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Please pardon our dust. I'm still in the process of moving into this new location. Eventually I hope to turn **SteelFalcon.com** into an on-line library of anime and sci-fi resources for role-playing games (RPGs). For now, feel free to browse my current web projects below. Comments and suggestions are always welcome, so please feel free to email me at deitrich@mcs.net at any time. Take care!

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ROBOTECH
THE THIRD INVID WAR

An unofficial web-based fan supplement for the ROBOTECH RPG from PALLADIUM BOOKS

Written by
DAVE DEITRICH and
CHRIS MEADOWS

Artwork by
AMY BORDEN and
JASON JUTA

HTML Version by
DAVE DEITRICH and
JOSHUA MEGERMAN

NOTE: For best results, use Netscape Navigator v3.04 or later to view these pages.

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Last Updated: April 27th, 1998

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Other Robotech/Palladium Web Pages

Some other Palladium RPG web pages I've created...

- **Southern Cross Garland Cyclones** by *Chris Meadows*
- The **Macross Mecha Designs** RPG stats page
- The **Stinger**, a mecha from the **"Robotech II: the Sentinels; the Malcontent Uprisings"** comic book.
- The **RX-78 Gundam** from the original **Mobile Suit Gundam** Japanese animation series.

*Want to download all or part of **TIW** for your own use? **Go for it!***
But **please** read my **Downloading FAQ** before asking me for help!

Here are some other Robotech RPG web pages that I **HIGHLY** recommend:

- **The Hellcat Squad Room**
- **Stan Bundy's Robotech and Rifts game pages**
- **Ravi Swamy's collection of Robotech RPG fan contributions**

Also take a look at the **Robotech** section of my web links page for other web pages on Robotech.

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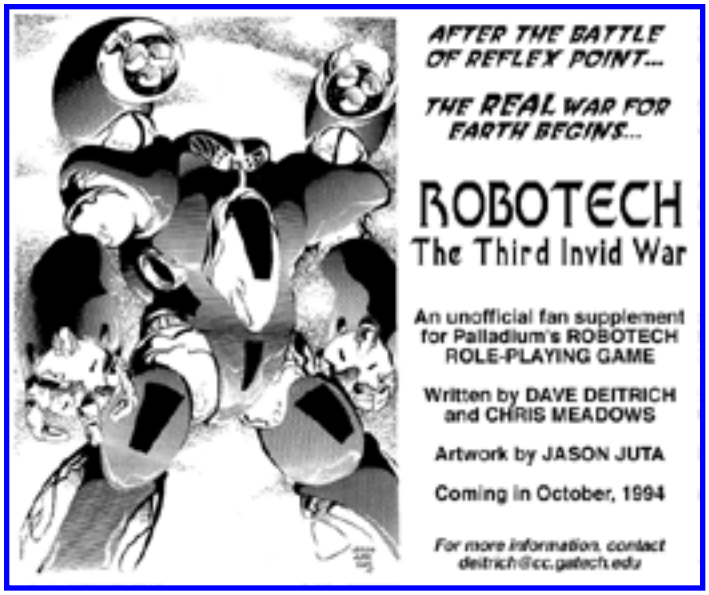
Made With A Mac

THE THIRD INVID WAR

Preface



Hello! Welcome to **THIRD INVID WAR**, one of the first completely web-based fan supplements for an RPG. TIW is written by *Dave Deitrich* and *Chris Meadows* , with artwork done by *Amy Borden* and *Jason Juta*. I emphasize that this a **"fan supplement"** because this project is strictly **not-for-profit** and is not intended to be a professional supplement in any way, shape or form. (so hopefully Kevin Siembieda won't decide to sue me over it ^_^)

TIW is my attempt to write a satisfactory (IMHO) conclusion to the "Return of the Invid" storyline started by Kevin Siembieda in his RPG. In *Invid Invasion*, Siembieda says that the Invid return to Earth 6 months after the final Battle of Reflex Point with a much smaller force, presumably to harvest more protoculture for the Regis. Although this background was expanded slightly in *Return of the Masters* and *Lancer's Rockers*, there wasn't much to differentiate it from the old *New Generation* saga. There were no new mecha, no new battle tactics, no plot development; just the same old Invid back to provide targets for the players to shoot at. And worst of all, the story was left completely open-ended with no hints of where to go or how to resolve it.

Several years ago Chris and I came up with some ideas for new Robotech RPG adventures that would take place several years after the Invid had left Earth for good. But in order to fit our stuff into Palladium's chronology, we had to first finish what they started. At first we wrote a pretty quick (and unsatisfying) wrap-up that really wasn't much better than what Palladium had already done. Not satisfied with that, I started to think about how we could expand on the events in the already-existing RPG supplements, adding in our own stuff here and there to turn what was originally a cheap solution into a decent sequel to the *New Generation* chapter of Robotech.

Things started to gain momentum from there, to the point where I've been working more on this Invid sequel than the stories I dreamed of years ago! I think the final product is well worth it, though. **THIRD INVID WAR** is a story of human courage and tenacity in the darkest years of the Invid Wars, when it looks like the Invid are only a step away from winning everything. Mysterious new Invid mecha, powerful orbiting hives, and devious tactics by new Invid leaders have turned the tide of battle against the human resistance. The REF at Tirol has tried to help by sending more weapons, mecha, and personnel to Earth, but due to the Invid blockade few supplies actually manage to make it to their destinations.

Unless things change soon, the Invid will win the war before long.

Can you and your friends succeed in preventing the fall of Earth??

THIRD INVID WAR is fully compatible with the *Robotech RPG* (and by extension most other Palladium games). It contains additional source material for the Invid Invasion scenario starting from the return of the Invid after the Battle for Reflex Point, up to and including the final climactic battles between the people of Earth and the Invid race. Please feel free to use and distribute these documents as you see fit. All we ask is that you don't claim this material as your own work. For more information please feel free to contact me at *deitrich@mcs.net*. I would love to hear any comments you have on this work!

Enter the THIRD INVID WAR

DAVE DEITRICH
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Last Updated: *Saturday, July 25, 1998*

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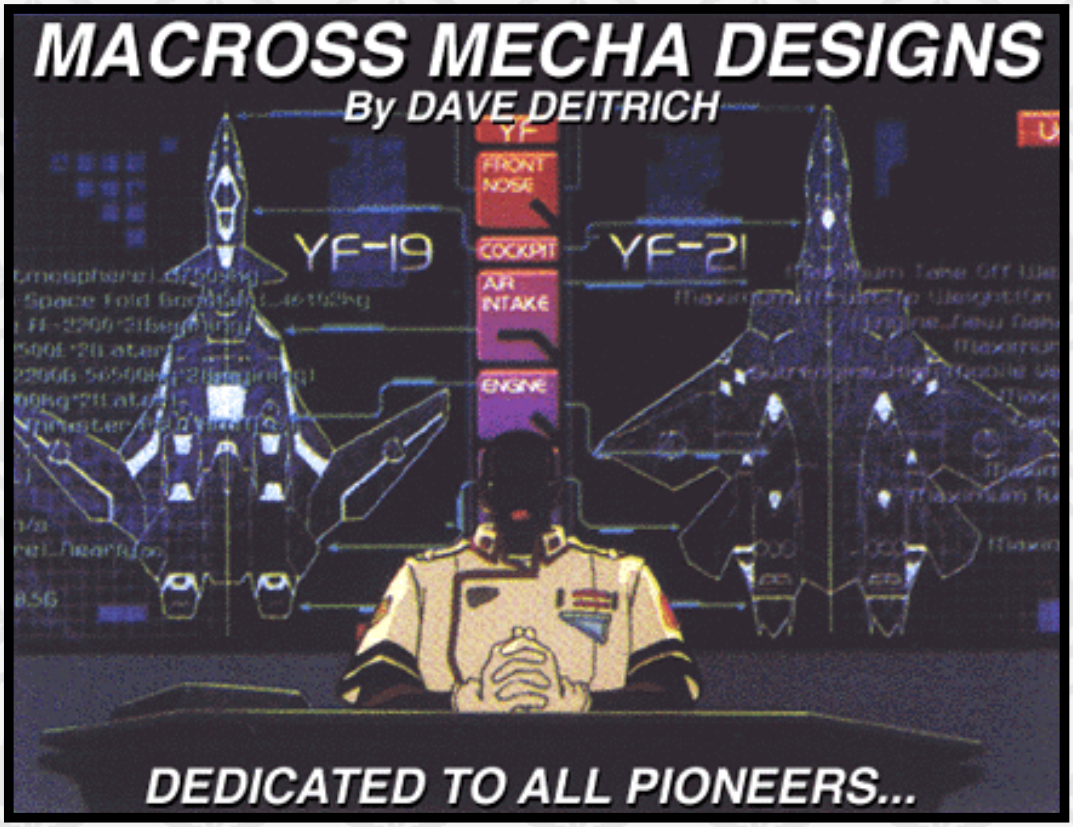

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- **VF-14 Hunter Heavy Fighter/Bomber** - Last Updated: 06/08/97
- **VA-3 Invader Bomber** - Last Updated: 9/17/96
- **VF-5000 Atmospheric Valkyrie** RPG NETWORK

- **VF-11 Thunderbolt Fighter** - Last Updated: 06/08/97
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- **VF-17 Nightmare Stealth Fighter** - Last Updated: 06/15/97
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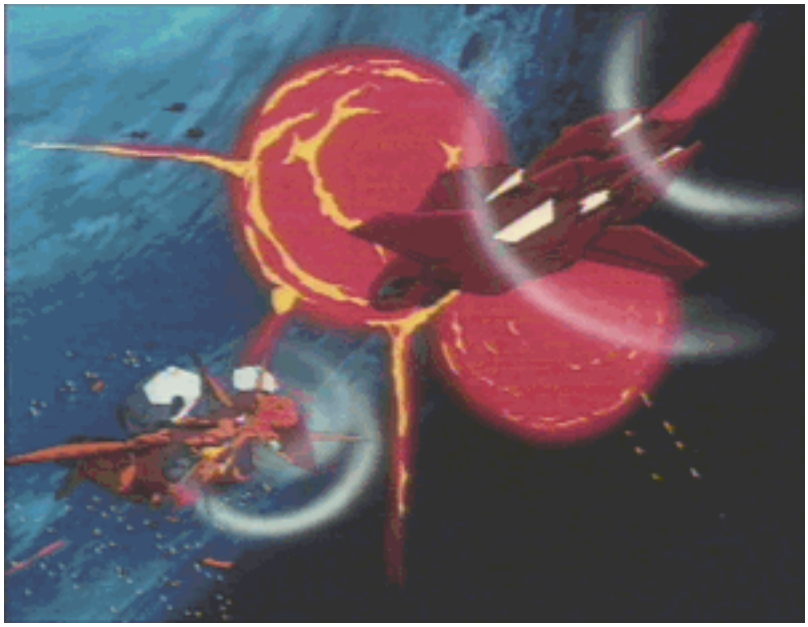
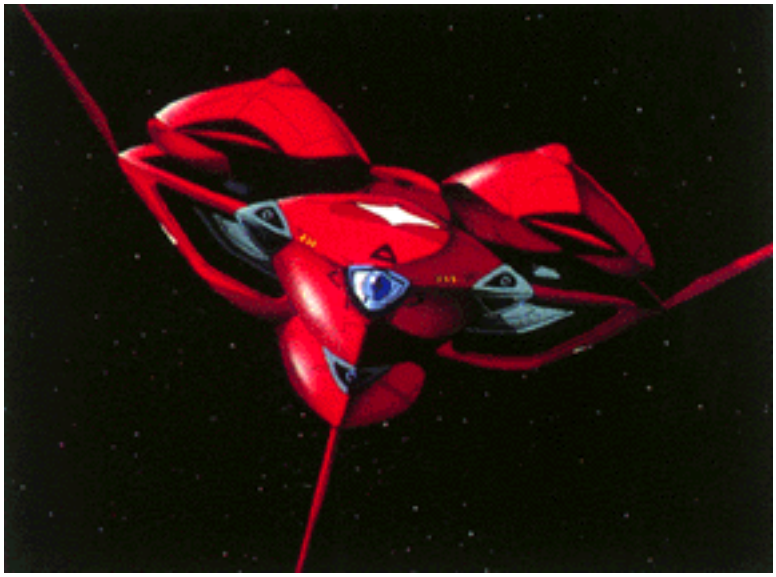
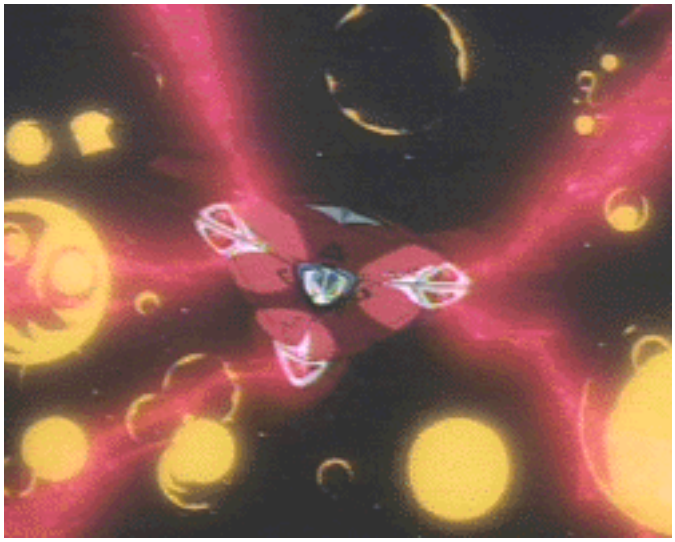
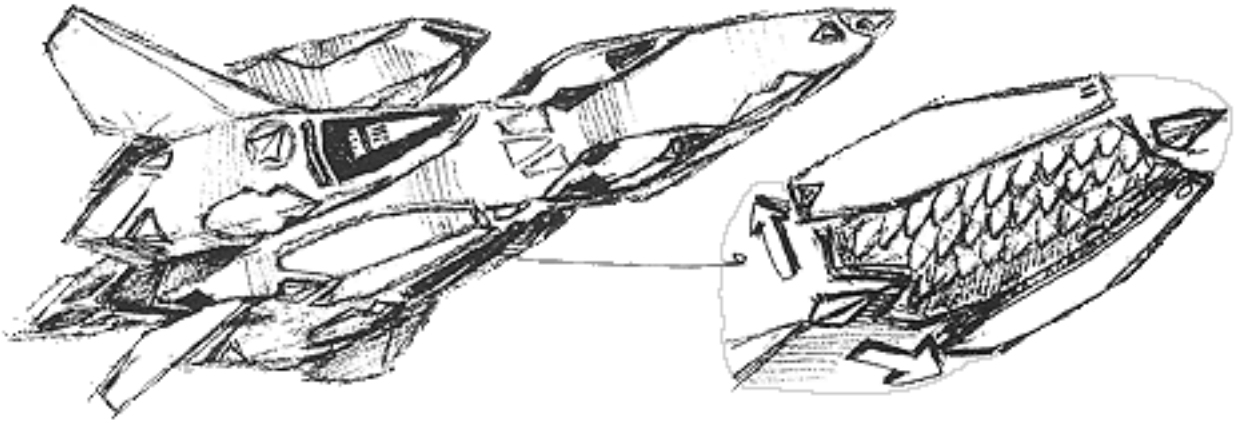
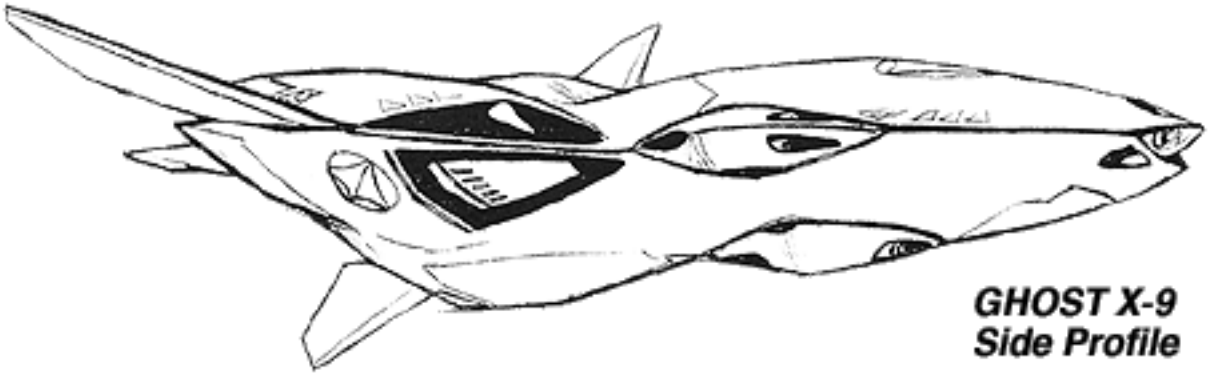


GHOST X-9
with External Rocket Boosters

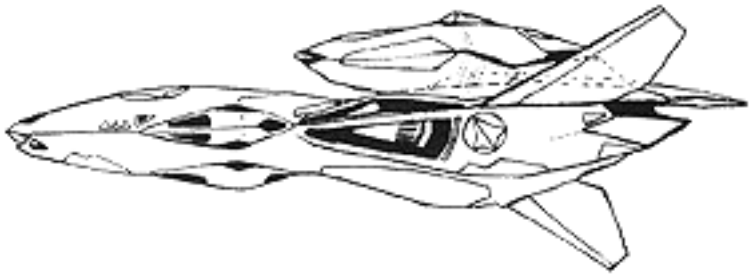


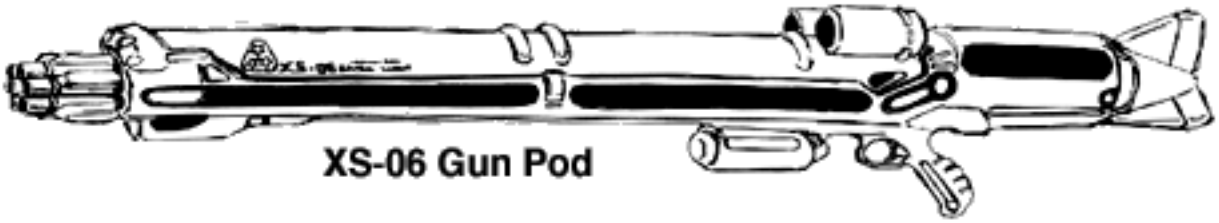






GHOST X-9
Side Profile

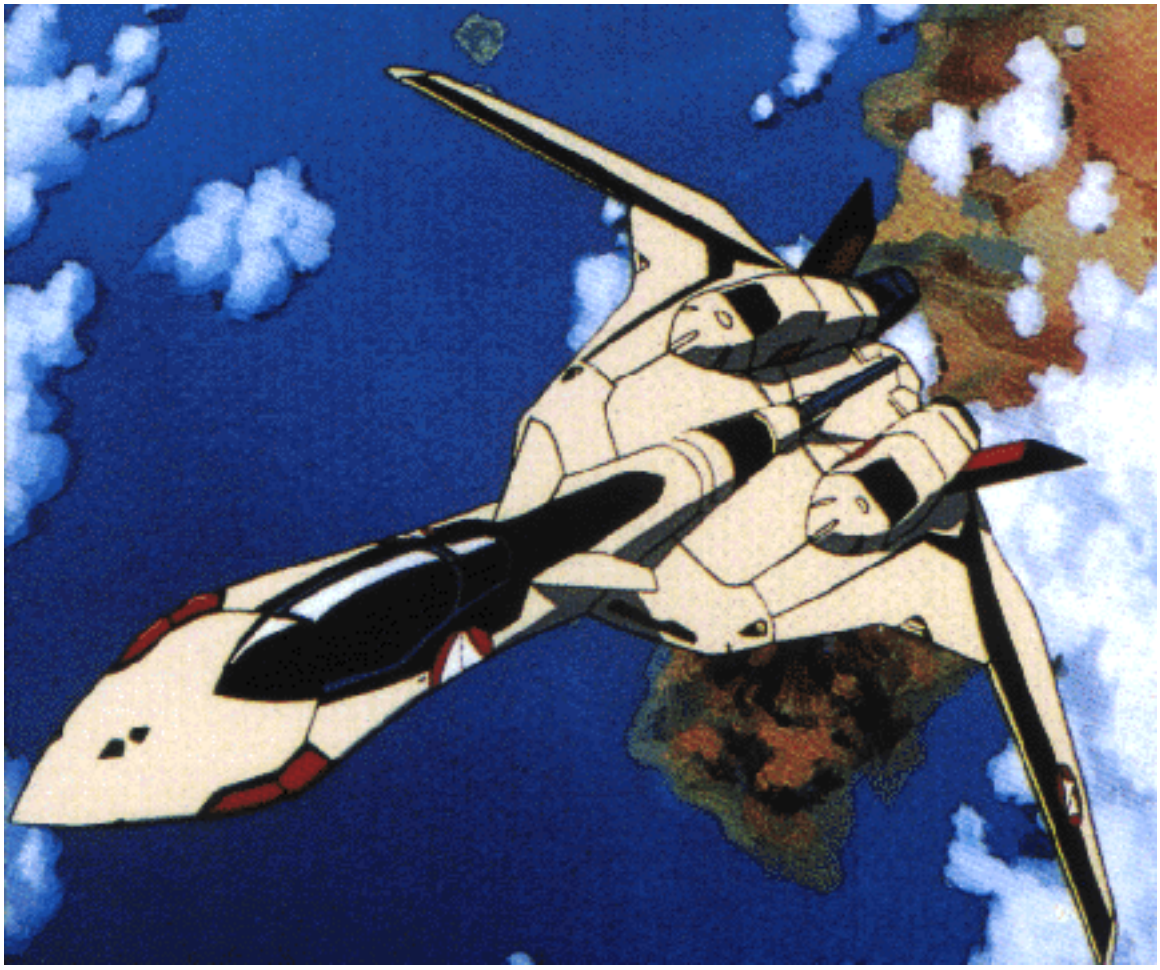




XS-06 Gun Pod

YF-19 FAST Pack Additions

YF-19 "ALPHA ONE"
Gerwalk Mode



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YF-21 FAST Pack Additions

YF-21 "OMEGA ONE"
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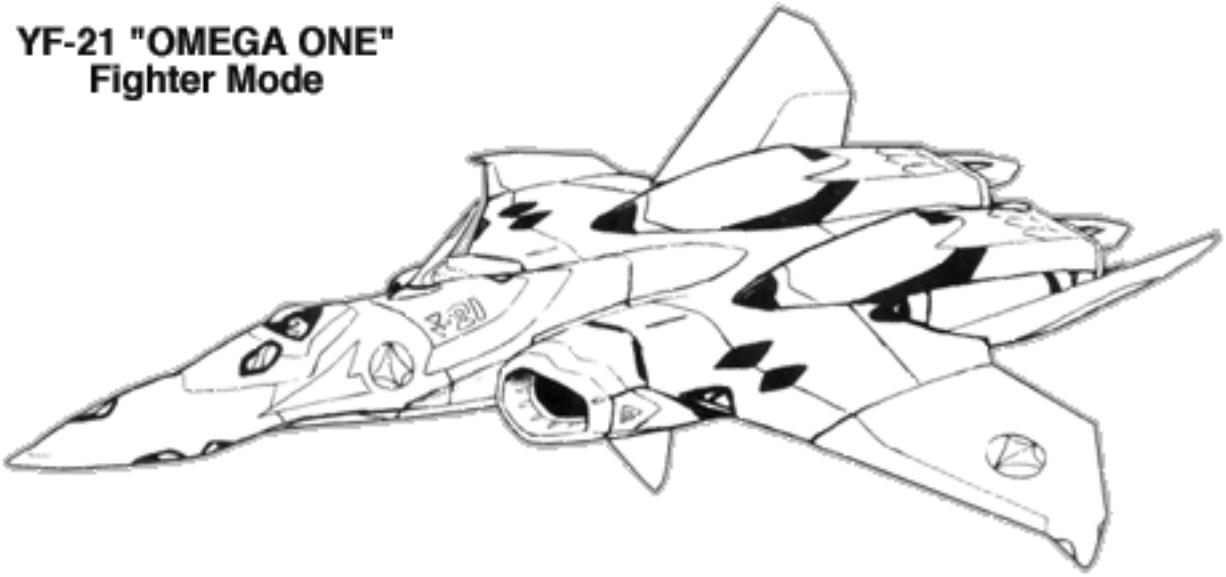

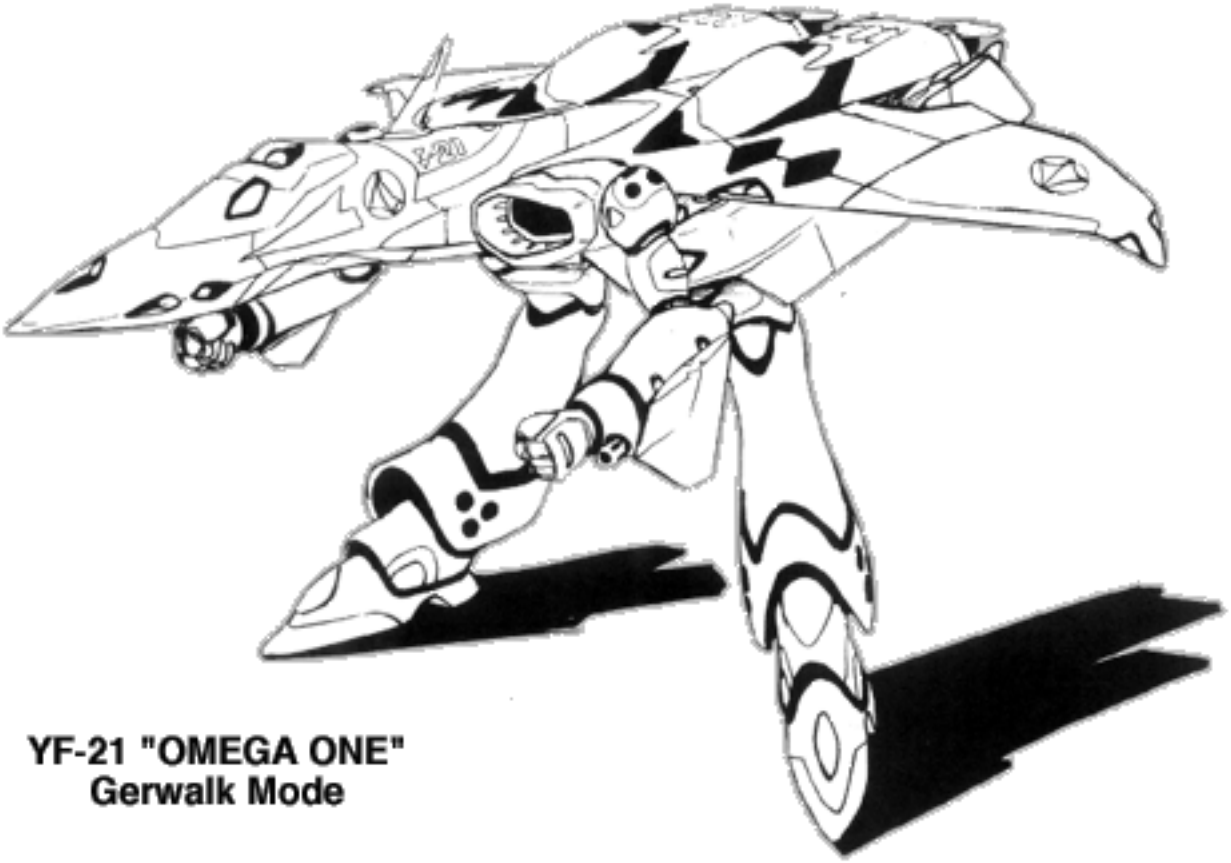

YF-21 "OMEGA ONE"
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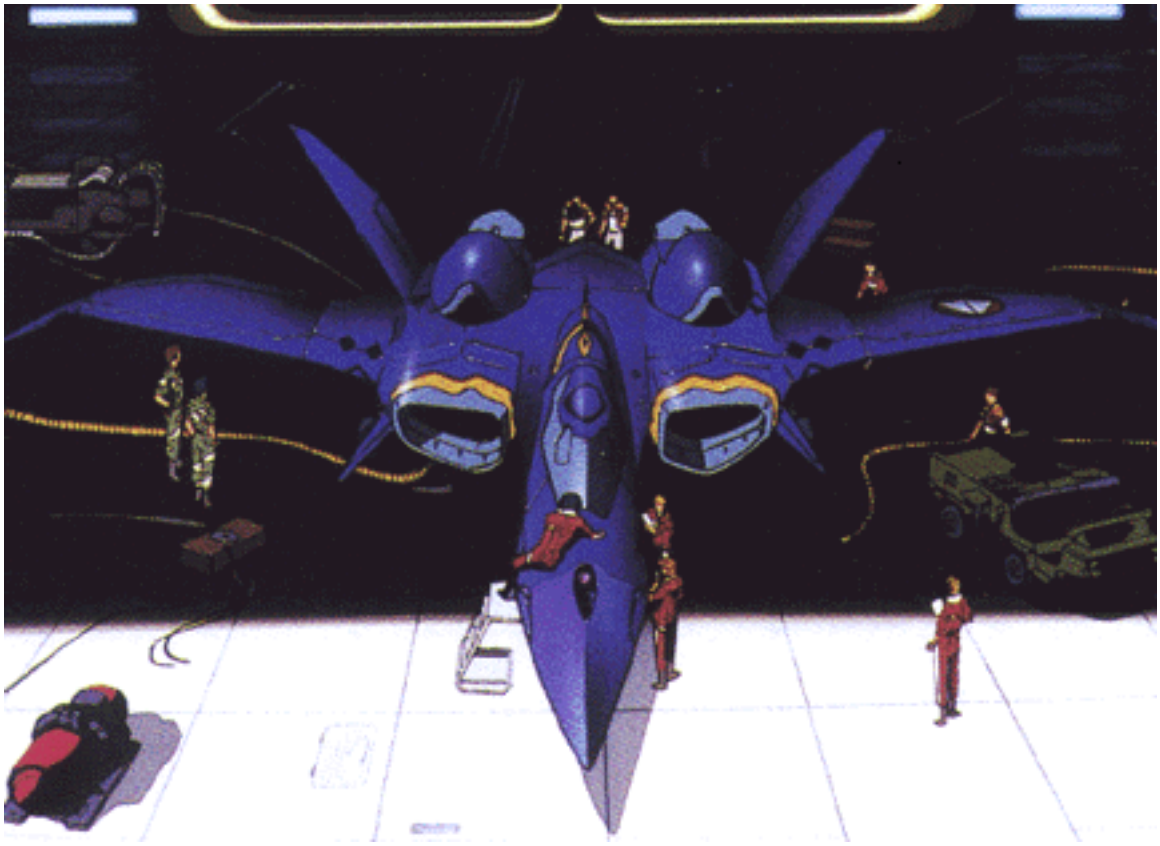
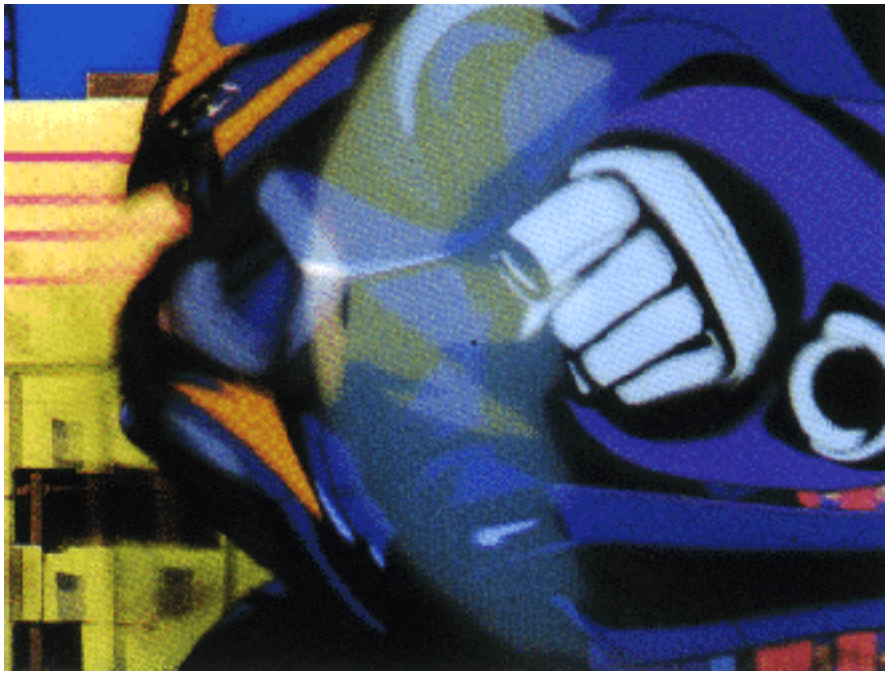
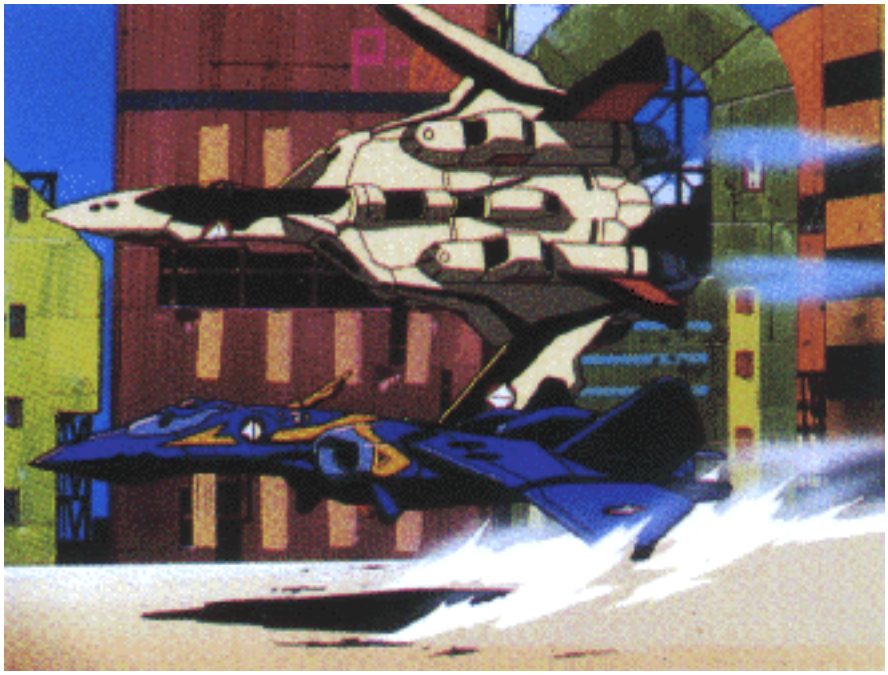
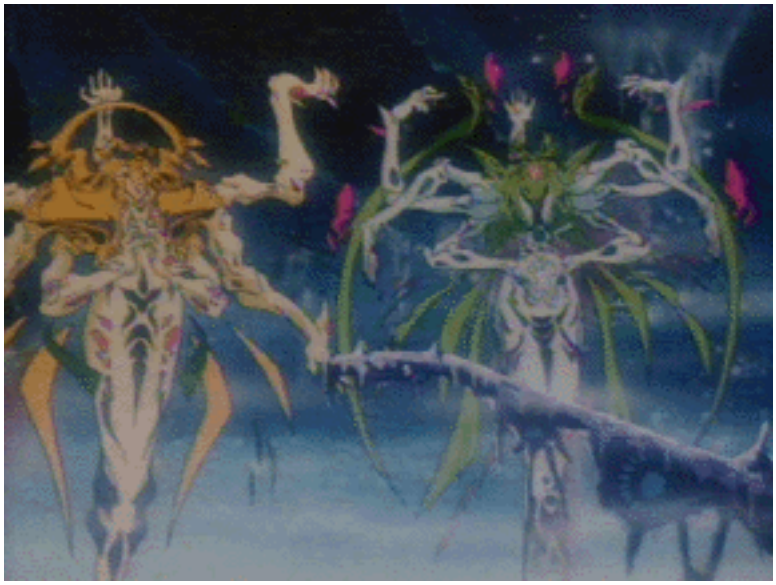




YF-21 "OMEGA ONE"
Soldier Mode





Third Invid War Image Index

Click on any title below to view the corresponding image. You can also download these images by setting your web browser to "download GIF" instead of "use browser as viewer".

Index last updated: August 27, 1997

- **stinger1.gif** - A Stinger launching from a hidden bunker.
- **stinger2.gif** - A Stinger attacking a plane.
- **stinger3.gif** - Two Stingers being prepared for battle.
- **stinger4.gif** - A Stinger attacking ground troops.

