each turn for one to five minutes (roll half a die). The effects of the toxin are not cumulative and a target may again be affected on a turn following his recovery from the last dose.

The Deep One *Needler Pod* is also presented on p. 115 of the *Core Book*. It is a short-range single or volley fire weapon that works with the limited sight capabilities of their users. Taking the idea one step further, the Deep Ones have also developed a *Needler Rifle*. It is the same caliber and has the same range as its smaller counterpart (10 mm, range 10/20/30), as is its damage rating and shots (+1 or volley, 1 or volley). It is in its volley capacity that it shines. It fires volleys of one to twelve needles – the target defends once against the volley, not each needle. If hit, the *Needler Rifle* does the standard damage for success plus one die for each needle in the volley, against which armor is rolled only once. To accommodate its larger volleys, the weapon carries 72 needles in its clip. It is very, very deadly in close quarters.

Armor

Utilizing a form of arcanotechnology unknown to the mortals of the planet, the Deep Ones have created an amazing material that they use as clothing on land (when necessary), but most

especially for their Hybrids. They call this material *och'wil*. It is lightweight, but particularly sturdy. While it looks filmy to the eye, it provides 1/1 armor protection to those wearing it. While Hybrids typically wear full clothes of *och'wil*, Deep Ones mostly wear hooded cloaks.

Other Gear

To accommodate those in their cult who have not or not yet developed the ability to breathe water, the Esoteric Order has created a remarkably effective rebreather device. It is basically a mouthpiece that extends the width of the user's head, which scrubs carbon dioxide from his exhalation and replenishes some oxygen. It makes no bubbles and is almost completely silent. A user can stay submerged for approximately an hour using one.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Weapons

Automatic machine pistols are not common technology. They are unwieldy and require special training. The H&K MP-6A1 is the most common such weapon in production. However, Special Services are specially trained to use such weapons. The kind of things that Special Services investigates requires that they carry a low profile weapon that provides the maximum rate of fire and effectiveness. In fact, the government has requisitioned a special machine pistol to be made especially for the agency's use. The H&K MP-6S1 has the same caliber (10 mm), capacity (30 rounds), and damage rating (+2) as its cousin, but with a slightly longer effective range (15/25/50) and a slightly higher rate of fire (3 or 2/1-5/15). This gun can be used with the Handgun Gunplay specialization, but its fully automatic capabilities are unleashed using the Submachinegun Gunplay specialization.

Once upon a time, human beings used quite a bit of the element uranium. One of the uses of the depleted heavy metal was as special rounds for weapons. Depleted uranium (DU) rounds are very dense – 84% as dense as osmium or iridium, which are the densest substances under terrestrial pressures. This increased density gives it a smaller diameter than traditional bullets, providing less drag and deeper penetration. The rounds are also often incendiary, especially if it meets with significant resistance. Since there are stockpiles of DU still left, the government has created the DU rounds for their most dangerous duties, including Special Services. In effect, it adds an additional +1 on top of the weapon's normal damage rating, in addition to its incendiary effects. Most Special Services agents carry one clip of DU ammunition for their MP-6S1's. It is very difficult to get DU if you're not top special forces or in Special Services.

Armor

The suit and coats worn by Special Services agents are more than the standard heavy concealed armor, giving it a 1/2 rating.

Other Gear

Special Services agents have ready access to Corporal Restorative and the Powder of Ibn Ghazi, as well as Glamour Locks.

HYDRA (IA'HOD): V2

Type: Multi-Purpose Main Battle Mech (10 AP)

Size: Medium (23' tall)

Engineering within the Esoteric Order of Dagon has changed since the original design of the Hydra. The introduction of such mecha as the Leviathan and the Merrow not only changed design aesthetics, it changed design philosophy. The beauty of the original Hydra was in its versatile design, something that has not changed with this re-envisioned version. The Hydra V2, however, is stronger to make better use of its tentacles and twice as fast. Pilots who thought they new what to expect from the Hydra are finding themselves unpleasantly suprised – sometimes fatally so.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +1
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 6
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
Long Range
Nightvision
Radar/IFF
Sonar
Targeting (+2)
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Cold Resistance
Depth Reinforcement
Life Support
Life Support Pod
Manipulator Arms

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74 ypt/18 ypt)
Air/Water Speed: 120 mph (296/72 ypt)
Acceleration Code: A [1/1]
Jumping Distance: 10/5
A-Pods
Enhanced A-Pod Speed (Double)

STRUCTURE

Integrity 15
Armor 2/2
Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Amphibious Chaff Dispenser
(Medium)
Amphibious Laser Cannon
(Medium)
Tentacle Sheathe (Medium)
Amphibious Torpedo Pod (Medium)



MUDSKIPPER (CIACTU): V2

Type: Deep One Tactical Powered Armor (3 AP)

Size: Tiny (10' tall)

The success of the Merrow has led to a redesign of the Mudskipper as well. The mech is still remarkably tough for powered armor and is still designed primarily for coastal deployment – having only a sealed system, instead of reinforcement for the depths. While the Mudskipper V2 is still as fast on land as its predecessor, it is twice as fast in the water, matching speed with the Merrow. Despite the poor eyesight of Deep Ones, Esoteric Order engineers have learned from the success of the Merrow and have embedded an amphibious laser cannon on the new version. No longer are Mudskippers forced to carry extra ammunition and, after all, sometimes shooting badly is preferable to not shooting at all.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) -1
Frame (*Strength*) 1 (-1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) -1

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
Nightvision
Radar/IFF
Sonar

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Sealed System

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 60 mph (148/36 ypt)
Water Speed: 60 mph (148/36 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance: 8/4
Buoyancy
Enhanced Buoyancy Speed (Double)
Enhanced Jump Distance
(Quadruple Total)
Enhanced Land Speed (Double)
Jump Pods

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10
Armor 1/1

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Amphibious Laser Cannon (Small)
Hyperedge Claws (Small)



WEAVING CHARACTERS

Not every group of Characters is going to be appropriate for this story. However, let's look at several different ways that groups of Characters may become embroiled in these events. These aren't the only possible ways, obviously, but it should give you a base from which to build.

The most important fact of being a part of this story is that the Characters must somehow end up in Italy. If Italy absolutely doesn't work for you and you are committed to playing through this story, your best option is to move the events to someplace that does work for you. However, you will have to do the work of finding a place that meets the needs of these events as well as meeting your geographical needs.

The trump card for any type of game is that one or more of your Characters is friends with or somehow related to the Trovatelli family. They could get a call from mutual friends, family, or even from the authorities and rush to Torino to become a part of events.

This story is not designed for rookie Characters. It is recommended that you play other stories first, weaving this into the natural flow of your game. We recommend that each Character has earned at least 100 Experience before embarking on this adventure, to increase survivability.

It is recommended that you break this story up into a minimum number of sessions based on Act. Act I should take a minimum of two sessions, Act II should take a minimum of four sessions, and Act III should take a minimum of another two sessions. Feel free to take as much time as you need to allow this story to comfortably breathe, but by spreading it out over a minimum number of eight sessions Characters are allowed to accrue another 40 Experience with which to develop over its course.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

Characters that are employed by an investigative or police agency are the easiest to get involved in this story. Since it isn't likely that your Characters are Italian police officers, those with the Federal Security Bureau (most appropriately the Sectarian Crimed Division) or the Office of Internal Security are the ones that will work best. They can be called to the investigation before Special Services shows up and then distinguish themselves in such a way that Special Services (who is notoriously short-handed) will bring them along for the ride.

Another option would be to create a Special Services game in which you are building the Characters towards these events. Use the guidelines presented in this chapter to create an exciting series of events leading up to this confrontation with the Esoteric Order.

NEG Arcane Underground Games

Those who run in the black magic black market might hear about something nasty in the works for the Trovatelli's. The Church of All may be keeping quiet about what's going on, but someone's bound to leak something about occult objects being a part of

the family's collection. The Characters might even be those intent on relieving the Trovatelli's of their treasures, but who are beaten to the punch. The key then is having them somehow be of use to Special Services so that they can be involved in the story – or at least curious enough to tail the government agents and find themselves involved the hard way.

Arcane investigation games or games involving those Characters who are simple investigators into the unknown can find themselves a part of these events as well. Perhaps they are subject matter experts or someone on the trail of members of the Church of All. Again, if they prove themselves useful, they may be dragged along for the chaos that is to come.

Eldritch Society Games

Many times the Eldritch Society many times polices the arcane underground when things are a beyond-the-norm kind of nasty. The attack on the Trovatelli family is certainly one in which the Society would take interest. A pack of Tagers could easily choose to take on such an investigation all on their own, completely independent of Special Services.

However, Tagers bring another level of personal power to the playing field. You may have to increase the threat level appropriately, so that Tager Characters also fear for their lives and sanity.

NEG Military Games

There aren't many cases in which the military would be involved in these events. If you're playing a Special Forces-style game, your Characters may be called upon to support Special Services once they head to the island. The events of Act I would purely be mission briefing for these action-oriented Characters. Mecha games are out of the question, because most mecha pilots aren't covert operations soldiers as well and the way this story turns out sneaks up on everyone.

Many of the other events of 2086 are military-based and most players of military games won't feel too put out by missing these events.

Cult Games

If you want to turn this story on its ear, you can play it using cultist Characters. They may be part of the Church of All, those who have entered full service of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, or even Hybrid Characters who have not yet begun (or are in the early stages of) their transformation. If you choose to go this route, you have a little work ahead of you as you hold this story up to a mirror and play through its opposite.

In this case, all you need is an excuse for your Characters to be in Italy and they've got a reason to be involved. They may even be a part of the initial discovery of the Trovatelli treasure and the raid on their villa. Their primary threat will be discovering the investigation and infiltration by Special Services and fighting the authorities to accomplish their goals.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Here are a few Characters for which you might require a little more detail for your game.

AGENT CHRISTEN

Special Forces SAIC

Agent Christen (first name classified) is a role model for other Special Services field agents. Even the way Christen carries herself speaks of authority. Her perfectly-pressed black suit, black coat, auburn hair with perfect streaks of gray, and striking looks do her well in her line of work. It is perhaps her eyes that are most noticeable – ice blue and penetrating. She is simply the kind of person that people listen to when she speaks.

Christen is efficient, but not heartless, in her job. She understands that there are people affected by the things with which she must deal and they are the same people she is trying to protect. While Christen is firm with those whose authority she must over-ride, those who she must slap gag orders on, or those who she must warn off, she never forgets that they are people and treats them as such. However, it is her chosen life that keeps her from having more close personal relationships. Christen is, unfortunately, a lonely woman.

There is much that Agent Christen has seen in her life, both personally and professionally, that she wishes she could forget. While she may tow the party line on the surface, deep down, Agent Christen believes that the New Earth Government is losing – and ultimately will lose.

Virtue/Flaw: Courageous/Pessimist

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Perception 8, Presence 9, Tenacity 7

Noteworthy Skills: Law Enforcement: Expert, Intimidate: Expert, Observation: Master, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Adept (Focused in NEG Unarmed Combat), Marksman: Expert (Specialized in Handgun Gunplay)

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority/3, High Pain Threshold, Special Services Training, Wary

AGENT CYRDOVA

Special Forces Investigator

The man who is now called Agent Cyrdova is someone who found himself on the wrong side of the law. Though not a criminal in the violent sense, Cyrdova has been a gifted para-psychic from his early teens. He chose to keep his powers a secret, so that he could use his gifts to his personal advantage. Unfortunately for him, he got caught. Rather than face a life of imprisonment and possibly worse, Cyrdova jumped at the chance to serve his sentence inside Special Services. Besides his initially selfish motivations, he now has truly embraced the importance of his work.

The most pleasant side of Cyrdova is when he is quiet. He is a bitter and caustic man, who is not happy with his fate, the state of the world, or the horrors he now has burned into his memory. Furthermore, he is ruthlessly efficient and has no problem simply peeling open someone's mind and raiding it. He is respected, but not well-liked.

Physically, Cyrdova is entirely average looking – height, weight, build, looks. He uses this to his advantage, being the agent that fades into the background.

Virtue/Flaw: Imaginative/Bitter

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility: 8, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Observation: Expert, Armed Fighting: Adept (Focused in NEG Kendo), Dodge: Adept, Marksman: Adept (Focused in Handgun Gunplay)

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority/3, Chronic Pain, Exceptional Para-Psychic, Special Services Training

Noteworthy Para-Psychic Powers: ESP: Adept, Probe: Adept, Psychometry: Adept, Telepathy: Novice (*Manipulative primary talent, sensory secondary talent, somatic preferred tertiary talent*)

CL'YCA

Esoteric Order of Dagon Spawn Priest

A ranking priest among the Esoteric Order's sons of Cthulhu, Cl'yca has long searched under the waves to find the way to its ancestral home. It has slept for millennia, only recently awakening in the last century to help guide its god's army in their holy quest.

Though Cl'yca technically outranks Shull in the hierarchy of the Esoteric Order, the Spawn respects her ability and treats her as more of an equal. It is not the type of creature that lets its ego get in the way – it is concerned only with what is more efficient and effective.

Since the average person is not familiar enough with Spawn to learn their cosmetic differences, most would be unable to identify Cl'yca from others. However, it is quite striking by Spawn standards. Its head tentacles are long and powerful and its wings are strong and wide. It is the sure and deliberate way that it moves that might stand out to the uninitiated, however.

Like Shull, Cl'yca is a powerful sorcerer. It is protected by wards and carries several useful magical items. This, combined with its natural abilities, makes Cl'yca a difficult foe to match.

Virtue/Flaw: Calculating/Cold

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 12, Tenacity 12

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Master, Education: Master, Occult: Master, Dodge: Master, Fighting: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Fast

RODRIGO ESPOSITO

Alessandra's Favorite Boyfriend

Rodrigo is one of those wealthy kids who could go either way. His family is, by Trovatelli standards, *nouveau-riche* and are not subtle about flaunting their privilege. Some days, Rodrigo is connected to the world and an insightful human being. Other days, he is the epitome of eurotrash. It was on one of his good days that he met Alessandra Trovatelli and she has brought them out most days since.

However, Rodrigo is like so many in the modern age – deep down inside he feels lost. He’s been looking for something to help fill that void and hasn’t found it in any of the usual dalliances or distractions. It was this, combined with being in the right place at the right time, that brought him to the Church of All. Combined with the cult’s indoctrination and brainwashing techniques, it didn’t take Rodrigo to go way too far and lose himself. It is sad that Alessandra didn’t notice.

Rodrigo is olive-skinned, dark-haired, brown-eyed, good-looking, and charming. His cars, clothes, and jewelry are expensive and he walks with an air of self-confidence bordering on superiority.

Virtue/Flaw: Self-Confident/Liar

Experience: Inexperienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 8, Tenacity 6

Noteworthy Skills: Persuade: Adept, Misdirect: Adept, Savoir-Fair: Novice, Seduction: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/2, Delusions, Wealth/3

SHULL

Esoteric Order of Dagon Deep One Witch

Shull is the female Deep One sorcerer that runs the secret Gorgona outpost. She is ancient even by the standards of Deep Ones, having seen many centuries on this planet. Her power is such that even the Spawn display respect for her. In appearance, Shull is tall and thin, but carries an imposing presence. Her black eyes seem to stare straight through people and it is plain from most anyone’s behavior on Gorgona that even her own fellows are leery if not outright scared of her. It is fortunate that she is possessed of the same excited distraction as the rest of the Deep Ones and Hybrids on Gorgona, or it would be unlikely that anyone would be able to infiltrate the island or suss out the Esoteric Order’s plans.

In general, Shull is a tough, but fair mistress. She expects competence and excellence from those who serve her and treats them harshly when they fail because of their own fault. However, she rewards those who prove their loyalty and ability and is understanding when failure is the cause of unforeseen forces or circumstances.

Shull is also a very skilled witch with access to incredible magical rituals. She is protected by any number of wards and carrying an array of enchanted items at any given time. Her canniness and mystical ability should make her a difficult target for even the most seasoned of veterans.

Virtue/Flaw: Pious/Sadistic

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Strength 11, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Computers: Adept, Education: Master, Occult: Master, Survival: Expert, Armed Fighting: Expert, Dodge: Master, Fighting: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Luck/2

ALLESSANDRA TROVATELLI

Youngest Trovatelli Heir

Alessandra is what many girls dream of being – pretty and rich. She is a modern day princess, spoiled young daughter of her father’s second marriage. Born into an old money Italian family, Alessandra has wanted for nothing in this world. It is fortunate that her father Enrico is not only old money, but old school. He has raised her to be a responsible member of society, instead of a selfish brat.

Her upbringing has created a generous heart inside her. Alessandra has the time of day for anyone. She routinely volunteers in the arcology, helping those less fortunate than her. Lately, it has been helping situate refugees from Eastern Europe.

Those who meet Alessandra often describe her as an angel. Blonde-haired, blue-eyed, thin and pretty, she also has a kind, inviting face. Truly, the only way one could hate the girl is out of jealousy – or if you were one of her lovers who just discovered you were not the only one vying for her affections.

Virtue/Flaw: Kind/Naive

Experience: Inexperienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 8, Tenacity 6

Noteworthy Skills: Persuade: Adept, Savoir-Faire: Adept, Seduction: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/2, Damaged

ENRICO TROVATELLI

Italian Blueblood

Enrico Trovatelli is both a man of privilege and tragedy. His professional life has not been terribly demanding. He is responsible for managing the family fortune and approving things at board meetings. Fortunately, he is a skilled businessman who keeps up on the activities of his companies, but he is hardly involved on a frequent basis. In another world, his life would have been about seeing the world and acquiring precious objects. In today’s age, however, his life has been about family. He is a devoted family man who has never missed a single birthday among his extended family.

Enrico also carries the wounds so many do in the Strange Aeon. His first wife, Tessa, a woman he desperately loved, was killed in the First Arcanotech War. He has remarried, but the depth of connection isn’t the same.

Many would describe Enrico as classy or genteel. At the very least, one might describe him as pleasant and polite. He is a shining example of a well-mannered blueblood. His family is well-respected in Torino and he intends to keep it that way.

Virtue/Flaw: Generous/Grim

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Tenacity 8

Noteworthy Skills: History: Expert, Savoir-Faire: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Wealth/4

SPECIAL SERVICES

The Freak Show – that’s what agents on the inside call it. Special Services is what the New Earth Government calls it. Most people don’t call the agency anything at all because so few people even know it exists. One of the most secret government agencies, Special Services deals with all the weirdest, most dangerous, and most mind-bending threats to society – and then quietly covers them up so that people can sleep soundly at night.

While the Federal Security Bureau combats crime of a mundane nature, while the Office of Internal Security regulates cosmic power in the hands of mortals, the Special Services heads straight beyond the pale. When cults manage to do something really scary, when a dark god is in danger of poking its head into our dimensions, when realities blur and shift, when people very oddly and very mysteriously disappear, when monsters walk hidden within society, the Special Services steps in to sort it out. Any crime or unusual occurrence that points to the occult or other-worldly dark powers beyond what men know is the jurisdiction of Special Services.

To society, the agents of Special Services are the proverbial men in black. They show up from out of the blue, take over with authority from on high, and shut everyone else out reminding them it would be a good idea to forget. They are a mystery, a conspiracy theory for people to rant about on the internet. And all this is because it is part of their mission to keep things that man was not meant to know in the not knowing category. Anything deemed too big for society to handle is quickly and efficiently covered up. Special Services maintains strong ties to the Ministry of Information, so when something is kept from the public, it is truly kept from the public or carefully crafted “debunking” media campaigns are launched. A few of the rumors on the internet are anonymous posts from eyewitnesses who have refused to keep quiet, but most of them are deliberately misleading posts from inside Special Services. Of course, those who insist on acting up receive further and more threatening visits from the agency and those who stubbornly refuse to obey authority soon find themselves the victims of it.

Nearly every field agent and investigator within the Special Services is mystically gifted in some way, either a sorcerer or a para-psychic. With the sort of threats Special Services faces, those that have a command of some kind of supernatural power stand a much better chance of success and survival. Those with para-psychic powers that can be used offensively, such as environmental or somatic talents, are sent out as field agents who have the dubious honor of being those who must personally combat the dark things against which Special Services fights. Those with more subtle powers, such as manipulative or sensory talents, are trained as investigators who dig out every last clue from a scene or shred of information from witnesses or suspects. Sorcerers are trained to utilize their slow but broadly useful abilities to assist in many ways and charged with carrying and bringing into play the never-ending stream of enchanted items that Special Services creates. They are also charged with being reservoirs of secret information, deeply schooled in the occult, dead languages, and the like.

One of the fertile recruiting grounds of Special Services is in the detainment facilities of the Office of Internal Security. Not all of those who face a life of imprisonment for violating the draconian laws governing the mystical are bad eggs. Some are those who felt the registration laws of the New Earth Government are unjust. Some are people who simply wanted to pursue their acquired or natural powers in any way they saw fit. Some are merely self-serving criminals. Of those who won’t necessarily be locked up for being true menaces to society, there are some who have the skills or abilities that speak to the duties of Special Services. These fortunate individuals are visited by Special Services once the OIS has finished determining if they are mortal enough to deserve mortal rights and offered a deal. All charges will be dropped in exchange for a life of service in the most unusual governmental agency. Considering the benefits besides staying out of prison, most accept.

One of the greatest benefits to working in Special Services is being able to play beyond the normal legal boundaries of the mystical. Para-psychic agents are no longer required to wear visible identification of any kind. They can walk freely in society without any sort of stigma and use their powers with little fear of reprisal. In fact, the more dangerous powers they develop the more valuable they are to Special Services. Sorcerers enjoy a similar latitude. They are given access to and encouraged to learn the most illegal, soul-draining, and dangerous of rituals. Not only are they important weapons in the arsenal of Special Services, such knowledge is key for a sorcerer to unweave their dangerous effects. Capable sorcerers are also encouraged to keep useful minor summoned creatures, including familiars, fetches, and the mystical unborn.

Each and every agent of the Special Services is intensely trained. In addition to the normal rigorous training that agents of federal law enforcement agencies undergo, mystically gifted agents-in-training must endure intensive training to hone their abilities. And then there is the weapons training, which is among the most challenging of any branch of service. Special Services trains its agents in the underground martial art form of gunplay, so that they appear to be almost superhuman in their deadly ability to wield firearms. On top of all this is training in the occult, investigation techniques, and survival in an attempt to give a Special Services field agent the longest expected lifespan possible.

However, Special Services duty is dangerous, as one might expect. Many agents are killed in action, horribly. An unfortunately high percentage of new recruits perish during their first few assignments in the field.

Death is not the only thing agents need fear. Special Services agents play in the dark end of the street and immerse themselves in powerful mystical energies. It can become easy for them to dissociate and lose their grip. Fortunately, an agent’s touch with reality is carefully monitored and managed. Regular weekly psychological evaluations and counseling is a part of every agent’s routine. Dedicated to the aid of Special Service agents are the cream of the crop from the Ashcroft Clinic, though they too

must lie about their involvement. It is, however, regarded as a prestigious duty, considering the fundamentally world-saving duties of the Special Services.

There are those within the Federal Security Bureau's Sectarian Crimes Division who have learned to hate when the black-clad government agents with strange identification show up to take over investigations. And there are those that are extremely happy when Special Services arrives, for they know the truly unholy business at hand is no longer their responsibility. It's no surprise that the two agency's duties sometimes run afoul of one another. Most of the cults can only aspire to the level of otherworldly insanity that would draw the Special Services, but one might be surprised how often they do.

One might think that the Disciples of Death's Shadow would be the cult most oft encountered by Special Services, but they predominantly deal in mortal crimes best dealt with by other federal agencies. Since the Chrysalis Corporation is too well entrenched and too well hidden to draw attention, it is the Esoteric Order of Dagon which often crosses paths with the Special Services. The EOD's constant quest for lost occult knowledge, legendary tomes, ancient artifacts, and other general delving into that which no one should ever know brings them firmly into the world of Special Services. Of any part of the New Earth Government, it is only Special Services that truly knows the threat the Esoteric Order poses. Unfortunately, all they have been able to cause is a policy of containment regarding the sea cult, much to the agency's chagrin. Still, they find themselves involved in investigations that involve the Esoteric Order more often than anyone would like to admit.

There are two other cults with which the Special Services is most often forced to deal. The Congregation of the Earth Mother, with the profusion of cultists that choose to undergo the Call the Soul's Beast ritual and bond with their spirit animals, is one. With everything they've been up to along with their complete lack of subtlety, it's no surprise that Special Services would eventually find themselves involved. The other minor cult that draws their attention is the Scions of Forever. Pretty much any time someone gets a strange note or visitor telling them to do something unusual and that incident is reported to the authorities, Special Services steps in. The agency is especially interested in what the mysterious and timeless cult is up to, though they still really have no idea. But who really does?

What is most exceptional about the relationship Special Services has with regards to cults is that they have some inkling that the Shadow War even exists. They know about Dhohanoids, even if they don't know what to call them, and they know about Tagers, without knowing what they are as well. They know that whatever force is behind the Tagers is trying to wipe out whoever controls the Dhohanoids, though they really don't know which side is which. They are starting to get an idea that the Tagers are the "good guys," but not enough so that they are willing to step in one way or the other. They are also not willing yet to issue any kind of report to anyone outside of Special Services.

As an aside, Agents of the Office of Internal Security could care less when the nameless federal agents take over a crime scene or investigation. It's just one less creepy thing for them to have to manage.

There are essentially four types of Special Service field agents. The first is the basic team, composed of two para-psychic field agents, an investigator and a sorcerer. They are what one comes to expect when the "men in black" come to take control of an incident or investigation. Of course, Special Services undercover agents filter into every aspect of government service and arcane underground activity that they can. Highly trained strike teams of military-trained soldiers wait in reserve for the situations that the mystically gifted agents can't handle. Then there are the heavy armor squads of powered armor, similar to the OIS SPAT units, operating in pairs and trained to deal with the ugliest of threats. Unlike the SPAT units of the OIS, those of Special Services routinely find themselves up against threats of which they are an inferior match. But the backbone of the Special Services is the behind the scenes staff of administrators, intelligence specialists, and most importantly researchers.

Special Services maintains a pay schedule according to a government service (GS) ranking system. The GS-10 to GS-13 ranks are typically occupied by agents, while GS-14 to GS-15 are the managers and directors. Overall, the agency is managed by a variety of directors. While seniority is valued and respected, field operations are overseen by the Special Agent-in-Charge (SAIC).

There are rumors that the Special Services are utilizing Orgone and para-psychic boosting drugs, developed by the Office of Internal Security in conjunction with the Ashcroft Clinic. There are also those that say that the Special Services have created learning drugs that allow sorcerers to more quickly assimilate rituals. But then again, conspiracy theorists have theories for everything, no matter how ridiculous they might seem.

Despite their desire for anonymity, the Special Services maintains a uniform that both inspires fear and identifies them as something with which to be reckoned. The stylish black suit combined with the priest-collared black ballistic leather longcoat creates an unforgettable image. Not to mention the skill and artistry with which they fight, added to their peculiar expertise and paranormal abilities. Despite their need to remain secret, they stand out to those whose paths they cross.

RUMORS ABOUT SPECIAL SERVICES

- Special Services even employs ghouls as agents, so that they can get information from the underground – literally.
- With their access to incredible political power and their secret nature, they are a ripe target to be corrupted by the things to which they regularly expose themselves. If the New Earth Government is going to fall from within, here is the within from which it will fall.
- Special Services knows all about the Shadow War and is keeping the existence of both Tagers and Dhohanoids a carefully guarded secret.

DESIGNING SPECIAL SERVICES CHARACTERS

Here are the requirements, new Qualities, and new profession templates so that you can design and play Special Services Characters.

REQUIREMENTS

Several things are required to design a Special Services Character and they may in fact be the most restrictive type of Character to design. There are a number of required skill and Qualities, and your Cheats are spent for you.

The following skills and minimum levels of expertise are required for starting Special Services Characters:

- Dodge: Novice
- Fighting: Novice
- Law Enforcement: Novice (one Specialization as a Focus)
- Marksman: Novice (one type of Gunplay as a Focus)
- Observation: Novice
- Occult: Novice

There are two Assets required for all Special Services Characters, totaling seven points:

- Authority (3) – Special Services agents wield broad federal power.
- Special Services Training (4)

There are three Drawbacks required for all Special Services Characters, totaling eight points:

- Duty (3) – Special Services isn't just a job, it's a lifestyle.
- Misfit (1) – Those who've served with Special Services rarely fit in with everybody else.
- Watched (3) – Even if your Character is not a felon, he's part of one of the most secret and exclusive branches of government service.

There are two Assets required for para-psychic Special Services Characters, totaling six points:

- Erupted Para-Psychic (2)
- Latent Para-Psychic (4)

There is one Asset required for magically capable Special Services Characters, totaling four points:

- Special Services Sorcerer (4)

As you can see, Special Services para-psychics begin with thirteen points worth of Assets chosen for them and sorcerers begin with eleven chosen. All Special Services Characters begin with eight of their ten maximum points worth of Drawbacks chosen for them. Para-psychics are then down six points and sorcerers are down four points, just out of Qualities. On top of that, thirteen points worth of the initial twenty points of skills are already spent on required skills. This leaves a para-psychic with one free skill point and a sorcerer with three points.

Para-psychic Special Services Characters must use two of their Cheats for skill points, giving them four more points for a total of five. They must use their other four Cheats on their para-

psychic abilities, as described on p. 57 of *Vade Mecum*. Sorcerer Special Services Characters must likewise use two of their Cheats for skill points, giving them four more points for a total of seven. They must use their other four Cheats either to acquire more spells or to increase their Orgone, as described on p. 65 of the *Core Book*.

White Characters are the one exception. They must spend four of their Cheats to acquire another eight skill points, using the remaining two Cheats for their para-psychic abilities.

Of course, Special Services Characters can acquire up to two more points for skills or another Asset by choosing two more points worth of Drawbacks.

NEW ASSETS

SPECIAL SERVICES TRAINING (4)

Prerequisite: must be either erupted para-psychic or sorcerer

Special Services training provides your Character with a variety of benefits. He can now acquire any or all of the Gunplay Cascades, if you use those optional rules. If not, he gains two free Focused combat skill Specializations during Character Design. He gains access to the special gear used by the agency, he becomes a ghost in the system as his identity records and paper trail are carefully erased to maintain anonymity, and he is no longer required to wear visible identification if he is a para-psychic.

However, all Special Services Characters begin the game with one Insanity Point, in addition to any others acquired through learning rituals or para-psychic powers.

SPECIAL SERVICES SORCERER (4)

Prerequisite: sorcerers only, Special Services Training Asset

In addition to the regular perks of Special Services, your Character is a sorcerer with access to other benefits. When he acquires this Asset, he may choose a familiar, a fetch, or a mystical unborn as a companion even if he is not capable of casting any of the appropriate summoning spells. He also immediately acquires the products of any Enchantment spells he knows. For example, if he knows Imbue Glamour Lock, he begins the game with a functioning Glamour Lock. He also begins with either a full Corporal Restorative or Powder of Ibn-Ghazi, even if he does not know the appropriate rituals. Special Services Sorcerers are also provided the time for the intensive study required to learn new rituals. He also gains access to illegal spells as long as he has a legitimate reason for on-the-job knowledge and use.

SPECIAL SERVICES AND THE ELDRITCH SOCIETY

Despite the fact that the Duty Drawback already precludes it, it deserves to be said: there are no Taggers within Special Services. With the kind of things Special Services deals with and keeps its eye out for, they would eventually figure it out – and then kill the Tagger. Ditto for Dhohanoids and pretty much any other kind of arcane shapeshifter or metaterrestrial.



SPECIAL SERVICES FIELD AGENT

Field Agents are the para-psychic combatants of the Special Services. They are the much needed muscle in every investigation, bringing both natural and supernatural force to bear in the face of unnatural threats. Under peaceful conditions, they are in charge of crowd control and managing crime scene security. They are the men in black telling people that there is nothing to see and reminding those who have seen that silence is golden.

Of any agent of Special Services, it is those para-psychics classified as Field Agents that must most often endure the most awful and mind-bending horrors. Investigators and sorcerers often discover the terrible truth behind that which they research, but it is the Field Agents who must face it head on.

Typically, Field Agents are gifted either in the Environmental or Somatic talents, or both. It is vitally important that the Field Agents of Special Services have more than just their guns with which to fight, considering that which they must face. Their para-psychic powers are rarely subtle. Their greatest advantage, and many would say freedom, is that they are allowed to utilize any of their powers in the line of duty, even those considered Dangerous or Invasive, without fear of government reprisal or even a need to wear identification.

What is perhaps the greatest benefit to being a Special Services agent is that, in their odd off hours, they don't have to be para-psychic or identified as such. For a few hours, they can just be normal.

Attributes: Higher than average Perception and Tenacity recommended.

Suggested Skills: Observation, Para-Psychic Powers

Required Qualities: Authority (3), Erupted Para-Psychic, Latent Para-Psychic, Special Services Training, Duty (3), Misfit (1), Watched (3)

Special Gear: Special Services gear

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 7/8

Intellect 5/5

Perception 7/6

Presence 5/5

Strength 5/5

Tenacity 7/7

Sample Skills:

Athletics: Student

Dodge: Novice

Hyperagility: Student

Intimidate: Novice

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Law Enforcement: Novice (Focus: Crime Scene Security)

Literacy: Adept

Marksman: Novice (Focus: Handgun Gunplay)

Occult: Novice (Adept, if Human or Xenomix)

Observation: Novice

Pyrokinesis: Novice

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Security: Student (if Human)

Stealth: Novice

Sample Para-Psychic Powers: Pyrokinesis, Hyperagility (*Environmental primary talent, Somatic secondary talent*)

Sample Psychological Disorders: None (1 Insanity Point)



SPECIAL SERVICES INVESTIGATOR

Investigators are the para-psychic detectives of the Special Services. They are the agents who investigate crime scenes, examine evidence, and follow up (or generate) leads. They para-psychically feel their way through the horrors left behind by what they seek, and probe the minds of those who might know.

While some might argue that it is the Field Agents who face the most gruesome horrors and in fact must fight it, there are those that would argue that Investigators deal with a dread beyond that. It is often they who find the truth behind that which they investigate and who are forced to go to the dark places where those paths lead.

Investigators are most often recruited from those para-psychics gifted in either the Manipulative or Sensory talents, or both. While Retrocognition is the only Sensory power considered offensive, nearly every Manipulative power is Dangerous, Invasive, or both. Such para-psychics enjoy the amazing leeway to freely use their powers in the line of duty, without worry of arrest or the need to wear the mandatory identification.

Like Field Agents, Special Services Investigators enjoy the ability to take off their hat and coat, so to speak. They are never required to wear para-psychic identification and can blend in seamlessly with whatever small private life they maintain.

Attributes: Higher than average Intellect and Tenacity recommended.

Suggested Skills: Law Enforcement, Observation, Occult, Para-Psychic Powers

Required Qualities: Authority (3), Erupted Para-Psychic, Latent Para-Psychic, Special Services Training, Duty (3), Misfit (1), Watched (3)

Special Gear: Special Services gear

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 5/6

Intellect 7/7

Perception 7/6

Presence 5/5

Strength 5/5

Tenacity 7/7

Sample Skills:

Dodge: Novice

Fighting: Novice

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Law Enforcement: Novice (Focus: Evidence Gathering)

Literacy: Novice

Marksman: Novice (Focus: Handgun Gunplay)

Misdirect: Novice

Observation: Novice (Adept, if Human)

Occult: Novice

Psychometry: Novice

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Streetwise: Student (Novice, if Human or Xenomix)

Surveillance: Novice

Telepathy: Student

Sample Para-Psychic Powers: Psychometry, Telepathy (*Sensory primary talent, Manipulative secondary talent*)

Sample Psychological Disorders: Phobia (choose one) (2 *Insanity Points*)



SPECIAL SERVICES SORCERER

Sorcerers complete the triumvirate that makes up Special Services field agents. While Field Agents fight against sinister threats and Investigators study leads and evidence, it is up to Sorcerers to know. They are broadly educated and fonts of knowledge on all the strange and unfortunate things which Special Services must face.

Furthermore, the ability to utilize magic makes them the utility player, cosmically-speaking. Those that have the luxury often choose to fill in the gaps between para-psychic Field Agent and Investigator. Others choose to seek whatever kind of magic they sought before they were recruited, knowing that no ritual is without its uses.

To some sorcerers, working as an agent of Special Services is like getting presents. They have access, legitimate access, to all known magical rituals and are given the time and space to learn and use them. While the regulations may state that a sorcerer is only supposed to learn an illegal spell if his job requires it, that is rarely the practice. No one knows when a Special Services sorcerer will need knowledge of the dark arts, so when a sorcerer requests such knowledge it is usually granted. And then there is the additional bonus that each magically-capable agent is given his choice of a familiar, a fetch, or a bonded mystical unborn, without fear of federal reprisal – something of which few other sorcerers in federal employ can brag. That, of course, doesn't even take into account the enchanted objects with which they can play. All in all, it's not a bad package for what equates for many to a life of indentured servitude.

Attributes: Higher than average Intellect and Tenacity recommended.

Suggested Skills: Education, Occult, Research

Required Qualities: Authority (3), Special Services Sorcerer, Special Services Training, Duty (3), Misfit (1), Watched (3)

Special Gear: Special Services gear, Familiar, Powder of Ibn-Ghazi

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 5/6

Intellect 8/7

Perception 5/5

Presence 5/5

Strength 5/5

Tenacity 8/8

Sample Skills:

Computers: Student

Dodge: Novice

Education: Novice

Fighting: Novice

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Languages (R'lyehian): Novice

Languages (Tsath-yo): Student (if Human)

Law Enforcement: Novice (Focus: Evidence Examination)

Literacy: Adept

Marksman: Novice (Focus: Handgun Gunplay)

Observation: Adept

Occult: Novice (Adept, if Human or Xenomix)

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Research: Novice

Sample Rituals: Phantom Vision, Ward Against Sorcery, Ward of Corporal Protection, Ward of Solitude

Sample Psychological Disorders: None (1 *Insanity Point*)

They look mortal. They don't move like they're mortal.

From the rooftop, Romer was the first to see them. Through the scope on his favorite assault rifle, of course. "Incoming. Trees across the street."

It's a typical October night in Seattle. Chilly. Misty rain. Just enough to make it so that it's harder to see than I'd really like it to be. I can't shift, because we don't know what's here and we don't want to tip our hand just yet. I don't have Romer's veteran sixth sense, so it takes me a minute to find them. Five people, moving in a group. Crouching down like they're expecting trouble, sniffing at the air. That's weird. We all watch them as they creep carefully out onto the front lawn of the abandoned house. I wait for that knowing that comes when I'm looking at one of the Children of Chaos' favorite children, but it isn't there. Then one of them growls. Not the kind of growl that someone makes when they're frustrated. No, a genuine back of the throat animal growl.

Then something comes flying out of the trees and onto the rooftop. Another person, followed shortly thereafter by a buddy. They land completely silently. Their eyes scan the neighborhood, moving in erratic spurts, jerky, but intentional. Like birds.

This is a whole new brand of freaky. Fortunately, I gave up that I've seen everything a long time ago.

Ever the subtle one, Romer breaks the quiet by firing three rounds from his rifle into the chest of the pack leader. He goes down. "Sorena. Roof. Everyone else, follow me." Romer shifts and something horrifying and black with lots of legs skitters across the street. He is one ugly Tager.

He's on the pack just as they're backing into the trees. I'm in the air before I can see his fangs tear into one of them. The bird guys on the roof freeze for a moment as they watch this monstrosity with 30-foot bat wings descend on them. Me. The look on their faces is one that an animal gets when it knows it's going to die, but it's terror nonetheless. Which is what I like to see. Their deaths are gruesome, but fast. I don't have the time for anything more satisfying.

Preacher comes over the ether. "They're in the trees. I've got the trail." Nazzadi, Phantom, and a tracker. They don't have a chance. I hope the fetch and the psychics remember to stay *behind* him this time. Kole's firestarting isn't going to do a lot of good in the rain.

I float down to the ground, shift, and follow. I need to be smaller right now. Romer's already up in the trees, like some kind of spider you'd only see in nightmares. The leaves on the ground are crunchy and slippery, but I'm over them without even blinking. I have to remember not to wear 300 terranote shoes the next time we leave the arcology. I see Mesta bringing up the rear, his white skin practically glowing.

Something sideswipes Preacher. A pair of the biggest guys I've ever seen tackle him and actually knock him down with a bellowing roar. This animal-business is clearly more than skin deep. Kole and Mesta back into each other, pistols waiting for something to shoot at. I can't see Grimmash anywhere, so that means the little bugger is waiting to hamstring something. Good.

It doesn't take long for Preacher to skewer one of the guys on him. Romer drops down and suddenly stops, which gives me pause, too. The shadows are crawling with things. There are

small things in the trees and humanoid shapes all around us. I feel like an amateur. We just got led straight into a trap.

As I take quick stock of our situation, the smell hits. It's flowery and musky, sweet and bitter all at the same time. It takes only a moment before it's downright overpowering, filling my head with an electric warmth that drips down through the rest of my body. It's kind of like coming up on really good Bliss, but I'd say even a shade better. I realize that the bestial people have stopped attacking before I realize I forgot we were being attacked. I take a deep breath and feel like I really want to hug someone. I look at the boys and they look just as messed up as me. Romer and Preacher have even shifted back.

Then I see where this is all coming from. They come out of the darkness, slinking through their people. Some of the hottest girls I've ever seen, and that's saying something. Built like porn stars, bare naked, with a look in their eye I know all too well. It doesn't even bother me that they're not quite normal. The one sauntering up to me has pointed ears, cat's eyes, claws, the barest whisper of fur, and a long tail. Preacher is staring down a gorgeous girl with segmented eyes, antennae, gossamer wings, and yellow and black patterns that follow the contours of her body. My heart skips a beat. They are so beautiful they're like angels. And I am ready to have sex with each and every one of them. Preferably at the same time.

"Let's not fight." One of them just talked. The growing need just got worse.

Kole's trying to lip off in the background. I ignore him. Doesn't sound important anyway.

The cat girl slips into my arms and strokes the side of my face. My body reacts like I'm fourteen again. She smiles and whispers in my ear. "You should all come back with us." Then, she kisses me and it's another wave of full-blown crazy.

Now I don't exactly have a problem with the ladies and I get more than my fair share of tail. But this is way different and





quite possibly literal. I don't want to be comfortable with that, but I can't help but be.

Kole is still making noise. I can't take my eyes off this girl long enough to see if he's the sane one or if he's just that annoying guy who talks through the movie. With Kole, it could easily be either.

Out of my peripheral vision, I can see Mesta. He's already making out with a girl who brings new meaning to the term bunny. I laugh. The cat girl responds by stroking me in a way that's not polite to do in public. This is way better than drugs. But the symbiont that's a part of me won't let me give in just yet.

"What do you want with us?" I manage to say.

She giggles. It's a musical sound. "Isn't it obvious, silly?"

I touch her skin and brush my hand down her shoulder. It's soft in a way that might redefine soft for me. Great, that just made it worse. But again, something in me resists.

"I can be slow. Spell it out for me."

She leans in and kisses me with a fire I've never experienced. Her tongue and mine intertwine for what seems like forever.

Pulling back, she whispers, "I want you inside me."

The words just slip out of my mouth. "Let's go."

She takes me by the hand and leads me into the trees. I look around and see that I'm not the only one. I shake my head to try to get a grip. Somewhere, inside, I know that this is bad and that this is wrong.

But I want it so much.

chapter five

MOM'S COMING TO VISIT

It really is the Strange Aeon, for the stars have come right once again. This time an oblique conjunction in far parts of the universe is about to create a shallowing between dimensional walls that if properly taken advantage of will result in one of the Old Ones being able to once again manifest in this world. The Old One in question is Shub-Niggurath, the Black Mother.

The Black Mother cannot simply manifest because the stars are in alignment. Bringing a being of such potency into this world will require a ritual of significant magnitude to create an avatar that is capable of supporting its immense power. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the Children of Chaos have already accomplished such a feat in the Ruined King. It is no surprise that they have been watching and preparing all along. The Black Mother will again walk the Earth.

To help them prepare, the Children of Chaos have found allies, rescuing the Congregation of the Earth Mother from near extinction. Though the lesser cult is almost entirely unfamiliar with the dark god they truly worship, they are fanatical in their worship of nature. The Children of Chaos has exploited their beliefs and galvanized them as a small army to help their Dhohanoids prepare for the ritual and gather the necessary components to bring their Earth Mother home.

The ritual that will breach the dimensional barriers is complicated and requires much. First and foremost it requires a primal place, a place of raw natural power, untouched by civilized man and unscarred by war. The jungles of Africa or the rain forests of South America would be perfect, but the Children of Chaos have chosen somewhere else. They've chosen the no man's land between the invading Migou and the frontier of the New Earth Government, in the primordial forests of North America's Pacific Northwest.

Next, the deity of nature requires fertility and lots of it. The sacrifice of newborn babies, to be precise. Since there are few mothers that would volunteer their children for such a horrid fate, it is up to the cultists involved to create the required bounty. At first, young fertile girls were kidnapped from across North America and brought to Seattle to become unwilling mothers. When the horrifying rape prison was destroyed by an industrious pack of Tagers, the cultists had to rethink their position. With the day rapidly approaching, they were forced to step into the public eye and steal an entire maternity ward's worth of newborns.

Babies aren't the only component. A wide variety of what might be considered standard ritual ingredients are needed but in much larger quantities than normal, including incense, harmonic crystals, herbs, and the like. Mystical artifacts are also needed. The Circlet of Ghabbaz is critical, an ancient fertility object that is indestructible and has been split into three parts. The Children of Chaos have been working to acquire this last item and have two of the three pieces already.

Things from beyond this world are also critical. The Children of Chaos have found what few of Shub-Niggurath's offspring still

live in the world. The Horned Ones, as they are known, are curious hybrids of man and animal, strangely sexually irresistible. They have provided the Congregation of the Earth Mother with the knowledge they need to bring more Horned Ones into the world. What's worse is that the animal cultists have been mating with the unearthly creatures, producing unholy things.

The magic surrounding this feat is too complicated and advanced for most Chrysalis Corporation sorcerers, so it is Nyarlathotep's other children that have taken the reins of this ritual. While the corporation throws its resources at acquiring the materials and artifacts necessary and provides the much needed security and muscle, the Circle prepares the more rarefied needs and provides the mystical knowledge.

The site itself is already extensively protected by magic as well as physical surveillance and security. Wards keep it invisible to all but the naked eye, high-tech Chrysalis Corporation gear keeps watch, and Dhohanoid teams patrol with Congregation mediums. Those unlucky few who have found themselves near this place have found themselves the subject of cruel, bestial hunts.

Because of the enormous amount of cosmic energy required to perform a feat such as this, Circle sorcerers have been laboring to create gigantic Ruach Wells to store it. Standing stones encircle the ritual site and every day cultists trek to the spot to donate their ruach to the cause. By the time of the ritual, there will be more than enough.

When the moment comes, Circle sorcerers will begin. They will ritually murder the babies while a gigantic orgy begins, chanting all the while. After a whole day of this, among other less disgusting things, the standing stones will shatter as the Ruach is released and the world will rock with the birth-cry of the avatar of Shub-Niggurath. Should it manifest, the tide of the Aeon War will turn – in favor of the Cults.

The Eldritch Society has no idea what's going on, other than things have been a little strange in the Pacific Northwest lately. There's been a lot of Dhohanoid activity. The strongest clue they've got is that the Children of Chaos are up to something with the Circlet of Ghabbaz and were running a rape prison – for what reasons, they don't know. Tagers are investigating, which is how the Eldritch Society will uncover this dark plan.

In the end, the fight the Eldritch Society has on its hands is big, perhaps bigger than the Tagers in the Pacific Northwest will be able to handle. However, there is another way, for not always do Tagers have to fight their own battles. The thing they seek to stop is something that the New Earth Government would jump at the opportunity to crush, but only if the less corrupt branches of said government were to be leaked the right information at the right time. Fortunately, the Eldritch Society trusts the zealotry of the Office of Internal Security. Spill the right beans about the right kind of mystical crime in the right place and a small army will be dispatched to shoot first and ask questions later. The Society only suspects that it draw the attention of even a bigger and

more zealous fish – NEG Special Services – who brings an even bigger and more mystical gun to the proceedings.

It is into this crazy arena that we bring your Characters, who will be the central figures in keeping a terrifying extra-dimensional creature of god-like proportions from becoming a new player in the Aeon War.

This is one of the few victories of 2086 and it is enormous. It's too bad no one will know about it.

THE BLACK MOTHER

The Congregation of the Earth Mother believes that Shub-Niggurath is the perfect embodiment of nature and that its return will bring perfect harmony to all life on the planet. They revere the Chrysalis Corporation as the machine of the gods, with servants that wear divine forms. What an incredibly romantic and naive view. It's no wonder the Chrysalis Corporation, who knows the truth, is using them.

The Black Mother is not what the Congregation believes. It is an Old One. It is an alien being that thinks in ways unknowable to us. Only one thing is certain and that is if it returns, we are insignificant to it. All we are to it are things in the way of whatever it wants to do and it will push us out of the way, just like the Unnamable is doing.

What is perhaps most disturbing about the Black Mother is that she may be indirectly responsible for the evolution of the Human race, when last her avatar walked the Earth. Millennia ago, when the Old Ones ruled, Shub-Niggurath walked in the most primordial places, the well-springs of life on this world. Whether directly or indirectly, the energy the Old One emanates influenced early life. Like it or not, Shub-Niggurath is one of the reasons why life has turned out the way it has. It truly can claim the title of Earth Mother.

At some point, your Characters are going to discover that Shub-Niggurath is the central focus of this heinous plot and will want to do more research. Characters with Occult skills of an Expert level of expertise or more (or those with the Old Ones or Occult History specializations) are likely to have heard the name and know something about it. Several arcane tomes are also of use: the uncensored Book of Dzyan, the uncensored Breath of R'lyeh, or the uncensored Necronomicon. These last two are extremely rare. Fortunately, your Characters are likely to be members of the Eldritch Society with access to the Lorekeeper network. They have an enormous library of occult tomes at their disposal and can easily help fill in the gaps of personal research, given a little time.

A NEW CONGREGATION

The Congregation of the Earth Mother worships nature to such a point that many undergo a ritual to bond with their spirit animal, taking on the soul of the beast along with certain physical traits and abilities. Because of their wild and untamed natures,

they have never been terribly cautious. This led to their near extinction at the hands of the Federal Security Bureau's Sectarian Crimes Division. In fact, as far as the government is concerned, they are no longer a threat, perhaps only existing in small isolated pockets with no real power structure.

They are most definitely wrong. True, the cult was nearly wiped out, but the Children of Chaos have plans for them. Nyarlathotep's cult saved them from both the FSB and from themselves, giving them the resources to rebuild, helping them reinvent themselves in to survive within the new landscape, and providing them with a purpose, one of which they never could have dreamed. The Circle had discovered something wonderful, that the stars will soon be in the right position to rip through the dimensions to bring forth an avatar of the Congregation's lost god, the Black Mother. They have been preparing for this homecoming ever since.

The Congregation of the Earth Mother is now larger and more diverse. For generations, it has been the cult's witches that have kept the Congregation together, communing with the powers that be, leading worship, exploring magicks, and coordinating their bestial members. Mortal cultists and spirit animal mediums made up the rest of the ranks. Now that has all changed with the return of the Horned Ones. These mercurial creatures are the closest thing to true offspring that the Black Mother has and as a result are regarded as holy beings by the Congregation. While they do not technically lead the cult, the rest of the Congregation is expected to cater to their whims and obey their commands, regardless of the wishes of the witches. Another powerful addition to the cult is the tainted animal offspring of the Horned Ones. These creatures are as smart as men and, with the advanced rate at which Horned Ones breed, are quickly becoming numerous.

Overall, the Congregation is still wild, perhaps wilder than it has ever been before, but it is rolling chaos somehow held in check by the sometimes predictable nature of animals and the unshaking devotion of the witches.

Despite the fact that the Congregation has become a powerful and clever force of its own, the Children of Chaos still regard them as nothing more than pawns in their unfathomable chess game. Once the Congregation has helped them ready and perform the ritual, once an avatar of Shub-Niggurath takes her rightful place on the Earth, the Children of Chaos will have no further use for them. They will be turned over to the Black Mother to do with as she pleases and left to their own devices. Inside of that, the Children of Chaos have no problem deceiving the Congregation, sacrificing them where they may need to be sacrificed, or cheating them in the name of Old Ones' greater good.

THE ELDRITCH SOCIETY

While the Office of Internal Security and the Federal Security Bureau are certainly clever, they simply do not live deep enough in the dark side of society to properly catch wind of what is truly

SPIRIT ANIMAL POSSESSION

A few basic kinds of spirit animal possession are presented on p. 32 of *Dark Passions*, but here are a few more examples from which to draw. Feel free to mix them in with the ones from *Dark Passions* to create an unpredictable mix of foes from the Congregation of the Earth Mother.

Arachnid (Spider Family) Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +2 Agility, +1 Strength

Quality Bonuses: Acute Touch, High Pain Threshold

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Fangs (+1), Quadruple Climbing Speed (can cling to sheer surfaces), Thermal Vision (as sensor system), Venom (as Shadow Tager)

Avian (Bird Family) Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +1 Agility, +2 Perception

Quality Bonuses: Acute Hearing, Acute Vision, Wary

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Long Range Senses (as sensor system), Quadruple Jump Distance, Nightvision (as Nazzadi ability), Talons (+1)

*Lagomorph (Rabbit Family) Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +2 Agility, +1 Perception

Quality Bonuses: Acute Hearing, Acute Smell & Taste, Fast, Wary

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Broadband Hearing (as sensory system), Double Jump Distance, Gnawing Teeth (+1)

Reptile Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +1 Strength, +2 Tenacity

Quality Bonuses: Acute Smell & Taste,

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Double Land Speed, Sharp Teeth (+1), Thermal Vision (as sensor system)

Rodent Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +2 Agility, +1 Perception

Quality Bonuses: Acute Hearing, Acute Smell & Taste, Fast, Wary

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Double Climbing Speed, Double Jump Distance, Double Land Speed, Claws (+1), Nightvision (as Nazzadi ability)

Ursine (Bear Family) Possession

Attribute Bonuses: +2 Strength, +1 Tenacity

Quality Bonuses: Acute Hearing, Acute Smell & Taste, Acute Vision, Peripheral Vision, Wary

Skill Bonuses: +1 level of expertise for Athletics, Observation, and Survival

Special Abilities: Armor 1/1, Attack with clawed hug, double climbing speed

going on. They may have suspicions based on rumors from the streets, but they have no idea of the scope. The only group in place to uncover this plot and put a stop to it is the Eldritch Society.

There are two key resources within the Eldritch Society that will help them in their quest. The first are the operators. Every pack has one at their disposal, a person who sits in front of a computer terminal and communications equipment, capable of coordinating efforts and digging up information on a moment's notice. They are the voice on the other end of the line that brings the power of the Eldritch Society to bear on behalf of any pack in the field, but they are so often overlooked by the Taggers. When one is facing otherworldly horrors, and is in fact one himself, it could be easy to see how one might regard an operator as nothing but an admin. Utilized properly and properly respected, the operator's network is a powerful thing.

The second are the Lorekeepers. They are scholars of all things needed for the Shadow War, especially within the world of the occult. The Lorekeepers maintain their own network, passing information and unearthed knowledge from city to city, pack to pack. Their libraries are extensive and enough to make most occultists salivate. However, perhaps the most useful and treasured part of their resources are the *Ta'ge Fragments* and the Lorekeeper journals. The *Ta'ge Fragments* give them access to secrets no one else in the world has, including the Rite of Sacred Union. They are, fundamentally, the spine upon which the Society is based. The journals, on the other hand, are collections of all the observations and experiences of Lorekeepers around the world, a sort of roadmap of shared experience. It is surprising the number of insights that are regularly gleaned from the personal writings of hundreds of Lorekeepers from all around the world for more than twenty years. If the Taggers are the arms of the Society and the Operators its eyes and ears, the Lorekeepers are its brain.

Like most orders of holy warriors, it is the Taggers that are technically in charge of the Eldritch Society. The packs make their own decisions and keep their own counsel. However, there must always be those who call the shots for the order as a whole. In the case of Taggers, it is they who have gone through the process of metamorphosis, joining in deeper symbiosis with the alien thing that makes them monsters. One might say that the leaders of the Eldritch Society are the monsters among monsters, those who give the already inhuman pause.

Metamorphosis is not a common thing. Few Taggers are willing to truly explore that alien part of themselves in the depth required for such a feat. Those that do emerge from the terrifying experience with far greater power, but are more divorced from their mortality. As such, there are only a couple dozen in most cities, even in a major arcology the size of Seattle.

The two metamorphosed Taggers that the Characters will be dealing with in this story are Garrett Paulson and Sary. Garrett is a Wraith, the metamorphosed version of a Phantom, and Sary is a Torment, the metamorphosed version of a Nightmare. (Tager metamorphosis will be presented in detail in the *Ancient Enemies* book. Their statistics are not important here, as neither of these supporting characters will be involved in a conflict situation.) Garrett is a delving of all things forbidden, and occult expert in his own right. Rumor has it that he practices sorcery, but with no

Orgone rating of his own, he must rely on the cosmic capacity of others. In any case, he has been avidly watching the events that are unfolding and will be the silent eyes watching the Characters' moves as this story progresses. Sary is a former soldier who did two tours as an intelligence specialist. She has been heavily trained in the art of military tactics, both large and small scale. While Garrett watches the situation from a cosmic perspective, Sary watches from a security perspective. She will be the one to help determine how Eldritch Society forces are deployed in the face of the impending doom.

In general, the current population of Seattle is around four million people, of which around three thousand are Tagers. Of those, about 80% of them are Mirages or Phantoms (around 2400), and about 18% are Echoes, Shadows, Spectres, or Whispers (about 550), and about 2% are Nightmares or Vampires (about 60). They are outnumbered by Dhohanooids at least four to one, and it is much easier for the Chrysalis Corporation to make more than it is for the Eldritch Society to create more Tagers. That is just one of the many reasons their war is fought in shadows.

As this story begins, the Eldritch Society of Seattle is in the dark. They know that something's up, that Dhohanooid activity has been on the rise, that powerful ancient artifacts have surfaced, but that's about it. The packs are keeping with business as usual, but they are also on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary. Everyone is just a little on edge and packs are keeping themselves busy. Undoubtedly, your Characters are no different.

The events that happen in this story are such that they only arouse suspicions until it is almost too late. Your Characters will work independently as usual, their actions and whereabouts passed on through the Operator and Lorekeeper networks. They will have access to the usual resources, though their activities will attract the attention of two important people who will be watching carefully – the metamorphosed Tagers. When things go truly wrong, the forces of the Eldritch Society are mobilized under the Characters' command. After all, the Society is about efficiency and what's more efficient than having those in the know be in charge, even if it's only temporary.

THE CHILDREN OF CHAOS

What few realize is that Nyarlathotep's primary cult on Earth, the Children of Chaos, is comprised of two important and distinct parts. The most prevalent side is the Chrysalis Corporation, a multi-national company that has been fully infiltrated and is controlled by the cult. It is the master of the insidious Dhohanooids and anybody whose anybody within the cult has undergone the Rite of Transfiguration. The other side is known as the Circle, a group of highly gifted sorcerers and para-psychics who did not agree with the corporatization of the cult. They are the power elite of the Children of Chaos – at least the power elite that aren't the highest ranking Dhohanooids. Both sides of the cult have massive occult power and the power that comes from large-scale finances and being a manufacturer of arms and armor.

In this story, the full force of both cults will be brought to bear. Let's look at what the Chrysalis Corporation brings to the table.