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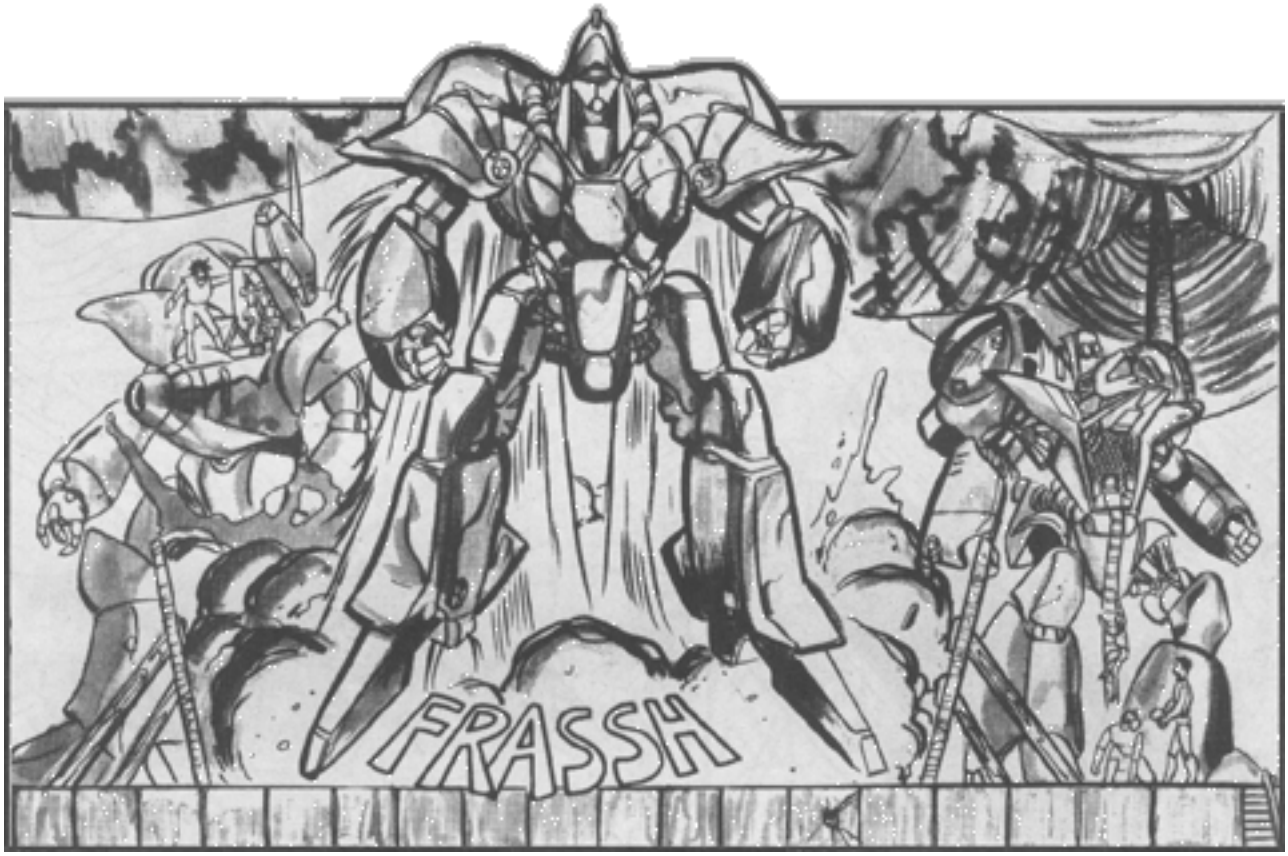
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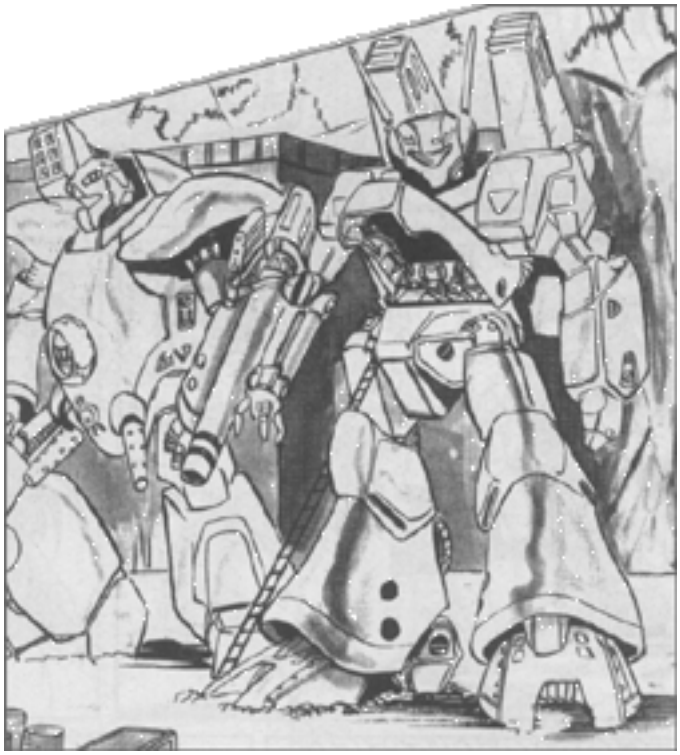

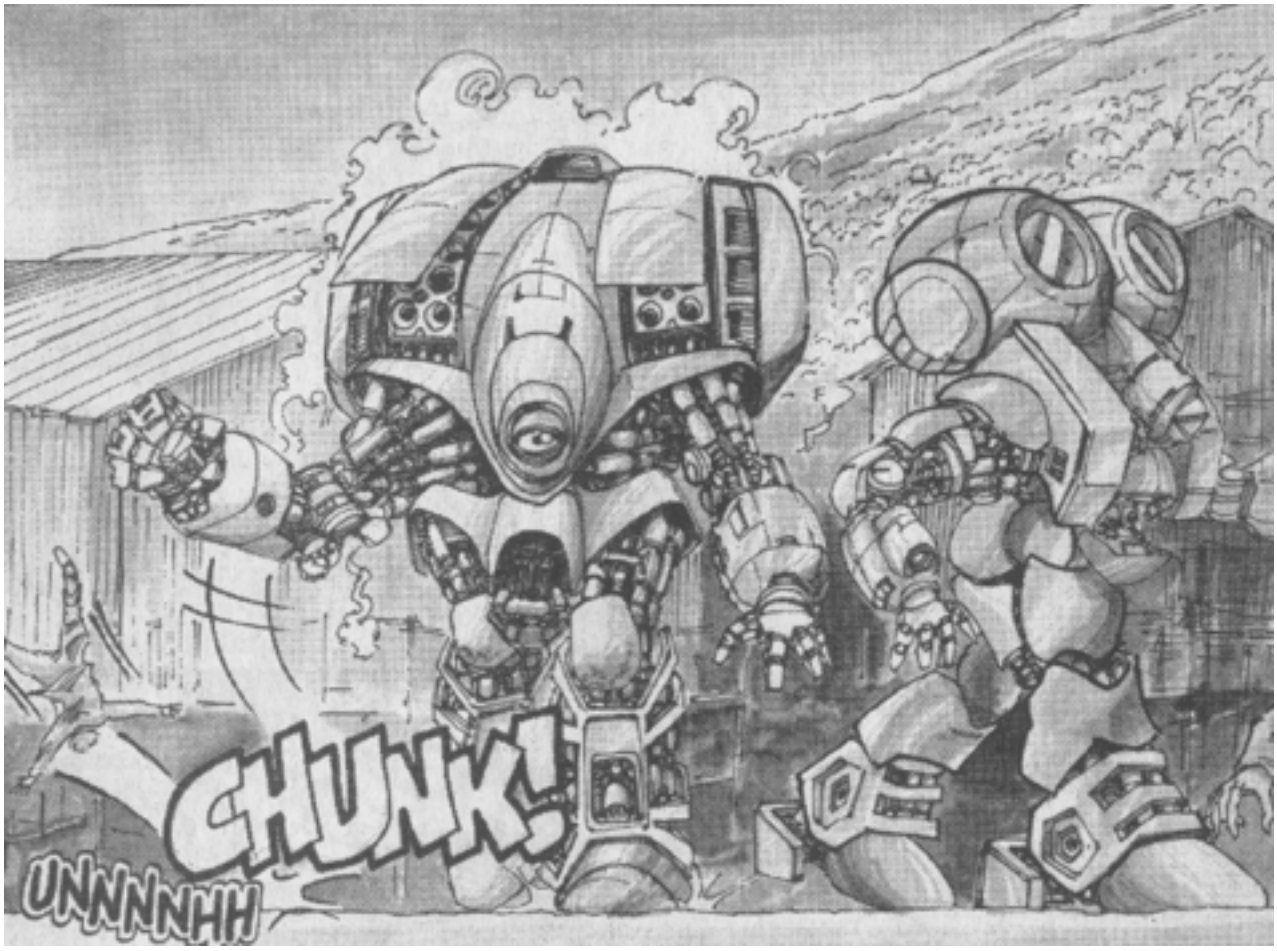
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Maryann and Kevin Siembieda, and Larry Jordan, Esq.

THE THIRD INVID WAR
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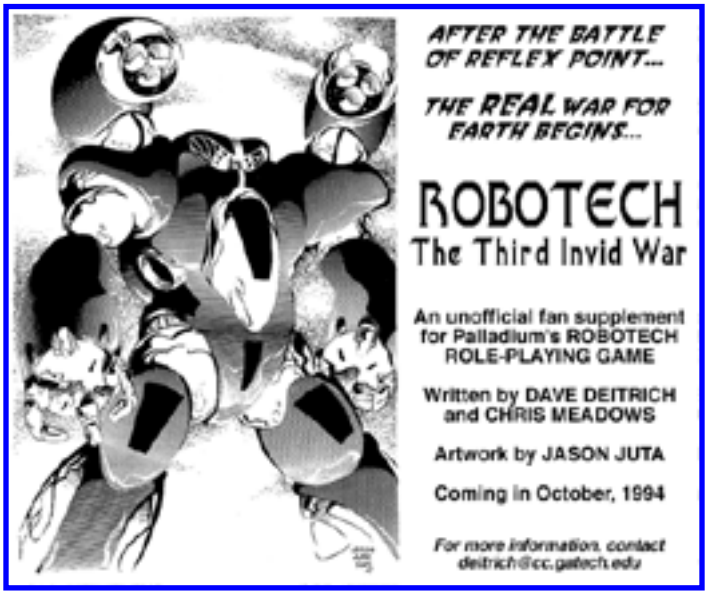
As a joke, I made up a few "ads" for TIW and circulated them around anime ftp sites last year to let people know about the project. The two ads are shown in reduced size below. If you want a full-sized copy of either ad, just click on it. Note that the ads are a little bit out-of-date, especially with regard to TIW's release date. ^_^ *Enjoy!*



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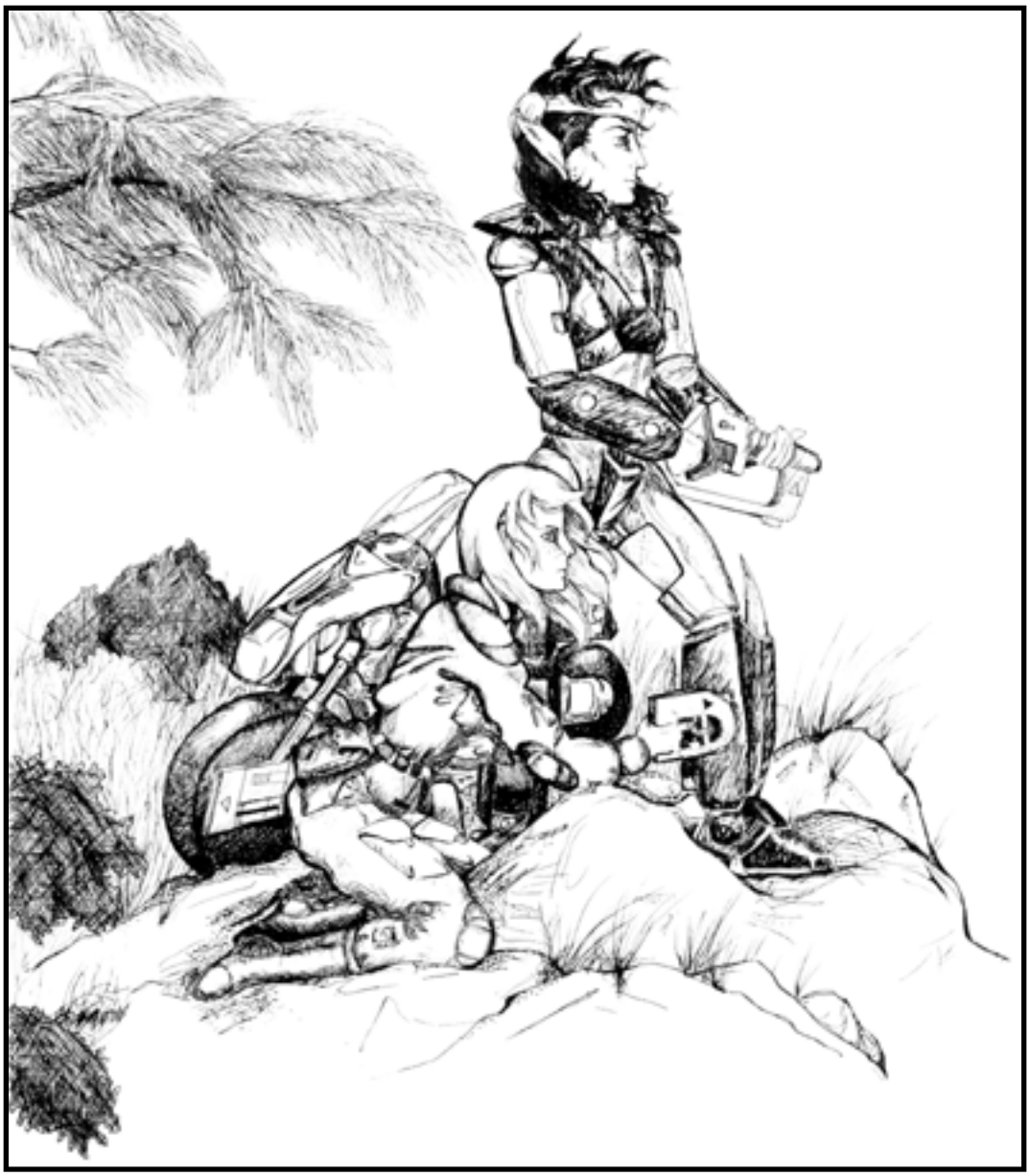

DANDELIONS

CHAPTER NINE

"Gnnngh," Dennis grunted, hauling on the roaring craft's direction as much as he could, as the hive filled his vision. He released the first set of missiles; they shot into the hive and the first few Scouts coming at him even as he left the next set of arms behind.

Kevin had been thorough; as he had claimed, a darkness of entrance was directly in front of them,

opening to receive them. Zinnert cut the thrust, praying it was enough, in enough time in order to stop before they hit the first turn...

The organic gut of the hive opening loomed, then was around them, as Zinnert fought for manuverability.

Behind the Alpha, the protoplex barrier shimmered to life, much, much too late to do anything.

Zinnert flipped more controls.

"Watch out!" he shouted to the back. "This thing's going to Battloid!"

Even as he spoke, Kevin was getting the scare of his life.

The seats were shifting; rotating and simultaneously moving backwards in a stomach turning-motion. In a couple seconds, they were two meters upwards and vertically oriented, Dennis's seat below Kevin's. But that was not all...

Outside, the changes had not stopped at the shift in legs and arms; the cockpit had folded down into a chest, and a head had manifested from its old position underneath the mecha. Plating and geometries shifted in boggling ways, and where there had been a fighter was now a black Battloid Alpha, pounding forward into the enemy's heart.

There were thuds; Scouts clinging parasitically on it, choking its movement and prying with blind persistent claws at the hull and the fragile pilots within. It was the work of a couple seconds to detach and dispose of them with the Battloid rifle or a carefully placed stomp. More fell on the Alpha, but were shaken off, as Dennis broke for the first opening and dashed the mecha into a temporary clear.

Kevin shuddered with the feeling of each death, but his lips were drawn back in a snarl of rage, his mind ranging for more attackers.

"Dennis! Combat Troopers coming from the northwest corridor! Take the other one!"

"Thanks!" Zinnert panted. He had never been in the Invid's world so intimately before; the screech of claws on metal and the asymnetrical geometry of the hive was going to haunt him. Trusting in the rogue's advice, he ran the Battloid onward.

"Lift shaft should be down here. Just jump the sumbitch down; they keep the prisoners on the lowest level is my guess." The lieutenant acknowledged it: then they were again among the mindless, scarlet, clinging insanity of the hive swarm.

"Morons!" Kevin snorted. "They do that, the troopers can't get us without hitting them."

Zinnert ignored it, swatting away the Scouts from the Alpha in a nightmare. Once again, they found a clear area, and a corridor ending in the shaft. Not even thinking, they plummeted into it. Dennis activated parts of the console; canisters were released, falling with and past them as they dropped.

Kevin raked his consciousness through the area, looking for more hostiles, and found--

"DENNIS! Wait! This one!"

Swearing, barely in time, Dennis got the Battloid's foot thrusters roaring, cutting the fall. They halted before the corridor Kevin indicated, and caromed through.

Neither noticed in the rush that the Scouts had left off their pursuit.

"What?"

"I felt a Sulagi mind there--imprisoned. That's where they're keeping the prisoners..." He panted in the adrenaline rush, his mind racing. "That way, quick."

Zinnert guided the Shadow Alpha along, the shock of each footfall transmitting itself to the two men as they sweated. It was Kevin who realized first that there was something wrong.

"There should be more enemy. Invid are persistent; they don't decide to try later!"

"You ought to know!" Zinnert snapped. "Quiet, I'm--oh, Jesus Harold Christ there's---" Abruptly, the mecha backpedaled, but not before screens, eyes and Hivesong told Kevin the truth as it rose to view.

In front of them, the gray and orange Battloid loomed and lunged.

The crash was terrific.

The Alpha's servos screamed in mechanic agony as its left arm was nearly ripped off. Lights flared in the cockpit as Dennis, lip bleeding, grunted and fought to stay erect. If they went down, they were both dead.

Deadlock, as the Alpha fought against the Invid's weight; then, there was a microsecond of give, and the mecha lurched forward, lunging and punching with all its power toward the Assault Battloid's cockpit. The Invid mecha's arm raised to deflect the blow, but it was enough time for Dennis to regain his hold on the Alpha's autocannon. It was held awkwardly in the mecha's grip; Dennis did not need to see to know that the left shoulder was sparking from the initial assault. Gritting his teeth, he managed to switch hands and fired.

The Assault Battloid's shoulder took the hit and reeled. One of the shoulder-mounted cannons was now

damaged at least.

Dennis took the opening to switch to weaponry. The TWR-25 cannons mounted on the head of the Terran mecha blazed; the Gamun's armor scorched as the lasers etched into it. Oryo'i was forced to fall back in order to recoup.

Then, the Terran mecha turned and ran.

"Coward!" she screamed, her eyes slitted with rage. Shkud would have her head on a pike... Snarling, she took off after it, forced to run in the confines of the passageway. Then she shrieked.

The Alpha bore down on her, full tilt; she did not even have time to get the cannons targeted before it was upon her.

With the battloid's arms protecting her vulnerable cockpit, she didn't see until too late the Alpha's leap. In a moment of disoriented horror, she did not quite realize the mecha was vaulting clumsily, using hers' shoulders as a pommel horse. Before comprehension fully hit her, the VAF-8R was gone down the corridor, moving in deper.

"JESUS." Dennis panted, sweat trickling into his mouth. "Fuck fuck fuck fuck.... Can't believe I did that. Can't use missiles in this goddamned corridor."

"She's going to be after us," Kevin said, clammy with shock. "We can't take her on like this."

"Do you think I don't fucking KNOW that?" Dennis spat. He left off, concentrated on losing their opponent. "If she gets clams after us--"

"Get to a good area, Dennis. Let me out and at the Cyclone. Two's better than one, especially with it."

"What if..."

"No Scouts within the mile on our level. I think we've got enough time...I hope."

It was the longest two minutes of their respective lives. But around a corner, Zinnert managed to execute a transition to fighter. The canopy popped; Kevin was out even before the mechamorphosis was complete.

Gritting his teeth, the scout clawed at the compartment panel; after a sick second or two; it popped and the Ferret was out. Zinnert was barely back in Battloid before the thump of the Invid's treads heralded her arrival.

Trying to buy his companion time to unfold and mount the Ferret, Dennis charged her. He was at a disadvantage in close combat and knew it. Without missiles, all he had was the GU-25 and the head lasers; the Invid had plasma and particle beam cannons, even though one was incapacitated, and her mecha's servos were still intact. Dennis' impossibly executed leap had not helped the VAF's rent arm all that much.

He saw the remaining particle cannon swivel and target him; he dodged, fighting to keep enough of an opening to target her without her gaining a fix on him. He had learned enough from Matt's accounts of his clash with this particular Invid that she usually did not fire unless she was certain of making a hit.

Oryo'i, for her own part, was studying the Human mecha with narrowed eyes as she pursued it. Despite the damage she had already done to it, after the move the Terran had already managed she was not going to underestimate anything the Human might do. The human's teammates had already proven to be quite innovative if the situation pressed. It was fairly obvious, though, what he had come here for. Shkud seemed to have had a strategy he was not letting her in on.

Fools! For one human female? Are they mad? Or stupid?

Her forehead damp with very human perspiration, she moved in on the Alpha, dodging agilely the autocannon's shot. It took out a goodly portion of the hive wall behind her.

Now if only she could pin him long enough for the Iigai and Torabs to arrive, there might be some answers. She had reservations on killing the human outright; valuable information might die with him. Targeting the Alpha as it tried to circle around her, her eyes fixed on its knees. With that sort of mecha; immobilization would also mean destruction of any thruster capacity, preventing escape...

Oryo'i did not expect distraction. Her attention was broken as a yodeling figure in a Cyclone blazed straight at her. Before she could move, the human had streaked between her mecha's legs and according to her screens, was retreating out the back way. It began to curve back around...

What? TWO pilots in the craft?

An explosion shook her, hard; screaming in frustration, she realized the second beam cannon was now out of commission.

Fool, fool, fool! What is the matter with you, Oryo'i?? You--

She no longer noticed the Cyclone; it was the lesser of the two dangers. Angry, she plunged after the Alpha.

What the hell? There ain't no guards...

Gwen could not follow this train of thought. Already fatigued by the half-suicidal journey of a couple hundred miles, she was plummeting into the very innards of the hive.

No sooner than they were on firm footing, they cut the power; no need to attract hostiles with protuculture output. The Super Saber up ahead was already running into the hive. Losing Lieutenant Ulm was the last thing she wanted; swallowing hard, she followed his lead.

No Scouts, no Troopers, no nothin'. Sure, patrols, but you'd think they'd be after us after we'd got this far.

Maybe...Maybe they already... Gwen bit her lip, the roiling in her gut not completely from the fear of being in the enemy's territory.

She hadn't meant for it to get this far...

Angry at herself, she changed that.

No, she had. *A kid whose only wrong was to get in the way of me... and I let her get...*

God. What have I become?

Did it start the day those Enforcers picked me up on the streets of Louisville?

And the worst part--

Matt hadn't even shouted. Just a sad, disappointed look that was in itself worse than any thrashing her mama had ever given her...

What the hell have I turned into? Whatever it is, it's never gonna get trusted by the team.

Ever. Again.

They were huddled in a niche in the wall now, a half-mile in that had been completely undisturbed.

Ulm was speaking quietly. "If we'd been the first ones to penetrate, they'd have been on us like--pardon the analogy--ticks on a dog. There's been no interference so far."

Gwen nodded. "My guess--the hive's stuff is concentrated on another mecha that's a lot more of a threat. Guess."

A terse nod in return.

"We've gotta find them, Matt."

"Either them or Mandy. But Amanda at least'll be stationary, and she has no way to fight back. The others'll keep until we can get to them. Keep down for a bit, until I confirm that the hive traffic's really not here."

Gwen complied.

"You're...angry, aren't you?" she said after a couple of minutes. He hadn't spoken much during the trip.

There was a pause.

"I can't lie, Gwendolyn.

"Yes, I am angry. You betrayed a trust we placed in you. But that's past. What's done is done. We can only migitate it now, not reverse it. If only you'd--" he broke off.

"What?"

"Understood the reasons for it. But no... That was impossible..."

"What?"

"Your attempts on Kevin didn't help him a lot. He's got problems more serious than you realize. You're better off not knowing what they were. And the Invid don't need to know those liabilities."

"Kevin?..."

"Enough of that, Gwen. The Invid'll find us if we don't keep moving."

The two moved slowly, further into the dark.

Kevin accelerated his bike, dashing back between the Gamun's legs as its pilot again turned attention toward the Alpha. An H-90 blast to one did nothing much physically, but it at least took away her concentration for a second, enough for Dennis to get in another shot. He circled around the leg as Oryo'i attempted to stomp him out of the picture, hassling her like matador to a technological bull.

C'mon, you... Leave Dennis alone--your REAL gripe should be with me... sister.

He had no idea about the ammo Dennis had left, but after that initial discharge on the rush, it could not be all that much. And they were hard to come by . How many invaluable resources had they used to rescue one person?

We're crazy. Nuts. Absolutely---WOOOLLLPPH!!!!

He should have remembered that Assault Battloids had plasma cannons in both arms.

The Cyclone's mechanics shrieked in torture as the blast went home. The left arm--the one had forgotten about being armed--had aimed and fired almost as an afterthought, while her concentration remained on Dennis.

Control lost, Kevin realized what was about to happen, and kicked.

The Ferret did not even reach the wall before it exploded, its systems destroyed by the hit.

He landed hard; rolled from the Battloid's treads even as he tried to get his breath back; bruised but no worse thanks to his CVR. The Invid mecha returned its full attention to Dennis, who had had some time to recoup--but not nearly enough.

Can't stand by and watch him buy it...if he does, I'm done too...

The Alpha had managed to get out of its pin against the wall, and the black and the orange-and-gray forms were again circling, waiting for openings. Kevin threw out a mental net. What it retrieved signaled that the Scouts for some reason were still trying to get down, but with no success. Quite a few were otherwise involved; and then Kevin realized those canisters Dennis had discharged on the way down...

Lures of live protoculture and explosives. So that was what he had been messing with back at base outside the Alpha. Not only a load of false leads for the simple-minded Scouts, but possibly damaging as well. That Sentinels War training--Dennis had learned some interesting tricks.

Dennis, you sneaky, sneaky son of a bitch... The rogue would have laughed if he had time. But the two were locked in combat, the slightest thing could tip their even balance...His mind scrambled. Why had she been down here? Weren't prisoners normally on the lower level... Shocked, he remembered that the plans weren't being followed here. They were up a couple of levels , near, or at... If she had been out of her mecha when the alert came through... It might be... It might be that...

Kevin realized that he was not completely helpless. If he were lucky, there was still a mecha that he could use.

Whirling, he edged past, and ran.

Dennis did not even notice Kevin's movement. He was much too busy keeping himself alive.

The Invid was far more talented than initially noticed; it was just a matter of time before she wore him down, and the transmutee obviously knew it. She was not even using her plasma cannons, apparently saving them for the coup de grace. Dennis tasted blood, lunged and struck, meeting only air as the alien mecha dodged, then moved in again. The human had only lost more ground instead, and he did not even have the time to curse before they began their circle again.

Oryo'i was not Shkud; there was no pleasure in her expression as she looked for a way to disable the Alpha quickly, except maybe in doing a job well. She very much wanted to take the Human alive, for he might yield up information that would corrobate his female companion's. And there was his companion, who, if not dead, was another possible useful source. Although, there had been something about the other...

This time, she kept her presence of mind as the Human's autocannon attempted another shot at her, the blast going wild. The Alpha could not have had much left, and she was as aware as Dennis that in close quarters, it was she who still had the advantage.

He was fast enough to move his leg before the plasma cannon went home, but the shot still connected enough to transmit up to the pilot, and he made a incoherent yell of despair.

Great, Amanda prisoner, Kevin probably dead, and I'm about to become slug dinner. How the mighty hath fallen. Of course, the Regent's troops weren't that bright...

As the REF is, I'm no example either...

The hive floors thudded as footfalls, far more rapid than most of the Malorosm could make them, clunked their way inward, their owner pushing them as fast and hard as possible.

The corridor opened into an enormous hangar, dimly glowing with hive biolumescence, puffs of steam escaping from whatever passed for Invid hydraulic powering. It could have easily housed one of the smaller Human star vessels, a Garfish perhaps. Instead, in the dimness, many smaller somethings stood, the hazy light flickered on slick surfaces.

The footsteps and ragged breathing wended its way amongst them, and halted.

Then, they picked up, acclerated, and suddenly stopped.

A split-second later, there was a clang, and a pained grunt of wind knocked out. There was a scuffle, as if someone were trying to haul themself up, and then a second, sudden, final clang.

Half a minute later, one of the metallic objects in that hangar stirred

---

"Matt, where are you?" Gwen called out. Any reply that might have been made was drowned out in static. She heard Invid mecha coming her way yet again, and neccessity prevented her from continuing.

And it had all started the minute they had first heard the enforcers coming down the hallway. Two humans in Cyclone armor were no match for three Enforcers and six Sentinels, especially in their own territory. She had dodged for one side, the lieutenant for the other. Unfortunately, in Ulm's case, the Enforcers had decided to turn down the side-passage he had chosen, and he had to run to avoid being found. Further attempts to find him had been foiled. They were probably both hopelessly lost by now, a fact Gwen grimly tried to ignore.

If she did not, her already iffy mental state would be done for. The memories...

The Enforcer, the needle that took her blood, the small bloody patch on her arm where her skin had been razored off, and the countless hours of terror, want, and cruelty by Invid and human alike...

That was what she had given Amanda.

Gwendolyn supposed her own current situation was nothing better than what she had deserved for that.

She sidled further down the passage she had been in since she had been separated from Matt. She had gotten quite a good practice at it during the past half-hour. When the passage suddenly opened into purgatorial blackness, she almost fell backwards.

Two seconds later, she almost did it again. It took that long for her to realize what the room contained.

Sweet Jesus... she cursed softly to herself.

She knew for a fact that the humanoid castes spent much more time out of their battloids than the other breeds of Invid. For the first time, she now knew where they actually put that mecha in their down-time.

She was in a mecha bay. Its roof disappeared in the darkness, but she strongly suspected that mobile

apetures in the ceiling allowed for easy exit from the hive for pilots. There was only a couple of those Battloids around; the rest either hadn't yet been assigned for use by lower Invid, or, in the case of the dark, empty Enforcer armor, was further proof that the Scientist-caste Invid themselves liked an unsuited stroll every so often. Shaking, she wandered in further among them, trying to find a place to hide, her H-90 up and despite her terror icily still.

She took in a rapid breath.

Something had just entered inside with her.

Crouching, she hid behind an Enforcer shell as best as she could, tasting her own sweat. Through her helmet, she heard slow footfalls, moving at an unhurried pace.

Matt? Gwen almost called, and then realized that even on these floors, CVR boots made a distinct thump. It was completely absent from this new entrant.

Like countless other humans before her, she thought the thud of heart on ribcage would give her away as the footfalls came closer, homing in on her. Or so Gwendolyn thought, before her eye caught the large space beyond her position. It was significantly empty. Suddenly, there was a gasp, and the footfalls picked up, to an almost run, before stopping less than ten feet away from where Gwen was. She could hear breathing, and then a series of shocked, wordless murmurs, all of which seemed to be in a masculine baritone. Then there was a pad of feet, circling the open area.

No second doubts now; she had only a matter of time before she was found.

In one swift motion, she was out from behind the Enforcer and pointing the H-90 at his head.

"Okay, buster! Move, and I'll--"

The silhouette yelped and whirled. Gwen was put off by the other's speed; before she realized it, he was trying to rush her.

Coldly, she aimed and fired.

There was a scream of pain as the Gallant shot burned his left bicep. In a second, she had the newcomer spraddled against the nearest wall, the muzzle readied again at his skull.

"Don't move, " she whispered. "Whoever you are, I got a pistol aimed point-blank at the back of your head. I got a rabbit running full speed once at two hundred yards off, so if you move, honey, you better tell me which part of your skull you don't need. All right, what the hell are ya doing in here?"

In what lighting there was, she could make out that her captive was several inches taller than her--forcing her to raise her gun arm--had straight light mid-back-length hair, and a squarish, somewhat Slavic face, currently contorted in fear and in pain from her hit. She could smell the stink of burnt flesh, and an acrid odor underneath it that betokened something slightly unusual about the quality of the prisoner's physiology.

The flightsuit he was wearing left no doubt to Gwen who--or what--she had taken captive.

This is it, Dennis thought, as the Assault Battloid moved in cautiously.

His autocannon was empty, and there was no other way he could move. The problem was, he knew it. He just wish the information would sink in to his rival and she would act on it. Watching her sidle up to him was almost funny, in a perverse way. At least he seemed to have acquitted himself well...

Oryo'i licked her lips.

Is this another ruse? she thought. *The Human's doing nothing at all... It has to be another trick.*

Slowly, she raised her Gamun's arm and the plasma cannon in it, intending to do a final disable on the other mecha before its pilot could change his mind.

Zinnert, calmly watching his death coming, caught a flicker of movment out of the corner of his eye. Automatically, his eyes flickered over and then he realized he wished he hadn't.

Another Assault Battloid had arrived at last to reinforce Oryo'i. This one, a mecha in spring green with construction-orange trim, was fully armed and fresh.

Dennis now realized that the dignity of death was denied him. With a sinking heart, he watched as they prepared to take him prisoner.

At that same time, Oryo'i caught the new Battloid's image in her rear screens.

What? She was incredulous. This had not been planned.

She reached out, and gave an incoherent cry of shock.

WHO'S in there??? It's not--

The mentality in there was not the one she expected, was not any she had encountered in the hive or

Shkud's service. Though she could feel the pilot's presence sharply, for one disoriented moment she doubted whether the pilot was even Invid.

And yet--and yet... Somehow, she almost knew... Her cannon sagged.

She failed to realize that moment of utter confusion had been a moment far too long for Dennis.

"Now!" he shouted, lunging foward, hoping for enough clearance, firing his last two missiles as he did so.

The projectiles shot out from behind the Alpha, curled foward into the gray Invid mecha, and detonated.

The explosions hit the Battloid in the right side and left knee--the combination knocking her to the left, even as the knee gave out from underneath the other missile's punishment. Gracefully, its pilot still stunned, it pitched over and lay inertly.

Oryo'i heard the dull smack of her own head as it collided with the side of her cockpit, and then there was only darkness.

Clammy from his own reaction, Dennis whirled to take on the other--

"Hi!" the familliar voice chirped. "Fancy meeting you like this!"

Dennis clawed incoherently at his radio. "WHAT?"

Staring, his brown eyes tracked from the fallen Oryo'i to the green Invid mecha.

It raised an arm and wiggled its claws at him.

"K-kevin?" he stammered.

"In the mecha, so to speak," came Kevin's ironic voice over the net. "Do you think this is my color? And is the precise term for this "Gamun-jacking?""

"Whatever you like, Kevin," Zinnert said faintly. "Whatever you like."

"C'mon," Kevin said, awkwardly turning. "We've got to get to the cells quickly. I'll lead."

"Took your what?" Gwen hissed in shock.

"Someone took my mecha."

The prisoner whispered this, feeling the chill of the Terran weapon against his head, the English coming hard to him. The feeling did not so much as shift a hair. Gwen's eyes were wide in blank astonishment at this frankly unique piece of news, but she did not allow it to break her concentration.

"This is somethin'. And if I even catch you looking like you're gonna mind-call your friends, you better kiss your head goodbye." The male Invid did not even twitch, only his mint-green eyes blinking. He seemed to be taking the threat with some consideration.

"I swear I will not, on my honor as a child of the Regis," he said, still tense around his nose with pain. "You have me at advantage." His eyes blinked in consternation. "Why would anyone want my Gamun?"

"Like Mount Everest."

"What?"

"It was there, whatever you are."

"My name is Miragai. Please, let me off this wall. I swore an oath."

"Fine lot of good it'll do me the human when my back is turned." Her arm was beginning to hurt; she obliged him so she could train the Gallant down between his shoulderblades. Now that the light fell more directly she could make out that his hair was an orangish-streaked blond and that his uniform was in a bright green-and-orange scheme. He showed no inclination to try her, but she kept her pistol at ready. "What were you doing in here--uh, Miragai?" she demanded.

"What are YOU doing in here, human?" he shot back, then hissed in pain as she yanked on his wounded arm, reminded that it was she with the armanents. "I was alerted to a--disturbance in the hive and came here to collect my mecha, which is obviously absent. You were here instead."

"Them's the breaks," she said shortly. "Walk before me and keep your hands at your sides. I have something to take care of. And then, we are gonna leave."

Siaga looked up, the white-streaked red of her hair falling back to reveal her face, eyes wide. Regardless of race, expressions of shock seemed to be universal. Her lemon eyes flickered back and forth and widened. Abruptly, she was on her feet.

"Human!" she hissed.

The opposing cell's incumbent did not seem to notice or move her fetal curl on the floor; asleep or worse, the Invid did not know for certain.

"Amanda," she tried again. "Listen."

Amanda did hear that but was choosing not to acknowledge; trying seemed to be too much or a trial. Siaga persisted, for the sudden painful feeling she was experiencing... Was this what humans called "hope"?

Amanda still refused to notice, the physical and emotional trauma occupying her attention seemed more important. But, then, something else began to impinge on her narrowed eyes-closed perceptions.

Voices?

Elsewhere, in a room unoccupied due to to the distractions of previous events, a hand reached out, its owner surveying a liquid-crystal display. It read: 000:02:00:00. The hand reached out, and with a quick, decisive flick, tapped a button.

Unstoppably, the numbers began to tick down.

The malachite-armored figure plunged ahead with intent accuracy, the olive-drab lagging a foot behind as they dashed through the corridor. They had had to leave the mecha behind; this passage was too small.