Keeping with the idea that the current population of Seattle is around four million people, the Chrysalis Corporation employs at least a quarter of the working population through itself or one of its subsidiaries. Of those employees, only about 1% of them are Dhohanooids – most of them are minor functionaries at less important companies – which equals about 10,000 of them in Seattle. The good news, for the Children of Chaos, is that Dhohanooids are much easier to produce than Tagers and their numbers are swelling faster than they are thinned. In general, about 60% of Dhohanooids are either Dua-Sanaras or Ramachese (around 6000), 20% are Gelgore, Namarok, Patul, or Vrykol (around 2000), 10% are Elib or Thog-Manna (around 1000), and 10% are Ciraqen or Zabuth (around 1000). All this equals a large fighting force of supernatural creatures that can mask themselves inside society.

They also have a technological advantage over the Eldritch Society. While the Society has to purchase arms off the unreliable black market, the Chrysalis Corporation owns companies that manufacture them. (The Eldritch Society is unwittingly putting cash in their enemy's pocket many times when they buy armaments off the black market.) This means they have unrestricted access to things that might otherwise be impossible to acquire, including full-blown assault rifles including gauss and rail rifles, full military-grade machineguns, a wide range of grenades including high-explosive, anti-mech, and incendiary, grenade launchers, explosives, anti-mech rockets, EMP weapons, heavy armor, and more.

This does not include the wide influence of the company, which comes in two parts. The first is the vast financial fortune that is the Chrysalis Corporation. Money is never an object. Operatives have access to virtually unlimited accounts, fast cars, expensive merchandise, and pretty much anything they need. The second is in terms of contacts. The number of leaders of industry and politicians that take kick-backs or contributions from the Chrysalis Corporation is staggering. One phone call often gets operatives whatever they need.

The Circle, on the other hand, brings occult might to the table. The sorcerers and para-psychics that make up the cult must already be powerful before they are even approached to join. High-order para-psychic powers are not uncommon in their ranks. Enchanted items abound – in fact, they have groups of sorcerers dedicated to nothing but creating a stockpile of enchanted items for wide-scale use. That does not include the ritual power they have at their disposal, with almost unlimited access to any spell they might want. Furthermore, the Blind Lady, an avatar of Nyarlathotep, is the matriarch of the cult, an enigmatic figure that specially guides them over their brothers.

The point is, the Children of Chaos will be bringing their A-game in this story. Your Characters had better watch their step.

THE HORNED ONES

The true heirs to the legacy of the Black Mother are creatures known in lost tomes as the Horned Ones. Precious little is known about them and few, if any, have been seen in the last several hundred years. Myths about them are rare at best, but those stories that special few occult delvers might find tell them to be both bestial and erotic. Such a disturbing notion seems hard to conceive.

Or at least it would be if the Congregation of the Earth Mother was not intent on bringing them back into the world. The Children of Chaos first provide the animalistic cult with what they need to contact the handful of Horned Ones still in this world. Unsurprisingly, they answer. Then the Congregation is given the knowledge to begin to bring more of the Black Mother's children into this world through ritual. Temples are set up in remote areas of cities outside arcologies where these unholy magicks are worked. Finally, the Horned Ones become instrumental in the earth-shaking ritual that will bring Shub-Niggurath into the world, tipping the Aeon War distinctly in the direction of mortal annihilation.

The Horned Ones are disturbing to anyone still in grasp of their mind. True to form, they are an unholy union of animal and incredibly alluring humanoid. Females are beautiful, trim, and busty. Males are handsome, strong, and well-endowed. Each might be considered attractive in a model-esque way – the top 2%. Then, add animalistic traits. One might be fused with a deer, a gorgeous female with horns coming out of her forehead, soft downy fur covering her body, legs that bend the wrong way, and hooves that almost look like high heels. One might be fused with a snake, a captivating woman with diamond scale-like patterns running the contours of her body, with slitted pupils, small fangs, and an alien way of moving that is truly double-jointed. Another might be a handsome man with chiseled muscles, segmented eyes, antennae, an interesting black and yellow patterning, and insect-like wings. Regardless of form, they never wear clothes or covering of any kind.

While some might find their alien looks to be attractive, most would be repulsed. That is, if not for the mystical pheromones that the Horned Ones constantly secrete. To be near one is to be bathed in a heady, musky smell that permeates the air, the effects of which might be likened to the onset of euphoric drugs. More than the euphoria is the overwhelming desire to copulate, specifically, the overwhelming desire to copulate with the part-beast, part-human thing producing the pheromones. Horned Ones are the ultimate seducers and seductresses and few can escape their wiles.

Horned Ones, as one could expect, are what one might term lovers, not fighters. It is not that they are not capable when things come to blows, but they prefer to have sex with their victims before killing them, sometimes repeatedly. Under the effects of Horned One influence, soldiers put down their guns, commanders cease issuing orders, and even Taggers shift back to their mortal forms. It is very difficult to wish to harm a Horned One and only those of steel wills are capable of such an act.

This is only reinforced by the experience of the sex act with a Horned One. It is, flat out, the best sex anyone can ever have. The full-body experience is like electricity, the orgasm is mind-blowing, and the act seems to last forever. It increases the endurance of the mortal partner manifold and makes him or her multi-orgasmic, ready to go again within minutes. And Horned Ones are hardly prudish, happy to indulge any fetish or fantasy along the way.

But what comes of these unholy unions? Surely no seed can find purchase in such an alien fashion. Wrong. Every union, every single one, even if somehow birth control is involved, produces pregnancy. The offspring are not what one might expect. Instead of being Horned Ones or sick animal-human hybrids, they are instead Outsider-Tainted animals related to the Horned One parents "breed," similar in characteristics to the familiars summoned by sorcerers. They are intelligent, dangerous, and completely loyal to the Horned Ones and the Black Mother. Armies of such creatures are being bred, as the Horned Ones never stop having sex long enough to not either be pregnant or to impregnate.

Horned Ones may keep their partners alive for a while, depending upon how interesting or cooperative they are. Typically, males are killed after several trysts and possibly eaten. Females are kept captive as long as they are pregnant and typically do not survive the birth of their alien offspring. The worst part about such a thing is that these victims aren't often bitter because of the ecstatic road that brought them to this point.

Within the Congregation of the Earth Mother, the Horned Ones are regarded as holy beings. After all, they are the Black Mother's chosen. Horned Ones are given free reign to do whatever they wish. Their instructions are followed by the Congregation's mediums and lesser witches and, of course, the Horned One's offspring always obey their bestial parents. They are not tacticians of any sort, but their intuition makes them unusually and instinctively effective. Their otherworldly way of being makes them capable of victories and defeats that seem in many ways unreal. Horned Ones are impossible to predict.

However, sometimes their urges try the patience of the canny witches who hold the Congregation together. Horned Ones will bring enemies back to temples, seduce each and every one of them, and never worry what danger they might represent. They are so in the throes of their animalistic lusts that such a worry would never occur to them. It is easy to see why this so often infuriates the witch overseeing the already rolling chaos.

There seems to be no hierarchy within the Horned Ones, no ruling class, no chain of command, if such a thing could exist. Each of them seems to regard the other as an absolute equal and they are rarely of differing minds. They can communicate soundlessly, through body language, in an almost telepathic fashion. Their graceful packs are almost seamless, except for the idiosyncrasies of some of their parent beasts'. It is almost as if they are an extension of the Black Mother herself.

SPECIAL RULES

The Horned Ones are designed to lure other creatures into sexual congress, through their pheromones and hypnotic voices.

People can smell the pheromones up to fifty yards away, but it isn't until they're within ten yards that they are effective. Anyone within must make Hard Tenacity Feat Test to resist. Failure means the Character is totally in the thrall of the creature, and will work to mate with it as quickly as possible. He will stay in that state until he moves more than 10 yards away - 11 to 20 minutes (1 die + 10) later, he can Test again. Success means that the Character still feels the pull to mate, but is in control of himself. He still will not want to harm the creature, suffering a -6 Test Penalty to any Action he takes against it if he forces himself to do so. In 11 to 20 minutes, he must Test again if still exposed.

Their voice functions the same way as the pheromones, but affects anyone who can hear their voice (including over the phone). Success, however, in this case means the Character resists fully.

Each Horned One is unique, gifted by the species of which it most resembles. The guidelines given here provide a basic framework from which to build. Please modify your Horned Ones appropriately. Each should be exotic and deadly in their own right.

Average Horned One

Allegiance: Congregation of the Earth Mother

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (5 to 7 ft)

Attributes: Agility 12, Intellect 4, Perception 10, Presence 12, Strength 14, Tenacity 8

Secondary Attributes: Actions 3, Orgone 14, Reflex 8

General Skills: Athletics: Master, Languages (a dozen): Expert, Occult: Expert, Observation: Expert, Persuade: Master, Seduction: Master, Stealth: Master, Survival: Expert

Combat Skills: Dodge: Master, Fighting: Master

Weapons: Most have some kind of natural close quarters attack, such as a bite, claw or horn, with a +1 or +2 damage rating. Some may have the ability to entangle or be poisonous.

Damage Bonus: +4

Vitality: 17

Armor: 2/2

Regeneration: 2 Points

Fear Factor: 12 (only if out of pheromone or voice range)

Temperament: Alluring & Mercurial

Senses: Acute Hearing, Acute Smell & Taste, Broadband Hearing, Nightvision (in most cases); Acute Vision, Thermal, and/or Wary (in some)

Movement & Speed: Land [27 mph (67/15 ypt)]; some have Flight [54 mph (134/30 ypt)] or Swimming [27 mph (67/15 ypt)] or can Climb and cling to sheer surfaces [17 mph (42/10 ypt)]



MOM'S COMING TO VISIT

This story is one possible way these events can play out. They may seem a little chaotic and a little disparate, but that's the nature of the beast. After all, the enemy in question is the Children of Chaos.

You'll also notice that some of the details are left deliberately vague. This is so you can customize things to work for your Characters, modifying numbers of enemies for the appropriate challenge, inserting your own Supporting Cast, and the like.

This story can take quite a while to complete. You can start at the beginning and stay on task the whole way through, or you can pepper other minor stories in between pieces. For example, it is easy to play out other plots in between the parts of Act I and the first parts of Act II. However, once the Characters begin on the path entitled "Furry Friends," it is likely a downhill spiral to the final conflict and conclusion.

ACT I: A TERRIBLE PATH

Goals: To bring the Characters into this large part of the meta-plot. To create high stakes right off the bat. To give the Characters a personal beef with the antagonists. To rescue a captured Tager and bring her to safety, along with the important information she carries.

Setting: The Seattle arcology; Harborview Hospital in the First Hill neighborhood; an Agrarian Foods processing and distribution center; Mercury Communications telecom hub.

Cast: *Dr. Simon Tam* – Experienced, Chinese male, early-thirties, very proper looking, speaks with an English accent. Simon is well-mannered and even-keeled. He is an old-money doctor-sorcerer who has been working in the trauma ward of Harborview Hospital as a way to give back. He is also secretly tainted and a part of the Eldritch Society.

Gustave – Veteran, German male, mid-fifties, weathered, unshaven, and unclean, dressed in second-hand clothes that could stand to be washed. Gustave is a veteran of the First Arcanotech War who never came back. He begs for change and drinks his way through his day. Gustave still has nothing good to say about the Nazzadi.

Domany – Experienced, Nazzadi female, mid-twenties, almost magazine perfect, Domany is smart enough to know how to use her looks without looking like she is. She is secretly a powerful sorceress who is a part of the Circle and a right-hand person to Farouk Hassan.

Wade Inoue – Veteran, Japanese male, mid-fifties but aging very well, unassuming and friendly. Wade is a man with a past, who spent years trading in the black market. He has been bought/blackmailed into helping the Circle kidnap infants at Harborview Hospital, something that doesn't seem to bother his conscience.

Chrysalis Corporation Employees – Novice and Experienced, Human and Nazzadi males and females, all who work assorted jobs at Chrysalis Corporation subsidiaries without knowing the true nature of their employer.

Chrysalis Corporation Dhohanoids – Experienced, Human and Nazzadi males and females, assorted Dhohanoids. They are part of the security at Agrarian Foods, near the end of the Act.

Angela MacGregor – Experienced, Scottish female, late-twenties, beautiful red-head. Angela has been kidnapped by the Chrysalis Corporation and subjected to almost constant torture for the last three months. See p. 142 of *Vade Mecum* for more details.

SO IT BEGINS

This story takes place in and around the Seattle arcology in the Pacific Northwest of North America. Since this story is a continuation of the Hot Merchandise story from the *Core Book* (p. 273), your Characters may already be embroiled in this plot and need no more incentive. Also, if your Characters are already playing in Seattle or have an excuse to go there, you're all set. If they don't, the first step is to get them to Seattle. Perhaps an old friend in the Eldritch Society calls them to tell them that some serious Dhohanoid activity has been picking up and they could use the extra help. Perhaps a family member lives there and has some kind of event a Character needs to come be a part of, whether it's a marriage, birth, or important birthday. Perhaps it's just a need to get away and one of the Characters is attracted to Seattle's reputation for having awesome microbrewed beers. However you do it, you can find a way to entice them there.

NEW PARENTS

The Eldritch Society of Seattle recently discovered that the Chrysalis Corporation was up to something big. The capture of two pieces of the Circler of Ghabbaz, subsequent loss, and break up of a kidnap/rape center set up in a industrial warehouse south of downtown has them on edge. All the Tagers in town are on the look out for a powerful sorcerer named Farouk Hassan and his assistant Domany, but neither has surfaced anywhere. It's as if they've disappeared.

Enter Simon Tam, a young Chinese trauma doctor from a prestigious old-money family. Dr. Tam is a recent recruit of the Eldritch Society, as he is also a registered sorcerer with some amount of skill. During one of Simon's personal less-than-legal magical experiments, something went wrong and he became tainted – now he bleeds something akin to formaldehyde instead of blood. His explorations into cures brought him to the Eldritch Society and his strong moral compass led him to sign on.

Dr. Tam has two important parts to play here. The first is that after Hassan went to ground, Simon purchased his upscale Belltown magic shoppe to remodel and open as his own. After all, the new life he is embracing isn't conducive to hospital hours, so he needs to create some sort of other respectable front. The second is that he works in the emergency room of Harborview Hospital and he's there when the babies go missing.

One quiet night in June, nurses scream and security scrambles as the hospital turns into a tightly controlled madhouse. Somehow, around three dozen newborn infants disappear. One minute the nurses are there and all is well, the next everybody turns their backs and they're gone. No noise, no crying, nothing on the security tapes. It's as if the infants vanished into thin air. It isn't long before the police have the place locked down and are playing spin control to make sure that this doesn't get out into the public's eye.

Considering that Simon, like every Society member in the Seattle arcology, knows that Chrysalis has been up to something with pregnant mothers, he makes the call. The key here is creating a convincing reason that your Characters would be the ones told to look into this. If they are already embroiled in Seattle events, it's easy – especially if they were involved in the events of Hot Merchandise. Otherwise, come up with whatever works, including the defaults of “right place, right time” or “they're the only ones not busy and someone needs to be there now.”

Investigating this incident will be much easier with the help of a respected staff member like Dr. Tam. He curries much favor with the administrators of the hospital and any half-baked story about who the Characters are and why they are there should fly. However, the evidence trail is dry. There were no witnesses, there is nothing on the security tapes (which show the babies there one minute and gone the next), and there is no fingerprint, DNA, or other forms of evidence. Pretty much everyone is assuming that whoever did this had some powerful magic at their disposal and the Office of Internal Security has taken over the investigation. About the best anyone can figure at this point is the perpetrators' access route. There is a nearby elevator shaft with a ladder that leads to the roof. Since going through the whole hospital to get to the front doors would not have worked, this is the most likely path. Unfortunately, there's nothing on the roof of the hospital to help – at least not directly.

Up on the Roof

What the police didn't find was the homeless man crashing on a nearby roof who saw a whole lot of what was going on. He's the kind of guy who doesn't trust the cops, so he left when they were investigating. Anybody else investigating he'll be happy, even eager, to talk to. Gustave is a veteran of the First Arcanotech War who never quite recovered. He is not friendly to any Nazzadi in the group and will not speak when they are present; he will also go on a tirade about how they're not to be trusted that will take a bit of time or a fresh bottle of liquor to bring him off.

His story is simple. A bunch of guys park an unmarked delivery truck a few blocks away, climb up on the rooftops, climb down the elevator shaft, and climb back out a little while later with a bunch of sleeping babies. They took the babies back to the truck and left. That's it. However, Gustave has two useful descriptions of two people that may help. The first he describes is a “lab rat” who seemed to be in charge, accompanied by a tirade about how of course it was a Nazzadi up to no good. She was beautiful, in a should-be-modelling kind of way, wearing an expensive black

suit. He can't give much more detail than that, but she did have one important distinguishing characteristic – a whitework tattoo that formed a semi-circle around her right eye. He can even sketch it. The second description is of a middle-aged Asian man wearing a hospital security uniform, who opened up and closed up for them. Simon knows exactly who it is – Wade Inoue.

Wade

A man with a checkered past, Wade Inoue is a security guard who has worked third-shift at the hospital for about a year. He's of Japanese descent, in his fifties (though he looks much younger), with an easy-going way about him. Truth is, Wade knows how to manipulate people. He has a background in weapons and drug smuggling and has made and lost his fortune many times. He does what he does now as a cover for having income, and because the “life” got too stressful at his age. However, Wade is highly-trained to resist questioning and to hide his thoughts, so he can fool talented interrogators as well as low- to mid-grade telepaths and empaths. As of right now, the authorities don't even have him on a short list. His real identity is buried and he has an air-tight alibi.

However, Wade is the inside man. He was recently approached by a beautiful Nazzadi woman who knew way too much about him – Domany, though he never knew her name. She threatened him with blackmail and offered him a load of cash, so Wade signed on for one job. All he had to do was regularly let in one or two people and then clear the way on the final night and that was it. The babies are gone, the job's done, and Wade's just waiting for things to calm down so he can move to Los Angeles.

Fortunately, the Characters have something the authorities don't – an eyewitness – as well as the ability to terrify people in whole new ways. Unfortunately, there really isn't anything to find out from Wade, other than confirming Gustave's story and what they may already know. However, this information does tie these events in with events that have already happened, so the Eldritch Society at least knows the same players are afoot.

On to the next emergency.

SOLDIER DOWN

Something that the Eldritch Society isn't terribly forthcoming about is the fate of one of the packs investigating Hassan. A pack led by Angela MacGregor, a Tager trying fairly unsuccessfully to live a double life as a cop and a Tager, had just found a hot lead on Domany when most of them were killed in an explosion. The only body not found was Angela and is has been assumed that she was captured by the Chrysalis Corporation. There have been no leads and the Society isn't even sure she is still alive.

However, oddly on the heels of the baby kidnapping, new information has come to light. The Eldritch Society tries to plant spies inside of Chrysalis whenever they can. It is not an easy job and most are either compromised or killed. However, one man in Seattle has done better than the rest, primarily because he was inside the Chrysalis Corporation first and turned on them



second. His name is Kole Sorenson and he is an environmental para-psychic who erupted during the Rite of Transfiguration. His powers prevented him from becoming a Dhohanoid and it was a rude fall from grace thereafter within the Children of Chaos. However, his identity is known only to his pack and a few trusted others.

Kole has heard about a captured Tager that the Corporation has hidden away on which to experiment. By experiment, they mean explore her endurance for pain and suffering. Kole is unsure if it is Angela or not, but there aren't any other missing Tagers in Seattle. He has the names and addresses of two locations and has happily passed those on before disappearing again.

The two locations are both subsidiaries of the Chrysalis Corporation. The first is a telecommunications hub of Mercury Communications. The second is a food processing plant of Agrarian Foods, who makes packaged and canned foods for the end consumer.

Mercury Communications

As with most telecommunications hubs, this Mercury building is highly secure. Gates, access panels, security cameras, the works. From the outside, it sure looks like the kind of place one might stuff a captured Tager.

It is entirely up to the creativity of your players how they get into the building. Shadows might trail someone in, Spectres might just walk through the wall, or Whispers might just look through using X-ray. They might sneak in using a more mundane method or they may impersonate a worker or delivery person. However, one sure way to know that this isn't the place is the distinct lack of mystical protection. Chrysalis isn't hiding anything here, but you may want to have your players work a little in order to figure that out.

Agrarian Foods

The security at Agrarian is average at best. Only standard corporate security measures apply – key cards, a few security cameras, a few guards. It is a facility that processes packaged foods, packages them, and ships them to retail centers. There's also a canning floor, where common vegetables and fruits are canned, labelled, and shipped. Unexciting is one word to describe it.

Again, it's up to the creativity of your players as to how they get inside. They may infiltrate as Tagers or impersonate employees. The point is that Chrysalis is hiding something here, but they don't want it to look like they're hiding something here. Their obvious security measures aren't anything a professional can't handle.

Two things give this place away. One, the security guards are all Dhohanoids and a lot sharper looking than one might expect from a food processing facility. Any Tager who spends the time to watch people coming and going will figure this out pretty quickly. Second, anyone on the inside who can will notice the mystical protection in the basement.

The basement is made up of utility machines. The utility bases for many of the processing and packaging machines are down here, as well as things like the boiler, the electrical cage, and the like. If someone is paying attention to the layout, there's about a quarter of the basement floor that isn't there. If the rest of the building is a square, the basement seems to be laid out like a square with a chunk missing. Where did it go?

Investigation by mystical means yields only that the area can't be mystically observed – or observed by any kind of mechanical device. Obviously, wards protect it. Time to look for the secret entrance. It requires a Hard Tenacity Feat Test in order to clue in on the electrical cage. One of the panels is lit up only for show, while the rest have deadly levels of current passing through them. It is important that the Characters are sure they have the right panel before trying to open it.

The Secret Prison

The panel swings open to reveal a short metal corridor which ends in a security door. Fortunately, whoever's on the other side was a little careless when the Character's come to visit and they left the door open a crack. Whoever's at the front of the mix can peek in to see what the Chrysalis Corporation is trying to hide.

Inside is a room divided into two sections. The bulk of the space is made up of a bare cell with one door and a large armored, reinforced window through which the cell can be viewed. The rest of the space is the experiment area, with several computer monitors to control the unusual torture equipment in the cell and record their effects.

There are several Dhohanoids guarding things, the most impressive of which is a Zabuth who will be quite deadly in these tight quarters. At the controls currently is a Thog-Manna who can ooze right past everyone to attack from the back. Feel free to add a couple more Dhohanoids or reinforcements from the rear to make this fight worthwhile for your players.

Inside the cell is a naked, dirty, and worse for wear Angela MacGregor. This cell has tortured her in all kinds of ways that don't involve anyone actually touching her. She's been tortured by starvation, noise, subsonics, light, fire, blunt and sharp trauma, heat and cold, and all kinds of other inventive sadistic ways. Angela is alive, but not quite as home as she used to be.

Getting Angela out can be as tough or as easy as you'd like it to be. If they're badly beat up, you might want to take it easy on them. If they're riding high on the hog, have them run across the Namarok and Ramachese security teams on detail. Either way, they have a limited time before trucks arrive with additional response forces and that would be very ugly.

Angela's Prize

Your Characters will likely either take Angela back to one of their residences or to an Eldritch Society safehouse. She is in rough shape, not very communicative, and doesn't stay conscious for very long at a time. The Eldritch Society will be sending someone

along to take her to a Society clinic so that she can be properly treated – since she regenerates, the majority of her wounds are psychological. However, at some point before she is taken away, she will either grab someone or simply have an outburst where she'll say three things.

Ballard. Rictus Knife of Ephrates. The 12th.

Given the source, it's probably worth checking out.

ACT II: THE RETURN OF LOST THINGS

Goals: To bring the Characters into the meat of the story. To stop the Children of Chaos from acquiring several important and powerful artifacts. To discover the hidden plans of the Congregation of the Earth Mother. To find out what is really going on and to begin to put a stop to it.

Setting: a pre-Halloween bash in Fremont; the Dive nightclub in Fremont; downtown Seattle; the Washington Park Arboretum; the Northgate neighborhood, outside the arcology; an abandoned grocery store in Northgate; several lakes on the Olympic Peninsula; out in the wild.

Cast: *Sorena* – Experienced, Nazzadi male, early-thirties, renowned pretty boy club DJ. He is a Vampire Tager with a strong Nazzadi pride and a sadistic streak towards the minions of the Children of Chaos.

Roy Romer – Experienced, Caucasian male, early-thirties, former soldier from the Chinese frontlines. He is a pragmatic and prepared Widow Tager, whose cover is as Sorena's bodyguard.

The Chrysalis Corporation – mostly Experienced, some Veteran, various races and genders. They are the Dhohanoid servants of the Children of Chaos, gathering the last of the needed components for the ritual and protecting the site. A typical team is composed of three Dua-Sanaras (mix and match with Ramachese), one Gelgore, one Vrykol, and one Elib or Zabuth. Recon teams will be mostly Thog-Manna and Vrykol, while hunter teams will be mostly Namarok and Vrykol.

Liches – Veteran, indeterminate racial types, two male, one female, wrapped up a little snuggler than maybe they should be. They are powerful undead sorcerers in various states of advanced decay. They are cautious, desiring only to sell their sacrificial knife for a king's ransom to the Chrysalis Corporation.

Domany – from Act I.

Kiry – Inexperienced, Nazzadi female, college student, who has the misfortune of being Domany's younger sister. The sorceress has kept Kiry around so that she can steal her sister's pretty face and innocuous identity to go and interact with the world when the heat is on, feeding her spending and attention addictions.

Farouk Hassan – Veteran, Arabic male, mid-sixties, a kindly-looking, genteel man to the outside world, Circle sorcerer. On the inside, he is what many believe is evil incarnate. He is the perfect sorcerer to have been given the honor of heading up the efforts to bring the Black Mother back into this world.

A Desolate One – Veteran, Caucasian male, early-thirties, dressed in an expensive suit. The obsidian orbs that pass as his eyes give him away as one of the powerful supernatural leaders of the Disciples of Death's Shadow. He has no immediate quarrel with the Characters and they had better leave him alone.

The Congregation of the Earth Mother – various levels of experience, race, and gender. Witches, mediums, Horned Ones, and Tainted offspring. Oh my!

Horned Ones – both male and female, magical creatures that are an alluring combination of mortal and animal. They have a strong urge to mate with the Characters and the mystical pheromones they secrete will make it hard for the Characters to say no.

Skye – Veteran, Caucasian/Indian mixed female, late-forties, queen witch of the local Congregation of the Earth Mother. She is striking and a presence to reckon with, as well as being a powerful sorceress. A constant menace radiates from her, a great help in keeping the chaos of the Congregation in line.

The Circle – Experienced and Veteran, various races and genders, dressed in ritual clothes. They are all dangerously powerful cultists who are managing and overseeing the setup of the ritual that will bring Shub-Niggurath into this world once again.

Nlada – Veteran, Nazzadi male, late-thirties, dressed in all black, Circle sorcerer. He is one of Hassan's right-hand men, helping him acquire the last components and set up the ritual. Having been Tainted by the Outsiders, Nlada has sideways green cat's eyes. He is the kind of person who speaks only when he has something to say.

LOST THINGS

There are many powerful objects that the Children of Chaos need in order to pull off what they are up to. However, they've been at this already for a few years, so they've already gathered most of them and have them safely ferreted away until they are needed. Two important artifacts remain – the Rictus Knife of Ephrates and the Circlet of Ghabbaz.

The Rictus Knife of Ephrates

The Rictus Knife of Ephrates is not an easy item to identify. Finding anything out about it will require some serious research into the kind of books the New Earth Government will throw you in jail for life for reading. This kind of activity calls for two kinds of Extended Tests: one for Research and one for Occult. The Degree and Difficulty of both these Tests is Incredibly Hard (28), each requiring five successful Tests to complete. The best and most efficient way to get through is with teamwork. Hopefully, there

are enough skilled researchers and occultists in your Character's pack or there are close supporting character on which they can call. If they can't get it, they won't get all the backstory. If they do, they'll get a supposed drawing and a bunch of information.

In reality, and not very well depicted in the illustration, the Rictus Knife of Ephrates looks like an oddly-shaped knife carved from one large single bone, whose handle is wrapped in a tough aged leather. Upon closer examination, it is likely the bone is a human femur and the leather is human skin. It's function is not likely to be left in doubt once one understands of what it is made. Aside from its appearance, there is something about the knife that is unnerving. Cold seems to radiate from within the blade, not enough to make it difficult to hold, but enough to let one know there's more to the object than meets the eye.

The object's name comes from both its function and its supposed place of origin. Rictus knives are not unknown things to those well-learned in the occult. They are typically enchanted objects used for blood sacrifice that allow the user to focus the energy of the offering more powerfully and intensely into a ritual. Ephrates was supposedly an area in the cradle of civilization that existed before the dawn of recorded history. Legends say that powerful sorcerers ruled the people in that part of the world and that the sacrifice of children was a common part of their ritual magics. They also say that whatever powerful magicks the sorcerers of that day commanded eventually laid claim to them, wiping their civilization off the face of the planet. Items such as the Rictus Knife were lost to the world, presumed gone forever.

No longer, if what Angela has heard is true. The Chrysalis Corporation is about to make a deal to acquire this dark artifact and, with the disappearance of a mess of infants, one might suspect what its ultimate use might be. It won't be hard for the Characters to figure out they should interfere with this meeting, if it turns out to be what they think it is.

Once the Characters have researched what the Rictus Knife is, or perhaps concurrently, they will want to research what's going down in Ballard on the 12th of October. Ballard is a neighborhood just outside the arcology to the north, on the other side of the ship canal. It is home to the Ballard locks, which allow shipping vessels to travel from Puget Sound to Lake Union – they are no longer as important in a day of A-pod vehicles. The area once was known for its Scandinavian heritage and pride, but now it is just a flavor of old town Seattle, boasting some of the oldest standing buildings in the city.

The bars and nightclubs of Ballard are trying to get people to come out of the arcology this Halloween by hosting a series of parties and pub crawls every Friday in October, leading up the costume bash on the 26th (since the actual holiday falls on a Wednesday this year). The neighborhood association is marketing the heck out the festivities, so it won't be hard for the Characters to get hip to what's going on in Ballard on the night in question. Since the party on the 5th has already gone off, they also know that people turned out in record numbers and that

some pretty big named DJ's will be there this weekend. It's the perfect cover for a covert deal.

The two questions become where is the deal going down and what kind of trouble can the Characters expect? Neither of these are easy to answer.

The deal could conceivably be going down anywhere. There are about eighteen participating bars and nightclubs and that doesn't include the many closed shops, art spaces, and restaurants. The Characters can scout all they want, but the best they'll get is the lay of the land. They're just going to have to place each other in key positions and keep their eyes out, spinning a web to catch their prey. They do, however, soon discover that they have allies in their venture. One of the artists scheduled to play is Sorena, an internationally renowned dance music DJ. He is also a Vampire Tager and part of the same pack as Simon Tam. Sorena will be there with his personal bodyguard, Roy Romer, an ex-soldier with more tours on the Chinese front than he'll freely admit and also a Widow Tager (a rare type from the upcoming *Ancient Enemies* book). They have the ability to get the Characters insider passes to the event and will be a couple extra pairs of eyes (as well as muscle).

The second question is pretty much impossible to answer. The Characters know that Chrysalis is throwing some serious guns at things lately and they can guess that whoever is delivering such an infamous artifact isn't a lightweight either. That's about it. The Characters will need to be ready to throw down in a serious way, not having any idea what is coming – other than the likelihood of Dhohanoids.

The Characters have several days in which to prepare, doing whatever it is that they feel is necessary. The end of the week comes sooner than anyone expects and it's go time.

The earliest people start to arrive is 9 pm. The crowds start to thicken at 10 pm and by 11 pm things are in full swing. The antics are initially what one might expect. Partiers dressed in the latest fashions, many wearing as little as they can in the cold rainy October night. The police have set up barricades to keep the parties and the crawls contained and are more concerned with keeping people safe from threats from outside the neighborhood than from within. Hundreds of people crawl from party to party, bar to bar in downtown Ballard and somehow the Characters need to pick out the ones who are about to participate in a highly illegal deal for a powerful magical artifact.

Keep your players on their toes. Have them make several Observation Tests to determine who is likely to see the trouble when it arrives. Feel free to throw a couple false alarms at them along the way. Finding the Chrysalis Corporation's Dhohanoid agents will be very difficult – even Tagers trying to watch for them will have problems working through the crowd. The Dhohanoids are dressed to fit in and are enjoying the party just like everyone else, until it's time for the deal. It's the other party involved that is the one that should draw the Characters' attention. Place them

however works for you, wherever works for you, but it is their appearance that makes them stand out. Three people – all Human, two male, one female – wrapped up a little snuggler than maybe they should be. Each of them is wearing some kind of hat, long coat, gloves, scarf, and in one case even dark glasses. One of them has an expensive looking, hard-side backpack. They try to fit in casually with those around them, but they don't quite match. If anyone tries to utilize otherworldly senses, particularly thermal senses, they will quickly discover that the people's body temperatures aren't what they should be – they match the ambient temp around them.

It's around 12:30 pm that this odd group makes their way to the back entrance of the nightclub called Dive. Contrary to its name, Dive is very nicely decorated and serves a variety of proprietary specialty cocktails. However, it seems that someone at Dive is in on this deal as the group of cold strangers has access cards to the back door, as well as access cards to the basement storage. They enter and set up their own positions, waiting for Chrysalis to come. There are only two ways into this basement – the door and stairs leading down and the elevator platform that comes up into the alleyway for deliveries.

The Characters may choose to fake being Chrysalis in order to steal the suspect backpack. However, the cold visitors are all liches, powerful undead sorcerers, who are no strangers to treachery. See below for their capabilities. It is a safer bet for them to sneak in through the elevator and take up positions around the entrances and wait. The Dhohanoids will be along shortly.

So here's a breakdown of what is all at play in the basement. The liches are a powerhouse of arcane forces. Each of them is protected by Wards of Corporal Protection, Wards Against Sorcery, and Wards of Solitude. Furthermore, they are each protected by Yog-Sothoth's Guards, and are functionally immune to harm. Two of them have Eldritch Faculties in play, while the third is watching their egress with Phantom Vision. They each have Glamour Locks that help subtly conceal their more rotten features, Powder of Ibn Ghazi, and about a half dozen Weeping Orbs between the three of them. None of them has a desire to enter into combat and will only fight to find a way to get out and be free. After all, they haven't each lived for centuries without being cautious.

The Dhohanoids, on the other hand, are itching for a fight. You will have to adjust the number and power level of Dhohanoids to match your group, but a good place to start is with one Ciraqen as the deal maker, one Gelgore as fire support, and a half dozen mixed Dua-Sanari and Ramachese. They are, of course, armed and armored in mortal form with whatever concealable armor and arms you feel like giving them.

Once the Dhohanoids show, they start to talk turkey with the liches, and the Characters will jump in at some moment to acquire the suspect backpack. They may decide to break up the party as it's happening or they may decide to wait to jump the Dhohanoids on the way out. Smart money is on disrupting the

deal and stealing the backpack in the basement – anything else will most certainly cause panic and call the attention of the authorities. The good news is that the Characters' two opponents are not necessarily allied. The liches want the cash and to get free and won't support the Dhohanoids in a fight. The Dhohanoids likewise could care less what happens to the liches when push comes to shove. It is likely that the Characters will get the pack, one way or the other. However, they will definitely have to make sure that the Ciraqen doesn't get the backpack and teleport away.

When they finally get to safety and all is said and done, they will discover that inside the backpack is the much awaited Rictus Knife of Ephrates. It will be easy for the liches to magically track it, so the best move will be to stow the knife inside a Ward of Seclusion.

The thing about the Rictus Knife of Ephrates is that it is not essential for the Children of Chaos' plans. They will be able to perform the ritual without it. It would be a nice and helpful addition that might shave off some time and effort, but if it is lost to the good guys they won't panic. They have other less powerful, less notorious rictus knives in their collection. The knife is fundamentally a red herring. But the Characters don't know that, so let them celebrate their victory.

The Circlet of Ghabbaz

The ancient artifact known only as the Circlet of Ghabbaz is discussed in the Hot Merchandise story on p. 273 of the *Core Book*. The Chrysalis Corporation, or more appropriately the Circle, already has two of the three parts of the artifact in their possession – both the headpiece and the circlet. All that remains is the clasp and the artifact will be complete, for the first time in ages.

Since the Eldritch Society has already been dealing with the Circlet, there is information already available to the Characters. The name of the artifact is supposedly Sumerian, but it is suspected that it existed long before Sumeria. It has been reported in ancient Egypt, but supposedly lost at that time. Someone along the way decided that the artifact was too dangerous to remain in this world, but it proved remarkably difficult to destroy. It was split up into its component pieces – the circlet, the headpiece, and the clasp. The Circlet is said to have been carved from ancient black trees from the primordial forests when the continents were still one, and thus has great power in nature-worship rituals. It has surfaced through several fertility cults through the centuries.

The Eldritch Society hasn't been sitting on its laurels since they lost the headpiece and the circlet to the Chrysalis Corporation. Normally, a theft on such a level would yield something upon investigation, but not this time. That is because Farouk Hassan, Domany, and Nlada are all part of the Circle, the elite mystical splinter sect of the Children of Chaos. When a member of the Circle disappears, he really disappears. Domany is the most recent addition of the three and it is through her remaining mortal weakness that the Society has gotten a lead.

If Domany has one fatal flaw, it is her vanity. She's a very pretty girl and expects to be treated as such. She likes nice expensive things and is unhappy when she doesn't get them. Underneath all that is an amoral, power-addicted woman who has sold her soul to a dark god. Strangely, that's not the part that's causing the trouble this time.

To attract the attention of the Circle, a person has to personally sacrifice someone close to him. Domany is no exception, a rich girl who was attracted to the power dark forces gave her, beyond the power of riches and beauty. Her parents were the ones she ponied up. Their estate went to Domany and her sister Kiry, and Domany went on to be a part of the Circle under her master, Farouk Hassan.

Frankly, Domany could care less about her sister. She has kept Kiry around for one reason and one reason only – someone she can become in a pinch. Using the Thieve Visage ritual, which Domany always has prepared, she knows she can kidnap Kiry and become her younger sister when she needs to. True, like all members of the Circle, Domany can swim through a dozen legal identities and subtly change her appearance with Glamour Locks, but sometimes a girl has to become someone else for a while. Especially when that girl finds the idea of laying low distasteful.

A girl who has the attention and spending addictions that Domany has cannot simply disappear and hole up in the arcane underground, even if one of the biggest rituals in the Children of Chaos' history is about to come to fruition. If the Circle knew about her sister, Kiry would be dead. If the Circle knew about Domany's shenanigans, she'd be dead. But they don't, so Domany's got to get out, play with some boys, and buy some expensive things.

However, there is a snag. The Eldritch Society doesn't know about Kiry. Domany cleverly changed her sister's identity, telling her younger sibling it was to hide from the miscreants that killed their parents. In a stroke of luck, one of the Society's spies heard the right thing at the right time and suddenly it's a whole new ballgame.

The Eldritch Society has just figured out who Kiry is, what she looks like, and that she's deviated heavily from her pattern as a student at the University of Washington. She's out shopping and flirting in the arcology, in the kind of expensive stores most college girls don't go into. And now she has a tail, a Whisper named Katie (callsign Gasp), who is keeping an eye on her until the heavies arrive. Cue your Characters.

Give them the basics. She was Hassan's assistant, she disappeared, now there's this tip. Given recent events, they'll be on the road in no time. Domany/Kiry will be shopping in a very exclusive section of the upper levels of downtown, the kind where the names are those of designers and the items don't have price tags. The most important thing is that the Society doesn't know that Kiry is Domany in disguise. They only know that this is her

sister, so the mission will be recon only. Watch her, try to find Domany, try to get past her to Hassan.

However, anyone who does a side by side comparison of pictures of Kiry from before and Kiry now will be startled. Her hair, clothes, mannerisms, the way she carries herself, everything is very different. Between Society Operators and modern facial recognition software, it won't be hard to pull up pictures of Kiry. Plus, Domany doesn't think that Kiry is as pretty as her, so she's way done up and probably showing a little more skin than is necessary. This is just the sort of thing to make most players suspicious and they may be overcome with the urge to confront or kidnap her. Bad idea. She's a powerful sorceress who is wearing a Yog-Sothoth's Guard and carries two Weeping Orbs, just for a start. Furthermore, she'll be alerted that someone's onto her, she'll drop the spell and honestly disappear. The Characters will have to be careful not to spook the prey.

A way to avoid potential trouble is for her to get a phone call. It's clear she's trying to keep it quiet and in code, and that she's trying to cover up what she is doing and where she is. However, the Characters do get that she is up to something, that it's going down tonight, and that it's happening in a park. It's enough to have someone keep an eye on her and for the Characters to get ready to raid a park tonight.

The Characters can continue to tail her if they wish, or Katie will be happy to, but the rest of the day is the kind of day that would make stake-out cops bored. She plays the rest of the day, spending enough money to make most celebrities blush, and takes her possessions back to her penthouse hotel room in Downtown. Once it gets dark, she loses the fake mystical face, dresses way down into something that won't draw attention and has a hood, and heads out into the night. Being fall, the powers that be have the fake weather system pumping out a slightly chilly breeze with a few light drizzles. It's the perfect night for what promises to be a sinister arcane deal.

Domany discreetly takes public transportation to the Washington Park Arboretum, a large park with many beautiful flowering plants. It is, no surprise, closed at this time of night. However, Domany heads deep into the park, through long shadows and dark thickets. This is where it gets tricky. Here's what's at play, so you can figure out best how to handle it with your Characters.

There is a small clearing in which Domany will meet Hassan. At first glance, it looks like it's only the two of them. There will be some short discussion in which Hassan asks to know what Domany was doing all day, to which she will deftly lie. Then there will be other conversation that won't make any sense to the Characters, but the mention of a clasp will get their attention. If all goes according to plan, one Caucasian man in an expensive suit will arrive alone, give them a small package, receive a small package, and then he'll smile, wish them good luck with the Black Mother, and quietly leave. Hassan will check the package and he and Domany will likewise leave, making a phone call to the Chrysalis Corporation to let them know that they have "it."

There are a few hidden things that make this situation more complicated than it first seems. Domany is the only thing in this situation that isn't a surprising threat. Hassan is likewise a powerful sorcerer and is protected by a Yog-Sothoth's Guard, a couple Weeping Orbs, pretty much any ward worth having, and has a bunch of Powder of Ibn Ghazi and Corporal Restorative. And that's only if you can get directly to him, because hidden in the shadows are many horrible creatures. Hassan's personal army of monsters lurks anywhere and everywhere, because he's just that kind of guy. Bakhi, Gaunts, N'athm, Fetches, and anything else you want to throw at your Characters is waiting here in numbers that should make them want to run instead of fight. Furthermore, it should seem odd that one man comes to make the deal alone. If someone looks closely, they'll notice two things. One, Hassan is actually nervous in the presence of this man. Second, his eyes are obsidian orbs. This creature is a Desolate One who is one of the leaders of the local Disciples of Death's Shadow. The clasp is too important a package to leave to chance.

In short, the Characters are in deep trouble. It'll take everything they've got not to get noticed and attacked by Hassan's minions. There's pretty much nothing they can do to Domany or Hassan as long they have Guards, and the Desolate One is so tough it is suicide to take it on. The deal takes place so fast, there's really no chance to call in reinforcements either. Most likely, the Characters will have to watch this happen and then fight their way to safety. The Circle will have all three parts to the Circlet of Ghabbaz and things will be well on their way.

After this, Hassan and Domany will have a heart-to-heart and the Nazzadi will promptly go and murder her sister.

FURRY FRIENDS

Once all the craziness about artifacts is over, things will calm down for a little while. However, once they get started again, it'll be a roller coaster ride to the end.

Missing Pets

Eventually the pack's operator calls them with an interesting and seemingly unconnected lead from the Eldritch Society. An unusual number of pets have gone missing from an area north of the arcology called Northgate. The operator network has tracked a number of calls to the police, all of which have been investigated. Nothing has turned up and the police aren't really all that concerned by an above average number of missing pets calls.

These days Northgate is only sparsely populated. It's a great place to go if you want a cheap (virtually free) house of reasonable to large size, but not such a great place if you want little amenities like regular security and the peace of mind that living in an arcology gives. Residents know they must defend themselves and are prepared to do so, despite semi-regular patrols by the military. The police do readily respond to calls in this area, but there is little they can do in a case of missing pets with no evidence and in the face of a whole stack of better things to do. Another noteworthy characteristic of Northgate is that it is not

terribly far from Lake Washington and that it is a seriously forested area, especially now that it is semi-abandoned.

With everything that's going on, it is a good idea for the pack to investigate. It might be nothing, but it might be something and it would be bad to let it go unchecked. Besides, they're probably itching for some action.

Discovering the Congregation

Travelling to Northgate requires a vehicle, something to which the pack is probably not all that accustomed. After spending so much time in arcologies, going outside should feel like going out into the wild. Real weather, far fewer people, and no watchful New Earth Government eye.

The people of Northgate are practiced in keeping to themselves once it starts to get dark, and this time of year it gets dark quite early. Those who take public transportation to and from the arcology watch cautiously around them as they bee-line for home. They are likely to be distrustful of strangers, but someone might be willing to talk about the places in the neighborhood that are starting to scare him or her if one of the pack asks the right way at the right time.

Whether it be through analyzing the police reports or by talking to locals or both, the pack will get an idea that there is a central hub from which it seems all the calls have been emanating. It is an area of land bounded by 5th Avenue NE to the west, Lake City Way to the east, 115th Street to the north and 95th Street to the south. It's a pretty big area, but one that narrows down the search pattern considerably.

Sooner or later, the pack will decide to check things out after dark. If the pets go missing at night and the locals don't go out at night, it's a good bet they'll find something. The something they find is in the form of some very strange folks. Travelling through backyards and tree lines come a group of animalistic people. The first clue that they are not normal comes as a group sniffs at the air and communicates through barks, like a pack of wolves. Another couple suddenly jump out of the trees onto a nearby roof in a superhuman fashion, scanning the ground like birds. They are mediums from the Congregation of the Earth Mother, as presented on p. 19 & 32 of *Dark Passions* and p. 96 of this book. Feel free to adjust the number of animal mediums to work with the power level of your group, as well as adding in your own kinds of spirit animal possession.

Taken In

There are three likely outcomes at this point. The pack may try to kill the mediums, may try to capture one, or may try to follow them. Regardless, the bestial mortals will lead the pack into a trap.

As the pack pursues the mediums, they will be led into a heavily wooded area within the neighborhood. Even if in heavy combat, there will be a moment of stillness as shadows emerge out of the darkness and the mediums pull away. Before they can act, the

pack gets hit with the mystical pheromones and siren-like voices of at least a dozen Horned Ones. It is likely that even if members of the pack can resist, that they will be forced to give pause to their attacks (both due to the influence of the Horned Ones and the fact that they are now significantly outnumbered). If the other forces aren't enough to convince them to chill out, the swarm of tainted animals in the surrounding trees should be.

Conversation can go however conversation needs to go, but ultimately the Horned Ones will flirt, cuddle up to, and generally want to have some sort of physical contact with each member of the pack. Those in the throes of mystical attraction will start making out with the alluring creatures. Eventually, regardless of what is said, the Horned Ones will insist on bringing the pack back to their den. The pack is not really in a position to refuse.

Their den is nearby, on the corner of Roosevelt Way and Northgate Way, in an abandoned grocery store. The pack is taken in through the loading dock, which is stacked with boxes, and into the main area. The shelves have all been taken down and pushed to one side of the store, in which all kinds of tainted animals lurk and nest (more offspring of the Horned Ones). The other side of the store is a mess of scavenged cushions, couches and chairs that serves as a lounge and crash space for the mortal and Horned One parts of the cult. Up against the back wall is a ritual space, complete with dark altar and occult imagery pointing to worship of the Black Mother. Vines and roots seem to grow through the altar, which is covered with bones, blood, and effigies, and up and through the wall to the ceiling. The pack is taken by the alien seducers and seductresses to the pillows and cushions laid out in the worship space.

Few people have ever heard of the Congregation of the Earth Mother. Honestly, most learned occultists haven't heard of them. They've frankly always been kind of a footnote as far as sinister cults go and being hunted to what most believe is extinction hasn't helped. However, Shub-Niggurath is something that is of interest to many occult scholars. Odds are that someone in your group is going to want to analyze what's at the altar and what it means. The problem is, no matter how gifted an occult scholar one of your players is, thinking that critically through intense sexual arousal is more than a little challenging. Whereas normally deciphering the occult significance of the altar might be Challenging, in this case make it a Hard Occult Test. Success yields information about the cult's workshop of the Black Mother, who is clearly a manifestation of Shub-Niggurath, and that the Horned Ones are the creatures so often talked about as the true offspring of Shub-Niggurath. Blood sacrifice and wanton sexual frenzies are routinely part of such a cult's worship – which might let the Characters know what they're in for if they can't get control.

One interesting fact about the food stockpile, should someone get an opportunity to inspect, is that it all comes from Agrarian Foods (a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chrysalis Corporation). Given the pack's recent experience with Agrarian Foods, this fact will be significant and tie things together a little further.

The Horned Ones will proceed to lay it on as thick as they can. They do, in no uncertain terms, each want to mate with members of the pack, right then and there. The next half-hour to hour should be a tense time as the members of the pack will be trying to resist having sex with these creatures, while their body fights to do so, while trying to gather some sort of information and formulate some kind of plan to get out. It should all be very alluring, very confusing, and very wrong.

Should one of the pack be unable to resist, the sex will be amazing (as described on p. 98). The unfortunate part of it is that whoever sleeps with a Horned One will be a brand new mother or father, for certain, no exceptions. Even the infertile will suddenly be fertile. The Horned Ones will make sure the new mommy or daddy knows that their union was fruitful. This calls for a Challenging Tenacity Feat Test, the failing of which gives one Insanity Point. Heaven forbid that one of the Characters is female and must carry a short-term (three month for mortals), complicated pregnancy that will yield Tainted animal offspring and will most likely kill her during birth. And yes, an abortion is potentially life-threatening – it is a mystical pregnancy after all. This business requires another Hard Tenacity Feat Test that will yield 2 Insanity Points.

The Witch Returns

The antics can only go on for so long before something has to give. That something is in the form of the queen witch around these parts and her trusted, still mostly possessed of their higher brains, junior magicians.

The queen witch's name is Skye and she stands out in this chaotic mess. She is middle-aged, but striking with her long black hair tinged with almost salon-perfect streaks of gray. She wears an Asian-style dress, split up both sides, which is red with arcane symbols embroidered in gold across it. If anyone's paying attention, it's the knee-high black buckled boots that break the elegance and let people know that she's ready for action.

There is a general murmur when Skye and her entourage return. It is pretty obvious that she is an important figure around here and her appearance should get everyone's attention, no matter what state they're in. Several of the more self-possessed mediums approach her and when she hears what they have to say and notice the Characters, she is clearly not happy. This goes doubly so if the Characters have any sort of displayed weaponry, especially anything that requires a high-level permit or is military in nature. Her first move is to have a conversation with one of the Horned Ones, in which she addresses it as "holy one." The emotional timbre of this conversation starts calmly enough, but eventually Skye is heated, which appears to be the only way the Horned One will listen to her. Her caution wins, which is a bad thing for the Characters.

Characters are resourceful people and no doubt one of them will create some kind of way to listen in on Skye's early conversation. At some point they will hear three important things – "ritual," "peninsula," and "by the lake." That's the jackpot right there.

There aren't too many lakes between here and Migou patrolled Alaska, which narrows things down nicely. However, the Characters will find themselves in quite the pickle.

The Horned Ones will seem put out as they have to change their plans. All of the forces of the nest will suddenly align into one purpose – the Characters are now to be corralled and escorted out of the nest and across the street to an abandoned house. This, again, is one of those magic moments where picking a fight equals suicide. Better to wait for the right opportunity to leave, especially since they are finally leaving the nest, than to try to leave when they are dramatically outnumbered.

Inside, the Characters are tied to simple metal folding chairs (remember than none of their enemies currently know that they are Tagers). Congregation minions will soon bring in small tables filled with scavenged torture implements that are all encrusted with blood and other viscera. Don't be afraid to let that moment sink in. The Characters should hear the mediums and Horned Ones outside, as well as somethings scampering all over the roof. Skye eventually comes front and center to start questioning them. If they are uncooperative, one of the sorcerers in her entourage will step up and choose an implement to begin the torture.

Since the Characters are what they are, the kinds of bonds that are holding them are wholly inadequate. It shouldn't take long before they decide that fighting their way out, even if against all odds, is better than sitting tied to a chair and being tortured. Their first and most obvious targets are Skye and her lackeys. Like all good sorcerers, they are heavily mystically protected. They all have active wards, some have Woeful or Weeping Orbs, some have firearms, and Skye is protected, like all powerful cultists, by a Yog-Sothoth's Guard. It shouldn't take much for Skye and most of her minions to escape the house, leaving the Characters alone with an army waiting outside. Scavengers have picked the house over already, so with the exception of an old bed frame, a couple chairs, a couple doors, and a fridge, there isn't much they can use to barricade themselves in.

Escape

When they finally try to get out, the thing that will throw most Characters is the behavior of the Horned Ones. So far, the creatures will have mostly presented themselves as sex-crazed flakes. However, Horned Ones are instinctive and hard to fool. Whatever the Characters are cooking up, captured or not, the Horned Ones have some kind of bead on what they are planning and won't be caught entirely off guard.

Most Eldritch Society groups will be able to hold their own for a little while, but there are many forces opposing them and those forces have superior numbers and some serious otherworldly powers. There are the mediums of the Congregation, who have more than their own fair share of mystical ability. There are the Horned Ones and their tainted offspring, who can hunt in almost perfectly coordinated packs. There are the Congregation's witches and more Human or Nazzadi members, who may be



armed with deadly firearms. All in a remote location where reinforcements will arrive too late.

Feel free to let your Characters tangle with the Congregation for a bit. After everything that's happened, they may be itching to blow off a little steam. They should eventually realize that they are going to be crushed by waves of bestial opponents. Then, suddenly, everything stops. Their opponents turn and disappear into the nearby foliage. The Characters will have been too distracted to have noticed that, other than those they are fighting, the Congregation has grabbed a few critical things and fled. What they have planned is far too important and the space is already compromised, so the cult has packed up for greener pastures. They will be setting up shop somewhere not too far away, but won't use it as their hunting grounds. The packs will return here to satiate their natural urges.

In the end, the Characters should escape to go back to the arcology to catch their breaths – and take some cold showers – before moving on to the next piece of business.

THE PENINSULA

The peninsula to which they are referring is clearly (given the rest of the evidence) going to be the Olympic Peninsula, west across Puget Sound and south from Seattle, home of the Olympic mountain range. They also know that they need some kind of lake suitable for such a ritual. The peninsula being as large as it is with as many lakes as it has is going to still be a challenge. The first thing to do would be to operate from the assumption that a major ritual involving this kind of mobilization is not likely to be held at just any smaller lake. They're going to go for one of the big ones.

The Olympic National Forest and what was the Olympic National Park take up most of the peninsula. These forests are rain forests – dark, damp, heavily grown, and very old – exactly what a supposed fertility god might need. There are four major lakes within these forests, including Lake Cushman, Lake Crescent, Quinault Lake, and Wynoochee Lake. Here are a few ways to help your Characters narrow their search down. Wynoochee Lake has a dam, the kind of feature that nature-worshipping cultists aren't likely to appreciate. Lake Cushman is predominately a mountain lake that isn't all that easy to access. This leaves Lake Crescent to the northwest and Quinault Lake to the southwest – the western side is, in general, wetter. Digging in further, Lake Crescent is near the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a major channel to the Pacific Ocean, across from which is Victoria Island and home to regular military patrols. When all is said and done, this leaves Quinault Lake, which is conveniently away from patrols, the ocean, and nestled in the rain forest.

The pack's Operator should be able to help them narrow things down a little – or at least as much as you want him to. The pack should be able to get that whatever it is that these freaks are preparing, it's going to be mystically guarded in the special way that makes it so you can only see it by sight. At the very least, military patrols have seen nothing. It's time for the pack to go camping.

Getting in and out of the mountains and forests will require a reliable vehicle, preferably something four-wheel drive. The pack will need to stock up on supplies, as Olympia is the nearest decent-sized settlement. Not a whole lot of people live out on the peninsula anymore and there won't be much opportunity to get help or supplies. They should also bring something besides their Tager abilities to defend themselves, like pistols or rifles to scare off bold wild animals or something even bigger to deal with the unspeakable creatures that roam these dark woods.

If you'd like your pack to investigate some of the other lakes, most especially Lake Cushman, Lake Crescent, or Wynoochee Lake, feel free. Give them the opportunity to go camping and scare the pants off them if they do. Confront them with the true wilderness, something it is unlikely to which they are accustomed, and throw roving packs of survivalist madmen, large wild animals, or horrific monsters at them when they least expect it.

Eventually, they will make their way to the right place. Lake Quinault is about 160 miles by car from the Seattle arcology, and is an eight-and-a-half mile long, more than 1000 foot deep glacier-carved lake sandwiched between the Hoh Rain Forest and the Quinault Rain Forest. Trees are gigantic here, as are the slugs, and it averages up to 400 inches of rain per year. It is primordial and teeming with life and the perfect place to attempt to pierce the dimensional barriers to bring forth Shub-Niggurath.

The Characters should be on alert from the moment they get there. The forest is very alive. Children of the Horned Ones will be prevalent, patrolling the forest as the first line of defense. At first, they just look like flocks of birds or packs of animals, but upon closer examination they are moving coordinated search patterns. Should the pack get past them, patrols of Congregation mediums are next, followed shortly by and sometimes in conjunction with fully-armed teams of Dhohanoids. Furthermore, there is a mated pair of Sea Serpents that live in the deep glacial waters of the lake with which the Children of Chaos have made friends, that will be happy to crush any transportation the Characters park anywhere nearby. Since there are few places clear enough to park a car that aren't next to the lake, it is likely they will.

The Characters need to find their way to the northeastern edge of Quinault Lake so that they can be witness to what this is all about, or they'll really be cheated on their journey. Your Characters may be looking for it and will be avoiding all the defenses to get to it, which is perfect. If not, use the defenses to herd them there.

The ritual space is heavily mystically protected. Wards of Seclusion and Wards Against the Unseen protect everything, and currently a Ward of Sanctuary protects the main space. Giant standing stones – powerful ruach wells – are erected in a semi-circle about 150' across, bordered on the top edge by the lake. Arcane symbols are inscribed everywhere – on the ground, carved into stone, hanging in eerie stick bundles from trees, and more. A silent generator powers the area and many Chrysalis high-impact,

temperature-controlled security crates are placed throughout the area. Members of the Circle and Horned Ones prepare the space and tend to matters that make it so the pack understands that the ritual is starting. If they haven't figured it out by now, it should be obvious from the security and the magnitude that they are trying to bring across the Black Mother herself.

To really up the stakes, give your Characters the opportunity to gather some information (or get really lost). Then, things get busy. The forest titters with excitement, A-pod vehicles bringing high-powered Chrysalis Corporation executives arrive, and the site kicks into full swing as they begin the days long ritual to bring forth Shub-Niggurath. Whether they know it or not, this is the opportunity for which they've been waiting. The ritual will provide a distraction and security will greatly decrease or simply be distracted. While Dhohanoid teams will remain on task, any of the patrols associated with the Congregation of the Earth Mother will end.

Some groups will want to immediately head for safety, but where's the fun in that? It will carry more weight when they return if they have some kind of evidence, even if it is just what they saw. The wards put in place by the Circle prevent any sort of electronic recording of any kind, but that doesn't prevent convincing sketches and diagrams that will let any learned occultist know that insanity is about to begin.

The ritual, in its early stages, is quite a site to behold. The site is lit with torches. Dozens of cultists in robes, Horned Ones, babies on standby. And who, pray tell, is leading this magical feat? Farouk Hassan with his buddy Nlada nearby. Domany is currently nowhere to be seen, but that doesn't mean she's not here. The ritual starts with chanting and bloodletting. The symbols start to glow with an eerie otherworldly light. The clouds in the sky above start to slowly swirl. Then the orgy begins. That's about as long as the characters will want to stay.