"There! Another hundred feet!" Kevin panted. Dennis acknowledged and fought to keep up with the rogue's mad dash. Kevin scanned the corridor. He reached out, to the mind he had only glanced on earlier, that had given him a hint on where to go.

Is anyone there? he asked.

What? Amanda thought. The curl of her position was broken, as she abruptly brought her head up, eyes wide.

NO. *Oh god, don't torture me like this. I'm hallucinating.*

They can't be voices.

Not in English.

Not...

She got on her knees, ignoring the pain from her battered frame, and then her feet, blinded by the energy grid. Across the way, Siaga was laughing, an unprecedented noise. Most shockingly, it sounded human and joyful.

"Human! Your kin is rescuing you!"

"No..."

"True!"

Footfalls pounding towards them, the distinctive clunk of CVR armor, and shrieking in surprise, she recognized the voices. It can't have been...

Two familliar figures eclipsed her vision. Even as she was lurching foward, one stopped, as the other fitted a barrel to an H-90. A second later, the light grid flickered out.

"Kevin...Dennis..." she cried, tears running down her face.

"Amanda!" the second CO shouted. "Stand back, and guard your face." She went against the wall and crossed her arms over her head automatically. She shuddered at the deafening roar, her ears ringing with the aftermath. Her eyes opening again, she saw a gaping hole where the hated ceramic bars had been.

Somehow, she lurched out, and was then again imprisoned in a pair of armored arms. She was completely immobilized by the crushing grip and did not even care, for she knew whose it was.

"Oh shit...your face--" Kevin murmured, still panting. "What did they do to you?" A gauntleted hand cupped her aching cheek with fumbling care, but she did not respond, her face pressed into his breastplate as she shook convulsively. "Easy..."

"We have to get out, O'Shea!" The rogue mentally kicked himself awake and remembered, beginning to draw Amanda along.

Siaga's laugh turned into a yelp of surprise. "Release me! Please!"

When Dennis seemed to hesitate, Amanda whispered. "Do it. She's going to get deevolved."

Siaga was already protecting her own exposed skin as Zinnert aimed at the edge of the cell. There was a dazzling blast of light as the ceramic and wall splintered under the attack. Siaga needed no prompting to dash through the remnants, her peppermint hair flying. "Where?" she asked her saviors.

"We've got to get to the..."

There was a sudden click, causing all four's heads to shoot up, eyes wide.

A Sentinel stepped into the passageway, rifle trained on them, behind which were several other Sentinels and Enforcers. On the other side, yet more Invid filled the space, all weapons aimed at rescuers and prisoners alike.

They were effectively surrounded by more than a dozen of the aliens.

Through the ranks stepped an armored Oryo'i, helmet off, rifle also up. Her expression was tired and resigned.

"I wouldn't think so. I've got other plans," a soft voice drawled. It was not hers.

In the dead silence, another figure stepped out from between the ranks. The four took in the scene; then, there was a muffled obscenity from Dennis, combatting with Amanda's terrified mew. Shkud stood there, enjoying himself, letting the captives take in the full impact of his appearance. He began to inspect his nails as he began to speak again.

"You know, you really were quite obliging. I'm amazed at how gullible you apes can be. Do you really think I'd have allowed that female to live if I didn't have something in mind?" The slitted, feline eyes narrowed in amusement. "My thanks to you," he said to Siaga, "Sulagi. A pity that you didn't realize that I could remain an observer in your mind and not make myself known to you. It seems my timing was just perfect."

"You bastard!" Siaga shrieked. "You iigaari-witted--"

Shkud's eyes narrowed. "Shut your prattling, Condemmed." Siaga wailed and doubled over, clutching her head. The others, frozen, did not move to help her. Coolly, the dominant Invid went on.

"As I was saying, I had something in mind. It went off even better than I planned. Not only did I get another human possibly amenable to persuasion in my hands, I got the actual reason for my inquiry." The emerald eyes focused on the bright green figure standing frozen there, its arms still wrapped around the quaking figure of the blond human.

"You were always such an idealistic fool, Kayagh."

Oryo'i visibly started, causing a low chuckle to rise in his throat. "What? You didn't even recognize your former research partner, Sulagi? I'm surprised. Then again, I suppose wallowing in filth as he's been doing can mask an identity."

"It...was...before we were transmuted," she said distantly.

"You, Shkud," Kevin managed at last, "were always such a smug asshole."

"Ah, Kayagh, but who's got the weapons aimed at them?"

"I'm trying to think of a creative way to say, "drop dead,"" the renegade said politely, "and I'm completely failing."

"But you see," Shkud whispered, "You, Kayagh, are going to wish you could drop dead."

Dennis and Kevin stared at each other, then released their holds on their H-90s. Shkud looked pleased. "Oryo'i, Malar, strip them and search for hidden weaponry." Looking ill, she did so. Amanda was forced away from Kevin and over to the side; she placed a hand on the agonized Siaga's shoulder in a comforting manner, and found her hand over Amanda's, squeezing hard.

"Forgive me," Siaga whispered. "I had no idea why he had placed you near--"

"It's not your fault," the human managed. Over to the side, clatters rose, as the CVR hit the ground.

"Good try," Kevin said. "It might have worked, Dennis." He felt the hands of the loyalist Sulagi patting him down for hidden weaponry, now that he was reduced to the basic Elms coverall.

Shkud said sweetly off to the side. "Not with my--"

"Shut up, Shkud. I wasn't asking you," Kevin said flatly. "By the way, what's with the new vogue in eyes and height? Those must've been some growth hormones the Regis gave you."

Suddenly Kevin stiffened, his breath catching, as a white-hot needle stabbed into his mind, and behind it, a sullen power that made his guts go cold.

There was only one contact in his experience that was more powerful, and that was that of the Invid Regis.

This is what, a voice cooed in him. Shkud's all right--but much stronger. And with a swollen, arrogant

corruption that was a perverted form of the consciouness Kevin had once known. A mental giggle followed on the heels of that, and Kevin realized that somehow, some way, he was following Kevin's very thoughts. Slowly, the presence withdrew, leaving the renegade Sulagi panting and trying to ignore the fact that most likely this was only the slightest taste of what probably awaited him. *Spirit of Light, what had Shkud become?*

That one mockingly indicated his own figure with a sweep of his hand. "Behold, Kayagh, the new pinnacle of Invid evolution. But you won't have the pleasure for long."

> I'd rather die
> Than give you control
>
> --**Nine Inch Nails** *"Head Like A Hole"*

Dennis was next to the pale-haired Invid. With a flick of his eyes, he noted her set, tense expression. It seemd that at the least, she was not pleased about something, and Dennis could take a few guesses. For all the trouble this Invid had caused them, the discontent was plainly obvious.

As had happened time and time again in the course of the wars ever since Maximillian Sterling's fateful encounter, he was also realizing that the enemy could also be, in her own way, beautiful.

This thought took a distant second to the main business occupying his mind: the future was bleak indeed, insofar as they had any. Compared to Kevin, though... The figure in front of him was rigid; Dennis could see the periodic shivers quiver through the scout's frame.

Anathema to the collective, he remembered Kevin saying. Compared to the magnitude of Kevin's actions, his and Amanda's role were just so much small potatoes . *And if the punishment were to fit the crime...* Dennis shuddered. There were a few things worse than death; considering the tall, red-haired humanoid with the inhuman eyes, he would probably try all of them on Kevin.

You stupid bastard, he thought of Kevin, grieving. *What made you think you had to join us and spend all those years hiding your nature? Look at what we've given you in return. Were we that attractive to you?* He flinched in pain; the Sentinel pinning his arms had decided to tighten the grip of its claws. The red-and-pink Invid woman off to the side was panting in stress; he looked over and tried to give her a comforting glance, which was a bit of a joke considering the situation. She did not respond, her head drooping in exhaustion and despair. He could not see Amanda; but periodic whimpers from near his locale sounded like hers. From the looks of the enormous bruises on her face and neck, she had received her fair share of the mutant Invid's tender attentions.

Kevin tested the restraints pinning his arms, and winced. The Enforcers had placed his wrists in cuffs set

into the wall, effectively immobilizing him and leaving his body wide open. A bead of sweat trickled down his forehead.

"Well, Kayagh, how do you like the accomodations?"

"Well, Shkud, I certainly didn't know you were into BDSM," the other retorted, attempting a mocking tone, overshadowed by the shake in his voice. "Especially not with other males. You learn more every day about the people around you."

"This was a gift, dear Kayagh. I had an impression from your companion that one of your like was coming, and I wanted to plan a...reception." Kevin pulled again and jumped, his eyes widening. Shkud looked on with interest, hands on hips. "I see you've found that pressure on the anchors activates an electrical charge. Do you find it of interest?" He tilted his head, raising his eyebrows. "I've always wanted to do this sort of experiment." The look in Kevin's eyes was not translated into words, but Shkud laughed nonetheless.

"I'm quite sorry, I don't think that's wise. I'm too valuable a resource to the Queen-Mother."

Kevin deliberately yanked on the restraint; this time the shock made him cry out, and the two female Invid jerked in empathetic unison. Shkud laughed again, and the renegade's eyes widened in understanding and horror.

"You are the most disgusting piece of offal it's ever been my displeasure to meet, Shkud," Kevin growled hoarsely. "The idea of you enjoying the feeling of my pain, reflected to YOU--"

The green, slitted eyes narrowed, and the mock-humor was gone. Kevin stood as high as he could as the Kulagi stalked nearer with fluid, inhuman grace, until the two were less than three feet apart. Shkud still stood some inches taller than Kevin, and he had to lean down.

"And you wonder why, Sulagi?

"You disgust me. Granted, you Sulagi were flawed. You forsake the collective because of some superficial--resemblance--with the animals on this planet... And to even become like them! Madness! Is it any wonder we were given the power on this occupation? You are not even worth crushing under my heel, trahl.

"I'm going to see you beg for death, Kayagh. And I am going to make your companions watch--especially that female..."

"Like hell!" Kevin shouted in fury.

The blow rocked Kevin back against the wall, tugging on the restraints again, arching him with agony.

Shkud tsked. "Not nice to provoke me like that. After all, I need you...recognizable." Kevin recovered, his eyes blazing. From where they were, his companions could see a trickle of dark green trailing out of the corner of his mouth.

The renegade's reaction to the comment was self-evident, as the Kulagi began to laugh again, full-throated this time. Kevin, trembling in rage and terror, looked over to the three held by the Sentinels, and closed his eyes. Then he seemed to make a decision, even as his interrogator forgot to inquire his mind as he savored his triumph.

The blob of green-tinted spittle hit Shkud dead square in the face, cutting off his gloating.

The eyes went glacially cold, and the face contorted in rage.

Silently, a hand went up, and Shkud stared at the results wiped onto his fingers.

"You DARE..." Shkud said silibantly.

The Kulagi's eyes narrowed. A flicker of something metallic was in one hand as he darted it forward.

Kevin's scream of agony shrilled.

So did Amanda's.

> Hey man, how will you feel
> When all you have and all you own
> Is your only true friend
> When above you in the firmament
> Flow the blood of the prophets
> Out of your reach
> From your aching speech
>
> --**Peter Murphy**

A searing, acidic weight crushed his thoughts even as the blade went to the hilt in his shoulder, slamming into his consiciousness like a tsunami. He fought helplessly, as the mass of the Kulagi's hate began to knife memories, emotions, thoughts and knowledge from him. Paralyzed by the double mental and physical attacks, Kevin writhed helplessly as he began to be picked apart from inside. But somehow, he kept fighting...

Where did he get that power?

Suddenly, he saw himself as how Shkud saw him, and the attack left him reeling again. Craven, cowardly, disobedient, traitorous, and weak, a betrayer of all the Invid was, a being refusing to see his place in the Hive and properly adhere to the ordained nature of things, and with nothing of Shkud's power. And to even associate with the vermin who infested this world--as if they bore any more resemblance to them than in appearance! What an utterly debased creature he was, so fouled he had no right to even the term of Sulagi.

Kevin shuddered in grief, made all the more painful by the fact it partly contained the truth. Shkud reveled in his power as it squashed the helpless psyche again, and he who was once called Kayagh began to surrender to the pain and despair from which there was no relief. He was nothing, a mere, half-completed shadow of the grandeur that was Kulagi.

And yet, a small, angry, and entirely human voice inside retorted:

Grandeur? This--is grandeur?

In his mind, a soft voice spoke, as Miranda read a book, years ago. "I may speak in the tongues of men and angels, but if I have not love, I am no more than a blaring trumpet or clanging cymbal..."

The Sulagi's pain-transfixed thoughts rallied, and began to push back. There was momentary surprise from the Invid torturing him. The thoughts were coherent and determined, even in hurt.

I may be weak, Shkud, I may be a coward, I may be a traitor, but you have done nothing for all your power, except destroy, and hurt, and kill, and torment, you dog. You're nothing, you bastard. Nobody'll weep for you, when you're gone. I think more of these people--people you bastard--than you will ever understand, or ever be capable of understanding. You aren't even worth my consideration.

There was a blanked moment of incredulity, as the Kulagi's ego struggled at the concept of a mere Sulagi thinking less of him than a human. Then, a venomous tide of rage scalded Kevin/Kayagh's mind again. Ouside, he could hear ribs break, as Shkud's fists pummeled into his sternum. He could feel the electrical surges spasm his muscles as he involuntarily tried to protect himself.

Light flared as he opened his eyes to Amanda screaming in horror.

"Quiet her!" Shkud snarled, his face barely human anymore, a transparent mask to the nature undeneath.

Oryo'i had her arms wrapped around her torso armor, a line between her pale brows. She stared at him with incomprehension. "My lord--he is transferring his pain to me..."

"Shut the human up or by the mother YOU will feel it!"

The pain nearly blacked himself out, but he managed to catch Amanda's eyes; she stopped screaming, her eyes wide and dry.

"Quit picking on the animals, Shkud! You said it first." Kevin felt a cough burble up; bringing with it the fermented taste of his own blood. More than ribs broken--even the action of clearing his lungs made the edges in his vision go dark from the incredible anguish. "Scared somebody might hear?" Oryo'i shuddered. Kevin sent her a desperate thought.

Oryo'i, this is what you're serving under! Do you want this monster to be running your life?

Kayagh, you are the one who erred! Oryo'i tried censure, but it rang patently false, and he could hear the sickness she felt at what was happening to him.

Was he truly broadcasting his pain that wide?

A momentary glimpse of himself out of her eyes; he looked a sight...

LISTEN, damn you! *It can't go like this forever! It'll be YOU, someday!*

Shkud was turning back to him. But he knew Oryo'i had heard him...

Shkud pulled out the scapel from where it was imbedded in Kevin's shoulder, making the renegade almost faint from the pain--but sagging on the anchors would electrocute him... Fresh wet warmth trickled down his shoulder and chest, soaking into his coverall. But Kevin had had enough time to partially recoup... He seemed to be observing it from a far-distant perspective, the pain strangely diconnected as somehow, someway, he managed to take on even now the detachment of his zazen practice. The Kulagi's mind clawed at him and could find nothing more than surface purchase at first.

Give, you offal! GIVE! the adder-like hiss of Shkud's thoughts coated his mind.

Kevin complied. He gave, but it was not what Shkud wanted.

The flight of a killdeer, the glow of sunlight off of dandelions, Malcolm's and Sherry's improvised waltz to a sixty-five year old tune... Ruthlessly, Kevin rammed them down one after the other, even as the weakness from the blood loss began to set in...the very humanity of those thoughts leaving nothing that Shkud wanted to understand or comprehend, a constant taunt against a being who considered the race less than nothing.

If he was lucky, it would enrage the Kulagi so that he would be killed--or die--before Shkud got what he really wanted.

In the concrete world, Shkud, his eyes dilated until they were merely emerald rims surrounding abyssal black centers, wiped off the blade and almost daintily began to cut.

After the second or third incision, Amanda and Dennis could no longer bear to look. The Sentinels' hold on them prevented them from covering their eyes but they both tightly squeezed them shut. It did nothing to block their hearing. And they heard every moment.

By this point, Shkud had decided to turn off the electrical charge. It was no fun if the prisoner's sagging killed him before Shkud was done.

The screams were much more infrequent now, and weaker. How much longer, before they stopped altogether? And there was the ragged sobbing off to the side, as Siaga took full communion in what was happening to Kevin.

"You're disappointing, Kayagh." Shkud commented. "Perhaps I should have made your female companion go first--she was more rewarding than you." A hoarse whimper was all his response, and bubbling, ragged breathing.

Nobody noticed the thumps of movement nearing the main entrance, and their stopping.

"It seems that I'll actually have to start on the internal organs next..." Shkud sighed. "Messy." Oryo'i bared her teeth in a rictus as a shiver went through her armored frame. Shkud shook his head mornfully, and took a cloth to clean the dripping blade. He narrowed his eyes again, looking for a place to begin.

Red.

Color of wrath, color of rage. Color of the sleeping reptile in the brain when it came alive. Nothing mammalian could stand against it.

The red boiled into vision, blanking out all that might have been sentient, as the reptile roared.

The bellow shattered everything; no scream of pain or horror, but of utterl hatred. Oryo'i stared wildly about at the shout, the Enforcers dashing about, and in the middle of it, even Shkud dropped the knife, startled.

Whistlesand then explosions of missiles slamming into the hive chamber; and an olive-drab armored figure plummeted into the middle of it, the black-on-yellow tree insignia on its shoulder briefly visible as it rushed forward like the hammer of God.

The red did not totally blank his vision. He saw the struggling figures, arms motionless in mecha claws. Carefully, with limpid clarity, he aimed and shouted the fire codes.

The Sentinels startled as the missiles shrieked in; most impacted within a couple of feet of them. One did hit, shattering the eye of the armor and reducing the head inside to pulp as it detonated. As the claws loosened in death, its captive broke and rolled as the mecha began to slump to the ground, her red-and-white hair flying. The rifle, attached to the arm, broke free, and the slender figure dove for it.

Matthew Ulm dove, his rifle fixed and prepared to fire, noting the tall figure in front of the slumped. Oh, he'd make this bastard talk, for certain. He'd certainly be in no position to vivisect Kevin with an H-90 to his head and his hive on the line...

He did not quite notice the zestful smile appearing on the Invid's teeth.

Suddenly, the Invid was leaping--AT him, holding himself in the air far longer than gravity would allow. A momentary glimpse of slitted pupils and wild red hair, and Matt was blinded by a hot white light.

Something clattered on the ground, and his suddenly bare right arm testified that his arm shield unit had mysteriously disappeared. The bar of energy completed its arc, and Matt was barely out of the way before it darted forward again.

Matt had watched his own share of Star Wars--he did not need to see the light's relationship to the clenched fist of the Invid to have an idea of the implications.

That's not possible!

There was a hissing sound, and a smoking wisp where part of his foot armor had been. The cat-eyed Invid chuckled, enjoying himself.

Matthew growled and charged, firing another missile.

It did not even hit, detonating instead somewhere on the chamber ceiling. Inhumanly fast, the Invid darted in; even with the mecha's assistance the lieutenant barely made out of the path of a cut that would

have disemboweled him. Underneath the fury, a tiny portion of fear was making itself known.

My god, nothing's that fast, is it? What is this thing? The servos on one leg had been damaged; chest heaving, Matt had to cope with the Cyclone's weight on the weakened appendage, Fighting to cope, he made for the air. The psionic weapon slashed at him again, and he was nearly killed in the blaze of horror that broke his focus.

He was hovering. So was the Invid, his feet invisibly supported several meters off terra firma.

Under the hatred, Ulm was beginning to get the small cold sensation that he was in farther over his head than he'd thought.

Grinning, the black-and-scarlet figure lunged at him again.

Siaga, her teeth bared and sweat sopping her uniform, aimed and convulsively fired at the Invid mecha still holding the humans, their having not reacted yet. The two shrills of shock and abrupt silence were hardly even noticed in the vast orchestra of agony that still shook her psyche from her willing communion with Kayagh's torment. The Terrans needed no prompting; as the Sentinel shells fell, they were running, the male human taking up one of the dropped energy shields.

Pain exploded through her, true pain, rending her guts, scalding her flesh. She began to fall, quite helplessly, the weapon falling from her loosened hands, but not before she saw a fleeting image of Oryo'i, pistol still raised, face twisted in anger and anguish.

As she folded to the floor, she saw another image; the yellow-haired young female, her eyes wide and mouth opened, changing her direction and running for her, a hand reached out.

With her fading strength, Siaga of the Invid extended her own, the green-smeared digits spreading as though in supplication.

Dennis saw the charcoal-armored female begin to turn away, catch the sight of him, and the the amber eyes beginning to widen in shock. She whipped around and fired, but the discharges were harmlessly absorbed by the energy lens still projected by the shield.

Then, there was the shock of impact as his body impacted hers, and his face was full of a hissing, clawing, white-haired demon, her pistol spinning out of use.

My God, she's strong, he thought, as he pushed the shield forward, trying to prevent her nails going for his eyes. Ducking under her grasp, he made one final lunge, dropping the shield.

She staggered forward, and before she could react, he hit her precisely in the base of the skull with a clenched fist.

She was human enough to feel it; she slumped bonelessly, unconscious.

Ulm dodged the psionic blade's attack, barely in time. He could feel the chill of his left arm now stripped of its shield, the labor of his overworked, aging heart, the fight for him to get enough oxygen to his system. The sensations were lost in the deadly dance of strike and counterstrike, defend and move, and the wrath that still deadened his mind to all but killing his opponent. At another level, he knew that even with the Super Saber's CADS systems both out and whirring, periodic discharge of missiles and the the Cyclone's power behind him, he was outclassed.

Badly.

The Invid's unarmored figure leapt and sidestepped like a phantom devil, constantly out of Matt's reach, often almost within contact, if only to taunt and take further bits off. Trying to hit him was like trying to damage a flame. The speed and power were unbelievable. Nothing human was that fast, but his opponent was not.

Matt was aware that he was being backed up against a wall; he tried to buy time, as the Kulagi toyed with him, shaving his battlesuit off piece by piece.

Elsewhere, in the paralyzed silence of the hive, its normal function and direction lost in the uproar in the audience chamber, the Sulagi Miragai was prodded, sweating, into a vast room.

"What are you doing, human? If you are going to--"

There was a sharp jab into his back, felt even through the padding of his flightsuit. "Shut up, or I'll by god shut you up," the clear female soprano snapped. Swallowing, her prisoner complied.

They were unchallenged as they crossed the floor, the room dead silent. "What's going on?" Gwen wondered to herself. "Did the others cause THAT much of a fuss?" The two made their way closer to a huge glowing hemisphere in the center of the room. The human in the Cyclone wondered what might be the best spot, and then--

Her eyes lit on a small object situated within a couple feet of the hive power core. Urging Miragai along, she got within visual distance.

"Oh my g--" she choked.

"What?"

Getting herself under control, she said quite clearly. "It's a bomb."

"WHAT?" Miragai half-screamed, forcing a further jab into his back with the H-90.

"I think my CO got here first," she explained in a low, rapid voice. "There's a timer on that thing; there's less than forty-five minutes left before everything in this hive explodes. If we stay, we go with it."

"Can you stop it?"

"I ain't no bomb-squad, Invid. If I tried, I might trigger it prematurely. We humans make damn sure nobody hostile can get away with tryin' to disable it without gettin' it in the face." And I'm not gonna even try, she added silently.

Too late, she realized what Miragai was trying to do. Even as he made mental contact, before she could fire, his face transfixed with horror.

"No! What has he done?? How could he?" he said in English, gasping in reaction, doubling over as he protected his midriff. Her rage replaced by astonishment, Gwen stared as he panted, shuddering.

After a few seconds, he seemed to break the contact and straightened again, his face taut with hurt. Emotionlessly, he said, "I will go with you. There is nothing left here for me."

Even more astonished, Gwen gaped underneath her helmet at this sudden change in loyalty. She had no idea what had just happened in his telepathic communion with the hive; but the reaction had been too sincere to be faked. And somehow, she felt curiously resistant to leaving him here to die with the rest of his hive. Miragai had done nothing as far as she could see to warrant that quick a judgement. Especially after Amanda...

Finally, she said in a brittle voice, "Keep in front of me, and for both our sakes, you better find the fastest way out."

Matt wheeled crazily, his directional thrusters now gone. Of his Super Saber, little was left except

shredded and disabled servoes and fragmented plating, for the Invid had put in many a blow. The CADS were gone, his missile systems worthless, nothing left except the last dregs of his backpack thrusters helping him to elude that deadly blade. Still, Ulm himself was untouched. He had a fair idea why, and from the sadistic smile on his opponent's face, it looked to be right on target.

Ulm got too close; a hiss, and suddenly he was falling.

The impact nearly knocked him out. He rolled to his back, just in time to see the tall figure hit the floor and stand over him. Detached, Ulm watched the white light-bar swing back for the last stroke at his neck.

There was a roar.

Shkud staggered, the blade diappearing, a look of shock on his face. He put up a hand to his side, then brought it up.

"What?" he said blankly.

There were two more reports; Shkud arched, then began to topple. Something warm splashed Ulm's face and armor in tune with the blasts as the Invid's side erupted in a green splatter. Ulm barely managed to roll out of the way as the Kulagi nearly fell on him.

Shkud writhed in anguish, no longer feeling anything below his chest, trying to drag himself back to his feet and failing. Desperately, he attempted to activate his healing abilities, but it was too little--even as he tried, his bodily systems eroded and shut down.

Through dimming vision and perception, he managed to turn his face in the direction where the shots had come from.

No! *It could... not be! Killed, by that? No, I can... not... will... not...*

"A present from my sister, you son of a bitch," the human said thickly, and fired one last time.

Shkud, Lord of the Kulagi, slipped several feet across the floor from the impact of the blast, smearing blood in his wake, and settled in final stillness, the snake eyes open and glassy.

Silence slammed a lid over all, except for the thud of bootsoles as the young woman dropped the heavy Invid rifle and made a beeline for the other figure curled on the floor.

Miraculously, it moved as Amanda skidded to her knees by it, the knees of her coverall soaked in green fluid. The fogging yellow eyes opened and focused on her in an effort; Siaga may have smiled.

"Hold your peace human...nothing...you can do..." The hands clamped over her midriff moved; Amanda knew from what lay under it that there was nothing in either Invid or Human science that would help Siaga now.

"S-siaga...I'm so sorry..."

Siaga did smile. "You grieve...for me? Young one...better death as a Sulagi...than life...as a drone... Little while...I knew your life...knew to feel...grateful for that...Amanda--save...my brother..." A gout of fluid came up from her mouth, and she went limp, the wide sulfur eyes fixing.

Amanda raised her hand and closed Siaga's eyes, the reality crashing in on her. Shooting to her feet, she repeated, "Save my brother--" the Invid's last words reaching her all of a sudden. She nearly vomited at she saw the wreckage still sagging against the opposite wall.

Matt and Dennis were already there; a couple of quick pulls on the trigger released the cuffs from the wall. Dennis staggered as he caught the falling weight in his arms; the bloody body barely twitched in response. A arm flopped to the side, revealing the slicing wound the late Lord Shkud had opened there, dribbling Invid ichor.

"We can't carry him like this, we'll kill him!" Dennis spat.

"We'll die if we stay, Zinnert!" Ulm barked hoarsely back. "I set a bomb at the power core, and it has less than thirty minutes before it goes off. We'll have to take our chances."

"The Alpha's half a mile off," Zinnert said. "Sunshine apparently anticipated our coming and had the reception planned here in advance. I'm just hoping that after our earlier fights the thing can still fly."

"What about her?" Matt said, indicating the unconscious Oryo'i.

"We haven't time to get her too," Zinnert replied. "Come on."

Amanda managed to grab Oryo'i's pistol. "I'll take point."

Matt nodded shortly, removing the pieces of his ruined Cyclone from his CVR. "You take his legs, I'll take his upper body." Dennis complied and the two managed to lift Kevin's ravaged figure.

The next several minutes extended to numb eternity, as they tried to move as fast as they could with their burden, which only occasionally moaned. There were a couple of bad spots were they thought Enforcers or Sentinels were about to shoot them down, but they all seemed unmotivated and confused, not even noting the humans sneaking by. To Amanda's eyes they all looked as though they were acting like chickens with their heads cut off; she was more correct than she knew.

The Alpha was still in gerwalk where Dennis had left it, there having not been enough time for the Invid to do anything about it. The Assault Battloid next to it was still undamaged, but the only one who could pilot it was currently bleeding onto the hive floor. Amanda leapt up into the rear cockpit, tearing out the medkit and shuddering as the two men handed up Kevin's limp figure. The stench of ichor was overwhelming. As Amanda began frantically to staunch the wounds of the softly whimpering Invid, the two officers crammed into the front and began to bring the engines to life.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Dennis swore. "Lot of bleed from the prior damage-- I hope the Shadow system's still functional."

"Fifteen minutes left," Matthew said, checking gauges. "Let's get the hell out."

The engines whined to life, and the craft began to lift.

The gray palled from black, bringing a horrific headache along with it. Muttering, she shook her head and opened her eyes to dead silence.

For a couple of minutes, all she could do was stare.

Then, she shakily rose to her feet, still not believing, her eyes on the two bodies lying there.

The Kulagi lay half on his side in a pooling smear of his own blood, his uniform soaked black with it where it contacted the floor and his long red hair clotted with it. For the first time in several years, his countenance wasn't contorted in pride, hate, or anger. The face wore a vaguely surprised look, the eyes open and dilated. From the look of the gaping hole in his side, he was quite thoroughly dead.

Siaga was curled up in another pool of fluid, her hands verdegris with drying ichor as they lay loosely over the gut wound that had killed her. The eyes were closed and the face peaceful, the lips curved, as though savoring some quiet, deep triumph.

Oryo'i stood, looking numbly on the carnage, unable to make a coherent thought.

"So, Shkud, is this the superiority to humanity you so claimed? Slaughtering ourselves as they do?" The corpses on the floor made no response.

Numbly, she turned on her heel and began to run.

The Alpha limped through the hive passageways, making for the first open passage. Abruptly, light--daylight--blazed around them. The Alpha accelerated as far as safe, unimpeded by the hive shields. Scouts started to rise and make a half-hearted pursuit, but the Alpha left them behind.

"We're out," Ulm declared. "Only a couple of minutes left. We've got to get a couple of miles away before the blast wave hits. How's he doing?"

Blankly, the back seat replied, "I don't know. There's so many wounds--I've only managed to stop the bleeding on the worst of them. Internal damage, and his blood pressure's too low."

"Shit," Ulm said. The interior of the cockpit stank like a compost heap. Amanda did not reply, instead cutting off yet another gauze strip to close the seven-inch-long slashes, her hands smeared with reeking fluid. There was another whimper of pain as she jogged his snapped ribs, but binding them would have to wait. His eyes suddenly opened, staring at empty space.

"Who's there?" the barely audible whisper came. "Get out of my head..."

"Kevin," Amanda said softly, "It's all right. It's me. I'm here."

There was a slight flicker, although the scout's eyes still did not see her. "Mandy? Is that you?" His lips moved in a smile. "Good..." The eyelids closed as he slipped back into unconsciouness.

"Hope Gwen managed to get out," Ulm said to himself.

"What?" Dennis yelped. "You brought along---"

"Her means of apology." Ulm murmured, nursing the protesting VAF along. "I don't think we should worry that much. Gwen's a born survivor, and she had the same plan in mind as me. I believe in her power to get out."

"Oh, shit," Zinnert muttered. "We've got company. One lone bogie still on our tail, and Marauder by designation."

"Oryo'i," Ulm said detachedly, bringing the image up on visuals. "Looks like she's in a bad way herself. Better gun it."

"Fantoma," Dennis swore. "Doesn't she know when to quit?" The Alpha was making headway; the Invid craft falling behind. "You'd think, considering what her dear lord was, she'd've--"

The last second disappeared from the LCD screen, and space dissolved into plasma. The hive power core gone, the chain reaction roared through the rest of the hive with lightning swiftness. In seconds, it was lost in a hemisphere of energy, taking transmission towers and Invid patrols with it.

Oryo'i screamed as the hive's death hit her, and then again, seconds after, as the blast wave rocked her craft, nearly causing the battered mecha to smash into the ground. She was forced to fight to stay aloft, all thoughts of pursuit forgotten.

The pain slammed into Kevin O'Shea's lacerated psyche at the same time. Hundreds upon hundreds of the minds of Invid, Iigaari and Malorosm, Iigai and Torab crying out, as they faded into brilliant oblivion, their ghosts left behind to torment him.

It was too much, and he was so tired, and so consumed with self-hate.

The loving darkness opened its arms, and took him in.

Amanda screamed in terror as the bloody figure on her lap convulsed violently and half sat up, eyes wide open, back arched and face contorted in a silent scream. As though a switch had been flipped, the body went limp again, eyes still open, chest still rising and falling, but with not a hint of personality left aware behind the blue irises...

Around a corner, two faces peeked into the massive, freezing hollow of the old ampitheatre. One was gray-eyed and light-skinned, the other lower down and ebony dark, eyes flitting.

"It's almost noon," the upper one said in a low rumble. The lower face nodded.

"Everyone's relocated now to Base Two. There's that steam-tunnel network we can hide in. You have any idea on where are available spots to move?"

Gerald shook his head, his breath steaming. "Not yet, Miranda. We'll give another twenty-four hours, just in case."

"Optimist."

"I try hard." Wilson did not seem convinced. "Did the kid settle down?"

"A little. That was a helluva fit this morning."

"I have to admit, 'Randa--she's weird. Any ideas why?"

"This coming from someone whose father was forty feet tall?" The big man winced at the woman's cool tone. "I still haven't ruled out what those Flower spores did to her."

"They're it." Miranda nodded at Gerald's statement. "Let's keep the sensors peeled."

"Doi's looking on the radar. She'll tell us."

Minutes passed and the two, hiding against possible hostile sensors, began to relax in boredom. They jerked awake at the hailing beep on their coms.

Wilson replied and listened, his pale eyes going wide.

"Gotcha, Sherry. We'll meet the crew here." The halfbreed looked up at Miranda. "She just got a bogie with the right callnumber. It's them."

Miranda's eyes widened, hope, for the first time, returning to them. "All?"

Gerald shook his head. "Don't know."

The next fifteen minutes were eternity, as a couple of the medics and repair personnel snuck up to wait with them. At long last, a low rumble built to thunder, and the hole in the roof was eclipsed.

Miranda bit back a swearword as she saw the Alpha drop through. The thing looked as though it had taken on an entire hive; the external hull gouged and scratched as though claws had been trying to peel it off, and burned in a couple places with plasma hits. It settled, and she was running to the craft as the canopy began to lift.

Two figures got out first; if the mecha looked bad, the experience of seeing the two CO's was infinitely worse: smeared with drying green fluid, swaying, eyes looking as though they'd stared into the maw of Hell itself. Involuntarily, she swore at the sight. If they hadn't taken on the Invid race single-handedly, she didn't know what they...she squashed the notion. What the hell did she think they'd done, gone macrameing or deconstructing Henry James?

"Amanda?"

Ulm said hoarsely. "We got her."

Gerald glanced at the Alpha, eyes widening in fear, and Ulm interjected, "Alive. But..."

"You need medics?"

Dennis fought with himself and blurted out, "It's not her, it's Kevin."

Whirling on his heel, the CO turned and began to lope back to the tattered VAF-8R. Ulm, utterly exhausted, eyes glimmering with fear, took a sling stretcher from one of the meds without another word and followed him. Miranda and Gerald tried to follow them and got a look of sharp reproof.

The two shifted the mecha to pure fighter and then began to move around in the rear cockpit. Momentarily, the others heard Mandy's voice, but so ragged it was nearly unrecognizable. The two core members on the floor stared at each other, completely in the dark at to what was going on and worrying.

After several more minutes, Ulm got out, supporting and carefully helpig lower the stretcher and the body it supported to the ground; Zinnert cautiously negotiated himself and his end out as well. Behind them, the battered face of Amanda Pierson popped up for the first time, her eyes red and a huge, blackening blotch spreading across one freckled cheek. She was shaking. Her coverall was covered with ichor as well. Fresh ichor.

Miranda and Gerald loped over to the burdened COs, attempting to offer help. Miranda, swallowing, was the first one to reach them.

For a second, she thought the limp figure on the stretcher had had a run-in of the violent kind with the enemy, splattering his shredded coverall, and there was an instant of pride in what Kevin had done. It was not until she heard Gerald Wilson's single, heartfelt curseword that she saw.

The dark-haired head of the body rolled to the side, the eyes open and blank, living but not much beyond that.

Out of one corner of Kevin O'Shea' s mouth liquid trickled, etching a pine-green line down his chin.

"Sweet Jesus God," she said.

Lady Asaav, an urgent report, the Brain said. *Sulagi Oryo'i has just contacted with terrible news.*

The figure in the orbital hive's control chamber straightened in surprise. "What?"

A small group of humans managed to infiltrate a major hive in Lord Shkud's domain, in order to rescue a human prisoner. Shkud was there at the time, and had taken most of them captive for interrogations. Somehow, the humans managed to destroy the hive and assassinate Shkud.

"Shkud? Assassinated?" she blurted out in incomprehension, for only one of very few times since the beginning of the occupation. This was unheard of. "How?"

Not yet fully known. Oryo'i was still suffering minor shock from the hive's destruction. But apparently the human still free had managed to interrupt Kulagi Shkud's questioning of a renegade Sulagi among them.