It really is up to you and your Characters what happens here. There is no way that a small group of lightly, or even heavily, armed Tagers (or other members of the Society) are going to be able to stop this. If they cause enough havoc, the ritual will just move and then the pack will be back at square one. Most likely they'll be captured or killed if they don't play to escape. Their best course of action is to get as much information as they can and to get out as fast as they can, without being seen or by making the Children of Chaos believe that they are dead.

ACT III: THE BLACK MOTHER

Goals: To successfully flee the forces at Lake Quinault. To talk with the Eldritch Society hierarchy to figure out the best way to stop the ritual. To roll out with the powers-that-be to stop the ritual.

Setting: the ritual at Lake Quinault; the skies between Lake Quinault and Seattle; the Seattle arcology.

Cast: *Farouk Hassan* – from Act II.

Domany – from Act I.

Nlada – from Act II.

The Circle – from Act II.

The Chrysalis Corporation – from Act II.

The Congregation of the Earth Mother – from Act II.

Garret Paulson – Veteran, Caucasian male, early-forties, a Wraith Tager, the metamorphosis of a Phantom. He is an occult expert who has taken an interest in the things the Characters have been investigating. He will smooth the way for government contact.

Sary – Experienced, Nazzadi female, early-thirties, a Torment Tager, the metamorphosis of a Nightmare. She is a tactical expert whose keen mind assesses situations and comes up with likely outcomes. She is, however, a woman of few words.

The Eldritch Society – various levels of experience, races, and genders, all Tagers in various packs. They will be mobilized to help deal with the threat at Lake Quinault.

The Office of Internal Security – mostly Experienced and Veteran, various racial types and genders. Most of them will be battle-hardened marines or powered armor pilots, decked out for heavy emergency response.

Flight

If the Characters make it out by making their foes believe them to be dead or if they escape on foot and somehow contact the authorities to be rescued, then this section will not occur.

However, one possible way for the Characters to escape Lake Quinault is to steal the A-pod cars in which the executives arrived, which sit idle and unprotected near the ritual. If that is the case, the escape is far from over, because their flight will be hard to ignore. As they climb to altitude, they will be harried by Gaunts, Vrykol, and any Horned Ones with wings. The in-flight combat should be intense, but ultimately the car should pull away based on its superior speed alone. Shake them up, especially if their experience at Lake Quinault was light.

Meeting Of The Minds

Coming back from their scouting mission, the pack's leader discovers that he has a message waiting for him. They are to meet with several of the metamorphosed higher ups within the Eldritch Society ASAP.

As most players are independent people, they will most likely first discuss how they personally can stop the threat. They should come to the conclusion that they cannot, or at least someone in their world should have the sense to tell them that they can't. Even a full-blown assault by the Eldritch Society isn't a solid

plan. With the mystical and technological forces commanded by the Chrysalis Corporation, such a battle will be bloody and uncertain. To help reinforce that things are bigger than they, the first earthquake hits – it's about a IV on the Mercalli Intensity Scale. Things start to rattle, people are shaken, and it is generally scary. It settles down after a few minutes. This should help facilitate moving the Characters into meeting with their masters.

If the Characters have a regular meeting place that is large enough for the pack, Garret and Sary will come to meet them. If not, they will meet in a closed restaurant to which they have access. They will ask to be quickly briefed on what's been going on and then ask for the Character's tactical assessment. Sary will point out any flaws in their thinking – she is your device to make sure the Characters can come up with something that will be successful and not result in their deaths. They also need to act quickly, but not right now quickly, as anyone with Occult knowledge will be able to figure out that a ritual of this magnitude takes days to complete.

Someone will check their peek at some point and update the Characters with what's going on in the outside world. After the first earthquake, the weather starts to get nasty outside. It pours down rain, with winds gusting up to 40 mph. The news also reports something unusual – that animals are getting violent. There have even been several reports of pets attacking their owners. People are advised to put their pets in carriers for the time being. What people won't realize and what the news won't report is the earthquake was strangely felt by the entire western half of North America.

Eventually, discussion will move in the direction of mobilizing a large-scale attack force not of the Eldritch Society. While the Society doesn't normally trust the government, it would be hard for internal corruption to cover up something this big and obvious. The military will be mentioned, but they are not in the habit of striking quickly on the tips of civilians. Someone might even mention the Migou, who are well-aware of the cultist threat and would quickly strike on the tip that the ritual was happening. However, the military would rapidly get involved and it would turn even more ugly. If one of the Characters doesn't realize it, Garret will point out the Office of Internal Security. This ritual is illegal magic of the worst kind and the OIS does have a "act first, sift through the ashes later" kind of mentality. Plus, they have squads of heavily armed marines and powered armor units at their disposal. They seem like the best option.

The Eldritch Society will help create and deliver a package of alleged evidence to mobilize an OIS investigation team. What they will need is full accounts from the Characters as well as descriptions of things they saw. Since the area was protected against digital recording, they will need as detailed sketches as they can get. If one of the Characters can draw, then great. If not, the Society has people on whom they can call.

Now is the time to plan the Eldritch Society's part in this assault. Sary wants to mobilize the packs to pick off any escapees



from the OIS assault, which means putting packs in a perimeter around the ritual site as well as near “no questions asked” entrances to the arcology. Since the rest of this story is mostly a military action, it would be best if you had Garrett and Sary give command of the forces to the pack, especially if any of them have military experience. Then your Characters will be the ones who are planning and coordinating the attack and listening in on OIS transmissions (they are given an appropriate device).

While they are planning, the second earthquake hits, this one about a VI on the Mercalli Scale. Everyone feels it, things fall off the walls and bookshelves, furniture is overturned, and things break. People fall down or are knocked into things. This one also lasts a few minutes. The world is responding to the return of Shub-Niggurath.

Not long after the second earthquake, they get the news that the OIS went to investigate and disappeared. A major effort is now being mobilized. Now is the time for the Characters to send out the packs and go supervise from Lake Quinault.

Taking Out The Trash

After the Characters arrive, the Tager packs get into position as the OIS arrives. When the Office of Internal Security sets out to stop something, they don't mess around. Add to that the threat of something huge and they whip out the big guns. UCH-70 Werewolves loaded with marines in full combat armor, armed with HKS-192 heavy assault rifles with M303 grenade launchers with a host of grenades (M100, M-460 tear gas, M-482 HEAM, and UT-42 flash), as well as suits of Mk-10A and Mk-10U Centurion and flamethrower and AP cannon armed Crusader powered armor, will quietly skim over the water and treelines.

They light the ritual site up like Christmas, but the battle is not one-sided. The OIS must face powerful sorcerers, fully-armed Dhohanoid teams, Congregations mediums, Horned Ones, and Tainted animals. Monitoring transmissions should make it plain that there are heavy losses on both sides.

After the OIS has been there a little while, the winds pick up to about 75 mph. Trees bend and crack, people have trouble keeping staying upright, movement slows, and flyers are forced out of the air. There's no way normal reinforcements can make it here now. Furthermore, funnel clouds appear in the swirling clouds overhead and three small twisters touch down in the forest.

It is boring on the fringes at first. However, it isn't long before the OIS calls in the military, because flying mecha are the only kind of reinforcement that will make it. Engels are the only answer – a Cherub and a Malach show up. Then the tides turn and the Children of Chaos begin to lose. As they do, the Tager packs start to have their hands full, attacking those who are retreating. If your Characters need to see personal action in all this, here is their chance.

Suddenly, there is a massive burst of bright energy from the ritual site, accompanied by a loud unholy sound. One last earthquake rips through (VI on the Mercalli scale), but then everything stops – the wind, the clouds, the twisters, everything. It is calm again and the ritual is over.

New Earth Government forces will be all over the place, so it is time for the Tagers to go. They will mop up and cover up. The fate of Hassan and his people is unknown, but the threat is over. The Characters have stopped Shub-Niggurath.

ENDINGS

There are really only two outcomes to this story: either the Characters stop the ritual or Shub-Niggurath manifests in this world again.

IF THEY STOP THE RITUAL...

If the Characters manage to pull it off and stop the Children of Chaos from bringing forth Shub-Niggurath, they will have accomplished a major feat. The gravity of the situation will eventually sink in. They just thwarted the manifestation of an Old One and prevented the scale from tipping against mortal life on this world. They are truly heroes.

Unfortunately, the world at large will never know what occurred. The Office of Internal Security (or other appropriate government agencies) will be grateful they received the tip they did, but the Ministry of Information will be able to play everything off. In a month, no one will even question the oddities that rolled through the New Earth Government during the ritual. Your average citizen will never know how close they came to the end, but then again it isn't the first – or last – time.

However, life inside the Eldritch Society will never be the same. They do know what just happened and news spreads like wildfire through the Society's various information networks. The Characters are heroes among their own, their names made famous among their peers. The Characters can expect a warm welcome from other Society members and shouldn't be surprised if some of them just drop by to say congratulations and thanks.

It is likely that the Characters will have suffered some kind of tragedy, though. Perhaps they lost one of their comrades in the peril of this story. Perhaps they lost other loved ones, or someone was taken past the brink of madness. Perhaps there were other consequences, including lost jobs, property, contacts, or friends. It is unlikely that they are walking away unscathed, and finally they will have a chance to pick up the pieces.

Be sure to acknowledge your players for having put themselves into the unpleasantness that is this story. They have undoubtedly played with commitment, keen wit, and a certain amount of grit, just to have survived. They also did what needed to be done to stop what would have spelled the beginning of the end.

Of course, your players will be even more acknowledged when they are rewarded. In addition to the standard amount of Experience awarded for each of your regular episodes, give them an additional 20 Experience to wrap up a major segment of the metaplot. They are also eligible to purchase the Famous Incident Asset at a rating of one (since the public won't know anything) for the price of 5 Experience. Acquiring this Asset is important if don't want the effects of such an achievement to fade away, socially speaking.

To be clear, this is the ending we will be assuming occurred for our continuing development of the *CthulhuTech* metaplot. If your Characters failed to stop the Children of Chaos, then read on for possible ways to continue with this important change.

IF SHUB-NIGGURATH MANIFESTS...

If the Characters are unsuccessful, for whatever reason, and the Children of Chaos complete their ritual, Shub-Niggurath's avatar will manifest and her energies will flood out into the world.

The Congregation of the Earth Mother will quickly grow from a minor cult to join the ranks of the major cults. The otherworldly energy the Black Mother is bleeding into the world will call to many the wild soul and more and more will come to her worship. As the number of adherents grow, so will the number of witches and mediums, where the real power of the mortal part of the cult lies.

Furthermore, many of the Black Mother's true offspring will come across dimensional barriers *en masse*. Horned Ones will once again live in great numbers in this world. Their presence will seduce still others into worship of Shub-Niggurath and bring chaos to the world. Hand in hand with Horned Ones are their tainted offspring, which will begin to dominate the wilds of the pacific northwest before striking out into other parts of North America.

It won't be but a matter of six months before the Pacific Northwest becomes a no-man's land. The wilds will get scarier and more dangerous and outside arcologies people will go missing quickly – either to join or be consumed by the cult. Unease will begin to seep into the arcologies of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and British Columbia, followed soon after by the infiltration of Congregation witches, mediums, and Horned Ones. Chaos will soon break out and those that can escape the arcologies are the lucky ones. Soon, these places will be the territory of the Congregation of the Earth Mother and the Children of Chaos.

Though this initial push is plenty ugly on its own, this event will ultimately be the straw that broke the camel's back. As the New Earth Government is pushed out of the pacific northwest, the Migou get to move in. It isn't long before they are capable of taking Canada and they begin to move towards the heart of North America – Chicago. The central nervous system of the New Earth Government will have to relocate somewhere safe, an idea that is becoming increasingly rare.

The Migou won't have an easy time of it, either. The energies that emanate from the Black Mother affect all life, not just us. The influence of the Congregation will begin to affect the Migou as well, and many will flock to her bosom. The Horned Ones will begin to breed even more alien creatures, as they adapt their forms to be attractive to the insect from Pluto.

North America will become a vicious battleground very quickly. The Migou will fight against the growing cancer that is Shub-Niggurath, with modest success, and rapidly encroach on New Earth Government cities. The NEG will fight back against both. The Congregation of the Earth Mother will continue to spread, while the Chrysalis Corporation messes things up from the inside so that the New Earth Government suffers defeat at an unprecedented rate. With what's happening in the rest of the world, the end isn't far off.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

Let's take a look at several possible ways in which different types of games can become part of these major events. These aren't the only possible ways – you may come up with your own. However, not all kinds of Characters are going to be appropriate for your story.

The most important thing to being a part of this story is that the Characters must end up in the Pacific Northwest of North America – particularly the Seattle arcology. If that setting absolutely does not work for you and you are committed to playing through this story, then you'll need to move the events to someplace that will work for you and your group. However, you will have to do the extra duty of finding a place that meets the needs of these events as well as your geographical needs.

It is important that you don't outclass your Characters in this story. It is recommended that you play other stories first, particularly the Hot Merchandise story from the Core Book, weaving these events into the natural flow of your game. We recommend that each Character have earned at least 100 Experience before fighting this fight, to increase survivability.

It is recommended that you break this story up into a minimum number of sessions based on Act. Act I should take a minimum of four sessions, Act II should take a minimum of twelve sessions, and Act III should take a minimum of another two sessions. Feel free to take as much time as you need for this story to naturally unfold, but by spreading it out over a minimum of eighteen sessions Characters are allowed to accrue another 90 Experience with which to develop over its course.

Eldritch Society Games

These events are designed for the Eldritch Society and most directly impact such Characters. Most of the Characters should be Taggers and at least half of them should be of a kind that can handle some stand-up combat. However, they must have some kind of reason to be in Seattle. If you've played through Hot Merchandise, your Characters are either already there or already have ties to the Society in the city. Otherwise, they might hear that there's some serious action going down in Seattle, a local Lorekeeper may suggest something, or a friend in a Seattle pack might say something. With the promise of intrigue and action, it shouldn't be too hard to get a pack of Taggers to bite.

NEG Arcane Underground Games

Considering the way the Children of Chaos are playing in the arcane underground, it is entirely possible that those who run in those circles would be exposed to these events. Some might want to get in on the action, only to discover this isn't the kind of action they want. Some might find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some might actively want to find out what is going on in the city, because they are the curious, investigative sort.

However, it will be difficult for simple black marketeers, black magicians, unregistered para-psychics, or arcane investigators to survive on their own, considering what lies ahead. If your

Characters are of this ilk, it is best that you get them involved with the Eldritch Society at some point. The kind of assistance the Society provides may just keep them alive.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

While it is unlikely that Seattle PD would stay on the case long enough for it to matter, other government agent Characters might be very appropriate to experience these events. Those from the Federal Security Bureau might be investigating the unusual and disturbing disappearance of so many babies. The Office of Internal Security may be investigating from the start, for the whole thing reeks of illegal magics.

This story presents another opportunity for Special Services Characters. The secret agency might be brought in quickly, as they suspect that things are rapidly spiraling out of control – and they are right. Because of their abilities and training, they also have a higher probability of survival than other agents.

However, since many of the clues in this story come from Eldritch Society sources, you'll have to modify where the information comes from in this type of game so that it is appropriate. Most agents have street sources, so this should work.

NEG Military Games

There really aren't many, if any cases, that military-style Characters would become embroiled in this story. It is happening so far under the radar, and is so far under the umbrella of other federal organizations, that military Characters wouldn't have any idea it was happening. They will, however, later feel its world-shaking events.

It is possible to play military-style Characters as part of Office of Internal Security response teams or those called by Special Services, but they would most certainly miss out on most of the story as they are strictly emergency-oriented.

Many of the other events of 2086 are military-based and most players of military games won't feel too put out by missing these events.

Cult Games

Stepping through the mirror darkly, you could easily explore this story from the other side. Characters could be Dhohanoids, sorcerers, or para-psychics especially dedicated to seeing that things go through on the side of the Chrysalis Corporation. They could be bestial mediums or witches with the Congregation of the Earth Mother, excited by the prospect of the Black Mother's return. Odds are, however, they won't be powerful enough to qualify for membership in the Circle.

If this is the style of game you want to play, you'll have to do a little work to flip things around so that the events occur from the perspective of the cultists. The Taggers of the Eldritch Society are the enemies then, and will do what you would expect them to do if you played this story as written.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Here are a few Characters that you might require a little more detail on for your game.

DOMANY

Circle Sorcerer

When Domany was working as Hassan's right-hand at his up-scale magic shop, she simply seemed like a pretty, spoiled professional girl. Of course, pretty was an understatement – gorgeous would be the more appropriate term. Domany is the kind of girl who has always known how to use her super-model looks to get what she wants, without looking like she's doing it. One might easily mistakenly assume that she's just another girl who has bought into the capitalistic dream.

One would never realize that her ambitions ran so much deeper. That Domany felt the pull of cosmic power at a young age and ran with the dark side of the arcane underground as soon as she was able. Her ability, ambition, and lost nature called to the Circle and she was more than happy to kill her parents to get in. She's not the most devout member of the Children of Chaos, but she's loyal to the power the cult offers her. Deep down, Domany is a nihilist and will be happy when mortals no longer have a place on this planet. In the mean time, she's going to spoil herself in every way possible.

Physically, Domany is the kind of girl that makes men's jaws drop. She dresses expensively in revealing Nazzadi fashion and rarely downplays her looks. However, she has a secret facial tattoo that she only reveals when she is her true self, the face of her evil. It is protected normally by a Glamour Lock.

Virtue/Flaw: Loyal/Vain

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 7, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Occult: Expert, Misdirect: Adept, Persuade: Adept, Seduction: Expert, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Novice, Marksman: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/3, Big Ego/1, Sexy Voice/2, Wealth/3

FAROUK HASSAN

Circle Sorcerer

If one were to meet the man the Eldritch Society knows as Farouk Hassan, one might be reminded of their grandfather. He's a kindly-looking, genteel man in his sixties who is helpful and generous. For a while, he ran a magic shop in Seattle that catered to the wealthy. But it was always just a front, though a profitable one.

On the inside, Hassan is what many might call evil incarnate. He is a ranking member of the secret cult known as the Circle, the elite of the Children of Chaos. As murder is a prerequisite for entry, Hassan happily murdered the love of his life to secure his place in the cult. There are many traits that can be attributed to him, including morally bankrupt, ruthless, heartless, scheming, domineering, and manipulative. Hassan might find this list a compliment. The sorcerer is the worst kind of snake – your

friend on the outside, your killer on the inside. His devotion to the goals of the Blind Lady are absolute.

Of course, Farouk Hassan isn't his real name. He has a dozen identities, like all members of the Circle, and he floats through them at will. He is unhappy about having to remove his Hassan identity from society and, given the chance, will settle scores with anyone responsible. It is his honor that he has been charged with the overall coordination of the effort to bring back Shub-Niggurath. He looks forward to meeting the Black Mother face to face.

Virtue/Flaw: Patient/Cruel

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 10, Presence 8, Tenacity 10

Noteworthy Skills: Education: Master, Larceny: Expert, Misdirect: Expert, Observation: Master, Occult: Master, Savoir-Faire: Expert, Streetwise: Expert, Armed Fighting: Expert (Focused in NEG Kendo), Dodge: Master, Fighting: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Fearless, Shrewd, Wealth/4

NLADA

Circle Sorcerer

Nlada has been one of Hassan's right hand men for many years. He first drew the attention of the elder sorcerer as a dealer of illegal arcane wares. His lust for the forbidden was formidable and he quickly went for the lure of the Circle, murdering his girlfriend to prove his allegiance.

Nlada looks much younger than his actual years. He would be handsome if it wasn't for the sinister cast of his face, aided by the sideways green cat's eyes that are the manifestation of his taint. His Nazzadi tattoos are mixed with arcane symbology to create a truly unique pattern of art across his body.

Nlada interacts little with the outside world, preferring to stay in the shadows of the arcane underground and within the Children of Chaos. It isn't just his appearance that keeps him there – he simply has no interest in other kinds of people. He is quiet and speaks only when he has something worth saying.

Virtue/Flaw: Methodical/Overconfident

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 7, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Appraisal: Expert, Criminal: Expert, Intimidate: Expert, Larceny: Expert, Occult: Master, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Hun-Zuti), Marksman: Novice

Noteworthy Qualities: High-Pain Threshold, Outsider Tainted

ROY ROMER

Bodyguard, Veteran, Widow Tager

Roy can boast something few can – he did multiple tours on the Chinese front lines and came back in one piece. At least, mostly in one piece. After years of living in ugly conditions, fighting with horrific creatures, and watching most of his friends and two brothers die, Roy was given a medical discharge, sent back to North America, and put in in-patient treatment for many

months. It is a small miracle any of him came home and none can doubt the man he was died in China.

However, Roy never felt like his duty was finished, which is why when the Rite of Sacred Union was offered him, he jumped at it. He has manifested as a Widow, a rare type of Tager (which will be presented in the *Ancient Enemies* book. Use the stats for a Shadow for now). The most obvious cover for him is as his long-time friend Sorena's security expert and personal bodyguard.

Because of his experiences, Roy has a rather pragmatic view of things. He doesn't get too worked up about anything and is what some might call over-prepared for everything.

Virtue/Flaw: Valiant/Pessimist

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 9 (12), Perception 9 (11)

Noteworthy Skills: Observation: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Eldritch Society Ninjitsu), Marksman: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Luck/1, Habit/4 (Opiates)

SKYE

Congregation Witch

Perhaps one of the most important witches within the Congregation of the Earth Mother, the woman known as Skye is no one with which to mess. She has privilege (and frustration) of coordinating the largest part of the Congregation in the world, home to dozens of the Black Mother's true offspring, the Horned Ones. Skye also is responsible for coordinating with the Chrysalis Corporation, though she suspects no duplicity on their part. It is hardly surprising, given the Herculean task of keeping the rolling chaos of the Congregation together long enough to bring the Black Mother into this world.

Physically, she is a presence. Middle-aged, she is striking with almost salon-perfect streaks of gray in her long black hair. She dresses in such a way that she can spring into action at any moment, also advertising her occult abilities. Even when she smiles there is a constant menace that radiates from her, keeping those around her in line.

Like all cult sorcerers of her ability, Skye is protected by wards and carries any number of enchanted objects with her. She is never surrounded by any less than three of her apprentices.

Virtue/Flaw: Patient/Short-Tempered

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 7, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Intimidate: Expert, Misdirect: Adept, Observation: Adept, Occult: Expert, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept, Marksman: Novice

Noteworthy Qualities: Wary

SORENA

Club DJ, Vampire Tager

If one is into dance music and nightclubs, he'll have heard of Sorena at one time or another. He is one of the world's fore-

most club DJ's, with a residency at the renowned Iris Club in Los Angeles – though he runs with a Seattle pack. He explains his last minute cancellations for Eldritch Society business through a chronic migraine condition.

Sorena is smooth, charismatic, good-looking, and talented – and there are people that both immediately love and hate him for it. He fights the good fight as Nazzadi pride runs deeply in his family and he is a Tager to help make sure his people get a real shot at freedom. His symbiont changed him, as they always do, and now he has a wicked cruel streak that he unleashes on the favorite children of the Chrysalis Corporation – sometimes with an intensity that shocks his fellows.

An inexperienced version of Sorena appears on p. 143 of *Vade Mecum*.

Virtue/Flaw: Smooth/Cruel

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8 (11), Perception 7 (10), Strength 8 (10)

Noteworthy Skills: Performance: Adept (Focused in DJ), Seduction: Adept, Dodge: Adept, Fighting: Adept (Focused in Hun-Zuti), Marksman: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Alluring/2, Chronic Pain, Elite, Wealth/2

DR. SIMON TAM

Eldritch Society Sorcerer

Simon is the heir to a Taiwanese fortune. Money has been in his family for generations and, as such, Simon was sent to some of the most prestigious schools in the world. Despite his privilege, Simon has always felt a strong drawn to serve in the trenches, rather from the high towers. That is why he became a trauma doctor and has worked in high-adrenaline environment of emergency rooms his entire career.

Also a licensed sorcerer, Simon also has felt the strong pull of forbidden knowledge and it has gotten him into trouble. He was tainted by the Outsiders in an experiment gone wrong, and now he bleeds something akin to formaldehyde instead of blood. This situation is what drew the Eldritch Society to him, offering him a chance to do good in an environment that would accept him fully.

Simon is polite to a fault. He speaks with an English accent and uses the words of someone who has been highly educated. Physically, Simon is a short, slight man of Chinese descent, dressed in a manner suiting someone of his standing. He usually walks with a cane for effect. It contains a blade, though he isn't particularly skilled at using it.

Virtue/Flaw: Courteous/Preoccupied

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Medicine (Physical): Expert, Occult: Expert, Research: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Elite, Outsider Tainted, Wealth/4



Cindy Tam stepped out of the military transport, not entirely knowing what to expect. Dusty was only one step behind her, his shooter rig at the ready. From the looks of things, it was going to be a busy night.

These days, when GNN called, she already knew how high to jump. Now that she was center on the desk, she didn't get to do a whole lot of field reporting. But today she got the assignment and was on a supersonic transport so fast that Dusty hadn't even had a chance to shower.

Cindy didn't look her usual well-manicured self either. Ever since the reports of a new assault on Juneau started coming in, she'd been behind the desk

bringing the word to the people. That was early two days ago and she'd slept only a few hours since then. If she could call napping on a couch in her office for less than an hour at a shot sleeping.

The Vancouver landing strip was a bee-hive of activity. Military transports were touching down one after another, many of them rescue. Mecha were in heavy patrols and many battle-scarred war machines entered nearby hangars.

A man ran through the chaos to meet her. He looked distinctly out of place. Perfectly cropped black hair, designer suit and eye-glasses, expensive shoes. Cindy knew who he was before he even introduced himself.



"Cindy Tam? I'm Bernard LeGrosse from the Ministry of Information. Thank you for coming." He shook Cindy's and Dusty's hands in a rather formal way.

Dusty was doing what Dusty always does, which was looking for the perfect shot to capture the moment. He'd found it and was bringing up his rig when Bernard reached out to stop him.

"No. Not yet. We don't want to convey the wrong impression here."

Dusty frowned while Cindy sighed. So that's how it was going to be. Information control was what they called it. When no one was listening, those in the know called it what it was. Censorship. Propaganda. An unfortunate fact of modern reporting.

Bernard motioned for them to follow. "Let me show you what's going on here and then we can discuss how best to paint the picture."

"Paint the picture?" Dusty whispered to Cindy. "You mean spin the truth."

"Quiet. I don't want to get sent home."

As they followed Bernard through the mess towards the main hangar, Cindy noticed that many of the rescue transports weren't unloading soldiers. They were unloading body bags. Her stomach dropped.

The way Bernard was leading them followed the rescue techs into a large hangar. They could hear the sounds before they got there. Trauma docs shouting. The cries of the wounded. Soldiers begging to live, begging to die, begging for the pain to stop.

This was going to be ugly.

Passing through the enormous doorways, the scene was laid out before them. Half of the hangar was an emer-

gency hospital, tending to the wounded. The doctors and medics were clearly understaffed. In true battle triage fashion, some soldiers were left to suffer with their wounds while others were left to die. Some were passing with friends, some with a chaplain, but most were simply perishing alone.

But the hospital wasn't the worst part. The other half of the hangar had been turned into a makeshift morgue. Rows and rows and rows of black body bags filled the floor. Some of them were oozing fluids. The smell of death was starting to seep into the air.

Dusty full-on threw up. Which was quite a statement coming from a guy who'd seen some of the things he'd seen. Cindy just stared in shock.

Bernard led them to what in a crazy world might be called an island of peace. Soldiers who had sustained only minor wounds waited here, knowing they would survive, unlike many of those here. The shell-shocked looks on their faces told a grim story. Bernard gestured to them.

"I think we'll want to get shots here. We want to show the hard road of the brave soldiers here, but in a... gentle way."

A soldier with a medicated patch over his eye turned his head like he couldn't quite register what the man had said.

Bernard led on, out a side door and across the road to another hangar, into which limped mecha. The scene here was no less gruesome. Pilots crawled out of mecha that looked so damaged it made Cindy wonder how they made it back. Fully a quarter of the bay held wounded Engels who had lost most of their metal parts. The hideous flesh things that lived underneath mewed and howled, hooked up to nutrient and sedative tubes. Cindy had never seen such a thing before. She had a hard time restraining a very primal urge to run.

"It's probably best if you focus your attention over here, where the repairs are being made. We want to show mecha getting ready to go back out to battle."

It was Dusty who said the first sensible thing. "We're losing, aren't we."

Cindy held up a hand, waving in disbelief. "Wait a minute. The reports I've been giving for the last two days have said that we're in a stalemate."

"As far as the public knows, we are," calmly replied Bernard. "And it is not our job to tell them differently. It is our job to inform them, but to lessen the blow, so they have a reason to wake up tomorrow. So I think the best way to present this is that it is a temporary setback."

It was never more clear that Cindy was just a mouthpiece, spouting the party line. She felt sick.

chapter six

more bad News

As if the fall of China to the hordes of the Rapine Storm weren't bad enough, more tragedy is in the works for the forces of the New Earth Government. This bad news comes in two parts.

The first is later in the year when the powers-that-be decide to launch the super-secret Operation Grudge. The Migou foothold in Juneau is an unacceptable tactical situation and one the New Earth Government has been looking to rectify ever since the bugs invaded the Alaskan city. With the help of the Global Intelligence Agency, they have been watching Juneau and analyzing Migou defenses. It is believed that the Migou are more spread out than was initially thought and that a strong, decisive unexpected assault might be effective.

They are sadly, sadly wrong.

When the New Earth Government armed forces launch their attack using amassed forces in Vancouver and Seattle, they discover the Migou have been testing new technology that hides their numbers. The bugs have been baiting the armed forces into an attack and clearly have the advantages of both surprise and numbers. New Earth Government troops are slaughtered and a messy retreat ensues. Overall, the attempt to retake Juneau is a dismal failure.

As if that weren't enough, the Migou aren't done with us before the year is out. During the late fall, majestic Mt. Rainier outside of the Seattle arcology erupts unexpectedly, covering the Rainier valley in rivers of lava and the whole area in ash. Scientists quickly determine that the eruption is not natural and the armed forces are sent to investigate several other seismic anomalies in the area. What they eventually discover is a secret Migou outpost that is testing more new technology – this time a seismic generator.