Asaav had regained her composure. "Unbelievable," she murmured, shaking her head, the chin-length pale green hair fluffing out as she did so. "A renegade, even. What madness has seized them?" Restlessly, the brown and burgundy figure paced restlessly on the floor, the only sign of showing her agitation. "What an incredible tragedy. Have the others been notified yet?"

As we speak, Lady.

The female Kulagi continued to pace, her aristocratic brows furrowed in thought. "Contact those with whom I have been speaking with. We must figure a way of preventing this in the future. We meet tomorrow, an orbit from now. Extend my consolations to the others on Shkud's death."

Done.

"You are dismissed. I must think."

The Brain's presence was gone, leaving Asaav mentally alone.

So he was no more. A major setback for the occupation as a whole, for his...aberrancies beside, Shkud's means had always managed to get the most yield of Flowers out of his segment of the planet. It had been his ideas and policies that had made the rest of the Kulagi adopt their current policy for the occupation. Yes, on the whole, it was deleterious.

But for her own goals...

Asaav stopped, her mind brewing, her face closed.

After a minute, the brushed-aluminum eyes with their slashes of pupil narrowed, and her lips curved in private amusement.

A bitter night coated the woods. The snow had decided to quit falling, but the cloud-cover overhead darkened the night, unbroken except for a small campfire. There were two huddled around it, but no word was spoken.

"D'you want some tea?" one said.

The second, shivering in a blanket, made a face and then seeing the steam rising off the top, reconsidered. A hand reached out and a mug was placed in it.

"I can get you some more cold gear if you like. Sorry nothin' my size fits you."

"No," the second said at last. "I'll be all right. The flightsuit was made for extremes in temperature."

"I'm...sorry," Gwen said.

"So am I," Miragai said in exhaustion. "You can sleep. I promise I won't escape."

The amber eyes slanted over, deliberated, and looking at the semi-collapsed figure, compromised mentally by deciding to fall asleep after whenever he decided to. She nearly nodded off, and dimly realized the idea might be sabotaged by her own weariness.

"Human?"

She jerked back awake. "Mhhn?"

"What will happen now?"

She had not exactly been thinking of direction when somehow she had managed to tear out of the hive with less than twenty minutes to spare, praying that the arms wrapped around her middle would not decide to strangle her all of a sudden. Nor had she been thinking when the horizon behind them flared blindingly, and her "prisoner" had made a hoarse noise of pain. Even now, his pale green eyes were grayed with reaction.

Now she had to think.

She had played Judas to the Elms, and as Ulm had implied, they would never trust her again. They might pretend to, but in a scenario where it was truly needed, when lives might depend on it...

There was no way she could ever return. Especially with her involuntary traveling companion. She strongly doubted they would welcome the Invid with her.

She remembered that the hive lay--had lain--to the northeast from the base.

She sighed. "North. We head north tomorrow."

A couple of hundred miles to the south, a lone figure made its way through the icy woods, trying to move as quickly as possible without running. It had discovered in the past few months that such movements in certain areas attracted unfriendly attention. While the traveler had little fear of being killed, the kind of things she might have to do might attract even more unfriendly attention, which was the last thing she wanted at the time. She was desperately needed elsewhere; being sidetracked would not help anyone.

The furtive moon, peeking through the clouds, picked stars of reflection out of her hair as she moved.

Sweat trickled down into Oryo'i's collar, and she inserted a finger into it to try and cool her neck off. She, however, was full aware that this section of the Orbital Hive's mean temperature was not all that warm. Her perspiring was for entirely different reasons.

It was the hardest effort she ever made in her current life, but at last, she managed to put a foot foward, and stepped through the door and into the audience chamber of Kulagi Asaav. For a moment, she saw the ruling Invid's tall figure, and her heart contracted as though in a clenching fist.

She was down on on knee even before Asaav noticed her presence, eyes fixed on the floor, her pulse thumping so loudly she felt it could be heard throughout the entire room, the knowledge of her shame constant in her mind. She had allowed the murder of one of the Kulagi and the destruction of a major hive and over a thousand Invid, and she was fully expecting not to walk out being able to pilot a Gamun. She would be lucky if she were allowed to live.

"I have come as you have ordered, Lady Asaav. As the Kulagi with the closest geographical area of control to my lord, you have full juristiction over me, and my--actions." Oryo'i was impressed; she had managed to say it with only the slightest tremor to her voice. She could feel Asaav's attention on her.

I must look a sight, Oryo'i thought. Her face was bruised from striking portions of the cockpit in her desperate battle to stay alive in her foundering mecha, as it had been battered by the blast wave of the hive's destruction; a battle that she thought was quite pointless in retrospect. At least, she would not have had to face this.

"Sulagi Oryo'i." the calm, unaffected voice said. "Thank you for being prompt. We have business to attend to.

"In this conflict, your ruling lord died as an indirect result of your actions, as did many of our kind. However, I must illustrate the fact that the root cause was your capture of the human female, an action in and of itself a good thing, as we must need to learn more of this species' battle tatics in order to firm our own plans. However, it cannot be helped that humans seems to be strangely--comitted to each other, often to foolish extents. Nor did you know that in addition to the initial rescue attempt, a second had entered, unknown by you or the others of your hive. Furthermore, none of us had any idea the humans were being helped by a traitor to us, and you most certainly did not. So it is not something that was under your control.

"Our lamented brother Shkud was well known to be--intransigent--on certain things. One of them being, of course, his relentless persecution of you once you failed to please him. Unfortunately, his failure was to see what you were trying. Or what was aiding the humans."

Asaav smiled. Allow the Sulagi to think what she was thinking for a little while longer, in order to ensure my hold over her. The results ought to be most...rewarding. The Sulagi was still hunched in her kneel, waiting for the blow to fall.

She paused for a couple of minutes.

"Shkud's failure was to see that events might happen that would not favor his plans, or that an accident might temporarily thwart his goals and that of the occupation. He could not conceive of events going wrong, especialy concerning himself. This made him completely incapable of seeing what you had tried to attempt, and in fact ultimately deprived him of his life."

Oryo'i was stunned. A Kulagi, admitting that one of their own was flawed? Asaav continued.

"I wonder what he might have thought had your original plan had went as intended. It was without sanction, true, but it was created with a great deal of foresight as to what might be needed in the future in combatting the native population. Those are talents we need. Shkud would most certainly have deevolved you had he been alive--" a shiver trembled the Sulagi's slender frame, "but that is a foolish and hot-headed waste of resources." Silence again, then:

"Rise, Sulagi Oryo'i."

Oryo'i complied. The Kulagi's silver, inhuman eyes were neutral, but there seemed no censure. There was movement behind her, but years under Shkud's control had taught Oryo'i to keep her attention on a superior at all times.

"We of the Kulagi are now one less of our number. Your lord's death will have repercussions in control and territory issues, unless someone else is willing to take up his post. And the remaining twenty-three of us have our own pressing issues."

Oryo'i blinked foolishly, trying to understand Asaav's point. Her concentration was broken, as she saw the sources of the movement resolve in the dimness to five other tall humanoid figures, all clad in the distinctive uniform of the Kulagi. Her heart going cold, she thought, *Mother, she's going to deevolve me after all. But I expected it, did I not?*

A smile, at long last, crossed Asaav's glacial features. Numbly, Oryo'i felt the background level of power rise, as the other five moved foward...

"Oryo'i, the Council has deliberated on this issue, and I have added in my input. Due to my earlier work, it has been agreed on. YOU will be that replacement."

"WHAT?" Oryo'i yelped in pure shock. Asaav did not take note, as the power suddenly spiked and energy began to form a nimbus around her.

"Oryo'i, prepare yourself for bio-reconstruction and transmutation!"

Confused, the subordinate Invid almost fled, but it was too late.

The other five Kulagi began to draw on their own immense power, and to feed it to the Kulagi in front of them, Asaav's figure suddenly going incandescent with the concentrated energy given her. As the focus, she shaped and directed it, toward the figure in front of her.

She lifted her hands, and began.

An intense blaze shot out of each palm, the protoculture-driven energy catching Oryo'i as she stood in astonishment, enveloping her.

The form she had known for six-and-a-half Terran years fell away, leaving nothing in the firestorm save a globe of light; her consciousness disembodied, kept coherent by the psychokinetic matrix holding it in place. Carefully controlling it, Asaav, with the help of the others, began bit by bit to reconstruct Oryo'i's genetic code. In seconds, a figure began reforming out of the primal tumult.

An indistinguishable time later, the energy output faded and disappeared, leaving afterimages in its wake.

The figure that had reappeared out of the Invid energy swayed, murmuring in confusion. Oryo'i blankly felt herself. Nothing seemed different than from before, at first. What did they do? Something seemed different about the uniform that had reappeared with her--a different color pattern. She felt taller, by a few inches...

Asaav's mind-voice entered her thoughts. *I would remind you that this was approved by the Council on my recommendation, Oryo'i. I sincerely hope that you would act appropiately about that in future events,*

when dealing with me. Please do not betray my trust in you.

What approved? Oryo'i thought. The slender hands seemed unchanged, but her figure, slimmer? Or taller. Where were her bruises? And where did this new and boundless energy come from? She'd been exhausted; now she felt as though she could take on a battalion of humans unaided...

"Welcome, Kulagi Oryo'i, to our ranks."

With another shock, and beginning exhaltation, Oryo'i understood.

She pushed her silver hair out of orange, cat-slitted eyes, and nodded for the first time to Asaav and the five others as equal to equals.

And she smiled.

End Book One: Lightning Crashes

Miracles will happen as we speak
Though we're never gonna survive, unless we give it our crazy

In a sky full of people
Only some want to fly
'Cause they're not crazy

Will you give if we cry
will we live
or will we die?

Jaded hearts
heal with time
Shoot the heart so we can stop the bleeding

Solitary brother,
Is there still a part of you that wants to live?
Solitary sister,
Is there still a part of you that wants to give?

If we try and live our lives the way we wanna be...
There is no other love like ours...

Whatsoever I've hated
Has come to life
Whatsoever I've fought against
became my life

--**Soundgarten** *"Fell on Black Days"*

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DANDELIONS

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dennis' neck was screaming bloody murder, but he completely ignored the fact as he stared in naked shock behind him. Out of many things, this was something he had not expected.

It took a second for his eyes to adjust.

"You," he hissed.

"Me."

Ignoring the daggers Zinnert was glaring at him, the CVR-armored man in the copilot's seat took his feet off the back of the pilot's seat and took his helmet from his lap. He looked at it for a second, then placed it over his head, visor up. The untanned pallor of his face seemed to gleam in the faint light of the console.

Dennis glared as he began to massage his abused neck. "O'Shea, what in the hell are you doing back there?"

Kevin looked frank. "Waiting for you."

"You--" Zinnert could not find a good phrase to finish the word with and fumbled.

"It's early December, Dennis. You aren't going to catch flies this time of year." The tone, while light, was completely belied by the unnerving stare of the pale blue eyes. "Like I said, waiting for you."

Dennis at last found something. "O'Shea, you're not authorized to fly an Alpha."

"I know. That's why I was waiting for you."

"Why'd you think I'd be here?" Dennis challenged, feeling completely out of his depth and belying his presence in the Veritech.

"Simple deduction, Dennis. Knowing you, I figured that after what I said to you earlier, you'd either be so eaten up by remorse you'd eventually do something stupid to make amends, or you were so whipped out of compassion you weren't worth following. And seeing as this is the single most powerful mecha in our arsenal..." Kevin punctuated it with a half-seen shrug.

"Of all the manipulative--" Dennis sputtered.

"Believe me, I wasn't orginally flaying you for that express purpose. But at the time," Kevin's eyes were hard, "I meant what I said." He might have smiled in the darkness. "So I figured it might be a smart idea to get out here and wait for you."

"How'd you get in?"

"Hey, I'm a spy. I'm supposed to be good at this sort of thing. Besides, there's quite a few entrances around here, and considering it's common knowledge Matt and you are the only ones with the capability to fly Variable Fighters in this dump--" Kevin shrugged again and leaned foward, cracking his knuckles and stretching.

Dennis sighed, feeling foolish. "O'Shea--chivalry is all well and good but--"

"You're in the Alpha too." Kevin pointed out. Dennis winced.

"Kevin, two-fifths of the Elms charter is in this cockpit. One of us shouldn't be risking himself like this. You're the single most experienced scout in this group, and if you get killed--which is damn likely, considering the situation--a lot of know-how gets buried with you."

Kevin sighed. "Pretty good, Dennis, but are you really suggesting we ought to go out and get somebody else for this little suicide mission at one in the morning? Matt has the biggest heart I know of, but you know he'll stop you. Besides--speaking of experience, don't you have a few years in the Sentinels War under your belt? That should amount to something."

Zinnert grunted noncommittally. After a second, Kevin made a wondering sound.

"Damn. You don't think it's worth all that much. You really don't. M'god." Dennis winced again depite himself, hoping Kevin could not see in the darkness.

Jesus, how does he know?

"Anyway, Dennis--" Kevin let out a shaky sigh, "there really are a couple good reasons I suggest you dragging me along with you. Other than the fact Amanda means something to me." He sucked in another breath, loud in the dead cold silence in the Alpha cockpit.

"You know those energy fences around protoculture farms? Invid use a variant of 'em to hold prisoners in hives too, human prisoners. Touching them is pain itself, not to mention taking them down is more than a matter of flinging a few GR missiles at them. It might kill the prisoner if you tried, too."

"And there's no way of unlocking it, I take it."

Kev swallowed and took in a shaky breath. "Bright move, Dennis. Right. Unless you suddenly get psychically gifted. And it also helps to have somebody to guard your ass meanwhile too."

Dennis grunted. "If we don't actually get killed trying to storm the hive alone first."

Kevin licked his lips and drew in a breath. "Actually, I know of ways to get us in that way too, Dennis."

Dennis looked over. "What?"

"I said, I've got ways of getting us in. Or at least, close enough that we can hit the place."

Dennis' brow furrowed. "Are you crazy? If they took her to the sort of hive I have in mind, O'Shea, they're going to have linebacker and clam patrols around it thick as leaves. We couldn't dream of getting

close enough without alerting them."

Kevin stared at the lieutenant, the sheef fixedness of his gaze, and something contained therein, causing something to go cold in the pit of Zinnert's gut.

Kevin O'Shea said, softly: "Not if I know they're coming. Which I will."

Dennis looked blank, and said, "What? Oh, yeah, the recon equipment in the back ought to help in locating patrols. Nice job for the Icarus." A rememberance hit him then. "But do you know how to use it? I don't think you've managed to see it yet. In fact, have you ever used this stuff? I thought you came in as a civilian."

"Did."

"Well, if you don't know how to use the equipment, how do you say you'll know when patrols'll be coming around? The only way outside hardware to detect Invid, as far as I know is another...another--"

Dennis couldn't think of how to complete the thought; his mental footing lost.

In a timeless instant, he was devoid of all thought, the sweat breaking out on his forehead, vaguely aware his neck still throbbed. Mouth gaping, he stared blankly at the figure in the back.

For over six years, he had had a set conception of the people surrounding him, an image which he thought had been concrete and solid. Now, for the first time, he got the feeling it was an optical illusion, a picture of two facial silhouettes staring at each other.

"Jesus Christ. Jesus H. Christ."

What he had thought was the First Scout of the Elms had just become a vase.

"God, you're slow on the uptake, Dennis." he heard.

Yeah, Zinnert thought blankly. *Yeah, I guess I am.*

"Aaaaghh!"

Amanda jerked back her hand, shaking in sheer hurt, trying to examine her hand. Where she expected char was only smooth, freckled skin.

She tried to reach her hand out again, but could not force it near the light bars again. Her will said yes, but her instincts would not, could not make her body cooperate.

She had no idea how long she had been at this, but the terrorized knowledge of her situation had made her try over and over in spite of the pain that seemed to increase with each time. Agony or no, it was better than sitting and being driven to near madness with the knowing.

She licked her lips, knowing that it had to had been several hours at the very least since she had had anything to drink. Her mouth felt like tissue paper. There was no water in the cell with her. She wondered if it would have been wise to drink it had there been, and knew probably not.

She probably would have anyway.

Shaking with the constant roar of adrenalin in her system, she folded to the ground, her hands supporting clammy forehead, and she could not help but remember.

What did I ever to do to be in this position? Why was I born to be here?

She supposed that in a perverse way, it was just as well Grace hadn't lived to be as old as Amanda herself. Knowing one to be the indirect cause of the death of one's mother through a postpartum infection would be cause enough for guilt. And Gracie had been such a happy little girl, with freckles as profuse as Amanda's but with their father's light ginger-red hair...

That led to the imprint of a pair of hauntingly human blue eyes on her mind. Although, she supposed, not quite as much as being trapped in the position of choosing to kill one's own people or choosing to see the perversion of a sacred promise. She could hardly envy Kevin's position.

Like Antigone, she thought, having read the play a week earlier at Miranda's insistence.

And Gwen's bitter, envious countenance... what had Amanda ever done to earn that woman's hate?

She supposed that no matter, something probably would have happened. Gwendolyn's betrayal was only at a convenient juncture.

From that, she went into a bleak reminscence and walk through her memory, her family life, their gardening projects and pea hybridizations, through the Elms, the Invid, humanity, Kevin, and the distinctions thereof. An indistinct time later, she raised her head again, thinking that perhaps she had forgotten the agony of the first few times enough to try again. It was hardly worse than the agony eating her up inside, and the constant war to forget what most likely awaited her once the Invid decided to return their intentions to her.

She began to rise again, but her ruminations had taken longer than she had thought. Her legs and the old

injury in her ankle were half-fallen asleep, and did not fully cooperate. Stumbling, she tripped and fell face foward onto the light grating.

Her scream of indescribable pain sawed through the hive tunnel for what seemed miles. Clawing and wailing, she rolled away from the light and toward the back of her cell, tears pouring out of her eyes. In the back of her mind, she definitely knew she was not going near that grating ever, ever again.

Oblivious to the outside, Amanda did not notice the scuffling from the other side of the passageway and the half-vocalized, irritated complaints emitting from the depths of the shadows within. It was only when Amanda had finished touching every square inch of her face to see it was still there that her viridian eyes popped open, rimmed with moisture. She began to breathe harder, imagining horrors that Invid hives might contain.

She did not expect, of all things, a decidedly feminine voice from the other side, speaking in perfect English. It seemed irritated.

"Will you be quiet and cease that demented ape-screaming? Some are trying to sleep in this accursed place."

Amanda rolled to her knees, breathing hard. "Who--who is it? Who's out there?"

"Someone who's trying to ignore her sentence with blessed oblivion, fool. I take it you haven't learned yet."

A weak, sullen light suddenly sprouted from an unknown source, vaguely illuminating the area. Amanda immediately wished it had not; Invid decor was not helping her already fragile state of mind.

She could see the lineaments of her enclosure; more a niche barred over than anything, with those hellish light-bars a few inches further in than the corporeal ones double-sealing the area. Outside, the corridor stretched away and curved out of sight, about twelve feet wide at the most.

On the other side was a series of ceramic bars identical to Amanda's own, but with no light bars inside for some unknown reason. Other than that, the cell seemed identical to Amanda's own. It was dark beyond the bars.

As Amanda looked on, her heart thumping, something moved in the shadows and then into the light.

The opposing cell's occupant leaned on her bars, looking at Amanda with disgust. Amanda in her own turn looked at her, trying to understand what was going on with her battered sense of things.

Through three sets of bars and the dodgy light, she could make out a figure about three or four inches

taller than herself, and slender enough to make Amanda, whose own Germanic physique was a testament to a lifetime of lean eating and heavy exercise, seem clumsy and gross. It looked to be clad in a tight-fitting, strangely-designed bodysuit of varigated white, red and pink, which made its occupant look like a large candy cane. The curves it outlined were undeniably female.

The hair, which seemed to be a candy-apple red with heavy white streaks, went past the shoulders and framed a face that had a kind of sophisticated elfin prettiness to it. It furthered the peppermint impression. But the eyes--Amanda saw them at last, and took in a breath--there was nothing whatsoever sweet about the eyes.

The eyes glaring at her were a sulfurous lemon yellow. The thoughts they reflected were not human.

"Gah."

"Yes?"

"Uh."

"Yes?"

"Gnnh."

"My, your conversation's gifted."

"Ah..."

"Told you, there aren't any flies in December."

Silence.

"HOW LONG?" Zinnert screamed.

The fine features in the back distorted in a scowl and the blue eyes looked up toward the ceiling. "Oh God."

"How long have you...you...been posing as O'Shea?!"

The back seat erupted. "Posing--POSING as WHAT???" Zinnert suddenly felt his neck yanked yet again as he was pulled back by the collar, and he was staring face-to-goggle-eyed-face with a quite outraged

humanoid. "Dennis, let me get this through your tiny little primate mind.

"I didn't bloody well wake up one fine morning deciding how nice it would be to have green blood. Nor did I cosh some other guy that looked like me and take his place and stow him in the Mississippi. The same man you chartered with is the same guy who's talking to you now. It's been the same person for all this time. Dennis, I'm Invid. It's not something I'm terribly proud of, but It's the truth at last."

"You mean..."

"Yep."

"God." Zinnert felt like passing out seemed like a good option. I've gone and chartered with an Invid, no wonder the blood screening didn't apply to him...

"Granted, this wasn't the best time to let you know. Hell, it isn't the best time for ME to tell you it. But trust me, I think the Pod People bit's for the birds."

A couple minutes passed before Zinnert managed to organize the disaster area of his mind into seni-order. "But you and Matt..."

"A coverup. Frankly we stank at it, neither of us being inclined."

"But..."

"It's amazing," Kevin declared to the universe at large, "how the human race will delude itself into an unlikely possibility rather than accept an unpleasant truth."

"All right, all right, I get the point."

"Well, that's a relief."

"So when you--were allegedly attacked by the Scout--"

"Wasn't a Scout, Dennis. Was a Kraken. The green stuff splattered on me was from me."

Dennis did a rapid calculation, then said: "You mean Pierson knew??"

A terse nod. "That's how she found out. Which makes it even more important that we find a way to get her out of there. Dennis, I'm a traitor, and traitors are anathema to the collective. The Invid will leave no stone unturned to take me out of the picture, and they'll take the Elms out while they're at it. If they manage to...force her..."

Dennis nodded. Already, he was gaining a grip over his composure thanks to his training and mostly out of necessity. They had very little time left before Matt discovered their absence.

The sudden discovery would have to wait for later for him to understand. If O'Shea--or whatever the hell whatever he was called--had worked these many years with him, a betrayal was exceedingly unlikely.

He shoved the helmet down. "So--what hive to the northeast do you think they took her to?"

"You..."

Amanda licked her lips, sweat dribbling down her forehead, and began out of gummy lips. "You're Invid, aren't you?"

A sniff and a head inclination from the opposing cell. "Very observant you are, Human." The cold yellow eyes glared at Amanda.

Amanda considered her.

There were subtleties to this being's behavior, movements and carriage that were ticking off alarm systems to the human even after a couple minutes of encounter. Amanda was not consciously aware of the vast language of nonverbal cues human beings used to communicate with each other, but she did not need to be to let the lack of them from the other prisoner confuse her. Similarly, although the English used by the Invid was technically flawless, there was a stiltedness, a sense of maladjustment to her use of the tongue that let the other feel how alien speaking it was to the Invid female's thought processes.

She realized in an instant that there was a world of difference between Kevin and this--this--creature, for all they shared the same racial background.

It made cold sweat spring up along her spine.

Nonetheless, she was as imprisoned as Mandy herself. Interesting. She decided to find out in order to ignore her situation.

"Name's Amanda Pierson, human resistance fighter. We have a custom of introducing ourselves here. Can I ask you who you are?"

The Invid blinked, surprised. "My name is Siaga, daughter of the Invid race. I am--or rather, will shortly have been--will have been--curse your tenses--Sulagi and princess of the lower rank." A twisted grimace that might be a smile marred her lips. "Perhaps I should have kept my mind quieter, although knowing

HIM, it probably would not have made any difference."

"Him? What?"

A widening of that ill-fitting ironic grin. "Ah, I shouldn't--but I suppose it makes no difference, not to a human and in this place." The grin faded. "I had a few conflicts of interest, and thus I am here." With an elegant, long-boned hand, the woman indicated her confines with a flip of her fingers through the cross-hatch of her bars.

Distantly, Amanda wondered how the Invid humanoids went about manicures.

"Yes? I suppose I could know about that sort of thing. Your people bombing my world and all. That's conflict."

An inhuman hiss of disgust. "You know nothing of it, human."

"I know I'm probably going to--to..." she could not finish the last word. "And probably h-hurt a lot b-before."

The Invid Siaga blinked. Then, a dry, ratchety sound scratched out of her throat. It was a second before Amanda realized that it was her idea of contemptous laughter.

Anger and fear was building rapidly toward an outburst from Amanda when the cawing resolved into words. "Ah, spirit of light, you ignorant ape! At least you will have the mercy of dying!"

The laughter dissolved into chokes, and the candy-colored figure released the bars, doubling over in pain.

Shocked, the human realized she was trying to weep.

She could only watch and wait as the shudders of the crouched Siaga ceased after several minutes.

Still breathing raggedly, the Invid muttered bleakly, "At least you will die. I..." The green eyes were wide around the irises, and the yellow did not need to ask for the question unspoken when they raised.

"I will still live. Or at least something that was once I. And I wish I would die." The dry rasp sussurated through the passageway. "I am sentenced to devolution to iigaari for aiding and abetting of your kind."

"You--what?"

Spitting noises. Finally, the alien regained enough of her sense to answer. She was understandably unwilling, but what she whispered did not seem to take the human's presence into account.

"They put us down... claimed we were no more than poor prototypes of their glorious selves. We who had once been Our Mother's greatest creations, before them. HE most of all, and I had to be vassal to him. He would--no matter. He would raise my hopes... I would to anything, just for the hope of favor, for the signs of encouragement he would give me.

"And when I had broken myself trying, and expected a reward--he wouldn't! And call me a fool for believing, enjoying my pain all the while. And if I tried to reason, or be unwilling to go through with his game..." The figure shuddered, and she would say no more. "And then, after a time, he would start again. And fool that I am, I believed him, over and over."

"Who's 'he'?"

Siaga would not tell her. Instead, the lifeless whisper came on, seemingly unaware of Amanda's listening in.

"I decided if he and they would make my existence thus, I would return some on them. And so I started to observe the humans. And not report on them. I did not tell him of them. My own kin. And then I started leaving opredti cansisters where the humans would find them. And when they attacked, renewed by them, his rage grew beyond bounds.

"And I smiled. Oh, how much pleasure I got out of it. Was it what he felt when doing it to me? The satisfaction I got spiting him--"

"Who's he?"

The alien finally heard her. Hopelessly, she stared at her.

"They. The lords. The leaders. Our...masters. I should have known...one day, he would have seen too far into me..."

Devolution. Something roiled in the human's gut. It had been a favorite punishment of the Invid Regent, from Kevin's and Dennis's reports. What the alien had said would happen to her was tantamout in the Invid to rape.

In some ways, it was worse. At least sexual invasion allowed for the chance of healing, but this was a willful destruction of all that she was, with no hope of ever recovering it.

And most terribly, she would live on with only the torturing memories of what she had been. Amanda would die. Most likely in agony, but her genetic code and her soul were at least involiate.

And this talk of "masters..."

She narrowed her lips.

"Siaga?" she asked. The blank eyes stared at her. "If I get the chance--I'll make sure you'll never have to endure that. Even if I have to--kill you. I promise."

A weak light of comprehension and stillborn hope glimmered in the sulfur-colored orbs, and the Sulagi inclined her head.

"I give you my greatest thanks for that offer, Amanda Pierson. But you will not get that chance." She lifted her head. In the sudden silence, Amanda's blood turned to stone as she heard the dull thuds of treads coming toward their prison cells.

"It seems that they are coming for you." Siaga said softly.

"Amanda's just one woman," Dennis said, flipping the final switches. "It's likely they took her to the nearest hive of any note in that direction. That leaves us with a choice of two."

"Got a coin?" Dennis scowled at the back.

"I though you of all people would know where."

There was a raspberry from the back seat. "After six years, with them doing the sort of things they have? Not at all damn likely, Dennis." Kevin made humming noises as he thought. "The major hive or the biggish one a bit closer. The Lafayette hive--we may just as well slit our throats trying to get into that. Too heavily guarded. The nearer one is probably our best bet. Like you said," there was a slight, significant hesitation, "Mandy's only--an average fighter."

"Not if they get her to reveal your involvement as you said." There was an intake of breath from Kevin. "Probably a good idea to get her if we can before they break her that far."

"God, you're a callous bastard."

"I'm stating the facts. YOU said them first." Zinnert said flatly.

"Amanda wouldn't do that. She...wouldn't break. Not that quickly." Kevin said in a tone near pleading.

"Guess again," Dennis stated more gently. "The Invid on Garuda weren't above exposing prisoners to the atmosphere. And you know what happened to Pierson's and that child's community. And for us Humans,"

he sighed, the statement hitting closer home than he desired, "pain...is a powerful motivator."

Kevin said nothing for a moment, and made a noise of understanding.

There was something in the broken quality of the sound that started Zinnert's mind ticking.

Kevin spoke again. "The nearer one. Let's go out and get killed, Dennis."

Dennis chuckled. "Wonder what last words I should say."

"'It's a hundred and fifty miles to the hive, we got a full tank of protoculture, half a payload of missiles, it's dark, and we're wearing CVR?'"

Dennis gave the Invid a dirty look. "You were watching that movie again, weren't you?"

"Proud to say on my free time. Hit it."

The guard outside the hangar was a blameless sort. It could be said that his efforts to keep warm in the deepening chill of the early morning, at a time when his body temperature was at its lowest, did not leave his mind on his duties. He could hardly be accused for ignoring the very slight scuffling inside (as Kevin had stalked past his point), nor the later entrance of a known accredited officer. He was too busy shivering in misery, his heavy winter uniform and several layers of clothing nonwithstanding.

But despite that, the sudden rumble attracted his attention.

He was about to run inside and into the wide area from which the sound growled, but then the rumbling built into a sudden roar of discharged jets.

As he stared in blank wonder, there was a flare of light, and the roar suddenly unmuffled, as almost daintily, the VAF-8R Alpha seemed to float from within the gaping hole of the dome and into the frigid night skies.

For a second, as he gaped, mouth opened to the wind, the Shadow Veritech hovered above the hole in gerwalk, blue-white jets searing from the foot thrusters, like some Daliesque version of a wyvern.

The legs folded back, rotating, in the space of two seconds resolving into rear thrusters.

Then the roar boomed, and the Alpha turned into lightning. It was seen for an instant, then it streaked with incredible speed toward the horizon, curling clockwize toward the north and east as it did so.

The guard stood there stupidly, then cursed robustly, a legacy of his time as an SCA grunt. Within a second, he had flicked a switch and barked his call, receiving a muddled reply from the other end.

"Get the Lieutenant. He's going to want to hear about this."

Then he stood, looking at where the Alpha had gone, occasionally shifting as the first flakes of thin snow came down.

The thud of Invid treads was unmistakable. After a couple of minutes Amanda knew they were coming toward their area, all her fond hopes to the contrary.

Her mouth tissue-dry, she rasped, "How do you know?"

Siaga sighed. "I'm probably going to be given more time to think about my fate, while I still have the capability to. You, human, likely have information they want now."

Amanda nodded, and rose to her feet, flinching away from the energy bars. She met Siaga's eyes. "I wish there was something I could say."

"There is not." The condemned Invid was blunt as she too rose to her feet, regaining the tatters of her dignity.

The noise turned down into their corridor, coming into their sphere. Abruptly in the gloom, the jailers marched toward them.

There was two of the eight-foot-high gray-colored Enforcers, seemingly the only old mecha class retained in Invid service, marching side-by side. Neither was armed; an unarmed human was in no condition to fight back.

Between them the light limmed another figure, seemingly human.

Amanda stared on, her mind washed crystalline by the hours of fear. In a limpid emotionlessness, she considered.

Like Siaga, this Invid was of the humanoid breed and female. There the simlarities ended.

She was about the same height as Siaga, but even more leanly graceful. While identical in design to Siaga's own, this one's uniform was shadowy gray and flaming red-orange, with accents of red. Above it,

the long moonlight-colored hair and pallid, delicately severe beauty of the face seemed to hover in the darkness. The eyes, a close match to the orange scheme of her uniform, observed the observer with a clinical attitude.

Something about the colors sent off alarm bells in Amanda's head, but she was too busy at the time to take note.

"Ah, Oryo'i!" Siaga drawled in English. "I see you're here collecting. Tell me, how does our lord treat you these days? Same graciousness that I remember? Hope the benefits are worth the tasks."

The second Sulagi jerked her shoulders. "Siaga, shut up." For some reason, both were allowing Amanda to listen in.

An explosive noise of dismissal came from Siaga's lips. "What have I to lose, by this point, Oryo'i?"

"Your life, Condemned." Oryo'i snapped.

"Ah, but I'm trying for that." However she had learned the feat, the hawking noise and the well-aimed glob of spittle plopping near Oryo'i's feet underlined Siaga's challenge impressively.

The other humanoid made an obviously forced decision to ignore the Invid prisoner, and turned to the human. Amanda had barely enough time to wipe her face clean of expression; since the second Siaga had spoken the other's name, her mind had been a litany of *ohshitoshitohshitohshitohshit...*

Abruptly, the light grid vanished, leaving blinded afterimages in her eyes. She got a fragmentary vision of the Invid woman pressing a sequence on an area next to her cell. The ceramic bars retracted into the floor and into the walls. As soon as they were gone, the Enforcers moved forward, blunt claws reaching for Amanda's arms.

She stepped forward. "I can walk myself," she said.

Oryo'i's eyes narrowed to fire-colored slits.

After a second, the surprisingly melodious mezzo-soprano mused, "I don't know, human. Your kin seem elusive enough. Enforcers..." The suits moved forward again, but Amanda stepped back.

"I'll come, but I'm not going to get dragged there." It was a pathetic plea, but Amanda wanted that much of her dignity left. The Enforcers hesitated again, and Amanda took the opening to walk docilely forward, to Oryo'i's bemusement. "I'm weaponless. You saw to that, didn't you?"

This actually flustered the Invid, to Siaga's snicker. "And how would you know, human?"

"Your color scheme's that of the Battloid that captured me. I'm not as stupid as you think I am."

Oryo'i stared at her for a second longer. "Ah yes. In that case, since you so plead..." she gestured the other two guards over to stand by the human's sides, then walked behind them. "I will alllow you this. Do not attempt to escape; there is nowhere within this hive for you to hide, and I have a pistol at your back." The Enforcers began to move in unison down the corridor, and Amanda had to startle to keep up. Underneath the thud of her field boots and that of the Enforcers' treads she could hear the light pat of the Invid's soles behind her.

Siaga called out, "Give my regards to Shkud, Oryo'i!" Another spit followed on the words, then silence as the holding cells were left behind.

"Fool," Oryo'i muttered. Unlike Siaga, Terran English seemed to come more smoothly to her. "If she was to sabotage our occupation, she could have at least kept well out of his mindsight. Messy."

"If I may ask," Amanda said in a cool voice, "who is this Shkud person she was talking about?"

There was a sudden silence from her captor. Then:

"You will find out soon enough. You're being taken to him."

Gwen looked terrible.

Having a teammate captured was cause enough, but the reddened, puffy eyes and the expression anguished even in her restless slumber denoted something more than that. Ulm had a fairly good idea by this point of its cause. He reached over and roughly shook her awake. Trembling and crying, she shuddered to awareness, amber eyes wild, before identifying the silhouette of the stocky, CVR-armored figure above her. The reddened eyes widened even further.

"Gwen?"

She nodded.

"I have something for you to do with me."

Her eyes were all white around the iris now. He'd have felt sorry for her except for his suspicions.

She nodded again and stood up, fully clad. Instead of leading her off, Matthew leaned against the door, studying her as she began to shift in her stance.

"You know," he said softly, "It's a bit interesting how Pierson got captured earlier. Do you think you could tell me again what happened there? I'm going to need to know."

Gwendolyn licked her lips, eyes flicking at his feet. "I was trying to help her. I was runnin' full speed back to where she and the Invid mech were tangling, hopin' to get a few missiles off at the thing, but it swooped down and grabbed 'er. She...she didn't even have time to transmode."

Matt studied the chalky countenance, just long enough for her to start to shift in nervousness.

"Funny, because earlier you told me that you'd turned down a side street before you heard the Battloid coming and had turned back. How long had she been trying to outrun it with no help?"

Gwen's eyes widened and her already alabaster countenance paled further.

"And another thing, Gwendolyn. When we went to investigate the abduction site, we found her Forager lying in the middle of the road, locked in mid-transmode. She may not have had time to complete it, but she'd certainly started it. I'd thought your powers of observation were among the best of the group."

The look on Gwen's face was indescribable.

Ulm's voice remained quiet.

"I know you didn't like Pierson. That's perfectly fine. But she was a fellow Elm regardless. Whatever the true circumstances were, the fact remains that you're obviously lying about your role in all this."

Gwen gulped.

"A soldier doesn't let her personal feelings get in the way of her aiding her allies. You did. Being controlled by your jealousy not only endangered Pierson, but the lives of everyone in this oufit."

The woman was trembling now, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

"Itr's obvious you had second thoughts. Remorse is well and good, Rutherford, but you've helped damage our ability to hide forever. There will be more Invid now, and Amanda will be only the first.