However, while they are dismantling this Migou threat, they discover something else, something that will shake the foundation of the New Earth Government.

Our time may very well be up.

THE MIGOU IN NORTH AMERICA

The place once known as the country of Canada is comprised of a large amount of land, slightly larger than the former United States. However, it is unusual in that much of that land is subarctic or arctic and most of its now about 12 million residents live within 125 miles of what was the northern edge of the United States. These residents are primarily spread out among the medium-sized arcologies of Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg.

Having taken Alaska last year, setting up their primary foothold in the ruins of Anchorage, the New Earth Government's primary concern is how to stop the Migou from taking the cold places. The Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and the better part of Greenland are all sparsely populated wintery parts of North America that are not heavily defended. The Migou

would fare better in an extended conflict in these places and they would serve to create effective tactical staging areas for Migou forces to invade the rest of North America.

The Migou's occupation of Alaska, along with their existing foothold in the Arctic Circle, has forced the New Earth Government to begin to fortify the major northern arcologies. The dangerous part of the Juneau occupation is that it brings the Migou further south into North America, within striking distance of the northwestern arcologies. Vancouver has been especially fortified and Seattle is on near-constant alert to support them. The New Earth Government is also concerned about the safety of its home in Chicago, and has special contingents in Toronto and Winnipeg with a military outpost in Thunder Bay.

SCOUTING

The Migou have, over the last year, been scouting into North America aggressively. They have most especially been poking at Vancouver, Seattle, Edmonton, and Calgary. It's as if they are trying to find holes in the New Earth Government's defenses as well as to find out about the scale and scope of those defenses. Patrols involving Saber, Hurricane, and Auphan recon units have increased dramatically.

The New Earth Government has been getting nervous about the nearly constant probing that seems to be coming out of Juneau. Intelligence analysts believe that this activity, combined with the Migou's rather ruthless disposal of the population of Juneau, indicates that the bugs are not going to stay put. It is quickly becoming a consensus among the brass of the armed forces that the Migou are going to strike out again, most likely at Vancouver. They could sit around and wait for it to happen or they could launch a preemptive strike against Juneau, the place most likely to be the bugs' staging area.

That is exactly what the Migou want them to think. The New Earth Government is being played.

A FEW NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Like the New Earth Government, Migou scientists and engineers are constantly researching and developing new technology that will help them in their war effort. While the Migou have more advanced technology than we do, the New Earth Government has developed rapidly to a point where we can hold our own. If the Aeon War presses to its logical conclusions, the Migou will eventually defeat humanity, but not without a fight. The bugs are trying to create for themselves the kind of edge that truly tips the balance of the scales, something that will make us much easier prey.

There are two pieces of such newly developed technology that will plague the New Earth Government this year, and their effects will both be devastating.

The first creation the armed forces will encounter is what New Earth Government intelligence will come to call the Blind. Traditionally, stealth systems have been touchy. They don't function

well in larger objects, which is one of the reasons they have typically only been built into small mecha. The development of the Aral Engel as a stealth unit took a small miracle of engineering on the part of Dr. Anton Miyakame. Stealth systems are also delicate pieces of equipment, failing after only a moderate level of shock or damage. They also require a significant amount of power to keep on-line, which is why mecha sacrifice other systems to have one installed.

The New Earth Government had only moderate luck with regards to developing stealth systems before and during the First Arcanotech War. We had elements of a full functioning system, but not all the pieces together in one place. The Nazzadi did, however, which was a huge advantage their military had over ours. Once the war was over, the Nazzadi shared their stealth technology with their new family, bringing the military to its modern form.

However, the Nazzadi are a created race. Who gave them stealth technology in the first place? The Migou. Which means they have always been and most likely will always be ahead of us on that particular technological curve. Like now.

The Migou Blind is a stealth system capable of concealing a building the size of a hangar and everything within, inside of certain limits. Normally, anything concealed by a stealth system is limited to half its normal movement. Anything underneath a blind can't move at more than a leisurely mortal walking pace or the whole thing will flicker with rolling failures. Anything the Migou want to conceal under a Blind has to be moved inside and into place very slowly and it had better not be something they want to work on or get at with any regularity. However, it is very useful if you want to, for example, move a large number of mecha underneath it to stage for a sneak attack.

Blinds also use a large amount of power, even hooked up to full Cascaded D-Engine Generators. If the Migou started to build excessive power generators, that would most certainly gain the attention of the New Earth Government. Rather than give their enemies the idea that something is up and lose the element of surprise, the Migou have instead had to deal with the problem of rolling failures in their Blinds. Migou artificial intelligences have been slaved to the problem. The gamble they are running is to take control of the failures, so that they occur at pre-ordained times while appearing completely random to anyone watching. Combined with the extensive use of Wards of Seclusion, the gamble has been working.

The New Earth Governments reports from aerial and stealth surveillance has yielded only anomalies. Since the Migou know when the NEG armed forces are coming, they do nothing in or near the blinds, so there's no reason to think anything is out of place. The only times an infiltration has come close to seeing anything, nearby Migou forces jammed the units' communications and exterminated them. That sort of thing is not unusual in terms of Migou behavior, so it drew no special attention. In general, intelligence anomalies are a part of the Aeon War, so the

New Earth Government is entirely unaware of what the Migou are doing.

The second breakthrough that the Migou bring to the table this year is something they've been working on for a long time – seismic generators. Utilizing technology well out of the grasp of the New Earth Government, the Migou have created a machine that can generate seismic forces to create earthquakes without warning. The limitation is that these earthquakes must occur along natural fault lines – they cannot generate any real seismic effect on stable ground.

For quite a while now, the Migou have had limited success, generating small seismic events along fault lines in territory they control. Then the breakthrough came and Migou scientists were well aware that they had finally overcome the limitations they'd had for many years. This new generator would direct enough waves into a fault line to cause a massive seismic event – still not enough to cause a city-levelling earthquake, but more than enough to say, cause a dormant volcano that's due to erupt sometime soon, to violently blow its top.

It just so happens that such volcanoes exist in the Cascade Volcanic Arc, running from southwestern British Columbia down into northern California. Its highest peak is Mt. Rainier, a stone's throw from the Seattle arcology. How lucky for them that one of the places on their "to-do" list is so close to a primary test site.

NEG FORCES

The New Earth Government knows that the Migou won't be content to stay put for very long. The kind of foothold they've gotten in Juneau is one that they will have to push out from, or it is a surrounded sitting duck. As such, the cities of Vancouver, Seattle, Edmonton, and Calgary have been reinforced, with battle groups ready to respond to an attack anywhere in the area.

Between the four key cities in the Pacific Northwest there are more than a quarter million personnel – pilots, infantry, armor, and support staff – under the command of Field Marshal Aura Swanepole. This force is comprised of six mecha corps. Calgary is home to the 17th Corps, Edmonton hosts the 27th Corps, Vancouver is home to the 2nd and the "fighting" 33rd Corps, and Seattle hosts the 13th and 23rd Corps. Two of these corps have special reputations. The "lucky" 13th is not only called so because of its designation, but because it suffered the least casualties in the Migou's Juneau offensive. The "fighting" 33rd is named so for nearly an opposite reason – it was nearly wiped out during the same conflict, but kept on fighting until the bitter end.

The area is regularly patrolled by recon and stealth mecha detachments. E-9 Sentinels rove the air in regular rotation, providing nearly constant surveillance from the sky. The New Earth Government likes to think that if a Migou so much as twitches, they'll have one eye or the other on it. Unfortunately, these patrols meet with regular resistance, so the intelligence picture is not nearly so neat and tidy.

TWO TALES

These events are designed to take place through the course of two stories. The first story – More Bad News (Part I): Operation “Really Bad Idea” – puts the Characters smack in the middle of Operation Grudge and the attempt to re-take Juneau. The second story – More Bad News (Part II): Wait for the Punchline – places Characters in the position of being the ones that discover the Migou seismic generator in the Cascade Mountain range, along with other news that will change the face of the Aeon War.

The New Earth Government Navy supports the army through the NES Victory battlecruiser and its accompanying task force of destroyers and frigates. When the conflict begins, the NES Dreadnought will also be brought into play from elsewhere in the Pacific, also with its accompanying task force.

Pilots who are part of the Pacific Northwest’s forces should be used to a heavy duty roster by now. There is no doubt that they are up to snuff and battle-ready, with the regular patrols and semi-regular conflict. It is fortunate they also receive regular counseling and a few days of leave here and there. Somewhere in the back of their heads, they’ve known this conflict was coming.

THE CULTS

The New Earth Government isn’t the only one concerned about the impending Migou threat. The Chrysalis Corporation and the Disciples of Death’s Shadow are none too thrilled about it either, each having their own plan for how humanity’s world ends. Alien insects from Pluto have never been a part of those plans.

The Chrysalis Corporation plans to do nothing to assist in the New Earth Government, at least not in the traditional way. Right about the time the armed forces are gearing up for an invasion of Juneau is right about the time the Children of Chaos will be trying to bring an avatar of the Old One Shub-Niggurath into this world. The way the Cult sees it, once the Black Mother returns, the Migou will have her power and minions to contend with and she will ultimately win. A dark god in their backyard is not something with which the Migou are prepared to deal.

The Disciples of Death’s Shadow are quite busy pushing some pretty sick things into the psyche of the New Earth Government’s culture. They might be tempted to let up on things at home knowing the Migou threat, but they are in on the plans of the Children of Chaos. They too believe that the return of Shub-Niggurath will solve the problem to their liking.



If either of them had any idea what was coming, they would do something to help out. Unfortunately, they have put all their eggs in the basket of the Black Mother, which will be thwarted by the forces of the Eldritch Society. By the time they figure it out, it will be too late for them to act.

MORE BAD NEWS (PART I): OPERATION “REALLY BAD IDEA”

There’s no doubt Juneau is a key tactical point in North America. It gives the Migou a land foothold that isn’t on the Alaskan peninsula, giving them the ability to stage troops much closer to dense population centers like Vancouver or Seattle. Considering the way the Migou often advance once they get footholds in other parts of the world, the New Earth Government is nervous. The heart of the New Earth Government is in Chicago, so the politicians are anxious for the armed forces to do something about bugs in North America.

The armed forces had to spend plenty of time to lick their wounds after the Migou invasion. They were brutally beaten by the bugs in Juneau and the tactical situation in the city has been uncertain. However, months of heavy intelligence gathering and analysis have made the brass believe that the situation in Juneau has stabilized and the Migou are surprisingly less reinforced than they initially thought. A smart and concerted effort might be able to retake the city.

Or so they think.

The reality of the situation is much, much worse. The Migou are testing out new prototype technologies that allow them to conceal their numbers. They’ve been hanging out up in Juneau doing what they need to do and also waiting to catch our interest. They’ve been baiting the New Earth Government into an assault that the bugs know they’ll win.

They’re excited. Or at least some kind of alien emotion that lives in the same ballpark as excited. They also know what else is on the way, so to them, win or lose, Juneau will be a great exercise.

ACT I: THIS TIME IT’S SERIOUS

Goals: To set the first murmurs of a large-scale military operation. To thrust the Characters into an unexpected briefing where they learn the part they will play in Operation Grudge. To send the Characters to prepare and then to their transports. To be on the way to Juneau, ready for action.

Setting: The Characters’ home base of operations; a briefing room early in the morning; the Characters’ lockers and ready stations; transport to Juneau.

Cast: *Major Angelina Perez* – Experienced, Human Hispanic female, early-thirties, Broadsword pilot, callsign: Kestral, officer in charge of the Character’s company. Angelina is a graduate of an officer’s training college and has not seen as much combat as

many of those she commands – though she is no greenie either. She tends to make decisions from the gut.

Field Marshal Aura Swanepole – Veteran, Human Caucasian female, mid-fifties, one of the top officers in the New Earth Government army, in command of Operation Grudge. Aura has a personal vendetta against the Migou as Juneau was under her command when the bugs invaded. One can easily see the weight of her command on her always tired-looking face.

Friends & Squad Mates – Inexperienced, Experienced, and Veteran soldiers and pilots, all of whom are close to the Characters and a part of the operation. They will be the closest thing to family with which they can have an emotional moment.

The New Earth Government Armed Forces – Inexperienced, Experienced, and Veteran soldiers and pilots from the Characters’ home base.

Setting the Stage

The events that occur in this story primarily take place in Juneau. Your Characters can be based out of anywhere initially. If your game takes place in the Pacific Northwest of North America, then this will be easy – your Characters will be deployed from their bases in Vancouver, Seattle, Edmonton, or Calgary. If not, you’ll have to do a little set-up work. With the armed forces wanting to maintain an intelligence blackout, it is easy to transfer your Characters from another base to one of these four without an explanation. Let them stew for a while, but when the time comes, they’ll get why they’re there and be glad to be a part of the fight.

Behind the Scenes

It’s unlikely that your Characters are top brass within the New Earth Government armed forces or the attached Ashcroft Foundation Advisors, so they probably won’t have any inkling that this is coming. Security is also very tight, so the information surrounding this operation won’t leak out to the ranks.

However, Characters who are either insightful, with the Minor Empathy Asset, or with full-blown Empathy are going to sense the restlessness around their base. There’s something that runs through the soldiers when a big operation is coming up, like they know something is coming on an intuitive level. People will start to get more tense, more heartfelt in their communication, and in general will stop just taking care of business as usual.

Let’s Brief You & Hope You Aren’t Still Drunk

The call comes early in the morning on a Sunday – like 3 am early. Here’s hoping that your Characters weren’t off-duty last night and doing what most pilots are doing on Saturday night – getting drunk. They aren’t alone.

When they leave their bunks, they’ll notice that it isn’t just them who is up. It’s like the whole base is awake. They’ll be rushed to a large briefing room and the magnitude of the situation shouldn’t

be lost on them. Something big is going down, no doubt. It's time to be nervous.

They are met by Major Angelina Perez, their company's commanding officer. She quiets everybody down and steps back to let Field Marshal Aura Swanepole address them by video link. This should alert the Characters to the seriousness of the situation – one of the highest ranking officers in the army is taking the time to brief them. The skinny is this: the New Earth Government is launching an operation to retake Juneau.

Odds are that your Characters are part of a squad of mecha pilots, soldiers, or special forces troopers and, as such, they don't need to nor will they be allowed to know the whole plan. They'll just get their part in the overall scheme – where they'll be dropped, what their objective is, who will be supporting them, and that kind of thing. When Field Marshal Swanepole is finished, Major Perez takes over with the specifics.

Here are some possible targets to which your Characters will be assigned – each of these is explained more thoroughly in Act II. Groups will be assigned a primary objective, as well as a secondary objective should they be in a position to take one on. The following is not an exhaustive list of possible targets, but they are certainly some of the most important and should give you a base upon which to build your own game.

There are four main tactical targets for stories involving mecha or Engel pilots: power distribution, troop staging areas or munitions depots, mecha and vehicle hangars, and hospitals. Taking on power distribution means going after the Migou's Cascaded D-Engine Generator infrastructure to knock out the bugs' ability to use much of their equipment. Going after the troop staging areas or munitions depots means destroying the areas where troops equip or re-arm themselves and/or deploy from as well, blocking the bugs' ability to put more troops into battle or for the ones already in battle to resupply. Taking on the mech and vehicle hangars means destroying bug armor before it can be brought into play. Going after the hospitals means destroying the bugs' capability to keep wounded troops alive.

There are four main tactical targets for stories involving soldiers or special forces: communications, assimilation centers, mecha repair bays, and command centers. Taking on communications means knocking out the bugs' ability to talk to each other or call in reinforcements. Going after assimilation centers means destroying the Migou facilities where they alter Humans to be collaborators and possibly rescuing people who have not yet undergone the process. Taking on mecha repair bays means knocking out the bugs' ability to perform repairs on damaged mecha or to bring damaged mecha on-line if needed. Going after command centers means finding and infiltrating the bugs' bunkers wherein are the leaders and tacticians – as well as gathering potential intelligence that might be useful in the field.

They will undoubtedly have questions and most likely be upset that they have no clue to what is happening. Everyone is being

mobilized on short notice so that the enemy won't know they're coming. The information black-out was necessary so that the New Earth Government can rely on as much surprise as possible. The Characters will have to be good soldiers and shut up, grab their gear, and get on with their mission.

Rock & Roll

Once properly briefed, the Characters are sent off to their respective staging areas to gear up and get to their transport. Mecha pilots will be off to their bays and then to a battlecruiser (the NES Victory or NES Dreadnought) or to a C-10 Griffon transport; soldiers and special forces to their lockers and then to a transport (either a C-10 Griffon or a UCH-70 Werewolf). The point is that the Characters will be geared up for full-scale warfare and in a vehicle that will get them to the fight. Here's where you can give them serious ordnance, including heavy assault rifles, grenade launchers, full compliments of grenades, anti-mech weaponry, full combat armor and more – mecha pilots will have a much scaled-down version of the soldier package.

The hardest part of all this is that Characters won't be given a chance to say good-bye to loved ones. The mission is secret and at an awkward time. Furthermore, Characters won't have much time to dally as they prep for the assault. The only people they can have some sort of intimate emotional moment with are those in their squad or close by. If your Characters aren't the sort to engage in these sort of personal interactions, it's likely that those around them will. Even the most battle-hardened soldier needs interpersonal connection when they are facing a likelihood of dying. After all, as the poet said, if you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with.

And with that, they are in the air and on their way towards Juneau. For some soldiers, this may be round two. Some may be looking forward to the rematch, but most are just dreading reliving the nightmare once more. The journey there is likely to be quiet and tense, with soldiers making peace with whatever universal forces in which they believe. Some conversation may break out among the nervous, but if it doesn't have to do with the task at hand it will be promptly squelched by the ranking officers or NCO's.

ACT II: LET THE GAMES BEGIN

Goals: To land and begin the assault on Migou forces in Juneau. To discover the Migou trap. To have the Characters fight for their lives. To receive the evacuation order and try desperately to survive long enough to get out of the city.

Setting: Various tactical points in the Migou-occupied city of Juneau.

Cast: *Major Angelina Perez* – from Act I.

Field Marshal Aura Swanepole – from Act I.

Friends & Squad Mates – from Act I.

The New Earth Government Armed Forces – from Act I.

Captain Isaac Lincoln – Veteran, Human male, African descent, infantry commander from Vancouver. Capt. Lincoln holds the rearguard that creates an egress point for evacuating soldiers.

Lt. Colonel Lorona – Veteran, Nazzadi male, Seraph pilot (callsign: Raven), a battalion commander from Calgary. Raven is a passionate man, a seemingly constant flow of emotions, who creates a way for those cut off from other evacuation points to survive and get home.

Lt. Commander Tzveta Markovski – Veteran, Human Caucasian female, a Navy dropship pilot and commander, callsign: Torrent. Lt. Commander Markovski creates a daring evacuation point for retreating soldiers by bringing her flight through the fight.

Drop in 3... 2... 1...

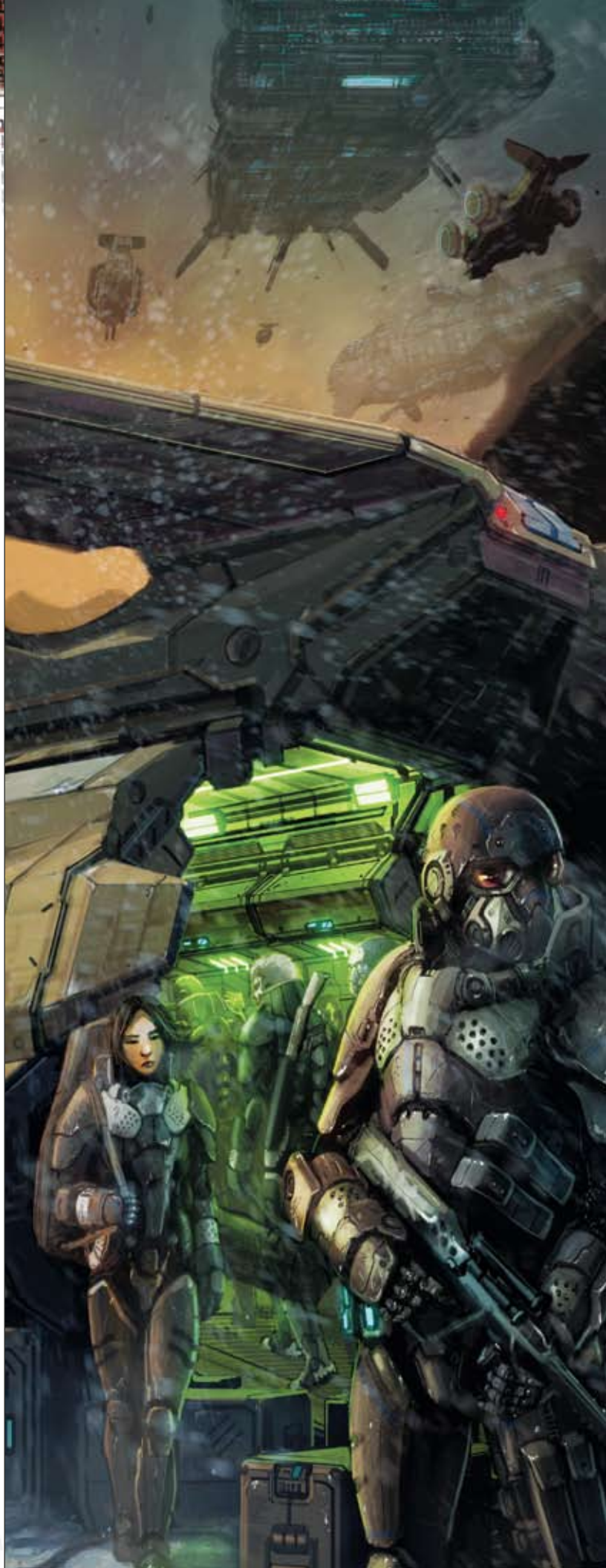
Juneau, a former government town, certainly isn't what it used to be. Sitting on the Gastineau Channel, the area that comprises the city is quite large – almost as big as the former states of Rhode Island and Delaware put together. Downtown sits at the base of Mount Juneau and at the top of the mountain is the Juneau Icefield – on this mountain is where many Migou operations are based. Because of its location, there was a time before A-pod vehicles that Juneau was only accessible by seaplanes or the ferry. Juneau was transformed into an arcology after the First Arcanotech War, but a small one, covering only most of the downtown area.

Despite its large area, the city's population was never very sizable. There were only about 35,000 residents in Juneau before the Migou invaded. Only around 25,000 of the city's residents lived inside the arcology. The rest lived in the ample and seemingly safe surrounds, where housing prices were cheap and space plentiful. When the bugs came, it didn't really matter where they lived because most of Juneau's residents were killed, the rest were either evacuated or assimilated.

The weather this time of year is cold – it will probably be around freezing or below. It is also likely that it will snow before, during, or on the way out of the operation. It is Alaska in November, after all. This will not impair the functioning of mecha, but if you want to make it snowing heavily, you may choose to impose a partially obscuring Test Penalty for non-mechanically or supernaturally assisting senses.

Depending upon their function and objective, troops or mecha will be dropped deep into Migou territory by a Werewolf, dropped from high above by a Griffon, or they'll be dropped outside of town and have to make their way into the objective on their own.

These days, Juneau doesn't look like it once did. Most of the city is war-scarred, ruins of a New Earth Government town. While much of the outlying city is nothing but either ruins or a ghost-town, the arcology itself has been coopted by the Migou. They



have begun to build over and through it, using their alien style of crystal and metal construction. Mount Juneau is dotted with Migou outposts all the way up to and including the Icefield. It is clear from all that remains that Juneau is no longer home to anything Human.

False Positive

The point during this part of the story is to build up false hope that this mission might go off as planned. It is your job to make it seem like the bugs really are caught unawares and that the carefully coordinated actions of the New Earth Government are having the desired effect. Give the Characters personal victories here, washing away the combat willies and pushing them to the point of downright confidence.

It will all come crashing down soon enough.

Since the Characters will be following orders and headed towards their primary objectives, let's break those down one by one. Let's take a look at the mecha or Engle pilot objectives first.

Power Distribution

If the Characters' primary objective is power distribution, they will have to target important Cascaded D-Engine Generators (CDG's). The Migou know that their power network will be a primary target, so such areas are guarded. The typical force a team will encounter in Juneau will be composed of one squad of mecha: two Grubs, six Locusts, a Dragonfly, and either a Scorpion, a Silverfish, or a Wasp, with a squad of ten Migou battletroops with a half-dozen anti-mech rockets. You may choose to swap out a couple of the mecha for equivalent Nazzadi Loyalists or Blanks in Sword-class mecha. If this force proves too easy for your Characters, feel free to reinforce with another group of similar composition. If the force proves to be difficult, reduce the number of mecha.

Taking out the CDG's will wipe out power to different things, most notably general power in the city. All important Migou facilities have backup generators on which they can operate for a matter of hours. The effects of the success of this objective will not be immediately apparent, but as the battle goes on critical Migou systems will begin to go off-line.

There is a possibility that Characters on this mission will encounter a CDG that is attached to a Blind. Such targets will occur as odd to the team, for they will be CDG's that aren't on their mission profile, nor do they appear to be guarded. If they attack, they will force the Migou group out of the Blind early (see the next section of this story) and will promptly be under fire. It will be an anomaly that will have little effect on the overall ambush and will put the Characters in the position of having to flee for their lives much earlier than the rest of the New Earth Government.

Troop Staging & Munitions Depots

If the Characters' primary objectives are troop staging areas or munitions depots, they will have to target barracks, weapons

lockers, resupply stations, and the like. These areas are typically more difficult to get to and are flurries of activity once the battle starts in earnest. Those attacking troop staging areas can expect to face a company of up to 100 Migou battletroops, armed with anti-mech rockets and HPM weaponry. They will soon be reinforced by up to four nearby Silverfish. Those attacking munitions depots will have to contend with both infantry and mecha. The depot itself will be guarded by four Locusts with one Wasp. However, at any given time once the fighting has started, add in a half dozen other mixed mecha and a couple squads (up to twenty) Migou battletroops who will have access to a lot of anti-mech weaponry. Feel free to increase this opposition if it seems too easy for your Characters, or decrease if too difficult.

Taking these objectives out will stop the Migou from bringing new troops into battle as well as hindering their ability to resupply or get new ammunition. For mecha, this will manifest as Migou mecha losing the ability to use rocket pods, missile racks, flamethrowers, or acid drips.

Mecha or Vehicle Hangars

If the Characters' primary objective is mecha or vehicle hangars, they will have to target war machines that are not yet in operation and destroy them before they can be brought into play. It is much like destroying air fields in days gone by. Again, the Migou understand that these areas are tactical targets and have guarded them appropriately. Smaller facilities will have the aforementioned type of squad: two Grubs, six Locusts, a Dragonfly, and either a Scorpion, a Silverfish, or a Wasp, with a squad of ten Migou battletroops with a half-dozen anti-mech rockets. You may choose to swap out a couple of the mecha for equivalent Nazzadi Loyalists or Blanks in Sword-class mecha. Larger installations will be protected by two such squads, as well as either a Mantis or a Spider. Feel free to increase this opposition if it seems too easy for your Characters, or decrease if too difficult – especially larger installations with Behemoth-class mecha.

These numbers do not include the number of pilots that are either hanging around waiting for duty or those in process of being mobilized. If the Characters don't find a way to prevent more mecha or armor from joining the battle quickly, they will face additional enemies.

Destroying these objectives will prevent the Migou from fielding mechanized reinforcements. This will be felt immediately, as Migou mecha squads will not be reinforced and new mecha will not be seen on the battlefield.

Hospitals

If the Characters' primary objectives are hospitals, they will have to destroy any places where Migou go to get medical aid. Though attacking hospitals was considered against the rules in the days of Human-only warfare, no one has an issue when the hospitals are for bugs only. Of any objective, this will be the least guarded. The resistance Characters can expect to face will come from patrols. There will be a contingent of ten or twelve battletroops that will be armed with anti-mech rockets, however.

Taking out hospitals prevents the Migou from healing their wounded or bringing the less wounded back into the battle. Hospitals are the easiest of the primary objectives, so it is likely that Characters will have time to support a secondary objective.

Now that we've explored mecha and Engel pilots, let's take a look at the objectives for soldiers or special forces. These locations are things that are better suited for infiltration by infantry or where a surgical strike by infantry would be more effective than attack by giant war machines.

Communications

If the Characters' primary objective is communications stations, they will have to infiltrate and destroy any emplacement that allows the bugs to coordinate. These stations can be identified by their connection to some kind of transmitter, typically placed at an elevation. If a mecha team attacked such a location, they would immediately be set upon by reinforcements. If an infantry team can sneak up and destroy the transmitter, they can get away without too much of a fight. During a time like this, infantry can expect to encounter a fully-armed squad of Migou battletroops (around ten) with Neurotoxin Handguns and HPM Rifles. Two of them will be set up as a team with an HPM Support Weapon on a tripod. Any battle needs to be quick, as the Migou will call for help immediately. Feel free to scale opposition as needed.

Knocking out the Migou's communications might throw them into some sort of disarray, making their attacks less coordinated on a broad scale. It would make it harder for Migou troops in the immediate area to be efficiently reinforced. The more communications transmitters that are destroyed, the more effective this tactic will be.

Assimilation Centers

If the Characters' primary objective is assimilation centers, they will have to infiltrate and destroy the labs in which they perform the inhuman procedures that make a perfectly loyal slave out of an independent Human. They are guarded like hospitals, as described on the previous page. Entering such a place is a disturbing experience, as soldiers find the equipment that brainwashes Blanks as well as the surgical facilities where the Migou open up their subjects' skulls. When all is said and done, make everyone who gets what's going on make a Challenging Tenacity Feat Test – failure equals one Insanity Point.

Destroying assimilation centers during the battle will have little effect, but it does give the soldiers the opportunity to rescue anyone who may have been captured – including some who have not yet been processed from the occupation. Juneau was unusual for a bug attack in that they began by exterminating everyone, not just the Nazzadi as usual. There are not likely to be many Humans left, but feel free to have them rescue people (possibly even Blank spies) if it serves your story.

Mecha Repair Bays

If the Characters' primary objective is mecha repair bays, they will have to infiltrate and destroy the machinery that allows the

bugs to repair their war machines. Such facilities are guarded similarly to the mecha or vehicle hangars, which means there will be mecha hanging around. Such an objective requires that the Characters attack via stealth, sneaking into the facility quietly, setting charges to blow critical portions of the repair equipment, and sneaking back out before the mecha can target them. It will be dangerous – feel free to scale opposition as needed.

Succeeding at this objective will prevent the Migou from making repairs or bringing lightly damaged mecha on-line to join the battle, as well as preventing the bugs from fielding mecha that were nearly ready to be put back into action. The effects of this might not be immediately felt, but most certainly would reduce Migou opposition in a more extended conflict.

Command Centers

If the Characters' primary objective is command centers, they will have to infiltrate bug bunkers and assassinate Migou leaders and tacticians. They may also discover intelligence that might be useful in the attack. The mechanized defenses of such a building are light, but it is getting inside the fortress-like place that is the trick. Command bunkers are armored buildings with heavy security measures, with only a squad of battletroops (most inside) as guards. This is a mission for only the most clever and resourceful of soldiers. It's a big deal and soldiers know it.

Once inside, soldiers have the opportunity to kill Migou commanders. Destroying the Migou command hierarchy could potentially cripple the bugs' ability to maintain cohesiveness over a long battle. It is also a moral victory for the New Earth Government.

It is possible that your Characters complete their primary objective quickly, in which case they may have time to go after a secondary objective to support the units already engaging it. It is a full-scale invasion, so there will always be something for the Characters to be doing.

Feel free to mix and match objectives. If you feel it's more appropriate for your game to have mecha go after an infantry objective or vice versa, go for it. You can have this first phase of the battle go however you want it to go.

No matter what objectives your Characters go after, they will have to deal with patrols. There are three primary types of mecha patrols: aerial, ground, and bait squads. Aerial patrols are a small detachment of flying Migou mecha, typically composed of two Dragonflies and three Wasps. Ground patrols are tricky, typically composed of three Locusts, one Fireant, and a Silverfish hidden nearby. Bait squads are composed of a mix of assimilated or Loyalist pilots with Broadwords, Storms, Rapiers, and Hurricanes. They will, if a target is identified as NEG, pretend they are allies until they can either sneak attack or reinforce. There is only one primary type of infantry ground patrol, composed of a squad of battletroops, armed with Neurotoxin Handguns and HPM Rifles. Overall, while the Characters may be able to deal with patrols, such units can and do call in reinforce-

ments, which may be as simple as another patrol or as dangerous as a full detail of Migou mecha.

Learning To Hate The Term “Field Test”

For the first part of this mission, your Characters will most likely do well. That is part of the Migou’s design. However, once the Migou have effectively lured the New Earth Government deep into the city and surrounds, they’ll drop the charade. It’s not that they knew the New Earth Government was coming. The Migou have been baiting us all along and have been prepared for some kind of invasion. Fortunately, patience plays into the Migou psyche and today their patience has been rewarded.

Near each primary objective, the Migou have placed a Blind in which sits Migou battletroops, powered armor, and mecha units. They are waiting for a cue from their tacticians, at which time they will flood out to support those already on the battlefield, overwhelming New Earth Government forces. It is up to you when you feel that your Characters are deep enough into the city and when they have the feeling that this mission is going well. The Migou don’t just want to crush their enemies physically, they want to crush the military’s morale as well.

The way this looks to your average soldier or pilot is that suddenly a hangar-sized building appears on their sensors, with multiple enemy contacts swarming out of it. No one knows where it came from or what’s going on and they have a matter of minutes at best to process this and come up with a plan of action. Feel free to give them a moment to figure out a point to which to retreat – that’s something they’d have worked out. However, don’t give them lots of time to ask questions and plan. The Migou reinforcements are on their way and reaction time is of the essence if they have any wish to survive.

Just to be clear, the idea here is to panic your players. Start the proceedings out with a Challenging Fear Test. They should be properly freaked out for the rest of this story.

The average Blind will hold a composition of troops something like this:

- The first wave out will be eight Dragonflies sent out as invisible eyes in the sky, so that the Migou can deploy in the most advantageous way possible.
- The second wave out will be primarily composed of artillery mecha. Eight Grubs and eight Wasps emerge, take positions, and start tearing up New Earth Government forces with rockets and missiles. While this is happening, four Silverfish will quickly move into the peripheries and start taking out the wounded with their Null Rays before disappearing again.
- The third wave will consist of a Mantis leaping into combat, while two Spiders race up and drop grav bombs so that no one can immediately make an effective retreat. They will soon be joined by a dozen Fireants and four Scorpions and the up close and personal urban combat will begin in earnest.

· The fourth wave will consist of three different parts, and will fill in any gaps in the fight. The first are a dozen Locusts, followed by two Cockroach powered armor squads of eight troops each. The third part will be a company of Migou Battletroops (around 75 soldiers), armed with Neurotoxic Handguns and HPM Rifles and wearing full heavy combat armor. Within this company will be a half dozen teams that will set up HPM Support Weapons on portable tripods. There will also be the equivalent of a half dozen NCO’s carrying Null Ray Rifles.

You may, depending on your game, need to increase or decrease these forces. New Earth Government troops should be dramatically outnumbered and stuck in disadvantageous tactical positions. They should not, however, all be immediately destroyed.

Now the forces of the New Earth Government realize that they’ve been lured into a trap.

Stand Your Ground!

Naturally, this development will be reported to Field Marshal Swanepole. The officers in charge will transmit her broadcasted orders – stand your ground. This is not so much because they believe they have a chance at repelling the massively underestimated Migou forces. Instead, they just need a minute to figure out what the hell is going on and how they need to adapt.

Meanwhile, your Characters are going to be stuck in a hellish battle, fighting to survive. Keep the attack going as long as you have to in order for it to seem hopeless. The Characters will have to dig in and hold back the forces that have emerged from the Blinds the best that they can.

We’re All Going to Die

Once the full might of the Migou forces in Juneau are actually brought to bear, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to realize that the fight is over. Those in the trenches, like your Characters, should realize that it will be a miracle if they make it out of here alive – just like the first time around in Juneau, which will be fun if any of your Characters have that in their backgrounds.

As the New Earth Government forces are being whittled down by the Migou threat, the Field Marshal finally calls it. The situation cannot be salvaged. The order for general retreat is sounded. All forces leave Juneau however they can.

It’s too bad that Operation Grudge didn’t include a comprehensive evacuation plan – or much of an evacuation plan at all.

Though the Characters have no idea how they’re going to get back to civilization, their first order of business is to simply survive and get either out of the city or far enough away from the fighting that they can figure out what they are going to do. They must first fight their way out of whatever battle they are in, tackling the Migou troops that flooded out of the Blind.

Do what you need to scare the living daylights out of your Characters. Make them wonder if they are going to die here. After all,

this would be the kind of dramatic moment that could very well warrant the sacrifice of a Dramatic Character, and don't be shy about pointing that out if your players get cocky.

The battles here should focus around retreat, not full engagement. Your Characters should do what they have to in order to punch an egress hole in their enemies' formations and then continually make their way towards toward a defensible place where they can call someone to get them the hell out.

Evacuation, If That's What You'd Call It

Hopefully, your Characters will find themselves a moment where they can call in to get some kind of guidance. The situation has fallen apart and communications chatter is chaotic and difficult to cut through. Eventually, someone will pick them out of the traffic and ask them for their location.

Here are a few rendezvous points to which you can send your Characters. Choose whichever one you like best – they'll all have their own challenges. Feel free to place these points wherever works best for where you have placed your game within the city.

A group of Werewolf pilots has been ferrying in through heavy fire to a group of still-standing twelve to fifteen story buildings that were once offices and condos. The location is five to fifteen miles from the Characters' current location. They have to get to the buildings and up to the roof. The coordinating pilot's callsign is Torrent and she's got a cool under fire that is undeniable.

A rearguard group is holding a position a few miles out on the other side of the Gastineau Channel. They have cleared an area for C-10 Griffons to land. The heat is getting heavy, so the Characters had best get themselves over there as quickly as possible. The coordinating officer is Captain Isaac Lincoln, who they can immediately tell is tough as nails.

Without any official air support, troops have begun to mass on the Northeast outskirts of the city. There are enough in one concentrated place now that they are holding back the Migou. However, the bugs have made it difficult for air evac to make it in, so the troops are planning on walking home. They're just waiting to get as many of their comrades out as possible. Lt. Colonel Lorona (callsign: Raven) runs that show, a passionate man with fire in his voice.

A FEW FOES

Here are a few enemy statistics that will be of use to you.

Average Migou Battletroop or Pilot

Allegiance: Migou

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (4 to 5 ft. tall)

Attributes: Agility 11, Intellect 8, Perception 6, Presence 5, Strength 8, Tenacity 7

Secondary Attributes: Actions 3, Orgone 12, Reflex 8

General Skills: Athletics: Adept (3), Computers: Novice (2), Education: Adept (3), Language (Nazzadi): Expert (4), Lan-

guage (R'lyeh): Expert (4), Language (several mortal): Adept (3), Observation: Adept (3), Occult: Adept (3), Piloting: Adept (3), Stealth: Adept (3), Survival: Adept (3)

Combat Skills: Dodge: Adept (3), Fighting: Adept (3), Marksman: Adept (3), Support Weapons: Adept (3), Thrown Weapons: Adept (3)

Weapons: Claws (0), Migou Weapons (p. 115 of the *Core Book*)

Damage Bonus: +1

Vitality: 12

Armor: Migou Battle Armor (3/3)

Fear Factor: 12

Temperament: Emotionless & Precise

Senses: Normal

Movement & Speed: Land [34 mph (84/19 ypt)], Flying [9 mph (22/5 ypt)]

Average Blank Soldier or Pilot (Experienced)

Allegiance: Migou

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (5 to 6 ft. tall)

Attributes: Agility 7, Intellect 6, Perception 8, Presence 7, Strength 5, Tenacity 7

Secondary Attributes: Actions 2, Orgone 11, Reflex 7

General Skills: Athletics: Adept (3), Criminal: Adept (3), Education: Novice (2), Misdirect: Adept (3), Observation: Adept (3), Performance: Adept (3), Stealth: Adept (3), Survival: Adept (3)

Combat Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept (3), Dodge: Novice (2), Fighting: Adept (3), Marksman: Adept (3), Thrown Weapons: Adept (3), Support Weapons: Novice (3)

Weapons: As mortal weapons (see Standard Issue on p. 112 of the *Core Book*)

Damage Bonus: 0

Vitality: 11

Armor: Heavy Combat Armor (3/3)

Fear Factor: None

Temperament: As mortal

Senses: Normal

Movement & Speed: Land [11 mph (27/6 ypt)]

Average Loyalist Soldier or Pilot (Experienced)

Allegiance: Migou

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (5 to 6 ft. tall)

Attributes: Agility 8, Intellect 6, Perception 8, Presence 7, Strength 5, Tenacity 6

Secondary Attributes: Actions 2, Orgone 11, Reflex 7

General Skills: Athletics: Adept (3), Criminal: Adept (3), Education: Novice (2), Misdirect: Adept (3), Observation: Adept (3), Performance: Adept (3), Stealth: Adept (3), Survival: Adept (3)

Combat Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept (3), Dodge: Novice (2), Fighting: Adept (3), Marksman: Adept (3), Thrown Weapons: Adept (3), Support Weapons: Novice (3)

Weapons: As mortal weapons (see Standard Issue on p. 112 of the *Core Book*)

Damage Bonus: 0

Vitality: 10

Armor: Heavy Combat Armor (3/3)

Fear Factor: None
Temperament: As mortal
Senses: Normal
Movement & Speed: Land [11 mph (27/6 ypt)]

ACT III: CONSOLATION PRIZE

Goals: To get out of Juneau alive. To get back to civilization alive.

Setting: The Migou occupied city of Juneau; an evacuation site or transport; a New Earth Government evacuation point and temporary hospital.

Cast: *Major Angelina Perez* – from Act I.

Field Marshal Aura Swanepole – from Act I.

Friends & Squad Mates – from Act I.

The New Earth Government Armed Forces – from Act I.

Captain Isaac Lincoln – from Act II.

Lt. Colonel Lorona – from Act II.

Lt. Commander Tzveta Markovski – from Act II.

Trying to Get Out

The Characters will now have to fight their way to your chosen evacuation point. On the way there, they may have to deal with patrols hunting them (like the patrols earlier) or spillover from the continuing battle. They have, however, managed to make it out this far, so the fighting doesn't necessarily have to be intense the whole way.

Werewolf Evac

Once to the buildings that Torrent has indicated, the Characters will discover that the Migou are wise to her plan and are firing on the Werewolves. Though her flight's actions up until now have been daring, the zone is simply too hot for them to land now. The Characters will have to deal with the Migou in order to get out. There are two pieces to this puzzle. The first is the BG-104 Hailstorm Null Cannon that is now firing on the Werewolves. The second are the Migou battletroops that have taken up positions in the buildings, firing on those escaping as well as the transports.

Once the Characters have dealt with both these problems, Torrent will fly in herself, welcome them, and get them out at top speed.

Rearguard Evac

Of each of the possible evacuation points presented here, this can be the easiest for the Characters. Patrols aside, the lay of the land here is simple. Capt. Lincoln commands the rearguard, who has secured a landing site for Griffons. There is an advanc-

ing Migou line of mecha and infantry that Capt. Lincoln's forces are holding back. The Characters only need to find themselves a hole in the Migou line or punch their own way through a weak section. Once through, the rearguard will be watching their backs, they can sprint to a transport, and be on their way home. The resistance can be as easy, or as difficult, as you'd like it to be, depending upon what works for your story.

Walking With The Mob

This should be the most difficult, but most rewarding, method of evacuation. Raven has assembled a group of mecha and infantry that are cut off from the rest of the evacuation points. Their goal – to gather everyone they can before walking south-east until the Migou no longer chase them and a transport can come and get them. Some of the boldest, toughest, and baddest pilots and infantry have dug themselves into the mountains and are repelling all comers. If the Characters can fight through the Migou patrols to get there, this group actually has a chance of making it out.

The terrain between here and the Taku Inlet is mountainous, which can make it slow going but also to the group's advantage. There are places to hide, cover to take, and high ground. However, because they are cut off from NEG reinforcements, the Migou will continue to attack for most of the way. Continue to attack the Characters with small groups of Migou, whatever level of danger is appropriate for you.

However, this is the kind of experience in which soldiers rapidly bond and the Characters will walk out with many new friends. The danger is not past though, and some of them will be killed in the escape. Those that survive will be legendary, those in command war heroes, at least to those in the know.

Happiness Is Juneau In My Rear View Mirror

Just making it to some kind of evacuation isn't enough to guarantee survival. There are plenty of Migou fighters (BG-01 Dart Tactical Interceptors) in the air trying to make sure that troops don't make it home. Thank goodness that there was no way for the Migou to conceal swarm ships or all this would be over.

If it's been hairy for the Characters and they just can't take anymore, have their flight home be relatively uneventful. However, if they're ready for another round, send a few Darts after them. Put the Characters in the gunnery chairs if you can, or at least somewhere where they can take shots themselves. As much as possible, put their fate in their hands.

By the time this is over and they are in the clear, your Characters (and honestly players) should be very worn out. They should be returning to the New Earth Government temporary hospitals and staging points shell-shocked. You know you've done your job if one of your players says the equivalent of, "Thank goodness that's over."

Now that the madness is over, it's time to see how much of it sank in. There are many possible ways that the Characters might

develop Aeon War Syndrome. Have each Character make Insanity Tests for any or all of the following possible things (as applicable) with the following Degrees and Insanity Point gain:

- Serious Injury – Easy/1 Point.
- Maiming Injury – Average/1 Point.
- Witness Death of a Friend (each one) – Average/1 Point.
- Enduring Fear (anyone who survived) – Challenging/1 Point.
- Causing Death of a Friend (each one) – Hard/2 Points.
- Witness Massacre or Bloodbath – Incredibly Hard/1 Point.

Characters should acquire at least one Insanity Point from these events. It is recommended that you do not let them use Drama Points for these Tests. War is hell, after all.

ENDINGS

There really is only one way for this to turn out. There's very little your average Character is going to be able to do to either discover the Migou's secret or to stop the New Earth Government from attacking. Characters get to be a part of this historic battle and will most likely distinguish themselves in some way that will help move them up the ranks. Maybe next time they'll be in a position of more authority and be able to influence events such as these.

Of course, news reports won't exactly portray the situation accurately. The official story will be something that paints creatively captured and cut news footage so that the defeat looks more like a setback. The New Earth Government has executed a tactical retreat early in the Operation, as soon as they discovered that Migou forces in Juneau were greater than intelligence led them to believe. The city is not lost. Instead the perimeter around Juneau is being reinforced with full knowledge of the Migou's capabilities. One day, the New Earth Government will march into Juneau again and claim it for its rightful owners.

Anyone who was actually there knows that the news reports are pretty much all lies. However, anyone who even came close to the action will be held to gag orders and won't be able to say anything about what really happened. In fact, they'll be given scripts telling them what they can and should say to friends and family. There will naturally be those who hint at the truth and rumors will leak out, but nothing will be serious enough to be substantiated.

People within the military and political hierarchies will have to resign in the face of such a disaster, claiming it was their responsibility and gladly ending their careers to be put on the public chopping block in the name of propaganda. In a reasonable world, no one could be held accountable for simply being outdone by the enemy. The Strange Aeon is not a reasonable world and therefore someone needs to take the blame.

The most visible figures to tender their resignations are Field Marshal Aura Swanepole of the New Earth Government Army and Director of Global Intelligence Traxony. Field Marshal Swanepole's resignation is a good thing from a propaganda standpoint, but a bad idea from a troop morale standpoint. It's



rare that the public has a sweet spot for any director of intelligence, so Traxony's resignation goes pretty much unnoticed by all but the Nazzadi – who remember her as a war hero from the First Arcanotech War and a woman of great integrity.

However, there will also be moral victories for the survivors. Lt. Colonel Lorona, Captain Isaac Lincoln, and Lt. Commander Tzveta Markovski will be decorated as war heroes and promoted (to Colonel, Major, and Commander respectively). The Characters now have friends in at least one of them and that relationship may pay off in the future. If they walked home with Lt. Colonel Lorona, they may have made a bunch of other friends, too.

Any Characters who were wounded in the conflict are eligible to purchase the Commendation (3) Asset, representing the Purple Heart, for a reduced Experience cost (they had to get hurt to acquire it). If a Character was hurt but remained at Moderately Wounded or below, the cost for the Asset is ten Experience. If a Character was hurt to the point of Seriously Wounded or beyond, the cost for the Asset is five Experience. What the Characters are paying for here is not the award itself, which they will get if wounded no matter what, but rather the prestige and respect that such an award may garner them in the long term.

Furthermore, there may be other medals for which Characters are eligible. Anyone who had a hand in keeping other soldiers or pilots alive is eligible for a Distinguished Service Medal – the cost of the Commendation Asset is 5 Experience. Anyone who clearly distinguished themselves as a leader during the chaos is eligible for the Meritorious Service Award – the cost of the Commendation Asset is 15 Experience. As above, the Characters will get these awards if they performed the actions involved, but the Asset cements the prestige and respect.

Regardless of commendation, most Characters will be eligible for promotion (and some may have had to take on battlefield promotions). Anybody who participated in this Operation and survived will receive a full rank promotion in their appropriate track – enlisted or officer. Anyone who is the sole remaining or sole ranking officer in their mecha squad will be promoted to at least the rank of Major (O-4), likewise anyone who is the sole remaining or sole ranking NCO in their infantry squad will receive a promotion to at least the rank of Sergeant (E-5).

Participation in this major attack will warrant additional Experience as well. Give your players 10 Experience on top of the usual awards.

In the end, the Migou still hold Juneau and still have a dangerous foothold in North America. They have wiped out more New Earth Government forces and learned more about the tactical capabilities of the military in the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps most importantly, they've tested their new track of technological development and found it to be a rousing success. It is uncertain if the Migou have some sort of emotion that equals 'pleased,' but one could suspect that they would feel something at least in the ballpark of 'satisfied.'

The New Earth Government now knows what to look for, so the Migou blinds will not again see the same use. They will use only one at a time in critical places, but the New Earth Government will now always plan for more Migou troops than intelligence leads them to believe are present. The bugs won this round, but their technology, at its current level, will not bring them this significant an advantage again. However, they will continue to develop the Blinds, so perhaps one day the improved version may come out to haunt the NEG.

The New Earth Government is, frankly, scared. They just got their behinds handed to them and they have little other than another large KIA roster to show for it. They will go back to policy from before Operation Grudge and reinforce Vancouver, Seattle, Edmonton, and Calgary. They will increase recon and stealth intelligence missions to Juneau and Anchorage, to make certain that the bugs won't use this opportunity to push forward and take other cities.

However, the attacks never come, at least over the next several months. The Migou don't do anything new. Probing recon missions even slow. Either they got what they wanted, or they're up to something else.

MORE BAD NEWS (PT. II) : WAIT FOR THE PUNCHLINE

The failed attempt to recapture Juneau is only the first insult the Migou perpetrate on the New Earth Government this year. It does, however, seem like a much less significant deal in comparison to what comes next.

The second begins as Mt. Rainier erupts without warning, spraying the Rainier valley with lava streams and covering the city of Seattle in ash.

ACT I: NOBODY TOLD ME IT WAS A VOLCANO

Goals: To experience the eruption of Mt. Rainier. To become involved in the events of this story. To begin the search for the eruption's cause.

Setting: The Characters' home base; the Seattle arcology.

Cast: *Agent Dierdre Cohen* – Experienced, Caucasian (Jewish) female, late-thirties, brown hair and eyes, a picture of agency decorum and efficiency. Agent Cohen is the Global Intelligence Agency representative to the military in charge of this investigation and one of the two people to which the Characters will report. She is a no BS kind of person, but thoughtful and understanding.

Colonel Tiraka – Veteran, Nazzadi male, early-forties, cropped graying black hair, glasses, a decorated officer. The Colonel is the military officer in charge of this investigation, cooperating with the Global Intelligence Agency. He is the kind of man that inspires those under his command.

Post Operation Really Bad Idea

Needless to say, after the failure in Juneau the New Earth Government has been heavily patrolling the Pacific Northwest. The military expects that the bugs will push out from Juneau after the NEG's crushing defeat. However, no such attack comes. In fact, Migou patrols do not increase in any way, nor do they move from Juneau. They sit tight. With the GIA now knowing what to look for, they're even monitoring the blinds as best they can. Nothing. This has a lot of people very nervous, especially with the New Earth Government re-examining its strategy here.

Little changes in the lives of the average citizen in the Pacific Northwest, post-Juneau. Most believe what they hear on the news, that the military is licking their wounds but reinforcing for another try. To back that up, reinforcements are flooding into key Pacific Northwest arcologies, but only to replace those lost in the assault.

Morale within the military, however, is very low among those who were in Juneau or close to those who went. Many are redeployed to other parts of the world to split these soldiers up, in an attempt to lessen the impact on the armed forces as a whole. All of them are sent to regular counseling and many are given all expenses paid leaves to someplace nice so they can recover.

The Cascades Are Volcanic

Most of those who live in the Pacific Northwest forget that a good chunk of the Cascade Mountains are volcanic. They're just used to seeing the mountains, especially the majestic Mt. Rainier, and have forgotten all about Mt. St. Helens. With bigger problems on the boil, most aren't too worried about the possibility that a dormant volcano might blow its stack. After all, there are people keeping an eye out for just such a thing.

Then, one day, without any warning at all, Mt. Rainier erupts. It's not a small lava-leaking, vent-blowing, mostly-smoking kind of eruption. It's a full-blown volcanic eruption of biblical proportions. The ground shakes, ash darkens the sky, and glowing lava pours out in a way that terrifies anyone who can see it.

Mt. Rainier is the largest volcano in the Cascades and the devastation it causes is significant. The first four miles around the volcano are destroyed by superheated ash and rock. Trees are either knocked down or moved for the nine miles beyond that. Lava flows out more than nine miles from the volcano, but fails to reach civilized areas. However, it is the volcanic ash that causes the most damage to the Seattle arcology. This toxic material causes damage to vehicles, clogs sewers, and only four inches is enough to cause structural damage in buildings. Emergency relief efforts are barely able to keep up with the ash falling on the arcology, much less the many buildings outside. Many neighborhoods are crushed and the city suffers a water shortage as those outside the arcology try to spray the ash off their houses. Most notably, the University of Washington suffers severe damage to its campus. The ash also pollutes fresh water sources, falling into both Lake Washington and Puget Sound. There is large scale die-off of lake-dwelling and marine organisms over the days fol-

lowing, bordering on ecological disaster. Furthermore, giant cement-like mudflows, created in part by the melting glaciers, travel more than 50 miles from Mt. Rainier, wiping out civilization all the way to and including the city of Tacoma.

It is a tragedy, one which requires assistance from the New Earth Government. The city of Seattle is ill-equipped to deal with such a mess.

Here Comes The Cavalry

Before scientific teams are sent out to investigate, the military wants to send out its own teams to make sure nothing fishy is going on. There was none of the usual warning signs that technicians would have picked up on to signal a volcanic eruption. The Global Intelligence Agency, sifting through related data, has determined that the seismic event that caused Mt. Rainier to erupt is not isolated. Other, much smaller, seismic events have been sensed in nearby areas. Something might be going on and GIA scientists are saying that the eruption may not be natural.

Enter the Characters. They will be the ones sent out to investigate. The key to their involvement, however, is that they are in the Pacific Northwest. At this point in time, that is not as difficult as it might be otherwise. Many soldiers still linger after the assault on Juneau, while others are transferred there to reinforce.

The briefing will be simple. GIA agent Dierdre Cohen will explain to the Characters the situation and provide them with a gridded area in which to search. If no one in the group is qualified to pilot a recon mech, a new pilot will be assigned. If the Characters are foot-soldiers, then they will be assigned to a Werewolf and do a lot of ground-pounding. Regardless, they have a mission and a place to start looking, so off they go.

ACT II: BUG PROBLEMS

Goals: To look for anything that might be the cause of the unnatural eruption. To find Migou deep behind New Earth Government lines and defeat them. To discover Dragonflies watching another eruption and follow them. To discover a hidden outpost in the Cascade Mountains. To penetrate the secret Migou outpost and discern its purpose.

Setting: The Cascade mountain range and the wilds east of the Seattle arcology; a small erupted dormant volcano in the Cascades; in and around a hidden Migou outpost in the Cascades.

Cast: *Agent Dierdre Cohen* – from Act I.

Colonel Tiraka – from Act I.

The Migou– Experienced battletroops and pilots, from mecha patrols and outpost guards, as found on p. 129.

Needle In A Haystack

Initially, the Characters will most likely be on edge as everything is still unknown. They will begin to search in a grid pattern,

covering ground as quickly as they can while being cautious. It might be fun to throw in a few false positives here, things that look like they might be important or things that might appear to be enemies or other danger. Ultimately, they should turn out to be nothing.

In fact, the first two days of searching turn out to be a whole lot of nothing. The pace should begin to drone on. The most interesting thing the Characters have to look forward to is camping with each other in the cold wilderness. Even that should get old quickly, as they can't build a fire – it might give them away. Welcome to cold MRE's.

Just when the monotony of searching starts to weigh on them, the Characters are sneak attacked by Migou forces. You'll have to scale this attack so that it works for your group – it is intended to be a challenge that the Characters will survive. Against an average squad of mecha, the Migou might field one Dragonfly, one Silverfish, and enough Locusts and Grubs to keep it interesting. If your group has some heavy mecha or Engels in it, you'll need to increase the Migou forces significantly. Feel free to add Wasps or even a Mantis or Spider, if need be.

The Migou forces will engage with intent to kill and will fight to the death. Any retreat (or even transmission) on their part might lead New Earth Government forces to the thing they are trying to keep hidden. However, finding bugs this far into NEG territory, especially Migou willing to fight to the last bug, definitely says something and should convince the Characters that they are on the right track.

Where There's Smoke, There's Fire

Not long after the encounter with the Migou patrol, the Characters experience something even more unnerving. One of the smaller mountains near them, also part of the Cascade Volcanic Arc, erupts as well. Again, it isn't a minor eruption. It is the kind that catches their attention.

It is fortunate that the blast, lava, ash, and mudslides claim only the countryside, as there are no populated areas near it. It will, however, bring the Characters running or at least it should, given the circumstances. At first glance, there is nothing for them to see other than the natural wonder and horror that is a volcanic eruption, even a minor one. However, now that the Characters know that something is up, they are bound to investigate a little more carefully.

Anyone piloting a recon mech or a stealth mech, or anyone with a particularly high level of expertise in the Observation skill has a chance to spot the hidden watchers of this event. Those with the Wary Asset may also have a shot. Hidden, gently hovering in the air taking it all in, are a pair of Migou Dragonflies. The aforementioned mecha might see it through long-distance sensors, x-ray systems, or possibly through instinct and raw sight alone. Use the rules on p. 144 of the *CthulhuTech Core Book* for spotting mecha using stealth systems, with the initial test for those eligible being against a Very Hard Degree.

The best way to play this encounter is if the Characters can notice the Dragonflies before the Migou spot them. They should be on the lookout for anything unusual, so give the Characters the opportunity. If they are successful, they will be able to follow the Dragonflies back to the place from which they came. If the Characters blow it, the chase will be difficult as the Dragonflies are more than likely faster than they.

These mecha are the key to finding the presence of the Migou in the Cascades. If your Characters can't get it on the first try, make them suffer a little before you give them a similar second chance.

Somebody Shouldn't Be Here

The Dragonflies don't have all that far to go, but the Characters will have to keep themselves quiet and concealed in order to tail them with any level of secrecy. It may be a better plan for the groups' stealth mecha to track them and come back for the rest of the group when the coast is clear. If the Characters are infantry, following in a Werewolf will be its own challenge.

The payoff, however, is worth the trouble. Over a few mountains, inside a deep valley within the Cascades, is something that shouldn't be there. From the surface, it looks like a small cluster of pod buildings. As the Dragonflies land next to it, it should be obvious what it is – a secret Migou outpost and most likely the source of all this mayhem.