"That's only the beginning of the mess. I take it your private vendetta with her had a good deal to do with O'Shea. Well, for your information, he and Lieutenant Zinnert have just hijacked our only Alpha and taken off in the direction of Lafayette. It's a good thing both of them are as good at their jobs as they are, or they wouldn't have a snowball's chance in Hell. They might, however, have a snowball's chance on a hot day. If you ever want to ensure that both of them see the day after tomorrow alive, it might behoove

you to follow me."

"Why?" she managed at last.

"Because we're going to make up for your error by going after them."

There seemed to be miles of passages, with no obvious changes to them save a gradual widening to something large enough to admit the Elms' Veritech. Amanda held herself carefully, knowing that any sudden movement would be grounds for constraint or killing. Not once did she lose her awareness of the cold orange eyes at her back.

Who am I fooling? she asked herself. *It'll get bad enough pretty shortly.*

Only a couple times did they pass other of the Invid running the site; they paid no attention, which was in its way more unnerving than if the human had been the source of stares. It was not the act of humans to do so. But the Enforcers and their attendant Sentinels were not. Amanda fought down the low but incoming tide of panic, knowing that eventually she would lose against it.

Eventually, they came to the end of the passage way, opening only on a vast shaft. Amanda hesitated when they neared it, earning a sharp prod in the back from the Invid.

"Go on," Oryo'i said.

Amanda hesitated, then saw a sort of invisbly supported platform hovering in the center of the shaft, near enough for her to step on. She did so at a further prompt, the platform supporting her and the three Invid with no change in its movement.

It began to rise, startling Amanda before she realized it was a kind of elevator. The acceleration was completely unnoticable until she realized they were rising very quickly indeed. They whizzed up...darkness, lost like a single cell in the bloodstream...flashes as entrances passed them, then eventually growing light as they neared the entrance of the upper floor.

They left the platform behind, the "floor" beneath them the same unnerving warm sponginess as the lower level. The omnipresent vegetable stink of the Invid hive was less here, as though those who lived here took more unfavorable notice of it. These facts the human impersonally noted and stored away, curiously detached from her situation.

Zazen's...being still, Kevin said in her head. *Letting events flow, not letting them move you. Helped me to no end.* She noted the information, and tried to maximize the feeling or lack of it, as they moved further

into the depths of the hive, toward what Amanda presumed was the center point.

They rounded one last turn, and darkness loomed before them. It took Amanda's eyes a few seconds to adjust and realize it was not so much darkness as that the size of the chamber mimized the dim radiance of whatever it was that the Invid used for light sources. But by that point, they were already inside, and Amanda temporarily lost most of her visual capacity.

She stood there, vaguely aware she was trembling a bit and that the Enforcers had separated themselves from her sides somewhat. She did not know where the Invid Oryo'i was, but she was no longer at her back.

She jumped violently as she felt a hand--seemingly human--abruptly grasp her chin with a deceptive gentleness that promised enough power to shatter her jawbone if it so chose.

She could hear breathing, but she had had no idea when the other had walked up to her blinded self. Rapidly she blinked her eyes, begging them to adjust; she was only making out the sudden outline of a humanoid figure better than a head and a half taller than her.

"This is the human?" she heard a brittle voice in English in front of her in a male reigister.

"It is, my lord," Oryo'i's voice said a couple of feet off to her side. Amanda's eyes flickered over, catching an image of a kneeling figure. "I believe she has the information we seek."

The voice in front of her softened venomously. "Ah, but who said 'we,' Sulagi?" Oryo'i did not answer. "But undeniably human. The thought processes are obviously primitive enough." A quick, unwilling spurt of anger leapt through Amanda's thoughts. There was a chuckle. "And apparently quite sensitive about it as well." The hand abruptly tightened its hold on her chin, and she gasped in pain from the grip now hard enough to bruise. The human feel was a front; the strength in it was not normal. The second Invid--for it had to be--was apparently of superior rank to her original captor, she thought, her mind racing. "I think it might serve to encourage her to part with her information."

How? I will NOT give it away. I can't, or the others are dead. Torture... She shivered with apprehension.

The voice dropped silibantly. "Do you know where you are, human? I can make you wish you'd never had the thought in what mind you had to ever think of defiance." She could feel his breath on her face. Still queerly emotionless, she did not answer.

The lock on her face was released; she staggered back, only to be met with a stunning blow to her cheek, pain flaring through her. Blinking away the purple blotches, she lay on the floor, staring up at the towering figure of the Invid above her. The panic was beginning to leak back in; the pain had throuwn her out of her trance state. Whimpering, she tried to lift a hand to her blazing and bruising cheek, but a foot came down; deliberately, the weight came after it, causing her to squirm in more anguish as the

Invid's not inconsiderable mass came within a few pounds of pressure of breaking her wrist. Whimpering, she saw the figure's head bent down to study her in critical interest.

"What a pathetic specimen," the voice drawled. "Disgusting little vermin. I almost wish the Regis hadn't seen fit to deem this the proper form to copy us after." The foot came down harder; this time. Amanda could not restrain a squeal of pain. A satistfied noise murmured from his throat.

Behind the pain, the anger blazed. At that sound of obscene satisfaction, it momentarily became an inferno. Amanda did the first thing that came to her mind; with her free hand, she attempted to give a quick, strategic blow to his knee. It affected absolutely nothing; but then the pressure was gone. She rolled, and then gagged as a hand lifted her by the collar of her jumpsuit, to his eye level. By this point, she was beginning to make out facial features through the blue and purple blotches of choking.

The voice was a silken hiss. "Not wise, human." Amanda, between the constriction on her windpipe, the smarting, cold burning of the growing bruise on her face, and the screaming pain in her left wrist, did not take time to take notice of it. Light shimmered across the silhouetted face as the features contorted in contempt.

"What's with this thing?" he snapped. "She has about as much reaction as a plant. I though her breed was rather more emotional than that."

"My lord," Oryo'i murmured, "Her...experiences...may have caused a mental dissassociation from her surroundings . It appears to be a kind of survival reflex."

"Survival?" he asked in a lilting tone. "Stupid flesh. No wonder they go around rutting all the time--ah-hah!" The leg moved fluidly away from a kick, and Amanda choked. "I see some reaction now. A pity I have to leave it in a state to answer me."

Amanda's brain was buzzing with edges of blackness, but she found enough strength to haul her collar away from the constriction on her neck, allowing a gulp of vegetable-flavored hive air.

"In your dreams, Shkud," she whispered through her tormented windpipe.

There was an intake of breath. "It speaks! It even knows my name. How would this miracle go about?" A hum of consideration. "Ah yes, the traitor and your mouth, Oryo'i. A moot point, to be sure."

Shattering pain as the floor slammed into her, knocking out her wind, the obscene warmth like flesh. She wheezed through her liberated windpipe, a cocktail mix of anger, emerging hate, confusion, hurt, fear and panic roaring through her. She heard the creak and shift of his uniform as he crouched down to study her with clinical, amused relish.

"But enough entertainment for now. Correct, human? It is now time to ask you a few things. It might be

wise to answer me."

For what? Like you're going to use less thumbscrews if I'm a good dog?

"Why? Will...you...give me my own...collar...with a personalized nametag...if I cooperate?" she snarled, beyond caring.

Oh, the anger. Blind purpose and battle-drive contained it in skirmishes, but what she'd felt in her mad fire on Oryo'i at the farm was a pale copy of... this... No way to execute it, no way to use it, trapped, so it built. She shuddered away as the long, human-seeming fingers and thumb pinned her neck to the floor underneath them, leaving only enough air to breathe. He seemed to like choking her.

But now that he was no longer either hurting her or cutting off her entire supply of air, she was able to flit her eyes around the dark, organic purgatory of her surroundings, to find her sight had adjusted to the dimness.

Above her, his face eclipsed the view of the ceiling for a second...something wrong about it...then she was hauled again to her feet by the collar.

He was indeed about a couple heads taller than she, making him shorter than Gerald but a good bit taller than anyone else in the Elms. He was also lithely built, quite slender, and clad in a uniform different in design from Oryo'i's or Siaga's--hadn't Kevin said something about different uniform styles for the genders? Background black, panels of orangish red, accents of bright poison green. Past shoulder-length, slightly shagged hair a red that did not look humanly natural. Something about the uniform, that made him look more important than his subordinate--he had to be a high-ranking enemy officer...

He put his face only a matter of inches away from hers, his skin the same ghostly pallor as the other Invid, or like Kevin's after a few weeks in the winter. She cringed away from him, but her aching face was caught again in that deceptive vise of a grip. She was forced to look him in his.

Shkud chuckled, hearing a noise escape from her bruised lips.

His face was perfect.

No blemishes, scars, or other marks marred the smooth skin, not even the indication of beard stubble. The clean, perfectly proportioned features might have been mistaken for those of a Rennaisance angel's, if a little leaner and masculine, a little harder around the cheekbones. It was flawless and beautiful, even set in an unholy amusement.

But all this time, she was locked, frozen, like a rabbit, as she met his eyes in blind hypnosis.

There were no whites. The irises were a pure, glowing green, bisected in their centers by vertically slit

pupils dilated in the dimness. They looked into hers with all the calm, uncaring intent of a viper's.

No angel's face, but perhaps Lucifer's.

Shkud, Kulagi, gave a laugh, dimly perceived through her din of fear.

"Who knows, human. I might even give you your own bowl as well." The elegant lips curved. "Shall we get on with our business, now?"

"Whoooooofff!!!" Dennis grunted, as the sudden kick of the thrusters pressed him into the back of his seat, the Shadow Alpha ripping the wind less than five hundred yards off the ground. At this low altitude, air drag prevented the mecha from going supersonic, but the acceleration gees were considerable nonetheless. Behind him, the lieutenant could hear a muffled grunt as his copilot fought the force as well. Outside, it was still inky black, the snow going by too fast to see but still opaquing vision.

They screamed foward, night and Shadow system concealing them and their mission.

"It ought to take about an hour or so for us to get to the target hive, straight shot. Probably longer, though. We may have to set down and walk part of the way to avoid patrols."

Kevin grunted an affirmative. "I second that. Hi-ho-ing directly in is going to get us killed. We're going to have to get strategic. How do you think we ought to take that?"

Dennis was at a loss. "Ahem...I don't think I thought that far ahead." Kevin gave a sacrificial sigh. "I think, right now, it's definitely an improvisational arrangement."

"Translation: We get to it when we get to it."

"Bingo."

Kevin's voice cheered up. "I can deal with that." Zinnert grumbled. "Wanna few apple chips?" There was munching noises from the back seat. "I still have some left."

"O'Shea," Zinnert snapped, before remembering, "I don't think you quite understand that eating in the cockpit is--"

"I doubt, Dennis, that you're going to get Invid puke down your neck if you suddenly accelerate. The Regis made enhancements in us that allowed for high-speed dogfights. Best genetic stuff Earth has to offer. Or Optera." There was an ironic snort. "Besides, I'm starving."

"How can you--"

"Eat at a time like this? Simple. Haven't eaten anything since breakfast." The scout's voice trailed off meaningfully. "But now that we're doing something--"

"I'd rather not."

"Suit yourself. But we've shared canteens. If my spit was going to poison you, it's a few years late."

"You're disgusting."

"And you're an anal-retentive--"

"I know," Zinnert said tiredly. "But we get to it when we get to it."

"Yeah."

"I project we're going to get within fifteen miles of the place in the hour. I'm going to set down then, or whenever you pick up the first hostiles. My idea is to get within range of the hive in Guardian, and then monitor the area. And then..."

"We--"

"Get to it when we get to it."

"I think I'm beginning to like you. For once, you're having the same approach to life as me."

Zinnert began to laugh, slightly hysterically, and leaned to check his instrumentation.

Many miles back, in a snowstorm fortunately not strong enough to be called a true blizzard, two trails sprayed the thin white stuff into the frigid air, beginning a rushed trek in the wake of the Alpha. Like the Alpha, there was no measurable protoculture radiation for the Invid to track, but unlike it, their small size prevented easy visual identification.

There was no need to worry about refueling the fusion reactors; there was more than enough water lying around in frozen confection for the taking. The cold was grim, but not the icy bitterness that would later come as winter tightened its grip on the ravaged land, and the two riders were well protected enough in their armor, clothing and jumpsuits. Instrumentation kept them from getting lost in the waste of the old

American Heartland, and the darkness that hindered their sight also was their greatest ally against the aliens that had taken the world it shrouded.

Heedlessly, they rumbled north at dangerous speeds.

Underneath one helmet, a pair of hazel eyes narrowed, intent.

Amanda was shaking and she knew it.

She no longer cared about the fact, however. The hand rendering her head immobile was an entirely different matter.

"Where is your group located?"

She didn't answer. There was a light slap on her bruised cheek.

"Wrong answer, human. Where? To the north? The south? Elsewhere? I suppose I should add that currently we're near the remains of a human city called Lafayette. I understand the T'Sentrati, Mother blast their hides, wiped out a fair amount of the population. To the east?"

Amanda refused, but after repeating a few more directions, the Invid made a satisfied noise and ended. "Transparent creature."

Panic flared up, and Shkud laughed, the viper eyes narrowed in amusement.

"You are an entertaining little beast, aren't you? You might be worth something, after all."

Amanda kept her jaws locked so tightly that they were cramped. He was not torturing her, per se, not as much as she feared he would. He was striking her, but in a half-hearted manner. She wasn't speaking. Yet this being was still seeming to get information from her. How, she did not know. But something about those inhuman eyes in that human face was causing her guts to turn to water.

Siaga was nothing in comparison.

She was terrified.

"You might want to speak up. It could make things easier."

No.

The questioning continued, with the constant sense of Oryo'i standing in the shadows nearby, the enforcers guarding them both. All the while, the demon eyes bored into hers.

"...I suppose your companions are similar natives of this planet, unless there's yet another settlement of those accursed T'Sentrati around that I haven't yet taken care of, or their mongrel whelps. Ah! A little response there? Might you even know one? This is most interesting."

Something penetrated Amanda's dazement.

My god, he can't be--reading my mind? Reading something? Oh SHIT. Shit shit shit.... I'm sorry, Gerald. Horror blanked out his next question.

Damn you, Gwen, damn you and the horse you rode in on.

A blow brought her back to her senses. Blinking away the pain, she reeled as the Invid leader yanked her back upright. She could taste the heavy metallic salt of her own blood, and did not dare spit the taste away.

"I want you to answer, human. Any other allies around? One of those Terran Robotech filth from the Masters' world, or their Tiresian bootlickers? No? Maybe? Pity. It's a bit boring having to harvest Flowers for my Mother.

"What would be truly a wonder is if you'd actually known anything of certain...traitors. Like that rutting bitch Sera or that idiot Ariel. To actually show inclination to mate with humans--disgusting!"

Anger came to the fore again, as she realized he had insulted two of the most revered names of the last war. They may have been Invid, but they were the reason why the Earth had temporarily gained some degree of peace. She kicked, and was hauled off the floor again, before being slammed back down.

"Angry, are you?" Growling, Amanda fought, but the next blow caused her to temporarily lose it. She came to consciouness again sniffing blood in her nose, woozy but still furious. The beautiful face with the green eyes regarded her in the same manner as she would have had a fly whose wings she was trying to pull off. Licking his lips, he reached for the zipper to her CVR jumpsuit. Before she could react, he had the suit partially open, exposing the coverall underneath. Horrified, she jerked away.

"So this disgusts you just as much as it does me?" Shkud mused. The eyes were narrowed, the pupils dilated. "You might want to talk, or I'll disgust you even more." There seemed to be not much disgust as he reached for the coverall zipper. Amanda whimpered, but refused to yield. He was breathing hard, a strange smile playing across his lips. "I wonder if it's true about this strange attractive force your kind seems to have for some Sulagi..."

"My lord, this is not--" Oryo'i interrupted, alarm in her voice.

"Shut up!" he snapped. There was an indrawn breath of pain from the subordinate Invid. Amanda twisted, to no avail. "Hmm, I seem to recall an odd frissom--interesting word--from you when I mentioned Sulagi just now..." The grasp was partially released. "But enough of that." A finger ran accross his chin. "You've been quite productive, human. I might send you to an opredti farm after I'm done. It's the least I can do after you've been so obliging to me."

Henderson, raving mad and wasted, writhing on her bed...

"You seem not to like the idea. Ah, I remember. A few lunar cycles ago, I started programs in the tradition of the last occupation. A few of the first were over by the large river to the west. The humans proved to be quite productive--for a while. The Flower spores and the physiology seem not to jibe well. Perhaps you met a few survivors in your exploits?"

Amanda's mind was blank, for a couple seconds.

Realization sank in.

Shkud's feline eyes widened, as he rose and looked on her.

Red blackened her vision, red like the pools of blood around the little corpses in the road, red like the flare of light behind her as she plunged into the clawing underbrush... She did not move, but the bruised figure was shaking as though in palsy.

Somehow, the overwhelming tidal wave of knowledge did not sweep her away, slam her shrieking at his throat--too late for that. It built higher and higher, peaked, until she thought she must scream or go mad.

It solidified, hardened into something deadlier and icier than any killing weapon ever produced.

Her voice was distant, perfectly sane, and calm.

"I take it that was to scare me? You're wrong." The solidified ice of the emotion somehow cut the ropes of fear. "I was from one of those towns." In and out of a breath: "I'm going to kill you."

Shkud stared on, arms folded. He was impressed despite himself.

"I sincerely doubt you will get the opportunity. Oryo'i, return her to her cell. I have work to do."

Shkud thought, as the battered native was led off by a subdued Oryo'i; *Most interesting. Will my suspicions be played out?*

Give a few days, and if not, well, humans were sources of numerous uses, not all of them requiring that they be alive...

"Not much more," Dennis noted. "I'm giving it a minute or so before I bring her down." They had cut the VAF to a fraction of the original speed; now the waves of snow they were carving through were discernible. He cut it more, but not so much as to stall the mecha.

"I judge maybe twenty miles away myself," Kevin noted from the back. His voice seemed strangely distant. "Your best bet is to work in as far as you can, Dennis."

"You crazy? Patrols--"

Kevin's voice was lucidly calm. "I'll know them coming. Trust me."

Dennis was blank, then remembered. "Oh," was all he said.

He kept forgetting that whatever was in the back seat was one of the very aliens whom he had dedicated most of his adult life to destroying.

Swallowing, he eased it further in.

Kevin noted, "The thing is that once on the ground, god knows what sort of things and terrain'll be in the way. While we're still in the air..." He broke off abruptly, into dead silence, before speaking again. "Dennis? Get it down. Now."

Biting his lip, the second CO slowed, activated the transformation sequence, flipping the thrusters down into the feet and legs of gerwalk, the inertial jerking of the ceased foward movement dragging human and Sulagi hard enough against the harnesses to bruise under the CVR. In twenty seconds, Dennis, praying as hard as he ever had, had found a narrowly open area among the trees and eased the mecha down with a scrape and a crunch of branches against the tough metal alloy of the Alpha's hull. It steamed a large radius underneath its still-glowing engines.

"Kevin?" he asked softly. It was a second before the back responded, now even more distant sounding than ever.

"Patrol of ten Attack Scouts...traveling...in surveillance pattern...coming in our direction. ETA judged two minutes."

Dennis looked over to the back; Kevin's eyes were closed, concentrating on something unseen. He shook

his head when Dennis tried to attract his attention. "I'm...trying to track them...dammit. Without them finding ME..."

Dennis whirled back to his still active console, his eyes going wide when he saw the ten telltale blips inching on an arc, almost over their position. Never before had he been so grateful the Alpha was Shadow. The wedge of enemy bogies blipped, touched their location...blip...blip...blip...and passed over, unmoving on their current course. He did not dare breathe until the last was out of the five-mile mark.

"Didn't see us," Kevin noted from the back seat in a much more normal voice. "We're okay for the time being."

"Jesus."

"You think that's bad? Quincy ranks in the alltime hall of fame of Belated Detections for me. Imagine waking up from a peaceful sleep and realizing there's a few clams on top of you ready to pay a house call."

"You mean you..."

"Oh yeah. There was a rude awakening for you."

"Well, I suppose I owe you one then."

"Make it a malt whiskey." Dennis snorted.

"Nice to know you haven't changed." he commented, receiving a miffed noise from the back.

"Well I could always start slobbering and eating poison ivy to celebrate my new status as Slug-Boy if you want. Let's get a move on, Dennis. We've only got a window of maybe fifteen minutes before the next sweep passes over."

The thrusters came to life again. "Correct. Keep your mind peeled."

"Gotcha, your holiness."

"Uh, 'Slug-Boy'?"

Kevin snickered.

Back to the front
You will die
When I say
You will die

--**Metallica**

She had started to shake again several dozen feet out of the chamber, the pain screaming down her swollen face. Mechanically, she zipped up her jumpsuit, not caring about the Invid guarding her. Her body was screaming for water. She licked her lips with a gummy tongue, coughing in dry barks, the taste of her blood foul in her mouth.

She did not notice the furrowing of the Sulagi's pale brows. Oryo'i was still recovering from the mental lashing Shkud had given her when she'd protested. The look she turned on the human was speculative.

Halfway back, after Amanda stumbled unseeing and after they had traversed the lift shaft, the Enforcers halted her with claws on her shoulders, causing her to startle violently. She heard the pad of the humanoid Invid's feet go around her. There was a distant, dull clunk.

In a minute, one of her Enforcer guards handed her a black container of some ceramic material. Somethine sloshed as Mandy stared blankly at the proffered item.

"Take it," Oryo'i said. After a moment, Amanda complied, sniffing at the contents, and reaching in a tentative finger. Wetness touched her fingertips and she tasted it. Water. She did not think of its purity as she lifted it to her parched mouth.

She drank sparingly, watching to see that her guts did not rebel. It was room-temperature, but tasteless and clean, and went down like nectar. She emptied it, and the humanoid took it, replacing it back wherever it had been.

Then they moved again.

There was no response from the opposite cell when Oryo'i and the guards put her back in detention, the bars sliding and lighting back into place as they left. Perhaps Siaga was asleep, or she had already gone to meet her punishment, but the hallway was dark again.

Amanda sat down, and her mind blanked.

She did not know she had been whimpering like a kicked puppy until the silibant whisper from the other side brought her back to reality.

"I take it you saw him," Siaga noted. The energy bars' harsh light delineated her figure as she crouched

near her own bars.

Amanda could not answer. Siaga waited for a second and continued. "You see now why I hate him so."

"He--he killed..."

"Burning Tzuptum," came the soft voice. "You are a survivor of his press moves?"

"THE SON-OF-A-BITCH KILLED MY SISTER!" Amanda shrieked.

Just as abruptly, before Siaga stopped trembling from that cry, the voice of the human was soft and shaking again.

"H-his eyes...I never knew Invid had those...those--eyes..."

No response from the condemned alien for a couple of minutes. Then:

"They did not. Not before the Queen-Mother created the Kulagi."

Blankly, Amanda asked. "The Kulagi? Isn't the name Su--"

"For us. For me and that unseeing idiot Oryo'i. But for they..." The Invid trailed off. Finally, there was a sigh, and she spoke.

"I am already doomed, at any rate. And you--need distraction. Listen, Amanda Pierson, for what I am going to tell you goes back to the very reason my race has returned. For this alone, I would be sent to the Genesis Pits, but I have nothing left to lose."

As she spoke, some of the awkwardness in her words left.

"We chose of our own will to leave this place, years ago. The sole alternatives were to either destroy all life on this planet or to poison both our races with the Shadow that the accursed Robotech Masters seeded. This we all know. Our Mother chose to find another, uninhabited world, where we could harvest our Flowers in peace and avoid interfering in other species' lives.

"However, there was a problem with the world we chose. It was temperate, it had no intelligent species. But the Flowers were...slow...to catch on and grow. This is nothing unusual, but in this case we had millions of our people to feed. Those of us in the scientist castes projected that with the slow growth rates of the Flower of Life, we would begin starving in a few of your months. We of the Sulagi who have been transmuted are not as dependent on them, but the lower castes are a different story.

"We needed more, soon. But only two worlds in the known galaxy have had the Flowers grow on them readily. Our old homeworld Optera, now for all purposes sterile, and this world, your Earth."

"The Regis felt She had no choice. Desperation does interesting things. Until the new world had enough Flowers to feed the Invid, She decided that some of us were to return, to reseed the Earth with the spores, and to harvest enough Flowers and opredti--your protoculture--to keep us supplied. But she could not chance the possibiliity of having us driven off or rejected by you Humans. So we were armed and--measures taken--to ensure a steady shipment.

"Our Mother, though, could not be there--Her experiments in evolution and in finding the ideal form took up too much of Her time. And so..." Siaga's shadowed lip curled back. "The Kulagi."

"The Regis called together some of the most intelligent, cleverest, and strongest of we Sulagi, and...changed them into what you saw. A further transmutation and refinement, into the Kulagi. They were designated as the ones to oversee this occupation. Thus, they have the eyes you saw, to designate their rank. And...more." She fell silent.

Amanda scrambled to understand the import. "You're meaning to tell me...they're the ones running things? Not your kind?"

A bitter bark of sardonic laughter. "Ah, Mother, how observant you are! If the Sulagi were, do you think I would currently be awaiting my new existence as an iigai drone here?" Siaga got up and began to pace. Finally, she stopped, her sulfur-colored eyes squinting into the comfortless radiance of the energy bars.

"Once, we had been the crowning achievement of Invid evolution, Human. But no longer. Now, now we have to be crushed under the heels of the likes of him." Another accurate spit into the corridor. "Those trahls had power given to them--too much power. Now they deem themselves slightly below the Spirit of Light Itself and far above the rest of our race. I will not even go into the opinion they have of your kind. You have felt it.

"We were only supposed to feed our kind, at the outset, but now--I'm quite sure you realize that they've moved consideably beyond that. Having tasted the sweetness of the force given them, they wish more of it. So much for the Shadow not touching us."

"What about--the Regis?" Amanda had stopped shaking; Siaga had, for an Invid, been remarkably good at her therapy.

A snort. "Our Mother is thousands of light years distant. The lower castes do not question policies, and none of we Sulagi have been allowed to return since we came here. And I presume the Kulagi are quite selective on what they tell Her." Siaga slumped against her bars, lost in her own otherworldly reverie.

"Ah."

Her face was beginning to throb hurtfully. Reaction set in again, and she crouched, arms clamped around knees, shivering.

Morning limped into the murky soup of the overcast. The snow had let up except for sporadic flakes. Drifts of white lay here and there in the woods.

A foot destroyed one, as the metal crunched into the ground. It was followed by another, both supporting the weight of a Shadow Alpha. Currently it was in Guardian mode, crouched near the earth as it stalked foward a parcel of land at a time. It had been doing it for four hours now.

The woods gave to emptiness up ahead; the mecha seemed to further crouch, as though realizing what lay before it.

"There it is," Dennis whispered.

A couple miles of open space was in front of them. Beyond that lay the perimeter of tree-like "transmission towers" the Invid used in communications.

Beyond that lay the hive.

It was roughly shaped like a fat upside-down wineglass, the bulk of it in the "cup." Like with all Invid architecture, it would not have looked out of place on an ocean bottom, if it had been a couple of miles smaller.

Out of a hidden apeture in the structure, a flight of several Combat Troopers departed; by them Dennis was able to scale the size of the hive. He made a half-audible whistle. It might not have been the main Lafayette hive, but it was still large enough.

"When should we?" he asked.

There was a muddled reply, then Kevin fished himself out of whatever sea of alien communications he had been tapping. "Whenever, Dennis. Any time is going to suck, frankly. This is one of the stupidest moves I've ever head of."

"Well, it seemed to be the least idiotic of all the stupid alternatives."

Kevin said as thoughtfully as he could while distracted, "Well, yeah, trying to get in with only Cyclones is asking to get killed..."

"Only decent alternative we have, I think."

"Actually Max Sterling's dressing his Veritech in Zentraedi clothing has to take the cake..." the Invid mused.

"O'Shea..." It broke off in a strangled giggle. The two men proceeded to snicker helplessly.

After a bit, Kevin stopped. "We can't piss around any more, Dennis. Now or never. It's getting too light."

"O'Shea--" Dennis started, then shrugged his armored shoulders. "Will getting my butt killed redeem myself?"

Kevin answered, "You're asking the wrong person. I'm in bad straits on the redemption thing. At least you know what you want to get redeemed to."

Dennis thought, then nodded, and began to flick switches and levers.

Kevin braced himself and, never one to reject native beliefs out of hand (especially Matt's), muttered a Hail Mary.

Dennis bit his lip, as a low rumble began to shudder the craft.

"Here goes!" he shouted.

Slowly, the Alpha began to lift, as Zinnert began to execute the transmode sequence.

The arms folded, retracted; the legs rotated and realigned themselves in the space of seconds.

In unison, the yell of challenge shook the air, as the last systems came to life.

The engines answered them, then roared.

A white line blazing deep
Soaring through the wasteland we
Soaring birds now hunt the brow
As I thirsty gripped with hunger now
Clear sighted pain ends to win
The battle of the me so wafer thin
The line between the devil's teeth

and that which cannot be repeat

--Peter Murphy

Human and Invid were slammed back into their seats by the acceleration, as the thrusters belched into life, vomiting the Alpha foward like shot from a cannon. The force increased, until Zinnert had to crowd the darkness out of his vision. Behind him, he could hear a low grunt, as Kevin himself fought against the gees of acceleration.

Like an arrowhead, the Alpha screamed in hard and fast , skimming the ground, aiming at the heart of the hive.

-*Intruder alert!*- the Hive Brain cried telepathically. -*Terran craft heading in to hive area at high speed, Iigai and Torabs, scramble to prevent penetration!*-

A pale head shot up in shock, the orange eyes going wide as the information sunk in to Oryo'i. Then, she cursed as much as she could in the limited linguistic field given her, and was running for the mecha bay and her armor.

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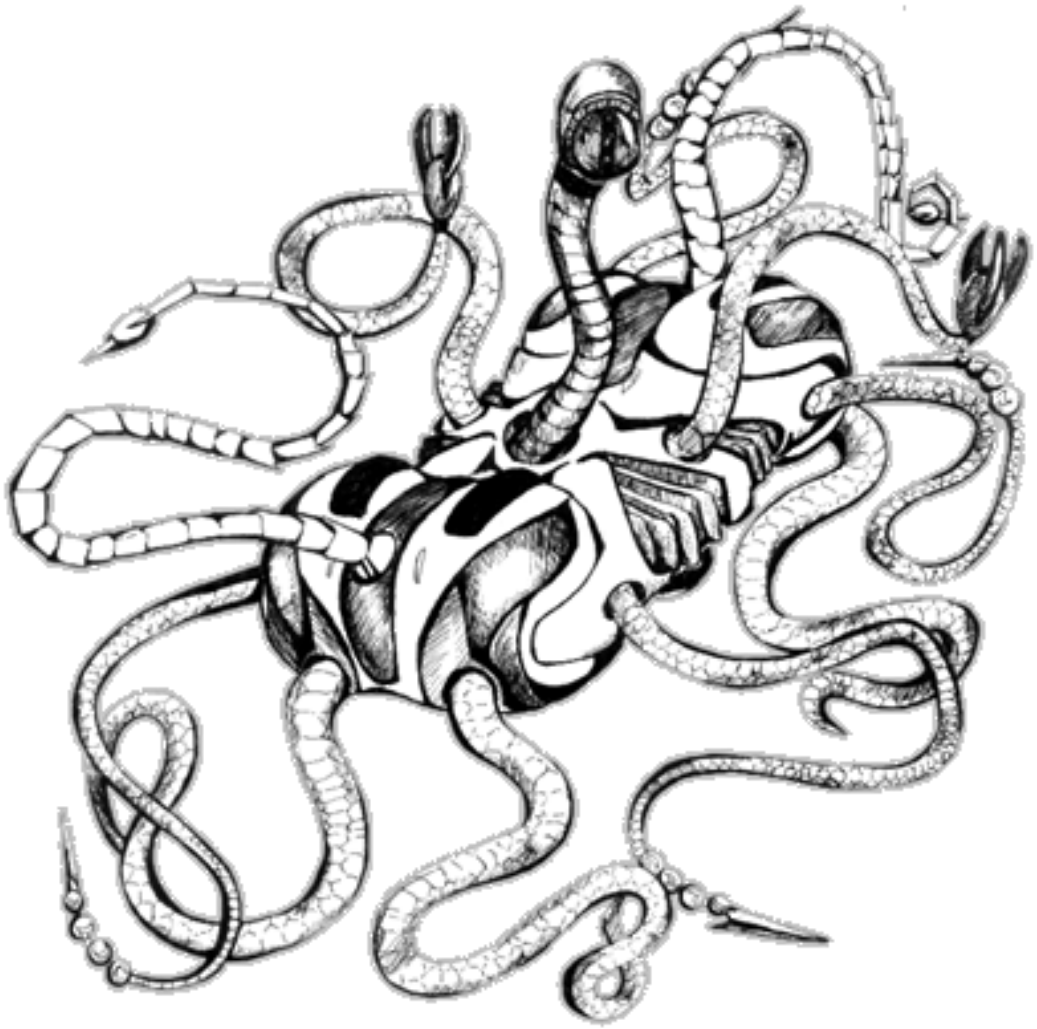

DANDELIONS

CHAPTER SEVEN

Personal Diary of Kevin O' Shea
December 4, 2045

Well, they brought in that Alpha in today. I was one of the fortunate ones who saw it come in, down near Base Two. Dennis brought it in and set in on that old university quadrant as nicely as you please, just like a real bird. Quite a trick, considering he was dealing with several meters of gray-and-black death and hadn't done it for years. Shame he never was

able to repair that Alpha of his that got banged up near Refles Point--it would have been a help. Bit of irony, that...

The Protoculture's been stored in places all over, so the enemy can't get a fix on it. I suppose I should say Invid, but then what does that make me? If anyone reads this and finds out, I'll probably be dead by then anyway, so my race is a moot point. Besides, I'm so sick of hiding it... And considering who I know we're up against now--hopefully a human deity or two is willing to intercede. Anyway, back to what's going on.

Matt listened. I'm glad being what I am is of some help, because he now has the place on continual yellow status. People are whining and bitching about it, but tough titty, folks. Shame I can't tell them the reason for it. The raid on the farm wasn't as inconsequential as we thought. Unfortunately, there's been no nearby attacks to keep them on their toes. Doesn't mean anything.

She--or maybe they--is biding her time. I know it. What event's going to trigger her move? This is like chess, but we don't have the luxury of looking down on the board and seing the picture. We're the players and the pieces at the same time. What will we do that can trigger victory--or disaster? The consolation is that they're not any better off in perspective. At least not by much. But they--well, I think they have us well in check.

Let's face it, the loyalists have the upper hand.

I daren't go near the child. I don't know if the spores' effects have worn off, but what if by accident she sees--and starts screaming? The only thing I dread more than dying is seeing the people I've worked with causing it. Ironic, isn't it? So I stay well away. Mandy sees her fairly often, and she hasn't made any comment about Florrie seeing any more weird auras around her, but I'm just too scared to get near, and much, much too guilty. And I would like a lot to just do the things human adults do for children, like playing with them, guiding them, so forth. Funny old thing, being Sulagi.

Something's been in the food. Malcolm's gone ballistic over it. It can't be a rat, because with the population of cats around--and it hasn't been crapped in. Just little nibbles. Critter's an awfully dainty eater, for vermin. Good thing not too much food has been lost.

Mandy's gotten better. I can't imagine what happened to her at the farm, but I can try and guess, and if not understand, try and be capable of understanding. At least she no longer gets nightmares again, but there's a perpertually scared look in her eyes. But at least--I pray--it's not directed at me. It's taken months, but I've finally gotten to her that whatever is this monstrosity of promise and justice is going on, I find it as abhorrent as she does, and suffer the guilt from it to boot. Her opinion is so important to me. And growing increasingly important, as though the opinion of the entire human race regarding me was hers. I jus t

don't know. With Amanda, I head into so much murky water emotionally I just have to stop, which I'm doing.

I have to ask myself for the hundreth time where the Regis figures into this. She's not here in body--I--and every other Sulagi, loyalist and rogue--would have felt Her presence if She had been. I suppose that's how She rationalizes the blatant reneging on Her word. But yet there's direction. Belmont pointed that out months ago when he was here, which confirmed Matt's and my suspicions on the pattern of the occupations. But who's running it? The Sulagi? The Malorosm? That's another thing I don't know (ye God that pisses the hell out of me!). Perhaps the Regis stratified things so there's a few of them running and directing the occupation and the rest helping. It would explain the hideously powerful Gosu/Gamun/Battloids that have shown up here and there, it's probably being piloted by the occupation heads. The very highest command below Her, just as Lihra, Kharoth, Corg and Sera were in the latter stages of the last occupation?

Or maybe--no, no, that's stupid. Forget that.

Dammit. Here I was going to actually say something intelligent about the day and I've wandered off into the hinterlands of speculation again. Well, I'm going to have to stop anyway. I'm so tired I'm about ready to drop the pen. Digging trenches for security wiring took the tar out of me. So tomorrow--

--***Kevin O'Shea*** *, First Scout of Ulm's Elms*

PS: Matt, you can still have my Valk model.

"Well, we're going to fly our baby over to that arena shell down south," Dennis confirmed thoughtfully. "It'll make a terrific VTOL hangar bay." He walked around in the dead grass thoughtfully, hood up agains the dry, frigid air, circumnavigating the meters-long bulk of mecha perched in gerwalk on the open, weed-choked quadrant.

The Shadow Alpha was a matte gray-black, a slice of light carved out of the air into a looming, louring form with simultaneous palpable mass and the airy, killing beauty of a sword's edge. Shiroikiku and Gerald had done their work well--there was no obvious sign of the damage that naturally resulted from being half-buried in weeds and dirt for months on end.

Fortunately, the damage had been mostly structural; the power systems were, to Sherry's gratitude, intact, for reasons she had made known to Dennis earlier

"I've never seen parts to an Alpha quite like these before. Or that worked quite like these, and I had the

privledge to see the guts of the prototype Shadows before Reflex. This had to be a new one that the Icarus dumped."

"Interesting. I only piloted the normal types."

"Trust me Lieutenant, this mutha ain't anywhere near normal. I've never seen anything like these systems before. My guess this sucker is a prototype of some sort, because the energy efficiency and the operating systems are so damned advanced it ain't funny. We're not certain just where to begin, even. My bet is that we'd better be goddamned glad it's almost intact, because an easy bet will get you that there aren't a lot of spare parts in the solar system that'll fit this thing."

"So what does the system difference mean?"

"It's powerful as shit," Sherry said flatly.

Dennis shuddered.

"And we can't really use the fucker much because if it gets hit in an important spot, Lieutenant, it won't be any good to use because of that very fact. I request this is our last-ditch special."

After flying it, Dennis had to silently agree. The thing was a pilot's wet dream when in the cockpit. It also, unfortunately, a resistance leader's potential worst nightmare when in the field.

Matt rubbed his whiskers, hazel eyes running over the curves and angles of the VAF-8. "I can't think of a better place myself, Dennis. At least it'll be out of sight from Invid there. My only worry is the structural damage from that monster hole in the roof. It'll let the thing in and out, but it also might collapse the entire thing on top."

"Them're the breaks. Perhaps there's a way to reinforce it?" Zinnert mused and then regretfully shook his head. "No. No engineers among us, and who'd have the materials anyway? The place is just too enormous." He sighed heavily.

"No alternative, though," Ulm said disgustedly, walking over and running a gloved hand over the sleek metal of the Alpha's leg. "God, but I don't want to risk it. There's not near enough Shadows on Earth, and anything like this..." He shook his head. "Who'd ever heard of one with two seats and that kind of equipment?"

"Recon was Corporal Doi's guess."

"I'd say so." Ulm stepped back. "She is a sexy little thing, though?"

"Thought 'shes' weren't your interest." Zinnert drawled. Ulm blinked and mock-glared as he realized his

second's joke.

"I meant the Alpha, Dennis."

Dennis looked transparently innocent and fought with the smirk trying to yank a corner of his mouth.

"Dennis, being a smart-ass really isn't you. The First Scout, Doi, Wilson, and the rest are bad enough. If you start, I'm going to have to do drastic things."

" I take it that you'll stick with the arena, Lieutenant?"

"Yeah, whatever."

"I'm freezing," the gray bundle hunched next to one of the three stoves commented. Malcolm shugged and nonchalantly walked around her, directing the KP detail.

"So why're you griping to me?"

"You're the closest one. God, I could kill a cup of tea right now."

"Over there."

"That ain't tea, that's sludge. I'm not going to befoul the vodka by pouring it into that."

"That's what you're gonna get until I can get some more leaves, Gwennie."

"Don't call me that."

"Sorry."

"No you ain't."

"Nope, I guess I'm not," Malcolm grinned, teeth white against his face.

The pallid, delicate face below scowled, the amber eyes narrowing under the shocking, none-too-clean blaze of hair.

"Jerk," she said shortly, then rose, the loose padded gray mottle of her uniform not concealing the rigidity of her figure. Malcolm looked after her, frowning. His expression remained pensive as he begain to wipe

the batter-choked ranges clean.

He shook his head.

"Smart move, bud," he told himself ruefully.

Then again, anything he might have done could have set her off. The effects of the raid on her had not been positive. The changes in her personality had made her difficult to get along with.

No, he amended. *Not changes.* He had seen such effects--similar ones, at any rate--on his elder sister, the day she had finally arrived to join the Elms.

It had not been a welcome meeting, although he loved her. The fact she was there was proof that their mother had finally died from the cancer consuming her ovaries, and that Miranda was free from having to care for her.

The surface convivality had fallen, replaced by the despair that had been underneath ever since she had come home from out east, a tattered refugee from the wreckage of the Invid invasion, a student now forever denied her study. There had been nothing left for her then, except to fight, and most likely die.

No wonder she had taken to O'Shea and Pierson so well, he thought. They seem to have had no connections to civillian normalcy themselves.

In Gwen's case, the superficial insouciance had been torn away from her personality, showing the true nature underneath. Malcolm was certain he did not like it. Nihilism was not the word to describe it, nor was furtiveness. The nightmares were apparenly not half of the scars that had been left by her experiences. If being an Invid prisoner did that to one, Malcolm wanted to make certain he killed himself beforehand.

He sighed, eye flicking over to the entraceway through which she had exited, and continued cleaning up after breakfast.

> Something in me Dark and sticky All this time is getting strong The way I'm dealing With this feeling Can't go on like this too long
>
> --**Peter Gabriel** *"Digging in the Dirt"*

Gwen walked stiffly away, the tight, hot feeling gripping her ribcage refusing to release its hold. She knew her reaction had been totally irrational--hell, Malcolm was like that all the time, but the anger refused to let go.

Anger and despair. She wanted to strike out, and yet she did not care. What was the point? Her captivity all those years ago had taught her some lessons best left unlearned; that no such thing as justice existed, that the strongest survived and the weaker got the end of the shaft, that life was hell and death's oblivion the best reward.

Another drink, another man, because they expected it, wanted it, and another high-ranking lay, just to prove she could do it, just to prove if nothing else, she had that much control over what happened. And the next resistance group was always ready to have her shooting. She had conveniently excluded the fact from the Elms that the Louisville Sluggers had thrown her out because the CO's girlfriend had taken extreme exception to Gwendolyn's taking him elsewhere--she smiled bitterly--for "talks."

At least Kevin had had aesthetic appeal and seemed--shit--to be a nice guy. She most certainly would not have minded his interest. Even despite the covert signals from his middle-aged angler boyfriend were that Kevin wasn't inclined... She had seen enough indications in her time with the Elms that it was at least partly a lie on O'Shea's part. She had started again, hope giving her impeteus.

So why didn't he oblige? Damn him, damn him to hell, and that little blond slut he favored. He could at least give her the courtesy of proving that her blood-earned view of the world was still intact.

Her anger reaching a peak, she randomly kicked the next object that came up. Unfortunately, the inflexiblility of the bench had a catastrophic effect even through the heavy toe of her field boot.

Limping and cursing, she continued outside, the tone of her thoughts going from murky dark gray to something very nearly black.

"I just LOVE it when she kicks Han in the ass down that chute," Gerald said dreamily, his purple-higlighted brown hair hanging in his eyes. He was busy digesting his breakfast and had decided to watch a portion of his favorite movie trilogy. "Just makes me feel so much better."

"So you like dominant women, huh?" quipped a voice from a bundle of beanbags. Gerald took his attention from the TV screen long enough to give it a dirty look.

"Bite me."

"Nope."

"The good part's coming up."

Kevin's head poked up from where he was lying and began to study the screen.

After a while, he said thoughtfully. "You know, these trilogy things... You know Sherry's animes..."

"You mean the one with the guy that turns into the girl?"

"That and the chick that went around chasing this guy because she'd been imprisoned."

"Huh? What about--you forgot the one with the pervert and the girl with the horns."

"Yeah."

Gerald rolled it over in his food and fatigue-clouded mind. He was drowsy, and was not exactly at his most lucid. "You know...suppose he--the guy with all the fiancees..."

"Which guy? There's the one with all the female roomies from other planets..."

"Thassa one. Not the other guy. Sorry. Suppose there was like," his mind churned, "suppose he was the son of the first guy."

"You mean his grandpa's a panda?"

"Work with me, willya. And like, the chick with the horns, you know, was his kid. The second guy's. And that cursed water had something to do with it all. Big fuckin' comedy epic. Be great. Woudn't even have to worry about copyrights anymore. Just dub over the Japanese with our dialogue."

"'Drop your panties, Sir William?'" Kevin quoted.

"In yer dreams. Oh. We'd take fuckin' forever to get over with the last one, but the audience wouldn't care, cause we'd get em hooked. Make a lot of money, man..."

"Yeah," the scout mused.

Gerald blinked, his sanity reasserting itself. "Nah, he said gloomily. "It'd never work."

"O'Shea!" Ulm's voice shouted out in the hall. "Wherever you are, report."

Kevin muttered a curse and heaved himself upright from his semiliquified position in the beanbags. "Shit."

"Ooh," Gerald said sweetly. "He wants you, Kevvy-boy." The half-Zentraedi snickered as the scout gave

Gerald his opinion with an extended digit as he left, then immediately returned his attention to the screen. The movie was reaching another good part.

Kevin resignedly followed Matt's retreating back to the conference room on the other side of the hall, in the storage room in the back of an old storefront. Pillages from elsewhere in Base One had made the place a bit cozy.

"What you want, Lieutenant?"

Ulm sighed and closed the door behind them. Kevin first thought the room was empty until he saw the figure drinking opaque tea, dirty boots up on the couch. She acknowledged with a nod while slurping the stuff.

"Insurance, Kev. Reason why Mandy's here is that she's the only one who you can tell without letting anything too untoward slip or any questions being raised."

"Run this by me again?"

Amanda paused in slurping. "I dunno. Apparently because I'm the only other who knows you're--what you are." She still not say the word. "So you can tell me whatever you need to tell me in case one of you buys it."

"Or namely, Kev, why you know what you know about the charming lady we met at the farm a couple weeks ago."

The Sulagi started. "Oh, that. Why didn't you say so in the first place, Matt?"

"Well, uh---" Mandy looked on, her green eyes beginning to twinkle. "Jeez." Ulm scratched his head. "I think--"

"I think six and a half years of this damn charade is beginning to tell on us," Kevin sighed. "Yeah, this is important. Amanda, it's not just human versus Invid anymore. It's gotten a bit personal. I know the Invid you went up against at that farm.

"Her name's Oryo'i." The glottal stop was slight. "Her ID colors are dark gray, vemillion, and carmine, not that that means much to anyone except a fellow Sulagi Invid or a human, and she's what roughly translates in human terms as an upper-ranking princess or royaltly, but not high-high royalty like Sera was for instance. She was transmuted to the human form a month or so before I was, or a month before Reflex Point. She's never been very flashy. She was more a supporting cast type in the last war, and the way things look she's playing the same part in this one. She's very good at the arts of war, but not spectacular.

Nearly enough to do for Matt though." Kevin shivered. "Nonetheless, knowing she's in our area scares the crap out of me."

"If--why?" Amanda's eyes were narrowed, all the humor gone out.

Kevin stared at her solemnly. "Because, Mandy, what people fail to see--human or Invid--is that it's not the ones who make the most noise who are the most dangerous. The really dangerous ones are the ones you overlook. Don't look at the plasma cannon, watch out for the slug in the back, sort of thing."

"So you're trying to say is that even though she's not among the Invid running the operation, she's still bad news?"

Kevin plopped down on the couch next to her as Matt looked on. "Oh yes. And she's extremely intelligent as well. It's just that nobody notices. I --before--" He trailed off, not willing to admit there was a before, "I--managed to notice. She's too bright to admit or demonstrate being so, because she knows it'll target her by the humans. And she's aware of the fact that a good plan of occupation is far more effective in the long run than simply going out and wiping out a few dozen enemy the way most Invid like to do. She's a creative thinker, and also completely loyal to the Invid cause. The two traits together are quite rare."

"Why is that?"

He smiled at her sadly, and then she understood.

"Why else do you think I'm talking to you now, instead of being on that side?" Amanda swallowed, recognizing the enormity of the question. "And back on the subject of Oryo'i, now that we've pissed her off, with that combination of traits--I'll bet you my lunch she'll start thinking of some very interesting ways to find out and deal with us. And the worst part, she'll go about it quietly and thoroughly until it's too late."

Matt said, "Amanda, you need to know about this. If Kev or I or both of us get killed, you'll be the only one who knows how dangerous our situation is with this person in the area. Since if Kevin--" he trailed off, "the entire point of the charade'll be moot, so you can then tell the others."

Amanda looked off to the other side of the wall. "If you say so."

The greatest single defining characteristic of the land surrounding the bases in the ruins of the blasted city in the old Protected Zone was: flat.

Except for trees, buildings, the crater lake, and a few artificial rises created by the highway contractors of the last century, the area had about as much distinguishing topography as did a pancake. It was not the

sort of land layout that facilitiated hiding. It had been a major worry for the Elms ever since they had arrived all those months ago.

It was also a source of great frustration for the enemy.

The sole pillar of alloy flicked light as it took a hesitating step to the shadow of another building, then it paused again, as lifeless as the building itself. In the shade and in the weak light of the half-hearted December morning, the body disappeared, while accents stood out like flame.

After several minutes of making certain there was no observation, the sensor array between the shoulders pivoted, searching.

Where was the last movement it had seen?

I am getting close now... she thought. The fingers/ claws of the mecha flexed in anticipation and nervousness. She constantly kept an eye on her instruments. This cursed lack of any real cover meant that on the first sign of approaching enemy mecha she would have to hide before their sensors picked her up. If they should notice her around.... The idea of half a lunar cycle's dilligent night-and-day searching undone, perhaps permanently, was unthinkable. And this close...

Her opredti sensors had been notifying her of the presence of fuel cells in several scattered sites. Now she had to find which of them hid the resistance.

I want to know. I have to know...

Bringing a convoy of underlings out here would have only dramatically increased chances of being seen, so only she stalked in the shadows, power at the barest minimum to ensure movement and function of instruments. After all, a trahl got into areas that the larger and stronger could not go. It was working so far.

So had the manipulation into letting her stay down south...a play on his ego here, some reverse psychology there, and a fine glaze of surface submissivness over all. He never thought to read any further underneath.

He might have been quite startled if he had.

I am going to find out if it's the last thing...

Nothing but quiet around, with no indication save the omnipresent hum of the sensors as they noted and detected locations of opredti in the area. There was one less than five hundred yards away. She ignored it. That wasn't her objective at any rate.

She forced the sensors to focus further out, reading other deposits. It would figure that at one of the largest the human gadflies would be hiding.

Hrmm, wait... She drew nearly all of her available power to the sensor--there, on the very limits of her perception to the north, there was something...

What? She started, surprise jerking away her concentration. She rerouted power to pure visuals, swiftly retreating into the shadows of the naked trees and the building they shadowed. There was movement, large movement. A flick between distant buildings, then another. She finally focused in far enough--no protoculure radiation to help, but it did not matter much. They were getting closer.

It was the first indication of human activity she had seen in the day or so since she had flown in low from the east.

At last she could make it out clearly, and her breathing picked up.

Two humans on Terran vehicles/ mecha moving south in roughly her direction, hooded against the deepening chill of the year, but with streamers of loose hair occasionally flying out. Bleeping, the Gamun's sensors moved in.

She blinked incredulously, then a growl rose in her throat.

Oh, she felt she knew them quite well. The yellow and fiery red hair was not easily forgotten, considering they'd had the audacity to thwart her of her execution of their nonetheless pointlessly heroic companion that while ago.

The sensor eye inperceptibly pivoted, tracking the trail they made.

"Gotta be there by 1030 hours," Mandy noted, her eyes flicking to her watch. Gwendolyn did not acknowledge the comment even with a shrug. "Do you suppose their ammo inventory is OK?"

Gwen still refused to answer. Biting her lip, Amanda turned back to the road, releasing her gnaw on her lower lip when a jolt almost made her bite through it.

Bravely continuing, Amanda noted, "I certainly hope so. I 'spect Terre Haute'll get pissy at us with us begging stuff off them when they need it."

When this still received no response, Amanda swallowed and sighed, turning with her companion onto the road that led southward to Base Two, the rather smaller, more cramped, and less well-appointed of the encampments the Elms had set up. She was privately wondering about the wisdom of Dennis' pairing her

with the redhead in order to go down and help take inventory on Base Two's millitary hardware.

Kevin had tiredly noted to her in the past couple of days Gwen had redoubled her advances after several months of inactivity. However, he had noted that there was something in them that turned him off, even as the prior ones had done terrible things to his composure. The vindictiveness he had noted in them was enough to prompt Amanda to walk in whenever Gwen looked as though she were making another play. This was probably the reason why Mandy was being given the silent treatment.

("I suppose if nothing else this proves I...uh am...inclined." he had said, as embarrassed as he had ever been. This statement had caused Amanda to start noodling over things that she eventually had to leave off because the implications were too unnerving.)

Gwen suddenly swerved, throwing Mandy off her rhythm. "Hey watch it!"

Gwen, her lip curled, turned back a look on her that even through the goggles made Amanda's stomach turn. She had not seen so much venom in a single expression before.

"What'd I do?" Amanda said to herself, forgetting the tactical net was still open.

She finally had a response: a contemptuous snort.

Amanda tightened her mouth and continued onward.

The hairs on the back of her neck prickled. This was nothing new; she had been paranoid for over a year now, and especially in the past few weeks. But little things were bothering her, particularly with Gwendolyn's obstinacy. Of course, with her nerves rubbed as raw as they were, anything was setting her off. She hoped that once they got to Base Two she'd be able to get away from Gwen for at least a while.

What'd you do, you little tramp? Gwen seethed. *What'd you think you did? Probably bonking His Holiness' buddy on the sly, the rottin' liar. What's wrong with me? Sure didn't stop the Sluggers' CO from eating his cake, now did it?*

Red around the edges of her vision, Rutherford ruthlessly accelerated, ignoring potential potholes, worked up into such an emotional frenzy that for the first few seconds she didn't notice the tell tale hum and whoosh coming from up ahead.

Then she saw.

And smiled.

Amanda was confused enough that for a second she did not comprehend when the Cyclone up ahead suddenly made a screaming ninety degree turn and went down an entirely different street.

"What? Gwen, what's--" There was no response over the tac net. Dammit, she had let her attention slip. She began to survey the surrounding area, but it was not until she saw the shadow darkening the ground that she looked up.

For a frozen instant, she was caught, moth in a flame. Then she twisted the gas and howled down the highway with both engine and voice, even as the clamping, arm-long alloy digits closed on the spot where she had been.

"GWEN!" she screamed, as the Invid mecha flipped over in midair and roared after her. If Rutherford could squeeze off a shot, it might be enough to distract the Assault Battloid overhead long enough so that Amanda could execute mode transition. It was too close, getting closer, and it took far too long to shift in close quarters. She would be dead before the first two seconds. In the icy prelude to true terror, she managed to accelerate to full speed, switching on the protoculture engines, but the Invid battloid's jets laughed at it.

"Gwen, help me, damn you!"

No help came.

Desperately, Amanda executed a tight 180, knee shrieking across cracked pavement, and for a moment disoriented the alien.

Its pilot watched detachedly at the desperately speeding human. Why doesn't her companion aid her? Is it some sort of ruse? A disquieting thought crept into her mind. Perhaps their companions may be waiting. (There had been some horror stories circulated on how the humans sometimes interrogated Sulagi captives.)

Her brow furrowed. *Well, if that's the case...*

Amanda crouched over the bike. One last possible chance...if she could only switch modes, then things might be a bit more equal. A gamble but the only one she had left... Pray to God if he were watching that she had time to spare after throwing the Invid off.

She flipped the mode transition switch.

The bike rocketed up, the Forager's front farings splitting and rising, as she herself rose. For a panicky

second she thought she might make it.

But then there was yet another jerk, and she kept rising. She did not need to see the vermillion fingers of the Assault Battloid lapped full around her waist to know, and she screamed once; a shrill ulutation of surprise, terror, and despair.

The thrusters boomed on with bone-shattering force, squeezing the breath out of her. Then the G-forces slapped into her, and into merciful blackness.

The gray and orange Invid mecha rose, and began to curl away to the northeast. It was gone to sight in minutes.

Below, safely sheltered in a building shell, a mounted figure on a Cyclone watched it depart.

It continued to stare for some minutes, stock still, seemingly lost in some bemusement. Then, unaffected, it began to start up its engines again.

Or seemingly unaffected.

As the fingers reached the ignition, they suddenly began to tremble. Abruptly, the tremble convulsed into convulsive shudders, as though consumed with a raging fever. Bonelessly, the figure slumped from the mecha, ignoring how it crashed only a couple inches from her leg.

The hands suddenly ripped off the helmet, releasing a cascade of copper hair. Shaking, she stared at the ground. Abruptly, the figure groaned, and then began to retch repeatedly.

When there was nothing left to bring up, the hands reached up and half-heartedly wiped the mouth. Then she looked up, revealing the gray countenance of a woman, sobbing, all malice gone, curdled with sickness and self-loathing.

"God, God, what have I done?" Gwendolyn Rutherford wept.

Miranda sat on a overstuffed couch, toying with a braid and watching Florence Henderson vigorously color a yellowing book with a box of crayons at her feet. The little girl's technique was interesting, her main modus operandi attacking the pages with layer after layer of bright yellow with little discretion for where the lines actually were.

The crayon broke and Florence pouted, before grabbing a purple stick and repeating the process in another section of the page. Miranda smiled. Florrie certainly had recovered quite well from her imprisonment, only occasionally--Miranda's coffee-colored eyes clouded--waking up in the night crying for her mother.

Of course, there were still the times the child stared off into empty space...

"What're you drawing, sweetie?"

"A big FLOWER!" Florence shouted enthusiastically, happily ignoring that whatever the page contained--in this case a horse in a field--it was hardly flowerlike. "An' a sun. An ' grass."

"How about brown?" Miranda asked, indicating the drawing of the horse with a toe.

Florence gave her an indignant look. "Flowers aren't brown."

Miranda was about to convince her that maybe horse-shaped flowers were when suddenly Florence gasped and went white, her sky-blue eyes wide under her cropped brown ringlets. Miranda propelled herself onto the floor--the child was having another of her fits.

"Florrie? Florrie, hon, wake up!"

For another minute, the girl stared, oblivious, then huge tears formed in her eyes.

"Florrie, what is it!"

Trembling with sobs, the child said. "I'm scared! Something real bad happened, 'Randa." The sluices opened and she began to cry for real, incoherent with whatever was possessing her.

Miranda held her close, her dark eyes wide with confusion, doubt, and fear.

"Nothing new, right?" Matt asked, sitting uncomfortably on the back of the comm room couch and looking over at the recruit manning it. She shook her head.

"No sir. Not a peep. It's been like this all day." She did not go into the fact the nearby groups had not been active ever since the return from the protoculture raid. Behind them, another Elm wandered through the doorway, a half-full glass of opaque tea in his hand. "The Riders checked in, and that's it. Nobody got wiped out or anything. Sir."

Matt shrugged and rose from his seat. "Well, if that's the case..."

"Alert all personnel!" Matt bolted upright. The radar array worker's voice brought the PA to life "A lone bogie has just been spotted in the second quadrant, moving away to the northeast. Believed Invid; turn all protoculture radiation off--repeat, turn all protoculture radiation off!"

"What?" Ulm said, not very intelligently. There was a sudden gasp from the comm worker, and she whirled back to the set, opening a channel.

The voice that screamed at them in sick terror was unmistakably Gwen's.

"Goddammit, Base One, are you readin' me? This is Rutherford down at Base Two! We were attacked by a Marauder--it got Pierson! Are you--"

There was a crash from behind him; the initial shock was so much it took a second for Ulm to turn and see the cause.

First Scout O'Shea was standing there, hand loosened, mouth open, azure eyes wide and blank with shock and beginning devastation. The remains of his glass was in shards on the floor and splattered all over his boots.

He had done precisely the same thing in late 2039: while he had been washing the dishes, the ham radio had suddenly crackled, "There was a reported sighting of a Shock Trooper..."

In a detached way, Matt was grateful that the glass had not cut Kevin's hands.

They stared at each other in the face of the tragedy, one unspoken phrase passing between them.

She's made her move.

"...We can't just let her get tortured to death!" Shiroikiku angrily insisted, her face red with repressed emotion. "What kind of people would we be?" Frustrated, she brought both fists down on the table with a hollow boom, startling all the core leaders there. His own face tight, Malcolm rested his hands on her shoulders in comfort.

Matt stared at the table, his face white under his stubble. He did not raise his eyes. His voice sounded as though it were being dragged from him. "Corporal Doi--from a rational standpoint, she's--one person. The Elms is forty-nine people. Endangering them, just for her sake..."

"If she's--interrogated into telling where we are, Matt, we're in deep shit all the same," Gerald Wilson pointed out, folding his thick arms over his chest as he leaned on Frederick's chair. Bohms, white around the nostrils, did not seem to notice.

"So there!" Doi shouted, bolting upright and jabbing a finger, her cheeks a good match for her hair dye. "We're fucked if we do and fucked if we don't. Personally, I'd rather get wasted trying to save Amanda rather than let her die before we buy it."

Ulm's logic warred with his heart at every word. "But, you see, if we move ASAP, we can save lives..."

"If we move ASAP, we're allowing her to die the same way every other damn Elm has." Matt winced visibly. "I thought we were better than the Invid in that respect."

God, Sherry, Matt thought, *don't make this harder than it is for me.*

He tried not to look down the table at the slumped, green-jacketed figure between the Altman siblings, or at the greenish tint in the red-haired woman's face. Gwen still had not stopped shaking ever since her blazing journey from Base Two twenty minutes ago, when the emergency meeting had convened. They were still at a standstill.

Privately, Ulm was proud at their loyalty, when it was not killing him.

Dennis spoke up from his end of the table, his voice crisp and his eyes worried. "It's too dangerous. We can't afford to risk any more personnel getting killed. Do you have any idea how well-guarded any hive they took her to will be? They have to know we might try to get her out."

Ulm was thinking precisely the same thing, for different reasons. From what Kevin had told him of Oryo'i, it was likely she had taken Pierson as a bait for the rest. Had she simply wanted to get out quietly with no notice, it was certainly in her power to do so.

He was certain Kevin was wishing he had never given those hints and influenced Matthew's decision.

I'm sorry, Kev. You don't know how sorry, as he watched the motionless scout.

And speaking of which, how had Gwen known precisely what direction the Invid was going with Amanda? That precison should have been going into her attempting to shoot the Invid mecha down.

Miranda and Fred seemed to be incapable of speaking; he from naked fury, she from an inner war as violent as his. Miranda, after all, was one of Amanda's oldest friends.

Zinnert sighed. "Let's put it to a vote. Aye means we send a party after, Nay means we spend our energy moving."

Seconding, Matt hoped privately for an illogical turn.

Stomach churning, Matt said, "Nay," turning his eyes from Kevin's look of betrayal..

"Nay," Zinnert said.

"Aye," Shiroikiku barked.

"Nay," Gerald said reluctantly. Spitting out his decision, Fred managed, "Aye."

Malcolm: "Nay." He dropped his eyes from Sherry's.

Gwen: "Aye." She stared straight ahead, reddened eyes fixed.

Kevin startled, his eyes lost. "Aye," he whispered.

Only Miranda was left to break the deadlock. Swallowing repeatedly, she looked around the table, in the back of her mind playing that unnerving coincidence with Florence.

Her voice barely audible: "Nay."

Kevin jerked, his eyes horrified. "Miranda--"

"Don't tell me!" she barked. Her composure broke, and tears trickled down her ashen cheeks. "I know, Kevin, I know."

"Why? Dammit, Miranda, why??"

"God, Kevin, I care about her as much as you do. But--but--God help me--they're right."

His voice a croak, Matt said. "Four aye, five nay. Tell the others to start moving procedures."

Maybe it would help if I went and killed myself now, Kevin thought abstractedly as the rest began to file out. He certainly felt dead already. As though they belonged to another creature, he watched his limp hands loosely interlocked down between his knees. *A walking corpse, that's what I am. A living lie living in order to fight another lie.*

It was bad as it was, trembling with fear everytime he thought he had drawn his own blood in public,

compounded by the crushing weight of six years of facade. But now...he could not conceive of life without...

"O'Shea, I'm sorry." The second commander's shadow eclipsed the flourescent lights. "I know you were her friend."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better, Dennis?" Kevin asked in a monotone. "Go away, that might help. I'm half-inclined to give it a shot anyway."

"Kevin, there's no logical way we can get inside an Invid hive, get her, and get out alive without dragging the hive's forces after us. We would endanger the entire group for the sake of one person. We don't even know which hive she was taken to."

"Make a guess," Kevin snapped, some expression returning to the dead voice. "There was a process of elimination the last I knew."

Zinnert ignored his obvious lead into making Dennis state that the nearest one in that direction was a satellite hive near the major one at the old city of Lafayette. It was a fifty-fifty guess where Amanda was being held--if she were still alive, that was.

"Look, O'Shea, she was a soldier, as are you, as am I--"

"You speak like she were already dead, " Kevin said thickly. Dennis did not answer save for the smallest of flinches when the scout met his eyes, but the phrase was clear: she may as well be dead.

Dennis continued again. "Kevin--" The scout's bleak eyes blinked when the CO used his name, "she knew the risks when she signed on."

Kevin managed to pull himself out of the nauseating swirl of memories that came up with that statement, with remembering it was his own covert intervention and training for Mandy that allowed her to join, allowed her to be in this situation. Through the crushing guilt, he snarled, life truly coming back, "Dennis, she was stripped of everything she had loved by the Invid, marched like an animal, and forced to run like prey. She didn't have a single goddamned alternative left. You have the nerve to call that a choice? My God! And you think she didn't know the risks of NOT signing on?"

Dennis winced visibly this time. "Touche, Kevin. It's just that I've--you've been doing this so long--" He awkwardly trailed off, noticing no reaction.

"And you sure as hell have seemed to forget quite a few others haven't. It ain't the same war the Elms drew up the charter for, Dennis Zinnert, and I ought to know."

Dennis sighed. "Yes, you're right. It isn't the same war. It's gotten a lot uglier, a lot filthier, and a lot more

desperate. We need every person we can get, Kevin. Trying to rescue her would end up killing more people. I can't tell you how sorry I am, but that's the cost of this war."

In retrospect, this statement was exactly the wrong thing for Dennis to say.

"THE COST OF THIS WAR?!!" Kevin roared in his face as the black and purple stars faded from Dennis' vision. The scout slammed the lieutenant's shoulders back onto the ground as he kneeled on Zinnert's chest. "The cost of this WAR?" In a distant way, Dennis noted Kevin's eyes were so dilated with the sudden surge that had knocked him down that only the thinnest of rims circled the pupil.

Suddenly, Dennis was yanked by the collar of his uniform, staring into O'Shea's maddened features.

"Let me tell you, Dennis, you haven't the slightest idea of what those costs are. You've been so damned busy for six and a half years playing savior to the planet that you don't even know the people you're saving.

"The costs of this war was a nice guy I tried to discuss Talmudic literature and history with--remember Evan Blume? He liked canned peaches and poached eggs. There's your cost. The cost of this was a woman driven crazy by Flower spores and dying like a dog in an Invid slave farm, leaving a little girl orphaned. The cost of this war was Henrietta Dalby, whose only mistake was to stumble a little too close to a hidden Attack Scout. I don't remember too much of her, but I know she liked potted flowers, especially petunias. And the cost of this war was the systematic destruction of an entire town for slave labor and making parents watch as Enforcers shot their little girls and boys down--because they were inconvenient, Zinnert. You're always blabbing on what the Regent did to the population of Karbarra, can't you see this? Let's not get into Raymond Thieu--if he hadn't come along, we wouldn't have a Shadow Alpha now, would we?"

"I think I once read something about some Russian dicatator saying one death was a tragedy and a million a statistic. Well, looks like he was right in your case."

"Kevin--" Dennis hazarded. Kevin wasn't listening, the repressed frustration of years spilling out.

"You idiot REF white knights with your idiot idea that this all is a big game of Battleship--oh yeah, that's another game Blume liked--and your bloody going on and on and on about saving the entire Local Group from the Big Bad Bugs, especially while your own race and your birth world is writhing in pain from several alien invasions--at least you can go and separate yourself from the conflict and pat yourself on the back once you're done. These people can't! They have to live with the results, and then have you come in and claim victory for them--it wasn't you that did it! You don't have a stake in this war outside your own life, Zinnert." He no longer knew why he was shouting at the terrified Lieutenant, except that perhaps he could expunge, somehow, the feeling of culpability. "The cost of this war isn't in numbers, buster, and it's shortly going to include someone who is a pretty decent shot and who likes weeds and botany. Okay, you can rant the nine yards about the costs of fucking war, Second Lieutenant Zinnert, but don't go asking ME

to save your ass when it comes time, because I'll already be dead, thanks to your counting costs."

Abruptly, Kevin was on his feet, not quite running, not quite walking out the door, trying to outrun--something.

Zinnert lay back on the floor, gasping, his co-charter's raging countenace imprinted on his retinas and his words in his heart. Instead of calling out on assault, he simply lay there.

"And then they came for me, and there was nobody left to speak out," he murmured bleakly.

Malcolm was following Sherry's rigid back, futilely trying to gain her attention, when Dennis wandered by, his eyes dazed and his usually impeccable uniform wrinkled with deep creases, as though the front had been grabbed in a fist.

"Dennis?" Malcolm asked, momentarily shocked out of his own depression.

"Never mind," Zinnert muttered. Malcolm frowned, and miserably tried to think of what he needed to pack--and if Sherry would ever speak to him again.

The landing bay boomed, then rang with echoes as the jets cut out and the tons-heavy Battloid thudded to the ground. The pilot watched as the Enforcers began to move toward her to begin service to the mecha.

She did one last maneuver: the mecha marched over to a nearby pedestal-like growth, and carefully set the limp form in one hand down onto it. Then she herself opened the hatch and made the Gamun dip, lightly jumping down as the mecha straightened. Raking a hand through ghost-pale hair--she had not felt the armor was necessary for a recon operation, plus it was uncomfortable for her--she walked over and looked down, studying her prize.

Still breathing. Good. She had kept the human out of the worst of the wind of her passage and cut back on speed, and although unconscious, the female was still very much alive and stood to be functional. Oryo'i nodded to herself, then removed the helmet that had protected the human in flight.

As always, Oryo'i continued to be slightly surprised by how much the humans resembled herself. True, it was intentional on the Invid's part, but even several Terran orbits after the fact it was a shock.

Yes, this was certainly the one that had fired on her back at the farm. With a hand, she peeled back an eyelid. The same color of eye, the same pigmentation speckling, the same color of hair, the same scar on

the cheek (how had she gotten that?).

Oryo'i smiled.

At last--I ought to have done something to please him. This human should be a valuable tool in finding out at least one human group's locale for elimination--particularly the one that's caused me this recent trouble. However--I should obscure to my lord HOW I came to know this fact...

She sighed and shrugged, unconsciouly human in her gesture. *Even if he does find out the raid, this should make up for it.*

Another sigh, then she steeled herself. Patching herself to the hive's Brain, she sent her thoughts out over the miles...

Contact was instantaneous, and irritable.

YOU again! *What stupidity are you contacting me on now?*

Yes, I, lord. But I hardly think what I am disturbing you on is trifling. You might find this of interest...

She let down her mind, allowing him to probe into her memories and conclusions, quivering slightly with the loss of privacy as she did so. Shkud was not gentle.

For a time, images flickered in her skull, with her as spectator, as Shkud searched. There was a quick, hot spurt of irritation as he found the raid, but she paid no notice, for she was too busy shielding her feelings about him from his regard... Then, a series of mental grunts and mutters as he reacted to the information.

And then, amazingly enough, acquisence, and the beginnings of real pleasure and expectation from her superior's mind. He immediately shut it off, but the quality of it made her shiver. It had been the same satisfaction he had gotten from her demotion, multiplied a thousand times.

Almost, she pitied the human for what was to come. But--for the first time in months, it was not directed at Oryo'i herself. In place of contempt, there was a grudging appreciation.

There was a lengthy mental silence as he appeared to think it over. She had almost thought he'd disconnected, before his thought broke into her mind again.

He actually seemed thoughtful.

Do not kill the human, Oryo'i. Not yet. I--have an interest--in questioning her myself. My own particular skills ought to make it more successful. I will arrive in a while to interrogate her. Until then, hold her in the lower levels for keeping.

Shkud coming here personally? Usually, she came to him, not the other way around.

She wondered. Again, she was getting the impression that there were things he was hiding from her.

But your place, Sulagi, is not to know MY thoughts on the subject, but to do what I ask of you. Do you understand? he asked sweetly. She started, not having heard him monitor her, and feeling his pleasure in frightening her, even now. *I will be there after night falls. Make sure she is conscious by then.*

With that, he broke the connection.

He had not commended her. It was too much to ask, what with hiding the raid from him, and her completely uncondoned searching. And Shkud was what he was.

But things were certainly looking up.

"Place her in the holding pen on the second floor," Oryo'i said to the two Malar that arrived then and prepared to lift the human's limp body. Then she left to attend to her own needs, a suspicious lightening of her mood helping her through her weariness.

Night cloaked Base One with early gloom, doubled now that in fear of being found, they had shut off all unecessary power, including lighting. The only glow was a halogen lamp flickering along the tiles, breaking the sulleness of the December darkness as the watch surveyed the area..

In the barracks, next to Miranda's bed, a small bundle was on another, smaller bed, with incongrously cheerful pink flowers and butterflies on the spread. The rest of the beds in the room were unoccupied, as their owners were busy helping with the nocturnal moving effort, but in this one, there was a huddle of blankets against the deepening chill.