The first step for the Characters will be to gather as much intelligence as they can from the outside. There won't be much they can do other than long-range monitoring from mecha, so forays on foot will be necessary. What they can glean is as follows.

The outpost is, first and foremost, designed to be temporary and is capable of being moved quickly. It is internally secured and looks as if it was just dropped off here, like some New Earth Government temporary command post. It is big enough to house a small contingent of Migou, including the patrol that has already attacked the Characters, the Dragonfly pilots, and about a dozen other bugs. The Characters should get that they have in no way eliminated the bug threat and that there is still a fight ahead.

Security around the outpost is moderate. The outpost is secret after all, and they are not expecting to be found. Clearly regular mecha and battletroop patrols are the spine, designed to keep anyone away. Video surveillance is performed by a couple of cameras watching the outpost's two main entrances. Anyone with the Security skill at an Adept level of expertise should be able to analyze the Migou security plan and devise a way to get past it and into the building.

Some Characters may be more interested in calling for help or going home to report at this moment, whether it be out of sense of duty or from feeling outgunned. Stress to them that this is a temporary facility designed to move and by the time anyone gets here, the Migou will be gone. If the Characters choose to simply

destroy the facility, they'll never know what the bugs were up to and that, likewise, is unacceptable. They need to get inside and figure out what is really going on, whether they like the idea or not.

Quiet & Fast

Once they have calculated a hole in the Migou's patrol and surveillance pattern, it is time to strike. What the Characters do not know, but may have already assumed, is that the bugs called for reinforcements when the patrol didn't report in as usual. If they don't get cracking, they'll have a brand new host of Migou mecha with which to contend.

They will be able to figure out how to get past one of the two main doors by watching what the Migou patrols do on their way back in. Even then, because of the alien design, it will require a Challenging Security Test on the part of one of the Characters to get the door to open quickly and without difficulty. With a little luck, they should be inside the outpost without incident.

The alternative is a far less subtle approach. The Characters can blow away a bug on its way out and enter the outpost like action heroes. It will work, but it will make the rest of this story more difficult.

Inside the outpost, there is no special security other than door locks like the ones they encountered outside. Unfortunately, that will be more than enough to stymie the Characters, who do not know the appropriate codes. They are not lucky enough that they are the same as the external doors. A pair of fully armed and armored Migou battletroops will patrol the facility at predictable intervals.

The outpost is fundamentally three pods radiating out from a larger central hub pod. The three radiating pods are accessible from a hallway that goes around the circumference of the central pod. Both of the possible main doors through which they entered lead into a small staging room, complete with armor and weapons, on the other side of which are Migou sleeping areas. They do not look like rooms with sinks, tables, and bunks. Instead, they are pseudo-organic with bug-sized cubby holes in which they can curl up. Some might describe the place as hive-like in nature. The third pod is what the Characters can only assume is the place where the Migou eat, but it seems to have medic facilities as well. It is industrial in its design, but without any of the furniture, food, or cooking supplies that the Characters would expect. Instead, there are perch-like poles, what can best be likened to slimes and possibly molds, and an extremely alkaline water-like substance that will cause intense hallucinations and death in any Human or Nazzadi that drinks it. The whole place is alien and the Characters don't have the time to linger, which is for the best.

The central pod is two floors, the lower of which is underground. The top floor is heavily secured and clearly something of importance. The lower level consists of a lab, viewable through a crystalline glass-like substance. Inside is a strange-looking de-

vice that looks a little like a D-engine, with rods that drive deep into the ground underneath. Even without special knowledge, it should be clear that this device is the thing responsible for the eruptions. Anyone with the Earth Science skill, or a decent level of Education, can make a Test against a Challenging Degree to guess that this machine has something to do with generating seismic waves – the harnessing of which would allow the bugs to cause earthquakes or the eruption of dormant volcanoes. Anyone succeeding at a Hard Test should realize the machine isn't just designed to generate such waves, but to also direct them.

The way the machine begins to hum and the spikes in the monitoring equipment around it, the Characters should quickly get that it is getting ready to fire again. Now they not only need to report what they've found, they need to stop further destruction by shutting this outpost down.

Getting into the room with the seismic generator is all but impossible. Locks protect it, the clear crystal windows are bullet-proof, and the clock is ticking. Whatever is controlling this thing is above them and they need to take them out.

ACT III: YOU HAVE TO BE EFFING KIDDING ME

Goals: To penetrate the Migou outpost's control room. To overpower the Migou commanders and take control of the outpost. To discover the secret the Migou have been hiding. To escape from the destructing outpost with their lives. To return home with terrible news.

Setting: The Migou outpost; the control room; the way back home; the Character's home base.

Cast: *Agent Dierdre Cohen* – from Act I.

Colonel Tiraka – from Act I.

The Migou– Experienced battletroops and pilots, from mecha patrols and outpost guards, as found on p. 129. Also elite guard and commanders.

The Migou AI – a dangerous Artificial Intelligence.

Big Bug Brass

The control room is easy to identify – it's the only room left to which the Characters have had no access. How difficult it is to penetrate depends on the Characters tactics and fortune so far, and how you'd like your story to go.

If the Characters have entered the base through stealth, taking out Migou guards as they go, then entry to the control room will require waiting for a bug to open the door of its own accord. This will naturally and eventually happen, especially as guards fail to check in. One of the bugs inside will emerge to find out what's going on. It will be fully armed and on alert, however, and the Characters will have to hit it the minute it opens the door to gain the access they require.

If the Characters have entered the base without subtlety, guns blazing, or have inadvertently alerted the Migou to their presence, the Characters will have to blow the door. The technology that unlocks the door is beyond the Characters, so there is no way to hack it. Hopefully, one of them will have a satchel charge or they will together have a mess of grenades. Anything with anti-mech capability will make short order of it. They will have to be quick about it or the Migou patrols or possibly even their mecha reinforcements will return and greatly complicate matters. Furthermore, the clock is ticking.

Inside are the outpost's commanders and their elite guard. The commanders are the equivalent of military scientists and the elite guard special forces. Use the statistics presented for the Migou battletroop on p. 129 for the elite guard, but with the following skill development: Athletics: Expert, Observation: Expert, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert, Marksman: Expert, Support Weapons: Expert, Thrown Weapons: Expert. Use the base battletroop template for the commanders as well – their skill development is in scientific skills.

There should be two commanders and three elite guards in the control room, but you may need to modify this based on your group. If they are beat up and you want them to succeed, you might lower the number of elite guards. If you want to create more of a challenge, you might add one or two more.

Killing all of the bugs is the only logical solution here. There really isn't any way to capture and interrogate one (no one can understand them) and New Earth Government intelligence has dissected more than enough of them. The problem is that the Migou have brought an advanced Artificial Intelligence with them that helps to operate the outpost. Even if the Characters stop the bugs, the AI has already sent out a distress call and it is what controls the seismic generator. The Characters may or may not pick up on the computer system running itself – after all, the technology is extremely alien and not designed for Humans or Nazzadi to operate.

That's It, We're Totally Effed

The control room contains exactly what one would expect – the controls and communications for the entire outpost. If the Characters can keep control of the place, the New Earth Government can come and seize it. If not, the best thing to do is look around for anything that might be useful and to subsequently destroy the place. However, first things first – they will need to figure out a way to stop the seismic generator from firing again. That involves dealing with the Migou AI.

The AI will be impossible for the Characters to manage. None of them are familiar with Migou technology and the AI can exist anywhere in any computer system within the outpost. However, it is grounded in the place and cannot leave, for reasons explained below. The good news is that it will now leave the Characters alone, hoping that by laying low it will buy enough time that it can survive and that they won't be able to figure out how to stop the seismic generator below them.

There will come a point when someone will sit down at what appears to be a computer terminal. Migou computer systems are almost impossible for other species to crack. Input is a combination of video recognition of facial tentacular movement and keyed input in alien letters that there is no way the Characters can understand. However, that won't prevent them from messing around with the computers, undoubtedly, as that is the only way to accomplish their goal.

The only way they can stop the machine downstairs is by examining the control room's hardware more closely. If someone cracks open the computer housings, they'll be in for quite a shock. It appears that Migou computers utilize brains as part of their processing system – these look distinctly Human. There isn't much anyone can do to try to remove them alive. Unhooking them will simply kill them, as will trying to remove them for transport home. Anyone who gets what's going on here needs to succeed at a Challenging Insanity Test or acquire one Insanity Point. In order to stop the AI and the generator, they need to destroy the brains and cripple the bug computer system. It only takes a couple of bullets.

Once the machine powers back down, the Characters are left with a quandary. By now, someone should have figured out that there will be more Migou along shortly and that they will arrive most likely before reinforcements from the New Earth Government. They may not be able to take the outpost and they may not be sure how to destroy it at this point either.

Something happens during all this that captures their attention. Whether it's by accident or it simply appears due to its priority, the Characters suddenly witness an image come up on one of the communications screens. At first they will think it's an image of the Migou Hive Ship in orbit, on the move. Except the Hive Ship in orbit isn't moving and there are no planets in the background of this image. All the Characters will have to do is look up into the sky and they can most likely see that the Hive Ship they know is still there. So what are they looking at?

It shouldn't take a genius to figure out that what they are looking at is a second Hive Ship. Based on the coordinates being transmitted, it is approaching Neptune. Migou technology being what it is, this new Hive Ship will be here within a year.

Let the gravity of this situation sink in. Just one Hive Ship has been kicking humanity's butt for the last eleven years. If another shows up, it will be the end. No if's, and's, or but's. It will be over. We will be the Migou's slaves and they may give the Cults a good run for their money. No matter what, life as we value it will be a bedtime story.

It is time for an immediate Insanity Test, against a Degree of Hard. Anyone failing will gain two Insanity Points – it is not recommended that you allow players to spend Drama Points on this test. It is likely that at least one member of the Supporting Cast will put his sidearm in his mouth and blow his head off right then and there.

Picking Up The Pieces

Once the Characters have dealt with whatever they have to deal with for themselves, someone is going to have to report this back. The news will meet with the same stunned silence that it most likely met with on their end. However, before those in command have the opportunity to debate their options regarding the outpost, the Migou AI that runs the place realizes there is no hope for rescue and plays the one last card it has available – it activates the self-destruct. Alien klaxons begin to sound and something resembling a countdown comes up on a monitor.

The Characters now have a very short time to get out before the AI overloads the seismic generators and shakes the place down around their ears. Make this scene build around them. They will no doubt run as quickly as possible back to their mecha or transport. The generators will fire up as they do. The Characters will have to dodge falling debris and may even have to be inventive getting out of the outpost as it collapses around them. Fortunately, the complex isn't very big, so they should make it out with only an elevated pulse and minor injuries. However, New Earth Government is left with nothing other than the intelligence personally gathered by the Characters – the site is now useless for anything other than Migou scrap.

The Characters will return to their home base to endure an extensive debriefing that will leave them even more exhausted, followed by a few days of leave. Or at least something that resembles leave with mandatory counseling visits sprinkled throughout. They will be allowed to recover on their own, but the hardest part will be having to sit on this new and horrible information when the most likely want to tell everyone they care about.

Aftermath

Like the Juneau operation, there are many possible ways that the Characters might develop Aeon War Syndrome. When the story is complete and things have had a chance to sink in, have each Character make Insanity Tests for any or all of the following possible things (as applicable) with the following Degrees and Insanity Point gain:

- Serious Injury – Easy/1 Point.
- Maiming Injury – Average/1 Point.
- Witness Death of a Friend (each one) – Average/1 Point.
- Enduring Fear (anyone who survived) – Challenging/1 Point.
- Causing Death of a Friend (each one) – Hard/2 Points.

These Tests are in addition to any they might have had to make in the command room of the outpost. Characters should acquire at least one Insanity Point from these events – don't be afraid to simply hand one out. It is recommended that you do not let them use Drama Points for these Tests.

ENDINGS

There are two potential outcomes from this story. The Characters can either find the Migou outpost and stop the seismic testing or they cannot. Either way, the second Hive Ship is coming.

If they destroy the outpost...

If the Characters drive the Migou off, then they will not return to the area. Seismic testing was successful and that information was transmitted to the Hive Ship by the AI before the outpost was destroyed. The bugs will continue to develop the technology for use elsewhere, most probably in the Pacific Ring of Fire.

The New Earth Government will excavate the site to gather whatever they can from the remains of the Migou outpost and double patrols in the area to make sure there aren't more out there.

If they do not destroy the outpost...

The Migou could potentially drive the New Earth Government patrols off and prevent the military from finding the outpost. If this is the case, the bugs will continue their seismic strikes in the Pacific Northwest. The Cascade Volcanic Arc runs from southwestern British Columbia, through Washington and Oregon, and into Northern California. There are many populated areas for them to strike that will cause at least equal devastation to the eruption of Mt. Rainier.

The New Earth Government will later have to keep watch so that they can hunt the Migou teams that are moving the generator around. Things will get worse before they get better and it will take much longer before the NEG learns of the second Hive Ship.

In any case...

The Pacific Northwest has to deal with the eruption of two volcanoes and the destruction that ensues. The eruption of the second volcano is hardly a problem in the face of what the region must face with the devastation caused by Mt. Rainier. The pollution of water sources and the mass die-offs of lake and marine life are one part of the puzzle. The damage to city infrastructure is the second. The volcanic ash not only has clogged and ruined large chunks of the city's sewer system, it has caused great destruction to buildings throughout the city and a dangerous amount of damage to parts of the arcology itself. Residents will be in shock as relief efforts from other parts of the continent show up to help get the city back on its feet as quickly as possible. Regardless, Seattle and the people who call it home will never be the same.

No matter what, the news will not report the truth. No one will ever know that the Migou are responsible, much less that they were even there. As far as citizens know, someone dropped the ball on sensing the seismic events that should have predicted the natural eruptions and people will be fired to prove the point.

Only the Characters (if they succeeded), their commanding officers, and top New Earth Government officials and military brass will know of the second Hive Ship. The Characters will be forced to sign a comprehensive gag order, preventing them from saying anything about it. This coming doom is now one of the government's most carefully guarded secrets. If it were to get out, this secret would cause widespread panic, destruction, and death.

Now that this information has come to light, the New Earth Government military now understands why the Migou have just sat tight in Juneau instead of continuing to advance. They're just waiting for reinforcements to arrive.

Desperation will grip the higher echelons of command, as the New Earth Government is forced to re-examine their military policy. The balance of power was becoming something akin to manageable, if not understandable, but this throws things so far out of whack that no one has a clue what to do. Many begin to explore options that would allow a handful of people to survive in an effort to continue the species, but there really isn't anywhere on the planet or the galaxy they could hide. Thus begins a long stretch where high-ranking government and military officials wind up on extended vacations – also known as in-patient therapy. However, those that make up the New Earth Government are plucky and have survived the madness so far. Perhaps they'll find a way to do it again.

The New Earth Government will give awards to each of the Characters. Any who were wounded on this mission are eligible to purchase the Commendation (3) Asset, representing the Purple Heart, for a reduced Experience cost (they had to get hurt to acquire it). If a Character was hurt but remained at Moderately

Wounded or below, the cost for the Asset is ten Experience. If a Character was hurt to the point of Seriously Wounded or beyond, the cost for the Asset is five Experience. What the Characters are paying for here is not the award itself, which they will get if wounded no matter what, but rather the prestige and respect that such an award may garner them in the long term.

Furthermore, if the Characters succeeded, each of them will receive the Meritorious Service Award – the cost of the Commendation Asset in this case is 15 Experience. As above, the Characters will get these awards, but the Asset cements the prestige and respect.

If the Characters succeeded, regardless of commendation, they will be eligible for promotion. The New Earth Government is happy to bribe them for their silence – besides, who would actually believe them. Anybody who participated in this mission and survived will receive a full rank promotion in their appropriate track – enlisted or officer.

Participation in this major event will warrant additional Experience as well. Give your players 10 Experience on top of their usual awards.



WEAVING CHARACTERS

Let's take a look at several possible ways in which different types of games can become part of these major events. These aren't the only possible ways – you may have a clever idea of your own. Even so, not all kinds of Characters are going to be appropriate for your story.

Regardless of other factors, the Characters must end up in one of the four arcologies from with Operation Grudge is based – Seattle, Vancouver, Edmonton, or Calgary. You could, conceivably, move these events to another Migou occupied city if your game takes place on the other side of the world. However, it won't have the same impact on the stability of North America and you will have to the extra work necessary of adapting the material and finding a place that meets the needs of these events as well as your game's geographical needs.

Even though Characters, according to story, are going to be seriously out-matched in Part I, it is important that you don't completely outclass them. It is recommended that you play other stories first, possibly Death and Victory from the Core Book, weaving these events into the natural flow of your game. We recommend that each Character have earned at least 100 Experience before joining in this fight to increase the chances of survival. If you are playing Part I, it might be better if they had acquired 150 Experience.

It is recommended that you break these two stories up into a minimum number of sessions based on Act. For Part I, Act I should take two sessions, one that leads up and another that puts them into the action. Act II should take a minimum of four sessions, and Act III should take a minimum of another two sessions. For Part II, Act I should take only one session, Act II should take at least three sessions, and Act III at least two more sessions. Feel free to take as much time as you need for this story to naturally unfold, but by spreading it out over a minimum of eight sessions for Part I and six sessions for Part II, Characters are allowed to accrue another 40 (Part I) or 30 (Part II) Experience with which to develop over its course.

NEG Military Games

Military-style games are those for which this story is written. All kinds of military Characters can be a part of these events: mecha pilots, Engel pilots, other kinds of pilots, infantry, special forces, intelligence, and more. This story is a major military operation, so pretty much anyone with a rank and a pay grade can join in the fun.

In general, if your Characters are enthusiasts of the military-style game, they'll want to be involved in these events, not just hear about them. It will be in everyone's interests to work out a way to have them there.

Your military Characters may be stationed in other parts of the world. The great thing about the military is that Characters get orders and get sent all over, and there's really nothing they can do about it. Operation Grudge is huge and soldiers will be transferred from all over in small batches during the months before-

hand. If you don't want to leave your current setting permanently, you can always transfer your Characters for Operation Grudge alone and then send them back when the events are over.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

It is extremely unlikely that games involving police Characters would be involved in these events. These types of games deal with threats of a more localized nature, not in the invasion and occupation of an alien-held city. However, your police Characters may be reservists who are called up to participate in the action – the one way it might work.

Few other government agencies will find themselves a part of the action. The Federal Security Bureau won't have any crimes to investigate, nor will the Office of Internal Security – but again, such Characters could be reservists. It is a time of war, after all.

One option for a government agent game might be operatives of the Global Intelligence Agency. GhOST teams might be sent into the action, while analysts most definitely will be there examining the constant stream of data to advise on the operation while it is in progress.

Eldritch Society Games

The Eldritch Society will have its hands full with either the events leading up to the Children of Chaos' big secret ritual or with the aftermath of said ritual. There aren't many reasons that Eldritch Society Characters would get involved in the assault on Juneau.

However, that doesn't mean you can't come up with ways if you are really committed. Perhaps the Chrysalis Corporation is planning to use the chaos to get at mystical artifacts that are stuck in Juneau. Perhaps the Eldritch Society is doing the same. Either way, they'll have to hide from the mayhem of war and the two groups will run afoul of each other, Migou battletroops, and assimilated Humans.

Regardless, there is really nothing they can do to help out the forces of the New Earth Government in their defeat.

NEG Arcane Underground Games

Those involved in the arcane underground will most likely have their hands full with other events, whether it be the Children of Chaos' plans or other murmurs on the street.

However, if your Characters would feel strongly about being involved in these events, you can always play the reservist card – as long as they don't have a felony record or are Outsider Tainted.

Cult Games

The Cults hate the Migou, too, but they have no influence when it comes to invading cities in North America like this. They will be sitting this one out. Furthermore, there are all kinds of things going on during 2086 that revolve around the cults. If you are playing a game with cult Characters, they will have plenty of other things to keep them occupied.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Here are a few Characters that you might require a little more detail on for your game.

AGENT DIERDRE COHEN

GIA Operative

Dierdre is the kind of agent that is on the rise. She does her job effectively with a minimum of fuss and always has her superiors and fellows backs. Well-trained and good at what she does, Agent Cohen is in many ways a shining example for new recruits. The problem is that she won't play politics, something that has prevented her from going further within the organization faster.

Some mistake Dierdre for being rude, when in fact she is simply the kind of person who has no time for people's crap. People who cannot get to the point or who cannot get out of the way to get something done are the kind of people who can't stand her. However, anyone who can rise to her level discovers that Dierdre is thoughtful and understanding. She just doesn't suffer fools well.

Agent Cohen worked under Director Traxony during the intelligence analysis of Juneau, but was fortunately far enough down the food chain that she did not get caught in the cross-fire after Operation Grudge. She has remained in the Pacific Northwest, an expert on local intelligence, and understands the importance of tracking down the possible threat that has manifested in the eruption of Mt. Rainier with efficiency. Dierdre is determined to help rebuild the GIA's reputation in this area and contribute to the defeat of the Migou.

Virtue/Flaw: Honest/Impatient

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Presence 7

Noteworthy Skills: Regional Knowledge: Master, Security: Expert, Surveillance: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Big Ego/1, Common Sense

CAPTAIN ISAAC LINCOLN

NEG Rearguard Commander

Captain Lincoln is the kind of officer that infantry like to follow – he's tough as nails, eats grenades for breakfast, and is always on point. An infantry commander from the "fighting" 33rd stationed in Vancouver, Isaac survived the Migou attack on Juneau and was one of the last out of the city. Stories are still told about how he dragged his bloody comrades out with a broken leg and shrapnel in his back. Ever since, he's been waiting for round two, something that makes him look a little off to his pals. Though not happy that he is bringing up the rear this time, he's bound and determined that no bugs will get past him – even if he has to kill them all with his bare hands.

Isaac is an imposing presence, standing well over six feet tall with the build of a prize-fighter. His face seems to have only two expressions – a scowl and a sneer.

Virtue/Flaw: Tough/Cocky

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Perception 7, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Adept, Dodge: Master, Marksman: Master, Thrown Weapons: Expert, Support Weapons: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: High Pain Threshold

LT. COLONEL LORONA

NEG Division Commander

Commander of the 1st Division of the 17th Corps out of Calgary, Lt. Colonel Lorona (callsign: Raven) is the kind of man one can rely on when the chips are down. He does his best thinking in a crisis and has gotten himself and his troops out of many scrapes. He is odd for an officer (and an Engel pilot) in that he appears to be a constant stream of emotions – his passions seem to run him. However, his decisions and orders are clear-headed and brilliant.

Shorter and slimmer than one might expect, Lorona's face is bright and in almost a constant motion of expressions. Of course, all under the darkened eyes of a veteran Engel pilot.

Virtue/Flaw: Passionate/Vengeful

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 9, Perception 8, Presence 7

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Adept, Observation: Expert, Pilot: Master, Regional Knowledge: Expert, Dodge: Master, Fighting: Expert, Marksman: Master, Support Weapons: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Damaged, Internal Compass

LT. COMMANDER TZVETA MARKOVSKI

NEG Naval Pilot

Deployed as part of the NES Victory, Tzveta is an adrenaline junkie. She knows how to handle any plane that is part of the New Earth Government's arsenal. Her favorite missions, however, are drop or evac missions in hot zones. Torrent, as she is also known, is perhaps one of the luckiest pilots in on the Victory and it has become a joke that if you rub her belly before combat, you'll have good luck (similar to the Buddha). When she's not in the cockpit, she enjoys the kind of recreational activities one might expect – skydiving, base jumping, and bungee jumping.

Tzveta's bright and adventurous personality is what makes her attractive to be around. Physically, she is a rather plain-looking brunette – but with the corded muscles of a thrill-seeker.

Virtue/Flaw: Courageous/Obsessive

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8, Perception 8

Noteworthy Skills: Observation: Expert, Pilot: Master (Specialized: Werewolf), Dodge: Expert, Marksman: Expert, Support Weapons: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Mystically Void, Luck/2

MAJOR ANGELINA PEREZ

NEG Company Commander

Major Perez (callsign: Kestral) went to a top military training college where she graduated with honors. Though she has not

seen anywhere near as much combat as many under her command have, Angelina has distinguished herself as an officer and risen through the ranks. There are those who might balk at what they might perceive as her inexperience, but the New Earth Government doesn't promote idiots – not these days, at least.

Unlike many of her peers, Kestral tends to make her decisions from the gut. She trusts her instincts more than laborious analysis when in the field or coordinating a mission, believing that there's only so much the mind can process. She is quite vocal about this philosophy, believing that it may be the key to ultimate victory. After all, survival is deeply ingrained in a place beyond the conscious mind.

Virtue/Flaw: Self-Confident/Impulsive

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 7, Perception 8

Noteworthy Skills: Athletics: Adept, Observation: Adept, Armed Fighting: Adept, Dodge: Adept, Marksman: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Fast

COLONEL TIRAKA

New Earth Government Officer

Colonel Tiraka distinguished himself as a mecha pilot during the Second Arcanotech War. Since those days, he has risen through the ranks, a decorated officer who has served in his share of combat. He speaks from both a position of authority and empathy and, as such, is greatly respected by those under his command. He is an officer that leads by example.

Since the Migou attacked Juneau, Tiraka is one of the New Earth Government officers in charge of the Seattle region. It has been a rocky road as he has managed both refugee transport and the distribution of soldiers who need psychological care. However, the tragedy of Operation Grudge makes those days look like walks in the park.

After the shake-up that is the fall-out of Operation Grudge, Colonel Tiraka knows it is vitally important for the New Earth Government to treat every mission as if it were critical. The people need a victory and the military needs to prove that it is in control. That may not necessarily be the case, but it at least needs to look that way. He approaches his command with a professionalism from which other officers could learn.

Virtue/Flaw: Inspiring/Proud

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Communications: Expert, Observation: Expert, Regional Knowledge: Expert, Security: Expert, Surveillance: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Driven

FIELD MARSHAL AURA SWANEPOLE

NEG High Command

Field Marshal Swanepole is one of the top officers in the New Earth Government army. She has been in charge of the situation

in the Pacific Northwest since the start of Second Arcanotech War. The attack on Juneau is her biggest shame and she takes personal responsibility for the Migou occupation. Aura has vowed to bring North America back under the sole control of the New Earth Government, driving the Migou back to the west and north.

Born in South Africa, Field Marshal Swanepole rose to her position as a leader from the field as a distinguished mecha pilot during the First Arcanotech War. She is a favorite among the troops in her command, as she has earned their respect by leading by example. It is a terrible blow to the morale of the soldiers of the Pacific Northwest when she is forced to resign. They know all too well that there was nothing she could have done about it. Sometimes, battles are lost in war. That does not mean that someone doesn't need to put their head on the chopping block in order to prevent further chaos, and Aura is all too ready to do so when it is required of her. Though there are very few who know it, she is a shining example of what Humans can be.

While she still maintains the perfectly pressed look of an officer, the years have weathered her. Field Marshal Swanepole always looks tired, as if the weight of her command never allows her rest.

Virtue/Flaw: Respectful/Vengeful

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 7, Presence 8

Noteworthy Skills: Observation: Master, Persuade: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Fearless, Obsessive

DIRECTOR TRAXONY

Global Intelligence Agency Director

Behind the scenes, Director Traxony of the Global Intelligence Agency is one of the primary minds behind Operation Grudge. Like most directors of intelligence, Traxony is relatively unknown to the people of the New Earth Government and she likes to keep it that way. However, many of the Nazzadi remember her as Colonel Traxony of the Nazzadi fleet, hero of the First Arcanotech War and a commander of great integrity. Hero, that is, to the Nazzadi and scourge to the people of Earth.

Allegiances change and now Traxony serves all of the people of Earth. However, she is caught in the same political cross-fire as Field Marshal Swanepole and is forced to resign in the wake of Operation Grudge's failure. While this means little to the people of the New Earth Government, it is a blow to the morale of the Nazzadi. How can world be so crazy that the powers that be are so ready to dispense with someone so dedicated and capable?,

Virtue/Flaw: Solid/Suspicious

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Perception 7

Noteworthy Skills: Communications: Master, Observation: Expert, Regional Knowledge: Expert, Security: Expert, Surveillance: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Dark Secret, Minor Empathy

chapter seven

appendices

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Time waits for no one. The Disciples of the Rapine Storm throw themselves with renewed fervor against the beleaguered troops holding the lines of the East. The New Earth Government desperately searches for a plan to drive the alien insects from their last bastion of safety. Deep within the dark places something ancient and primal stirs, ready to gift the world with its unspeakable presence once again. And somewhere, the children of the fish-god find lost things that were better left lost.

This is how the end begins. Welcome to 2086.

Discover new breakthroughs that might give humanity a much needed edge – but at what cost? Suffer a plague of street crime, eroding the places where people once felt safe. Watch in shock at the lengths the Nazzadi are willing to go to police their own kind. And quietly, something new is born within the darkest pits of the Chrysalis Corporation. Explore a year in the Strange Aeon or lose yourself in the lies and pretend it isn't happening.

Nowhere else will you find a setting like this.

Inside this book you will find:

- a continuing detailed exploration of the Aeon War, detailing the important events of 2086 and everything that goes with them.
- seven pieces of provocative short fiction to help portray the feel of the setting, including a four-page comic.
- a look at pop culture in the Strange Aeon, to add more unique flavor to your game.
- an exploration of four smaller year-long plots that can be used in any game, with suggestions on how to weave them into your existing story.
- a detailed look at four major areas of the overarching *CthulhuTech* storyline, including the war against the Disciples of the Rapine Storm in China, the continuing quest of the Esoteric Order of Dagon to find their lost city, the Eldritch Society's investigation into the Chrysalis Corporation's plans in the Pacific Northwest, and the Migou's invasion of North America.
- ready-to-run stories for each major storyline that put your Characters front and center for the biggest action in the setting.
- the option to play as one of three powerful new professions within the secret New Earth Government agency known only as Special Services.

This book is meant to be used with the *CthulhuTech* storytelling game and requires the *Core Book*.

FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

This book is intended for mature readers. It contains dark and disturbing content and images. Reader discretion is advised.

Catalyst Game Labs
23300