In it, tear-tracks reddening her face, Florence Henderson had drifed off to an uneasy slumber,

There was a snuffle from underneath the bed, then something pale and fuzzy bounced up, and managed onto the bed. It snuffled around for a minute, inspecting the child's face, then curled up in the hollow of her body.

Florence did not notice, caught in the deepening darkness of her consciousness, the oily tendrils of nightmare beginning to reach for her almost instantly. Behind it lurked the unimaginable horrors only a child's mind could experience in a year's bondage, amplified by the events of the day.

And as almost always happened, just as they touched her, they were brusquely shoved away. Whimpering with relief, the little girl reached for who she knew would be there. Even in her dreams, the arms around her felt warm and real.

"I'm so glad you're here!" she gulped, and hung on, her dream body shivering.

"Aw, Florrie, do you think I wouldn't?" her savior said, picking her up into a solid-feeling lap. "I don't do that."

"But--"

There was a snort. "That time I was being chased by a bunch of bad guys and had to get away, honey. You know."

"But--" The other grew silent, catching the chaos of the child's mood. The shining hair swept down to curtain her face and Florence.

Florence had decided weeks ago that her night-friend was an angel, even without the wings. Maybe she could do something.

"Manda got taken by the monsters!" she wailed suddenly, and began to cry again. Her friend went stiff, then tightened her hold on her girl. "She needs help, bad!"

"What?" The angel's face dropped down to look into the girl's eyes. "Are you sure?"

Sniffling, Florence said so. A decidedly unangelic look was clouding her companion's face. Finally, she said: "Tell me what you know, Florrie."

Incoherently, Florence did so, until the other pieced it together. By the time Florence was done, the woman holding her was subvocalizing words that would have earned her automatic ejection from the heavenly realm.

"You gotta help her!" Florence said again, her blue eyes desperate.

Slowly, the other nodded. Of course she would, Florence thought, a glimmer of hope lifting her spirits. She was an angel after all, wasn't she?

"I have to see what I can do, Florrie. But don't worry, I'll help you. I swear it. Now do you know where you are?"

Nodding solemnly, Florence told her.

In the conscious world, the pollinator yawned deeply, then began to make whistling snores.

O'Shea hadn't been completely right. There had been people that influenced his decision to be here, Dennis thought. He managed to navigate a pothole the size of a tub, then continued his path south, the equipment in his carrier rattling slightly.

For example, there had been this girl, back on Tirol...

Funny how a few years of fighting dimmed some memories and sharpened others. Now that he remembered about her...

He had been crazy about her. Even though she worked in the med division and he was in the regular army, he'd used every pass he could to see her. The two months he'd gone out with her had been the happiest of his life thus far. She'd had long, golden-brown hair he loved to run his fingers though...

Then she dumped him for some high-class jock with fifty or so Invid kills.

When he tried to ask her why the one time he'd cornered her, she'd hawed and eventually come out with a excuse of "we're not compatible," that sounded a lot like he wasn't "exciting enough."

What else is new? Zinnert thought.

The last he'd heard of her, she and her new beau were squabbling in a high-priced Tiresia resturaunt. The same day, despondent, he had signed up on the Jupiter Division's final push to Reflex Point.

He swerved around another pothole, aiming for the oppressive holed dome he felt more than saw against the gut of a sky that promised acid-cold snow.

If only he could be other than what he was, Dennis thought, perhaps the pain might go away. But he was what he was: not overly handsome, very much deliberate, and all too correct. So correct, in fact, that people tended over him toward the charming ones, the handsome ones, the companionable ones; while he relied on his rules to ease the hollowness inside.

Maybe a little incorrectness would get Dennis, if not love or respect, at least a good epitaph, and maybe the absolution of the guilt that had overcome him after the scalding words O'Shea had spoken earlier that day.

He passed the checkpoint, ID'd himself in, and began to walk through the tunnels of the ruined arena toward the center, and toward the entranceway to the stage area.

Nobody stopped him, the only person present being the guard at the entranceway. The rest, as Zinnert knew, were in the middle of moving preparations even in the wee hours of the morning. They could not risk the possibilitiy of the Invid's finding their location.

Finally, he reached the entranceway he wanted, wheeling his Cyclone through.

The Alpha loomed above him in gerwalk, its configuration allowing for VTOL manuvers through the gaping hole in the west side of the massive concrete dome. The mecha blended in with the darkness even when Zinnert turned on the halogen lantern, its black coloration, like that of the first Shadow designs, making it hard to see. Apparently some smart-aleck genius on Tirol had made his own peculiar homage to the original Shadow Alphas in the design scheme.

Zinnert stared at it a bit, trying not to let his thoughts get the better of him, then began to unload his Cyclone.

It was about twenty minutes before he was done; but at last, he had made all adequate preparations. He tried to get his Battler in the cargo space and already found a Ferret there. He was miffed, but then realized somebody had decided to do their own fitting of the mecha. And, after all, the Ferret was in its way much better suited for what he was thinking.

Shrugging, he climbed up into the front cockpit of the Alpha, seated, and lowered the canopy. It boomed shut, and he sighed.

"What took ya so long?" a voice drawled from behind him.

Zinnert went ballistic.

The first thing she was aware of was the hum; the second was that the floor felt warm for being a floor.

Groggily, she moved a hand, and winced halfheartedly. Her hand, and now that she thought about it, entire body felt as though someone had tried to flay it with a dull butter knife. This ignored the fact that in addition her ribcage hurt with every intake of breath she made. It was probably that which had woken her up.

There was an annoying actinic light off to her left, and aching, she turned her face away. Who was the idiot who'd turned on the flourescents this time of the morning? And why was she on the floor to begin with?

And especially, who had left the vegetable stores out to compost?

Cringing, blinking crusted eyes, she looked up.

The flourescents off to her left were a retina aching blue-white series of lines in a rather attractive chessboard pattern, with squares about a foot wide in diameter. On her right was a darkness she took to be a niche or wall. Beyond the luminary chessboard, there was more darkness. She could not tell for certain; as brilliant as the light-grid was, it shed suprisingly little light and only seemed to increase shadows. The floor underneath her hands was, as she had noticed, warm and oddly pliable.

Somebody certainly decorated the place, she thought detachedly. Sherry probably had a field day when I was knocked out after guard duty.

Whimpering, she painfully got her legs underneath her and sat up, raking the tangled mess of her hair out of her eyes. Time to get it trimmed again, she thought. Sore and shaky, she pivoted her head around, looking for a familliar landmark.

She'd been in CVR the last she knew, hadn't she? Why wasn't there any on...

The last dregs of her unconsciousness dribbling away, she began to truly see and remember.

Softly, coldly, the reality settled over her like a blanket of lead, and she began to whimper in helpless fear. Oh, she remembered that smell, out of the haunts of her nightmares, and in daydreams best not described.

She was in the belly of the beast.

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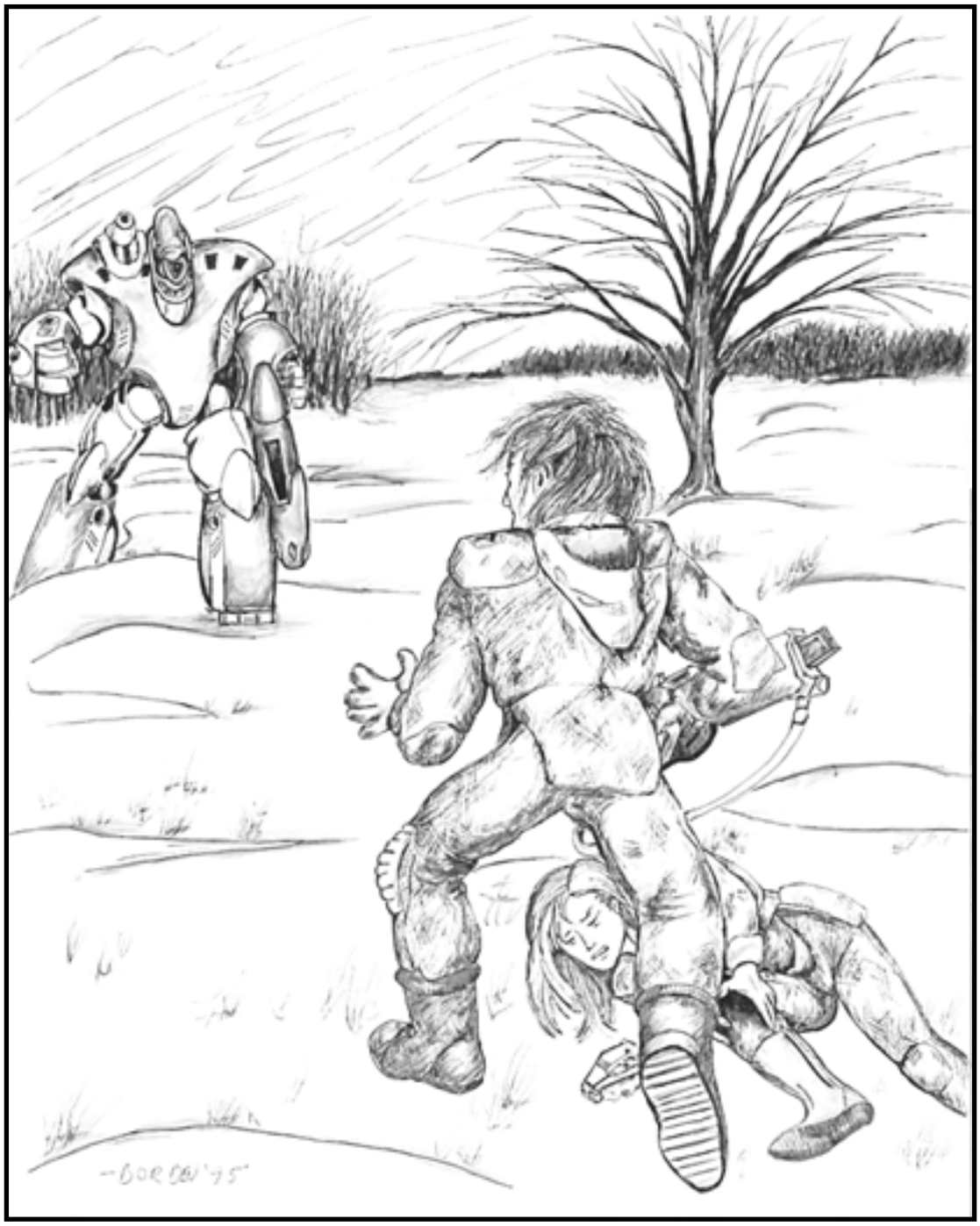

DANDELIONS

CHAPTER SIX

November 2045

"Listen up, people."

Dennis strode back and forth in front of the line, his CVR boots clunking dully against the tiles of the floor. He raked them with a glance, secretly approving. Although he did not care for Ulm's laxity, he was glad to see that the rest knew when to behave. Even Ulm's lover, whom he knew detested him, was staring at him with concentration in his eyes.

"As you know, we now have forty-five functioning Cyclones, each of which use a couple canisters yearly of Protoculture in order to work at optimum level. Considering the flying we do, that lifespan is sharply reduced. Furthermore, we are almost finished with completing repairs on a VAF-8R Shadow Alpha, which requires far more. If we're going to move it, it needs to be fueled. In short, Elms, we're running out, and don't have any replacements for our stockpiles.

"Even though we use fusion if we can help it, in some cases it can't equal protoculture in function and manuverability. And frankly, people, I'd rather run the risk of more Invid detecting us rather the risk of any one of you getting killed because we have no protoculture to spare. Ergo, we need to get more. And the only feasible way to do this is hit a farm."

Mutters arose. Sternly, he said, "Look, your first CO agrees with me on this. The Invid are cracking down. We can't risk signs of trade among other groups or towns without attracting unfriendly attention. The Apocalypse Riders, for instance, has its hands full with the Invid as it is. Whoever organized the strike against Rantoul is a sore loser. Plus, the Riders and the other resistance bands need what they have. So the trick is bring the fun back to the Invid." Off to the side, he felt rather than saw Ulm's nod.

"That's fucking crazy," a newcomer said softly. Agreement backed him up.

"It's been done before," Malcolm pointed out. "You just weren't there when it happened."

"Okay," Sherry said, "How does the plan go, Dennis?" She looked almost ridiculously small in her oversize armor, as though playing dress-up in her mother's things. There was nothing childlike about the hard resolve in the black almond eyes. She ruffled her now green-and-indigo locks, her numerous earrings chiming gently. "Like the last time, the speedy guys--meaning me, Harmon, Elizabeth, and damn-all everyone else you can think of--providing air support and recon while the muscle nabs it?"

Zinnert gave a reluctant nod. "And the sharpshooters providing cover for the power." It was the only way he could think of maximizing Rutherford's...extraordinary talents in that area. "There's more, but yes, that is the gist of it." Doi's nostrils flared, the little gold ankh-stud catching light as she did so.

"So what's the farm in mind, Dennis?" Rutherford asked in her honeyed Kentuckian drawl. "I do hope

you got in mind somethin' far away enough the bugs don't know where to look for the swatters."

"Glad you asked that, Rutherford," The blinding smile she turned on him left him trying to collect his thoughts for a second. He put it away, albeit reluctantly; a career REF officer had no time for that. He looked over to Matt. Ulm nodded, and threw the switch.

The holographic countour map flared into life, then established itself as a representation of the surrounding terrain. One white asterisk began to flash. "This is where we are." Secondary lights began to come to life. "These are either surrounding towns or known resistance bases--the latter are the stars." Now, sullen red lights began to sprout. "And these are the known Invid outposts."

Ulm took over. "You all know our little friend here." He gestured to one red mote. Mumbles arose; it was the hive strongly suspected of providing the troops for the Rantoul hit. "And this one," moving east and north. This blot was larger, believed to be a controlling hive. White lights began to flash; keen minds could make out that a rough circle of white flashers extended from around the red marker. "And these are towns known to have been attacked or taken by the Invid." . A similar, but slightly smaller affected radius was flashing around another major hive across the blue band that was the Missisippi. Both came frightfully close to their site; only a few towns, to the south and west, remained steady. "This doesn't have much to bear on our next mission, I suppose, except as an illustration of how desperately we need fuel and how close we are to being hit." He moved in front of the holo-map, carrying a pointer. It traced downward, away from the blinking areas. Eventually, it came to rest approximately a hundred and fifty miles away toward the south-southwest, on a red star.

"We're going away from those spheres, since if we keep hitting those aggressors, they're eventually bound to put two and two together. The information we're gotten indicates that different areas seem to have different MO's, which indicates that the command's not as unified as it was during the last occupation, but that also there is a unified leadership of whatever sort controlling within whatever sector you choose. It also means that we make better not make ourselves too familliar to whatever's running things in either of those spheres, or it'll increase interest. However, if it's a different area, it's not as high a risk."

"Depending, of course, how you rate 'high'," Fred said. Dennis made a face and concurred.

"Yes. Well, whatever's in that area hasn't been as hot on enslaving civilians, maybe because whatever it is doesn't really need it, since the resources are already there. The other reason we're interested there being that that particular area is unusually high in Flower concentration. And where Flowers of Life are, protoculture farms aren't far behind. This thing," a gesture at the sourthern dot, "appears to be one, and it's going to be the one we target. Any volunteers?"

No hands came up. All of them seemed to have gotten down the first rule of recruitment down pat. Zinnert sighed to himself, taking out the list he had prepared in case. He could feel Ulm grinning ruefully off to the side, which chafed.

How was it that the man could prompt ready devotion when his idea of command was a shambles, while he himself only got reluctant compliance? Zinnert was yet again staggered by it. He had traveled half a dozen worlds and yet could not understand the sullenness he received when faced with his own people.

"Okay, well then, if you're so eager to offer your services, I'll tell you where you need to be assigned. Acheson, Elwin, heavy backup 2; Altman, Malcolm, heavy backup 1; Ballard, Krystal, light backup 1..."

Shiroikiku bounced along the trail at a (for her) slow clip, savoring the feeling of the Battler undernath her. She had recently been upgraded to the new mecha due to her capabilities and was enjoying every second of it. It meant that she could kick alien rear even more effectively than before. With a kill rating that was in the top five, this only boded good things.

"Hey, Doi!"

"Yeah?"

"How much further, you reckon?" Gwen asked. Her blazing hair added color to the bland monochrome of the late fall, counterpoint to the dull greens and tans of the mecha they were riding. It streamed out from underneath her helmet like a banner into the wind.

"Unh. I think Matt's gonna let us within twenty or so miles of the farm, then we're gonna stop for the night, and hit it tomorrow morning. Do it well rested. I think we're almost there now. Course since I was raised thinking kilometers my sense of measurement's fucked."

"Hhm. I'm gonna hafta cover you, you know."

"While I kick bug ass. I got no worries, Gwen." The other woman chuckled, full aware of her prowess. Sherry grinned, aware of her own. Then the grin melted away. "Bout myself anyway."

"Huh?"

Shit, she'd let it slip. "Well, I can damn well cover myself. It's the other people I--" Well, hell, it was almost a given one or two would not be here to see the day after tomorrow, at least not intact. But...

"Ah, don't worry, Malcolm'll be fine."

"Huhn. Always that anni disc out there with your name written on it." She had been a child of the military long enough not to raise foolish hopes.

Besides, despite the seeming casualness of her relationship with Malcolm Altman, she truly cared about him with a depth she was often frightened by. No matter if you got killed; but if someone you were close to got it, a bit of you died with them, leaving the rest of you to feel all the pain. That was the worse fate.

Gwndolyn grunted. "You telling me, hon." She said no more, trapped in whatever thoughts swam through her own mind.

Yeah, Doi thought, as the Battler thudded its shock-shattering way along the overgrown, rubble-filled trail south. No shit she knows. Unlike me, she knows up close and personal what happens in an Invid hive and has the nightmares to prove it. She's got lots to think about all right.

However, she had plenty of company with her own.

Ha, just think what my parents would think if they knew I was shacking with someone like Malcolm, she sniffed. Bad enough they had cats when I didn't stick to a nice little desk job and trucked off to Reflex Point with the Jupiter instead. Damned glad there's a sweet few dozen light years between here and Tirol. Place always did remind me of a bad set from Ben-Hur. And you think I can be a sweet little addition to their wishful dreams of "getting back to their roots" in that place? Shichisei my banana butt I will, yeah, and Zentraedi have pituitary problems.

At least if I get my ass wiped here by the crabs I won't get gravel raked over me, a headstone with kanji, and their saying prayers to Shiroikiku Evelyn Doi's spirit in Japanese every so often. Badly. Mispronounced. The shogunate would shit. Hell's preferable to that.

Not to mention the slight possibility of their darlin' little White Crysanthemum having a kid that half-WON'T be Nipponese.

God, my grandparents should have married Anglos or Spaniards or Zentraedi or God knows what before they produced my parents. That would have put a break on badly done ethnic searches right off. Man, I may not be on that sort of kick but at least I know when it ain't being done well.

At least Malcolm's never tried to make me into something else I ain't. Pity my parents will see only the melanin ratios. What a dumbfuck thing to think about when you're on another planet with a whole bunch of people whose closest relation to you is a couple tens of milennia back at least.

If they'd been the ones to splash through the shit getting shot at by bugs, they might've seen how stupid the deal is. Corpses are corpses. Down here I've seen enough of them and the way they got that way to know all the innards tend to be the same. Her hands clamped down on the unfamilliar handle grips, hard.

You didn't think about it. Some parts were okay to remember, but after a while some...you just stuck them back there and didn't bring up.

And you sure as hell hoped that nobody you'd lived with would end up in one of them.

Matthew Ulm, former Second Lieutenant of the Southern Cross, was otherwise occupied.

"Dennis, once we settle down, we have to get a look at the situation, then finalize plans for tomorrow. You got the records from the last time we had to go on a recovery trip?"

The Battler off to his side made a grunt of confirmation. "Of course I do. And we do need to look. Depending on how things are is going to determine our approach." Privately, Dennis hoped that no civillians were being held as slaves. It made things--complicated, and with their own force probably not near that manning the farm numbers-wise... Innocents were not something he cherished putting at risk. "The first scout made his records available." Dennis paused; Matthew steeled himself, knowing what question was coming next. "So why isn't O'Shea on this trip?"

Matthew paused; likely any way he phrased it Dennis might interpret it as favoritism. "Basically because we've got others trained by him in the fine art of sneaking around. Furthermore, I can't deploy every experienced Elm on this trip. If..." we get wiped out, he added silently, "he's got to keep things in line back home, as will Miranda. I thought that was our arrangement at any rate." He made a half-grunt, half-rueful laugh. "He wasn't happy about it, if it makes you feel better."

Damn right he wasn't. Although he knew he had to play Fuzz/ Bug-Buster for Base One, the rogue was still refusing to talk to Ulm as they had left.

"If I get back," Ulm said in the now, "he's not going to be talking to me for a week at least. I hardly call that favoring him." *Gee, I wonder why he didn't ask about Miranda's status,* he thought with slight sarcasm.

"You say if." Dennis commented.

"Always that chance. You know that."

"Well." Dennis seemed to leave it at that, and concentrate on the matter at hand. "According to what I remember of the map, we ought to get near it in another hour, barring any surprises. Ten miles should be sufficient. We'll keep it on hidey-hole setting--" Elms slang for a vigilant nightwatch and camping setup that was ready to move at any notice, "get scout reports, and then, giving favorable conditions, move before dawn."

"And with luck, we'll be able to infiltrate the place and get the goodies we need without too much trouble. Right."

Dennis sighed. "But as we both know by now, like you said, there's always that chance."

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYAAAAAAA!!!!!!"

Matthew bolted upright in his bedroll, disoriented in the darkness. The scream repeated as he was out and running toward the source, barely missing the fire in the pursuit. His skin was clammy in direct reaction to a sound that was wringing out every nerve he had.

"What is it?"

He finally saw something; a new recruit hanging on to a struggling figure in a bedroll that was shrieking still, but lessening. He managed to get enough light to see the red hair of the person.

"Gwen, what is--" She had awakened and calmed down enough so that there was no more screaming, although by now half the company hunched together in the rocky little defile was awake.

She sobbed something like "Sorry, sorry, I didn't mean--" as he knelt down, his feet freezing in the cold, and took hold of her shoulders.

"It's all right Gwen, it's all right."

"The fuckin' bugs are probably gonna--"

"Hardly, Gwen." This was not the first time Gwen had awakened like this, but it was the first time in the field and certainly one of the most intense. Memories left their mark. "Night critters, they're going to think it is. Easy, easy, you're among us. You're safe."

The redhead, although she was still panting and shaking from whatever nightmare had taken her, was beginning to reassume her usual insouciant oh-it's-nothing-I-meant-to-do-that attitude. "Well, there goes our nightie hours, folks. Sorry." Ulm snorted below her hearing.

Fred was fairly unsympathetic. "Nice of you to play alarm clock."

Ulm sighed further at the insinuation. "Let's not get into the my-pain-is-bgger-than-yours, Bohms. Gwen--will you be all right now? I have medications."

"No. No medications. I'll be fine." The sharpshooter was resolute in refusing any further consolation, so Ulm wearily rose and encountered Zinnert, who had been manning watch.

"You sure we should take her in? She seems a bit unstable at the moment."

"I take it you've never been held prisoner in an Invid hive, Lieutenant?"

Zinnert's mouth tightened. "No, but--"

"Please, don't presume. Some of these people have much more intimate vendettas with the Invid than you or I can ever imagine. Remember Gwen's one of them."

Zinnert still looked stiff with offense--no surprise there. Six years of knowing him meant that usually it wore off. Matt was embarrassed for reminding him that after all this time he was still the outsider. "Will Rutherford be all right?"

"She knows she has to be. I'll keep an eye on her, Dennis. I'm supposed to be the people person and you the tactical type, right?" Dennis relaxed and rewarded him with a half-smile.

"Right. Thanks for the reminder, Ulm."

"Anytime." Ulm leaned in.

"One of these days...you're going to be the useful one. I'm just an old fart that looks competent."

Dennis grinned, pained. "One of these days, old man, you're going to realize they think I'm a stratified idiot from Tirol who still doesn't know the ropes. And I believe them."

Ulm sighed, gripped his arm, and left in order to get what sleep he could.

Over in another bedroll, Fred Bohms hunched, thinking resentfully, *It's not that my pain is bigger than hers, Lieutenant. It's that she thinks her pain is the only one there is.*

Elsewherel, Amanda Pierson held herself and quivered, incapable of returning to sleep. Gwendolyn's shriek had not caused the sweat that turned her bangs to the color of wet straw. In fact it had broken it, for Amanda herself had been mired in nightmare. Unlike Gwen, no one knew.

"There it is. In all its ugly glory." Malcolm drawled this with seeming unconcern, then passed the night-vision binoculars to Amanda. She looked and drew in a breath.

A half-mile away, through the last fifty yards of trees, she could make out open land. Beyond it, in the distance, she could make out the faint ghost-shimmer of some sort of energy barrier. From her quick

surveyal of the area yesterday afternoon (Kevin had been a thorough instructor), beyond it lay the extruded-looking outbuildings of the protoculture farm.

A massive figure tromped its path around the outer barrier, the clawed feet of the Combat Trooper piercing and rutting the stiff soil as it did so. She already had an idea of how often such patrols were.

It was the intervening distance between the barrier and the scrawny trees that caused her to wrinkle her eyes.

"Is it me," she whispered, "Or--"

"It's not you," Malcolm said. "Those little stinkers're worse'n crocuses. I've seen them blooming in mid-January."

Amanda shook her head, amazed despite herself. "Still. I've never seen so many even in summer before."

"And you don't want to, kid. When you go in, you're gonna need a mask, because if they're sporing, one snort you'll be seeing green bunny rabbits for the rest of the day. Not what you're gonna want."

Amanda eyed the pale spread of three-petaled flowers before returning the viewer to Malcolm. She wiped her hands on her pants for the seventh time that hour.

"Well, you're going to want to wish me luck." Malcolm looked solemn as she said this. "I hope I can get away with it."

"Me too. I'd go, but--"

"You're too big to be all that sneaky. And I hope to God there's no captives inside." She paused, a tremble in her voice. "Just make sure I can get out, please."

"Glad to oblige."

What a disgrace this place is.

Not only does he have the gall to send me to this Motherforsaken Unaligned farm, he also apparently hasn't recently seen how it's been run. And he thinks that this place isn't producing enough.

Even I can see why!

The slender, chitin-armored figure stepped out of the outpost hive entrance and fretfully began to circumnavigate the perimeter of the building. She had been unable to sleep after having awakened as she had lain on the pallet placed in the commander's chamber for her convenience. Besides, dawn would soon make any attempts moot. Already, the sky was beginning to gain a pearly texture to the east.

Although the sharp breeze through her long pale hair was refreshing in its way, Oryo'i sighed and placed the helmet on her head, pushing the hair up underneath. One had to keep up appearance when dealing with one's inferiors.

She watched the Malar change their shifts, the night patrol replaced by the morning. The Torabs and Iigai out on the perimeter did not change their unceasing rounds. It was only the Malarosm and above that seemed to need a respite from higher thought activity. She continued her pace around the hive, glaring through the helmet iris at the outposts and shipping buildings. One particularly makeshift contruction caught her eye and she plummeted into even deeper grimness.

Only our kind can work here, he says? Only a few humans left to harvest the fields here? He is just as blindly spiteful toward them as toward me! Humans cannot be exposed to Flower spores without protection. No wonder the majority of the workers that came here died or went mad after a few lunar cycles. But Shkud doesn't care.

How amusing. We actually have something in common. Shkud's spite. Was he like this before, after the Ascension and before he became Kulagi? Such a while--I don't think I remember. A true pity he is currently reponsible for this area. Asaav seems to have given up on it.

Fortunately after I get this particular shipment of plants and opredti readied for transport to the orbital hives I can leave. But I had better be certain to do a prolificshipment of it. I have no wish for any more of "my lord's" frustrations directed at me...

On the other side of the hive, away from observation, a figure wriggled belly-down through the chilly foliage. By all rights it was cold enough to freeze the Flowers of Life, but neither frost nor browning marred the pink petals and green leaves of the plants. Amanda was very grateful that they were high enough to obscure her progress in the predawn twilight.

An overripe red fruit, about the size of a tomato, fell off a plant and collided with the ground in a splat. Amanda froze. Five minutes later, she moved again, her heart still thundering along.

"You know the drill, Pierson," Dennis had told her. "Get into position. Then wait."

Amanda was hoping fervently that the other ruffling trails in the fields were out there. She would be severely embarassed if she were the only one ready to sneak in past the perimeter once things started to

happen.

She patted her backpack. Good. All of her presents for the Invid were ready. And once empty, it could carry enough protoculture for several Cyclones.

Her nose itched terribly, but she was afraid to scratch it and perhaps break the seal her mask had with her skin. It was only a simple cloth arrangement, but it seemed to work given the continuing lack of hallucinations she was failing to experience. Within twenty minutes, according to the several years of scouting notes in Kevin's neat hand, the barrier would fall in order to let the Enforcers and Sentinels out for harvesting work, and she had to be ready to dash the second the decoy began. She hoped in the meantime the track of movement she and the others had made hadn't been seen from the air by the Attack Scouts sweeping the area.

There was a yelp. Amanda choked and realized it wasn not a human sound. The yapping began again, and her eyes flitted frantically around, incapable of looking behind herself and seeing nothing. Whatever the thing was, it was barking its fool head off. Was it some sort of feral chihuahua?

Amanda craned her eyes around as far as they would go in their sockets, trying to avoid moving her head. Her eyes popped as she heard a rasping, vigorous pant dashing around her. Then the yelping began again.

Ohshit what if the noise attracts them? she thought in terror. She would have thrown something at the source but she couldn not risk any extraneous movement.

I'm nice, really I am, I'm not meaning any harm. Just shut up, you little monster! Then she almost shrieked.

Something was walking up her leg, snuffling. Eyes closed and shaking, she supposed it was better than the prior barking. Suddenly, the weight dropped off, still panting away, circling around her. White fluff caught her eye as the thing got within the range of her vision.

Chihuahua my ass, she thought dazedly. *Did somebody's pet get loose?* The fuzzy entity danced up fearlessly in front of her and sat, red tongue vibrating in overdrive with its pants. It regarded her, then began to scratch with a hind leg.

This is not happening. If I didn't know better, I'd say I was being scoped out by this thing. This is NOT happening. Unmoving, she watched it watch her, aware that time was ticking down and she wasn't quite in position yet.

Finally, the dog got up, sniffled her gloved hand, and licked it. Then it was gone in the mini-forest of flower stalks.

Those weren't horns there? Nah, just a figment of my imagination. Dogs don't have horns.

As the final minutes passed to zero hour, she wriggled a few yards closer to the barrier, narrowing the distance she would need to run, her hands wet in their gloves. Heart thumping, she then waited.

The sky took on a shade of pink to the east.

The energy barrier, Invid behind it and waiting for the harvest, began to flare and fade. With an eerily silent snowflake-like melt, it fragmented and disappeared.

Trembling, she watched as forty yards over to her left the monstrous, utterly inhuman armored figures began to file out.

Her muscles tensed.

Any time now.

"It's down!" Malcolm hissed.

At selected points around the perhiphery of the woods, hands began to move, light and ignite. Next to the solid bulk of the crouching Malcolm, Fred's saturine features, white with tension, watched as the aliens continued to file out.

When the match had almost burnt down, he lifted it to the wick.

The forest margin erupted.

The Elms lying in the fields were gifted with the fascinating sight of Enforcers doing a double take as a horrendous blaze of light, color, and noise threw what had been a dawn peace into bedlam.

Oryo'i's head jerked up.

What?? she said in naked confusion. The blankly anonymous faceplate of the gray and orange battlesuit robbed her of any expression, but no being could mistake the posture of shock. Then understanding leaked in.

All personnel, scramble! We are under attack! she shouted telepathically. Sod flew from under her feet as she dashed inside.

Amanda ran, legs churning for all they were worth. She was too intent on her own welfare to note the dashing silhouettes that like her, were running for the now un-guarded gate. As expected, the Invid were going after the explosives, flares, and fireworks set up as a decoy, but they had seconds at most before they were detected.

Five seconds never felt so long before, but she was inside. Hearing gasps beside her, she dove for the shadow of the nearest outbuilding, desperate to get bearings.

She hid, in the shadow of a creation that looked more grown than built, behind a piling. A hand jerked her on the arm, and before she could react, she was through a door and inside the tar-blackness of the interior.

Despite herself, she gagged on the odor inside. It was indescribably awful, filled with fetor and decay. Whoever had helped her was choking as well. Surpressing it, they huddled inside, into the darkness. Outside were continuing explosions, roars of Invid jets, and occasionally human shouts.

Amanda was full aware they had to move. "Who is it?"

"Oh, it's you," Gwen's voice said, flatly.

"The last I checked," Amanda said. "We gotta go before they start looking." A grunt of confirmation, and they began to sidle around.

"Further inside. That's where...they keep it." the other woman said. The two dashed outside, around the building. Gwen and Mandy nodded at the same time, seeing a familliar shaped compostion: it matched descriptions of what they wanted. It was unguarded, thanks to the chaos outside.

"Excuse me," Amanda said, remembering. The perimeter barrier was near; she deposited and readied one of her backpack's contents. She had made it back over to Gwen before a ThooOOMP made her stumble. The fence was down.

She made to throw another grenade, but Gwen hissed, "No! What if..." Mandy stiffened, realizing what she was implying.

"If there were, wouldn't there be..." Heavy footfalls came up behind them, and both women whirled in fear only to see Matthew.

"'I thought you were..."

"No time!" he barked. The Saber suit lunged over toward the storage depot. "You two, disable what you can and see if there's any captives. I'm going to get the supplies. The rest are near the north and south entrances." The two complied.

Amanda shrieked in challenge, tossing another grenade toward the main entrance. The organic looking watchtower erupted in shards and plasma.

A soft moan could be barely heard above the background devastation. It was arising from the first building the two had hidden in.

Eyes wide, the blonde and the redhead stared at each other. With the same thought, they turned toward the interior.

As planned, Matthew met up with Sherry and her penetration squad as they neared the depot. Sherry was growling as thanks to the power of her Battler suit, she was rocketing forward as she ran. The rest were either in Battloid or in REF cold-weather uniform; the disablement squad could not have managed to get near to the base crawling in the cumbersome CVR.

Without a word, Shiroikiku and part of her armored band whirled and placed themselves at the entranceway; a few others took the point entering. Matthew carefully kept one eye on his helmet readings and another on the interior.

I want this to be a raid, not a massacre, he told himself. *If anybody kind is listening from above...*

As his eyes adjusted to the humid interior, he drew in a whistling breath.

Like all Invid structures, the place looked more grown than constructed. Ulm could see the expressions on some of the unarmored troops; the outright revulsion was enough indication of their idea of the aesthetics of the place. The air was warm and carried a vegetable jungle reek. The Invid still thought that the attacks were coming from outside, so it was unpoliced. It was a matter of only a few minutes before they realized that they were wrong.

In the dim light, there was the glint off smooth, curved gray surfaces in long, stacked ranks.

"Okay!" he hissed. "Move in! The second I say get out, get out." The party fell to, yanking canisters with silent, clumsy haste. The enitire time, Ulm kept an ear open on the radio, waiting for the first indication from those outside that the Invid had realized the ruse.

Three minutes had passed, and there was yet no sign. Yet something...

Matthew opened his mouth, years of instinct warning him. He turned back toward the outside to check, preparing to tell those inside to retreat.

At his question: "Nah nothing. Bugs still chasing the decoy parties all over the place."

"I..." He had a feeling of Something Not Being Right. Usually, he got it just as Kevin got a strange look in his eyes that was then followed by panic.

"Okay, group, move--"

"Oh CHRIST!" someone screamed. "It's--" The voice cut off into a roar and static. Sherry gasped, and dashed inside. The rest began to follow--and then a blaze of energy melted the last stragglers into their component elements. The heat was staggering.

"Lieutenant! It's--"

Ulm was not even listening. In a single leap, he had pivoted toward the one opposing wall that did not have protoculture canisters, and with a shouted command, loosed a shoulder missile. It detonated, leaving a hole large enough to admit human bodies.

"Doi, get them out! Now!"

"Matt--"

"DO it, Corporal!" A quick, reluctant stiffen, and Sherry took the point, leading the survivors with their cargo out. As she did so, she shouted, "Matt, it's--"

He was already moving toward the first entranceway

"I know what it is, Sherry. Good luck."

A strangled gulp, and she proceeded to fight her way out.

Matt was disoriented as he made it into the sullen autumn dawn, arming his missiles. What waited for him was what he expected, but still, an icy trickle of sweat made its way down his armored back.

He saw attention being drawn for him--and leapt.

Hands slick, Gwen found the lantern and turned it on low, as the low groan sounded again.

The visual added to the olfactory input was enough to make her gorge rise.

It was, in the most basic sense of the term, a pen.

At one time it had held at least a hundred bodies. It was, like all Invid architecture, organic in look and nature, but it did not take the humans much to see that very little effort had been put into it. Pallets, encrusted with unnameable substances, were raised about two feet off the floor and seemed to be intended for sleeping. There seemed to be no toilet facilites except for a container over by a wall. Even in the November cold, the stench was overpowering.

It looked empty, but then there was movement over in the corner, on an isolated pallet.

Gwen was too possessed by past ghosts to notice, but Amanda gasped. The movement became more pronounced.

"Leave me alone...alone..." a hoarse voice rasped. "Oh leave me alone, so I can sigh and die and fry..." The cadence was in a high, childlike croon, and something aimless and empty about the chant sent daggers up the spines of both Elms.

"Who's there?" Amanda snapped in terror, her voice muffled by the mask. Backed by Gwen, she made her way over to the pallet. There was a huddled mess that looked like a bundle of rags, but it moved.

"Aliens and aliens, go and go..." the chilling singsong continued.

"We're not Invid," Amanda said. "Please, we've come to get you out."

Some recognition appeared in the blank tones. "Get me out? Are you humans?"

"Yeah." Gwen said.

A high giggle came. "Oh no human gets out oh no. You stay and you work and you lose your mind, just like me..." With an effort, the bundle unfolded itself.

Amanda stared, her face going utterly chalky white under her freckles. After a few seconds, she began to gag.

"Oh am I seeing am I seeing another ghost?" the prisoner said, something that might have been surprise crossing the empty voice. "Is it James' girl, come back to haunt me? Oh you are not Invid, you do not have the colors, you must be a ghost, nobody leaves here, not me or my baby, nobody at all..."

"Holy shit," Gwen panted, shaking like she was possessed.

The creature looked as though it might have been a hardy woman of Germanic descent in her mid-thirties, before months of privation and work had melted her into an etoliated caricature in rancid tatters and stringy mats of hair. The dark eyes in their pits of socket were not anything anyone would have called sane.

Amanda was making retching noises with no result. "Oh Jesus God, Gwen, I know her..." She was shaking.

"Shee-it," Gwen murmured. "Are there any others?"

The woman giggled, a noise with no hilarity in it. "Did some come here? Some did, and then they saw things, and then they died and now only we are left and we see things alone..."

"Mrs. Henderson!" Mandy gasped, barely coherent. "Where..."

"My baby don't wake my baby..." The clawed fingers aimlessly trailed in a direction, and Amanda saw a small figure in the corner, curled up, asleep or dead. "Are you sure you are alive? You have some of the color, just like the pale woman..." Something, coherent if not sane, for a moment glimmered in her eyes. "No! Not the pale woman, her hair like snow..." Raggedly, she began to scream in hoarse cries that were too exhausted to carry. The child in the corner stirred for a second.

"What woman?!" Gwen shouted, shaking in fear. 'Mandy, we've got to get out, the Invid are coming!"

"She's out there!" the wreck cried, purpose in her mad voice. "Run, take my baby! Their hand is on you, Amanda, I can see it! Before they crush you, run!"

"Let's do it," Gwen said, suddenly aware that far too much time had passed.

"I can't leave her! She's from my town!" Amanda snarled.

"Then you'll stay!" Gwen spat. The child did not protest as she hauled it into her arms. "And end up like her!"

"Mrs. Henderson--" Amanda began. She met a pair of eyes--eyes that seemed sane and calm.

"Amanda... You lived. Good. I am dead."

Casually, the madwoman lay back down, shifted as though going to sleep, and then went limp, her eyeballs fixed.

"God." Gwen gasped. "She's --."

Amanda stood staring, just before Gwen hauled savagely on her with her free arm.

Matthew flipped in midair, gravity nauseating him, seeing his worst nightmares step for him with plain intent.

He had expected Enforcers running the place, or even a few Strike Units, replacements for the Pincer Command Units. He had not expected, of all things, an Invid Assault Battloid at a minor farm, and that presumption had killed eight people by itself.

The Invid mecha, an affair in dark charcoal gray with vermilion trim, swiveled its sensor array, focusing on him.

It swiped its arm at him, and he barely managed to dodge before the slab of alloy whipped with enough force to crush stone. He swept back, concentrating on harrying the thing, enabling his command to get out with the materials needed to continue the Elms.

It was far larger than him, far stronger, and with a payload that dwarfed his.

This was not a fight Matthew Joseph Ulm expected to win

Oryo'i snarled like a dog, her teeth gritted, intent on crushing this --insect, this malicious hindrance to her dignity, not even wishing to compliment it by destroying it with anything other than fist and arm. She had tried and tried beyond belief to fulfill her duty to the Invid, to a lord that would not be pleased, and this latest insult was beyond endurance.

She had waited until she had boarded her Gamun before setting the troops after the humans; any notice by them that her troops had known about their penetration would have set them off from the farm, before she could use the Gamun's weaponry to eliminate them in part, before she could see what they were trying, and before she could exact her vengance. She knew now who to destroy, first and foremost.

The rest were next on her list.

The human mecha darted around her like the fly it was. Rage boiling in her, she urged the Gamun up after it, fixed on settling the score once and for all.

Ulm could see one forearm swing towards him, plasma cannon primed. Before it discharged, he did the least likely thing; dove towards the mecha, close enough that neither cannons, missile launchers, or shoulder weaponry could focus on him. He readied his missiles.

The pilot, gifted with the human cunning of the Sulagi rank, knew what he was planning and dodged out of the way; the missile Ulm loosed missing but the Assault Battloid's own targeting fix broken. It was not before the diving suit had flashed past the semi-transparent canopy and Matthew had seen what was piloting it.

The body armor the humanoids had taken to wearing rendered the pilot anonymous, but Matthew's concentration was shattered, knowing that an individual face was lurking behind the mask. There had been something about the way the suit was designed...

What?! Oryo'i barked mentally. Still reeling from her close call, she put aside vengefulness and concentrated on wiping him into free atoms. She released a missile, but the blazingly agile human mecha dodged.

I will not have you humiliate me so again!

She checked to see that the Malar were following his minions satisfactorily and then turned her attention back on him.

Sweat rolled down Ulm's face, his blood pounding in his temples, as he dashed around the hulking Invid, his mouth dry from his pants of exertion. He was forty-two years old, gods he wasn't up to doing this, any time now... He prayed in a tiny corner of his consciousness the incoherent prayers of the warrior, prayed the rest had managed to run for freedom, prayed that Kevin, the closest thing to a son he would ever have, would be able to survive in a world against him; prayed that somewhere, somehow, Kevin, the first Kevin, would have pity on his younger brother's eccentricities and would intecede for his alien namesake. *And for all the Gwendolyns, all the Geralds, Freds and Amandas that his dying might save. The last of the Ulm family would die like a true Catholic martyr,* he thought. *Isn't that charming?*

In the rest of his mind, he simply fought for the time to take another breath.

The Battloid persisted after him; apparently it was quite aware of his role, and no surprise, Ulm thought. He knew what their pilots were capable of.

Ulm pushed aside the knowledge it could have been Kevin in that mecha and fired.

Malcolm and Fred knew from experience something had gone disasterously wrong as soon as the first raiding members had arrived, loaded with canisters and reduced in numbers. As per plan, Dennis had radioed the decoys to withdraw as fast as they could, scattering so groups could not be picked out by the Invid. Although what seemed like the entire farm's personnel had gone after, from the net it was obvious the tatic was working. With the Cyclones on fusion, the Scouts and Combat troopers had to rely on visuals, and the forests of Earth had proven to be the Elms' biggest ally.

The two men were holed up behind a tree, making certain everyone had gotten out, when the last band plunged past. A Battler stopped as the rest blazed by, its carriers loaded with canisters.

"Sherry, honey, where's Matt?"

"There!" she panted. "The place is run by a Marauder--he's taking it on singlehandedly--Malcolm, you have to--Gwen and Mandy--"

Frederick's contenance was gray and shaking, his breath hissing through teeth. Wordlessly, he gunned the engine, back toward the clearing.

"Jesus! Fred! Wait!"

"Oh no--"

They emerged, seeing an eerily silent vista, before they saw the blast craters. It was Gwen, her arms loaded, whose eyes went upward and saw the two figures juking high in the air, one tiny, one massive and deadly.

"It's a Battloid! The fuckin' bugs had a sonofabitching transmute here!"

"It's Matt!" Amanda's eyes saw the fighting pattern clear as day. "Oh god, he's fighting that thing, we've got to help him!"

"We've got to get out! Come on!"

"YOU can go ahead." Unarmored, Amanda fixed stock and barrel to Gallant in two motions.

"You stupid little bitch, we've got a kid here!" The green eyes were dilated, ignorant of Gwen's screech, locked in a world perhaps the corpse back in the pen would have understood. White-faced, Amanda took aim and fired.

It failed to do anything important, except attract attention.

Two other humans? Oryo'i thought. Lazily, the arm plasma cannon reached out and blazed.

Gwen knocked Amanda down as the blast scorched and singed clothing, filling the air with the stench of hair. They rose to their feet with a bad case of sunburn but alive.

"Jesus, the Enforcers..." Gwen hissed.

Oryo'i had been distracted, but she moved to avoid the missile Matthew discharged.

Wrong, human. Not this time.

He was wide open. Chuckling, she targeted.

Then, a thud of missile detonation sent her spinning crazily.

What, I'm not dead? Matt thought distractedly.

What?!? There are more?? Oryo'i thought in shock. *Torabs, back here!*

Fred was snarling as he exploded into the air, Malcolm on his heels.

"Matt, get out!" Malcolm was shouting. "The rest are okay!"

"Kill YOU!" Fred screamed in pure hate. Armor-piercers left launchers, and for the first time in the fight they found their mark; Oryo'i had to draw her attention to the shocks her armor was taking.

"Okay! " Matt shouted, and dove.

Trying to draw attention elsewhere, Gwen reached in Amanda's pack, activated a few more grenades, and let them go, just as an armored arm wrapped around her waist and she was hauled shrieking into the air, human burden and all.

Amanda lost her footing again from the detonation, just as she was unceremoniously dragged into the skies, and the world blurred into blackness.

Several hours later, through the dint of activating false leads of protoculture radiation, Matt finally deemed that they had thrown off pursuit.

"Ten dead." he said in a emotionless voice late that night. Still in his armor, he did not look up as Malcolm walked up to him. Sitting on a fallen log in the thickness of skeletal trees, he looked pasty and exhausted to sickness, his eyes hollowed out with bister and a network of crow's feet that were more pronounced now than ever marring them.

"Sixty-seven canisters taken," Malcolm reminded him softly. "Matt, you gotta stop beating yourself over it."

"If I could, Malcolm, I would." The dark bearded face above the slumped commander made a grimace of sympathy. "It's never gotten better. It gets worse. And it's my fault."

"Bullshit." Altman said flatly.

"Look, if I'd kept in mind the possibility of a Marauder running that place--"

"You wouldn't have gone in, Matt! Look, if we'd sat on our duffs playing chess, we wouldn't have gotten killed either. We wouldn't have done a damn for the resistance either. And it wouldn't have helped shit when the crab lice came for us. "

"My logic, Malcolm, says yes." Ulm wiped something away from his eyes. "My emotions are doing veto power."

"Look man, I trust you, basically because you admit you have no idea what the hell you're doing. You're just trying to do what you can." Malcolm crouched down. "In my opinion, it's ones who think they know

what they're doing who don't."

"What about Henry the Fifth?" Matthew said, his mouth twitching upward a second. Malcolm snorted and ran fingers through his kinky hair.

"Ah, him, he never existed anyway. Shakepeare was a nationalist anyway. 'Randa blabs about a fictional character, not actual history."

"Agincourt was history."

"You're off the subject."

"Dennis."

"Even HE doesn't think he knows what he's doing."

"Thanks much," Zinnert said dryly as he came up in Battloid. The three men exchanged exhausted smiles as patchy clouds swirled over the hunter's moon above.

"I've been talking to the other gangs on our assigned channel frequency. All of them seem to have gotten out with a few casualties and no deaths. We'll probably be able to rondezvous in a day or so at our spot."

"Any signs of pursuit?" Ulm asked.

"Not that they could see."

"Tell them to keep an eye out. There is a humanoid running the affair."

"Even he can't be omniscient."

"She."

"Wha?" Malcolm startled.

"She. During the fight I got a look inside the mecha. The suit seemed to be a female design."

"Wonderful," Dennis sighed. Sitting, he removed his helmet and began to rake his dishwater-brown hair into spikes, face blank with exhaustion. "I checked up on the--child."

"How is she?"

"She still hasn't awakened. She occasionally shifts, but it's like a light coma. Those Flower spores... No idea what they may have done to her."

"It's obvious," Fred's voice said bitterly, out some distance. "Easily replenished resources, just take another town, enslave it. Why bother with masks? If they're going to go crazy from breathing spores, just get fresh ones."

"Point taken," Zinnert noted, sighing. "Keep your mind on watch, Fred." It had taken a hard smack on the helmet for Malcolm to break Bohms out of his suicidal berserker frenzy at the farm.

"What about Gwen and Amanda?"

"Both--" Dennis sighed. "We're going to have to put them on standby, Ulm. Not just the physical, but..."

"Don't tell me I should have known."

"I'm not. What they saw--it would have done it for me." Dennis sighed. "I'm--sorry. This isn't the kind of war I was trained for."

"Dennis?" Malcolm said mildly.

"Yes, Malcolm?"

"Shut up and leave the 20/20 hindsight for when you got the mind for it."

"Yeah. That point taken."

Oryo'i stood and watched the Malar begin to clean up the wreckage of the humans' strike. Other than a few craters, the destroyed watchtower, the downed energy fence, the gaping hole in the storage building, and a few missing canisters, there was little damage. She offered the Terrans a grudging piece of admiration for their precision.

She paced back and forth, outside her mecha, as it was waiting for repairs to the dented and cracked armor where the missiles had connected. Fortunately for her, none of them had been direct hits, but it had been just enough to keep her from pursuing the humans after they took off from the depot with their unarmored comrades.

She began to think, carefully, about what Shkud's reaction would be once he heard of the affair.

Hmm, what do you remember about piloting a Gurab, Oryo'i? The fear that should have been there was replaced by a cool, detached consideration.

For nearly nine lunar cycles now, since the fiasco near the river, nothing she had done had pleased him. In fact, it had reduced her to her current inglorious status. The humans had hardly been accomodating themselves, but at least she knew the reason for that. But to have received nothing but more and more contempt for months, from her own kind...

What had been a tatically aggressive and intelligent if quick-tempered leader a few dozen lunar cycles ago was now a vicious, spiteful being who struck if there was any hindrance and often even without, just to show he could do it to his subordinates. A move she had made nine cycles ago that he once would have thought innovative if flawed had instead given him an opening to target her over and over.

No wonder the other Sulagi she had met under his command had looked at her with wide, shifting eyes when she had brought the subject up.

Pacing, pacing, she watched as under the direction of the Malar, the Gamir began to dismantle the human holding pen. Debating how to present it, Oryo'i took off her helmet in the chilly breeze, her hair whipping like corporate fog.

Suddenly, she stiffened, her breathing beginning to race. Her eyes began to dart, considering.

Not all that many canisters had been pilfered. It would be below the average for a monthly shipment, but she could blame the Flowers' production on that. The physical damage to the establishment could be repaired in a couple of days.

The lower Invid out here were permanently assigned, with little turnover and not much communication with the outside. If not asked directly about any situations, they were unlikely to make the affair known, being the literal-minded creatures they were. Even those inside the Malar preferred to give the accepted answer rather than present a new question. And Shkud heard only what he wanted to hear.

And communication was invariably with the highest-ranking member of any given hive.

And the humans? Interesting, most interesting. Something about the way they attacked... And had not Shkud said once, that she would have her opportunity finding out why they had done what they had done? Why not take him up on his word? After all, it had gone far beyond adversary to adversary now. It was most personal on her part.

She continued to think, and then looked up.

The amber-orange eyes narrowed, and a secret, chilling smile curved her lips.

Miranda dealt in a card, her face blank with concentration, chin resting on her hand. The guerrilla next down looked at it.

"Nasty," he commented admiringly.

"You betcha. Pay up." With grumbles, the rest around the table watched as she smugly raked in her loot and began to eat it. A stereo was softly playing Miles Davis in the background.

"Those were my carrots," whined someone.

"Sure as hell hope they weren't your lunch, kiddo. You need your vitamin A."

"What he needs is a brain transplant." A loud groan met the wisecrack. The five people around the coffee table began to deal another hand as the garage's space heater gave grudging warmth against the cold.

"Any word from comm on the others?"

"Not a peep. It's been five days now."

Miranda sighed. "Doesn't mean anything. Back at Quincy, we made the most incredible routes back to base to make sure the bugs didn't find us. Not that it helped." The casual cheer of her tone was belied by the furrow wrinkling her brow.

"I tried to grow veggies in those old tree planters," the carrotless one said. "The cats pissed on them."

"Grooosss. Remind me not to eat the radishes." a teenager said in a disgusted tone.

Miranda was in midchew, blinking.

"No, those weren't in there." She resumed munching, and shuffled her cards.

The blat of the klaxon sent two under the table, severed Miranda's carrot, and threw the other three spinning upright. Even as Miranda made the first couple of steps up the stairs, the PA came on.

"This is Paul Yau up at comm. This is not an attack, repeat, not an attack. The rest are enroute home, ETA one hour. They have wounded. All medic and mechanical personnel report in the staging area in ten minutes. Message repeats; this is not an attack warning, expedition on the way home in an hour, with casualties, medic and mechanical personnel report in staging. Connection closed."

"That's my carrot."

"It is? Sorry." Kevin finished masticating the vegetable and swallowed, shivering slightly in the cold at the entrance.

"You got it off the card table, didn't you?" Miranda asked with a preoccupied look on her face, peering in the distance. He nodded. "You have got this knack for eating my food."

"Can't deny it, I try hard to." he said abstractly. "Malcolm's alright. He's the one that sent the okay."

"Didn't say any on the others." She licked her lips. "I know my brother, and although he did a great job of hiding it, something in his voice..." She trailed off ominously. The carrot abruptly lost its taste for Kevin.

"They better not have." he said. "I'll be pissed."

"Ditto."

Inside, there were clatters, bangs, orders and curses as the others finished up triage preparations and fixing up the repair bay. The two figures outside waited in the gray chill and squinted their eyes, looking.

Soon, a trail of thin dust rose through the air. The two tensed, then shouted back to the others.

The noise increased, until a ragged band began to make their convoluted way up towards Base One. Miranda subvocalized as she counted heads, then drew in a harsh breath.

"There's--"

"Gods. Don't tell me."

In a couple of minutes, Lieutenant Ulm dismounted in front of them. Both took a look at him and stared.

"O'Shea, Altman. We're back."

"Where's the twelve back there?" Miranda asked flatly.

Ulm told her.

"I see." The tone was obvious that she didn't and didn't want to.

"Move in," Ulm told the rest. There was the hum of engines as they complied. They followed inside.

"Matt--" Miranda licked her lips. "What happened?"

The lieutenant began to tell her in a drained, near-monotone as Kevin listened, a clamp tightening around his ribcage. Then, Ulm reached a certain part--

"Jesus God Allah Buddha!" Kevin whispered, his voice cracking. The bloodshot hazel eyes two inches below his fastened on his face in unspoken communication, and Ulm nodded. Kevin lowered his face to his knuckles.

"I think I'm going to be sick now," he said conversationally.

Miranda merely shook her head bleakly, her cornrow beads clacking together.

"I guess it was only a matter of time before we pissed one of them off."

"Running a farm you mean?" Ulm answered. "Yes. At least that's what I keep telling myself."

"We--well, I suppose sneakiness doesn't work one time out of a hundred. We were just damned lucky out of the other 99 that it wasn't the transmutes we went up against. What one was doing at--" she trailed off. "You were lucky. Real lucky." Ulm nodded.

"I was six inches away from being number eleven. I know all about it."

"Where's that girl you picked up?"

"Over in the triage area, most likely." Matt turned and made a noise. "Where'd he go off to?"

"You," the short Hispanic medic told Fred, "are gonna have to stop playing with linebackers."

Bohms snorted, his lank blond hair hanging in his eyes as he examined the medic examine in turn a superficial burn on Bohm's muscular arm. The heat of a plasma blast had conducted itself to the affected area via the CVR armor, undersuit nonwithstanding. "Tell the linebackers that, Valdez."

Valdez sighed, knowing well though what he knew of the core member and of the situation his advice would not be taken. "Good thing it's not more than skin-agh!" He ducked as someone leaped over his head and ended up yanking on Bohms' arm doing so, forcing a curse of pain out.

The figure, clad in thick gray-and-white REF cold-weather uniform, loped through the rest of the injured

being treated, dodging occasionally. Valdez noted the dark hair and shrugged before going back to the still-quivering Bohms.

Sherry was gently unloading the small malnourished figure from her Battler. "Take care of her," she said to the medics, who nodded and began to hook up a bag of their limited IV supply. Wrapped up, the child looked only five, although the deprivations of hunger could mean she was considerably older. The tiny hollowed face was prematurely aged. In fact, she had to be at least seven. Sherry remembered belatedly that every child under six in Amanda's village had been systematically murdered.

Sherry swallowed back a lump in her throat, and looked up, getting a view of Kevin's knees.

"Hey," she said. He nodded, looking down at the little girl with an ill expression.

"Who is she?"

Sherry sighed and said "Mandy said her name was Florence Henderson. Her mother was Mandy's teacher. They were..."

"I know," he said thickly. She squeezed his knee in understanding.

"Where's--"

"Mandy?" Sherry looked bleak.

"Where IS--" he began, panic cracking his voice.

"She's here," Sherry said. "But I don't think you want to see her, not right now. She and Gwen--"she shook her head. "Shit, Kev--" she said, looking up and finding nobody.

Kevin was already weaving through the crowds, his eyes on a familliar yellow head. The returnees slid past him as he zeroed in.

He grasped her shoulder. "Mandy, I--"

She looked up and he bit back a curse.

Kevin had no true conception of the human Hell, but looking into the blasted green eyes gave him his first real taste of it.

As his visual image began to register, she began to shake.

Their hand is upon you, Amanda, the voice of her dead history teacher screeched in her mind. Before they crush you, run...

"It's not me, Mandy," he whispered in desperation. "Whatever you saw, that's not me!" She stared at him, blinking and trembling like a leaf.

With an agonized decision, he took her in his arms, trying to avoid the red burns on her face. She froze, not even breathing, and then her shudders redoubled. It was seconds before he realized she was sobbing dryly.

Unnoticed by either, Gwendolyn Rutherford stared at them as antidepressants and endorphins were injected into her system, a wild, hard light growing in her amber eyes.

Fred, bandages stiffening his right arm, looked down at the small face in the dark room and absently stroked her cheek. The expression in his dark gray eyes was far gentler than most of the others would have normally seen.

"That poor little tyke," he murmured. Miranda looked down as well, having finished her periodic ministrations to the small body on the bed.

The child, although she would swallow and take water by reflex, had not awakened in the week since she had been taken from the pen in which her mother had died. She remained still, locked in whatever hallucinations the Invid Flower of Life had given her. The only changes had been the slight lessening of the deadly sunkenness of her face and slight movements and complaints on the jolting ride home.

"The only thing we can do is wait for her to come out," she said, pity crossing her tired features. "It's what usually happens in any case."

"After god knows how long breathing that?" Fred stated flatly. "Even if she does, what will she be like? Gwen told me what her mother..." He trailed off.

Miranda's mouth tightened. "I'm not about to give up."

Fred nodded. "Me neither."

Miranda sat down, gazing at the bed in the private infirmirary. "Frankly I'm surprised you... It doesn't seem like..."

Bohms stiffened. "You don't know the slightest thing about what I'm like."

Miranda sighed. "Sorry. Been up twenty hours now. I lost my courtesy about eleven tonight." Fred shrugged it off.

There was a quiet sigh from the little girl. Miranda looked over.

"Well, at least it's not as though she's in a classic vegetative state." She took a book out and began to ruffle through the pages. "Well, I don't think she'll mind..."

"Hmm?"

Miranda shrugged and with a voice hoarsened by fatigue began:

"T'was brillig and the slithy toves/ Did gyre and gimble in the wabe..."

Fred listened in to the Carroll poem with no comment. About the time Miranda got to the good part, he looked over and jumped, stopping her mid-recital. He stared.

It was dim in the room but bright enough to watch the eyelids flutter. After a minute or so, they slipped wide, revealing eyes like morning glories. They blinked, trying to focus.

"Hello?" Fred said quietly.

The child stared at him, her eyes wide. At last a whispery voice came out.

"You're not mommy." Fred shook his head. "You're people, not the monsters," Fred startled, then bit out,

"No I'm NOT the monsters. You're safe. You're with good people. Florence."

Miranda had dropped her book and was bending over the girl. "Are you seeing anything strange?"

The child was confused. Finally, she said softly, "Where's the nice lady?"

"'Nice lady?'"

"There was a lady where I was. A really pretty lady." She drifted off into memory. "She had green eyes and long sparkly shiny hair." At last, tears welled up in her eyes. "She told me lots of things and hugged me. She was nice, not like the--bad place. " She trailed off. "I thought she was an angel, like in Christmas, but she didn't have wings. Where's mommy?"

The two adults stared at each other, lost.

That's one heck of a hallucination, Miranda thought to herself.

Fred looked down, but the effort of keeping awake had been too much for her. Quietly, he sidled out of the room.

Kevin sat on the upper level, a view of the parking lot spread before him throught the windows, and clasped his hands between his knees.

"Run this past me again, Matt." he asked.

Matt let out a breath. "On the way back, I managed to piece together from Amanda and Gwen what Henderson said before she died."

"Which I'm hoping were the dying rantings of a spore-crazed victim."

Matt shook his head. "Insane, yes. But it makes a weird sort of sense, Kev. The effect of spores on the human mind...well, it's not out of the question."

"Wouldn't know. I seem to be immune."

"Well, it does seem that the spores seem to activate...strange portions of the human brain. Latent PK, god knows what."

"The "colors"? Are you meaning that breathing spores that long--showed some sort of...aura...around--You Know--to her?"

"Could be."

"Why Amanda?"

Matt stared at him. Kevin swallowed.

"That's crazy, Matthew. That's absolutely nuts. Do you mean...my contact with her, and you, left a weird psychic mark?? If that was the case, the others would have dug me out years ago from seeing you."

"Maybe, Kev. 'Some of the colors', she said...Considering other Invid don't seem to notice it, maybe it's a spore addict's vision only."

"You know Matt, if I wasn' t considering going up the wall just now I'd kick you for that."

"Right. 'The pale woman,' she said. 'Her hair like snow...' Who do you think that is?"

Kevin snorted through his hands. "Obvious, isn't it, Matt? The fair damsel you tussled with and who took out almost a quarter of Ulm's Elms. By elimination."

"Ahem. Anybody you might--ah, know?"

Kevin grunted. "Gods, I don't know. You saw Sera. I'm screaming normalcy in eye and hair color by comparison. With all the transmutation the Regis was doing before and probably after the Ascension, there's probably any number of white-haired Sulagi females around." He stopped speaking, a frightened look rising in his eyes. "Oh shit. What was her color scheme?"

"On the Battloid? Very dark gray with an orangey red."

"Oh shit oh shit oh shit."

"I take it you know her?" Ul said quietly.

Kevin swallowed heavily, his Adam's apple bobbing. "I'm afraid I do."

Somewhere else in the mall, one of its large population of feral cats crouched, green eyes intent on a piece of movement off in the shadows of an abandoned storefront. Stealthily, it moved another inch, its tabby tail twitching ever so slightly. The smell of the quarry was odd, but tempting, and the shape had mouse written all over the hunter's predator perceptions.

Food! the cat thought.

The scuffling little movements grew nearer. The twitches stopped, and the cat crouched, salt-and-pepper vibrassae trembling.

The movements came withing three feet of the animal.

The cat sprang.

In the next second, it was yowling as claws came down on nothing, and traction on the slick surface sent it caroming into the entranceway. Stunned, it lay there for a second.

Eventually, it shook its head, nothing but its pride abused. Giving a quick glance to make certain nobody or nothing had been watching, it began to hurriedly wash its head.

Behind it, there was little yelps as what looked like a ball of white lint trotted happily further into the base interior.

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DANDELIONS

CHAPTER FIVE

"No!" Shkud hissed. "That is my final word on the subject."

His petitioner stared at him, perhaps a trace of frustration beginning to rise to her normally glacial surface. "If you do not wish her in your command anymore, then why--"

"There is no why!" he spat. "Since you are obviously so intent on circumventing my rightful punishment for her, then there is no discussion! You are not going to have this Sulagi for your own purposes, Asaav. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite clear." She began to gnaw on her lower lip. "Quite clear that you are wasteful with personnel and valuable evolved resources, Shkud."

He whirled back on her, his eyes two blazing slits. "More can always be evolved."

Asaav's temper had already frayed; now it visibly snapped. "Our resources are finite, brother! We were alotted them for a specific purpose: to convey what we need back to Our Mother. How will she see the way you obviously discard our brothers and sisters? YOU are obviously unfit to lead! How you were chosen to become Kulagi defies all logic!"

He froze, eyes wide, then made a noise that could only be characterized as half-growl, half-hiss. Suddenly, a bar of searing white light was in his hand, and swinging toward her. She stood as it whizzed toward her, the only visible reaction a slight widening of the silvery eyes.

A matter of inches before it made contact, Shkud made a spitting sound of disgust, and the blade of psionic energy disintegrated into random crackles of energy. He dropped his now-open right hand and turned away.

She had called his bluff and he knew it. Although there was no hive-loyalty lost between the two, the one immutable fact remained that Kulagi never fought Kulagi.

"No." he bit out. "Your Taf Gamun is refueled and waiting." Without another word or thought, he strode through the organic-looking doorway and out of the audience chamber of his orbital hive. She looked after him for a minute, then turned and left out of the opposite doorway toward the docking bay, her plans unborn.

Oryo'i had finished with that lunar cycle's protoculture inventory and shipment to the Orbital Hives and was leaving the shuttle bay when the vaguely familliar mindvoice contacted her through Living Computer.

Sulagi Oryo'i...I regret to inform you that despite all my proposals and entreaties, Shkud is steadfast in his refusal to allow you to be transferred to my authority. He was quite...obstinate. I could do nothing, for which I offer my apologies.

Oryo'i paused in her progress for a second, the only external expression a momentary pulling back of her lips.

I understand, Lady Asaav. It is of no great consequence. All for the Hive.

Yes. I will see what I can do.

The connection was broken.

Oryo'i continued onward

In my case, it doesn't matter, does it?

Promises are always insubstantual, especially if you have the power over keeping them.

All for the Hive, and all for the Kulagi and Mother. Nothing new in that, really, and nothing ever new in anything. At any rate, I have work to do, at least until Shkud finds a good reason to rid himself of me.

Shrugging her shoulders with an entirely new fatalism, Oryo'i continued onward.

August 2045

"Well, look, if we keep the policy on p-weapon usage tight, we ought to cut the energy-clip usage by about 20% percent..." Lieutenant Zinnert insisted. "Same ought to go for the protoculture usage of the Cyclones. I'm all for the idea of stricter frameworks for battle usage..."

Ulm groaned privately to himself. It was this sort of interplay between himself and Dennis that was alternately a vital and productive means of leadership and management and more often like now one of the banes of his existence. Ulm knew full well his flaws and his tendency toward un-millitary laxity, which was part of the reason he felt between himself and Zinnert a viable synthesis that worked in the command structure. On a personal level, however, it seemed to accelerate the disappearance of his already-fading hair.

Not to mention it was getting near three. He religiously checked up on any happenings related over the communications setup in the former video store and monitored the Invid encounters and other details the other local resistance groups related every three hours during the day. Monitoring such patterns had helped predict Invid purges before, despite the sharp and unexplained rise in the enemy's unpredictability in behavior. Unfortunately, Ulm could not very well ignore Dennis' nattering; this meeting on protoculture and ammo inventories had been long overdue. As Zinnert had rightfully pointed out, the stuff hardly grew on trees.

Matthew fought down the thought of the various sarcastic comments Kevin would have made about that remark. The last think he needed was to be seen smirking.

He managed to steal a look at his watch. *Damn*--it was 2:55.

While nodding, he looked mentally around the garage/mecha bay trying to find a good substitute for himself.

No, no--not Gerald, he'd just gotten back from his annual "trip" along with Kev as his escort, and was

exhausted. Not Sherry or Miranda...both were occupied with a jacked-up Samson they were fixing. He heard a clatter from another direction...that would be Amanda, fine-toothing her millitary hardware with the quasi-paranoia so her these days. Fred was two-thirds along with a perimeter that was part of a high security guard "shell" that they had begun to construct last month in order to isolate the inner work centers of the base from the rest of the mall, so he couldn't be spared. *Damn...*

He called Amanda over, gesturing to Dennis to hold it for a second.

"Pierson, could you do a favor for me? Sorry to bother you with your overhaul and all, but I need the comm reports checked on."

She nodded shortly, her green eyes watchful. "Sure. Where's the clipboard, Lieutenant?"

"Hmm... the table in my barracks. Let me know if anything unusual's popped up." She nodded and left, trying to cool herself by flipping the bottom of her sweat-drenched T-shirt in the airless heat of the lower garage as she did so.

> I'm a man without conviction
> I'm a man who doesn't know
> How to sell a contradiction
> You come and go
> You come and go...
>
> --*Culture Club*, **"Karma Chameleon"**

Amanda was actually relieved to be back up in the mall level. While it certainly was not the most strategically secure base left in the world, it was definitely the best air-conditioned. Of course, that never played much of a part with how the enemy dealt with it.

I've got news for you..., she thought bitterly.

Since their arrival, the Elms had made continuous efforts to compromise for the place's obvious strategic liabilities; not only was there an outpost a couple miles south in the abandoned belowground library that had originally atttracted Zinnert's attention, there was now a tightly monitored perimeter about a hundred yards in radius that contained the lower level and garage, with the communications center at the dead center and quarters surrounding it in the zone. To create the barrier, a lot of the old mall furnishings had been ripped up, forever destroying the old Wonderland aspect. Amanda wondered if she were the only one who mourned that loss, a small one in a world filled with worse tragedies.

With the population boom, the old sleeping arrangements had also been altered. Amanda, as one of the

elder members, now slept in a back room with four new recruits. Similar had happened with most of the other members. Of the lot, only Matthew and Kevin still slept together in the same room as before.

A twisted smile touched her thin lips.

The others assumed it was because of their personal relationship and preferences. As Amanda knew full well by now, it was considerably more...involved than that. She had found out that it was responsible for the fact that they were still alive and not dead along with the Quincy base.

"Kevin," it seemed, could detect an enemy attack coming in before the actual incident.

Takes one to know one, eh? she thought.

Clipboard under one arm and pencil in the other hand, she slouched into the communications center, where the schedule said a recruit by the name of Mark MacNamara was on duty. The place had originally been the TV room, but it seemed Matthew had had other plans on mind. However, it didn't preclude off-duty personnel from still utilizing it for entertainment purposes, as the noise of movie dialogue and the figure slumped in front of it proved.

Abruptly, the watcher shot to his feet and whirled on her.

"Whaddaya want?" Kevin snapped, his face angry. Mandy gasped.

Strangely, his eyes seemed to be focused on a point some inches above her head. Suddenly he blinked and looked confused. They tracked downward and found her face.

"Urk," he said, his feet beginning to shuffle. The expression on his face could be characterized only as scorching embarassment. He did not blush. He couldn't. It was not a matter of control, Amanda had found out; it was a matter of complete physiological incapability. It was all a matter of blood flow, Matt had said, and that considering the color of Kevin's it could not show without revealing Kevin's true self. The only rosiness that tinted Kevin's complexion was an opaque capillary pigmentation.

It did not take any petty blood flow for her to detect that he looked ready to crawl under a rug and die there.

"Uh..." he fumbled. "Sorry. I thought you were somebody else." His eyes shifted away from her astonished gaze.

"Who?" she asked unthinkingly. Mark had turned from his comm monitoring and was looking on with interest; a filthy look from Kevin made him change his mind.

"Matt. I got a bone to pick with him. Sorry."

Amanda nibbled on the pencil eraser, stretching her face into the protective, glassy smile that she had used around him for nearly three months. "Oh, well, then, that's okay. If you'll excuse me..." She turned and began her move over to the communications array, hearing out of the corner of her perception a sudden intake of breath, a huff, and silence. She took a step, then gulped suddenly.

Kevin tightened his grip on her elbow, his eyes narrowed. While the hold was gentle, he made it perfectly clear he was not about to let her go. It felt completely human. It scared her out of her wits.

"Matt can wait. Speaking of bones, you're another one."

"I've got to monitor the calls--"

Kevin made an obscene suggestion regarding the calls. Before she knew it, she was halfway up the stairs, towed by the scout.

"Let me go!"

"Like hell." Kevin made a perfunctory salute to the gawking guard at the perimeter and dragged her further down the hall. Thirty seconds later they were fifty yards outside. Only then did he let go of her arm.

"Look, Ishmael, I can't say the whole business with the Kraken didn't foul you up a tiny bit. But for three months?"

"What did you call me?" she screeched.

"Moby Dick, dammit! The guy on the whaler!" Amanda got the context and only got angrier.

"Because the Invid--you KNOW what happened!"

"Do I?" He smacked the side of his head. "I haven't intentionally touched the Hivemind in six years and I'm not going to start now!"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah!" Even in the blazing glare of the August sun and under his sweat-blackened headband, his eyes were dilated in vented emotion. She stepped back and prepared to make a run back inside, the hive reference not having made things any easier for her.

He sagged suddenly, the anger gone.

"Oh God. Mandy...please..." The misery was so apparent that she halted. She turned back and saw him suddenly on his rear in the middle of the roasting afternoon parking lot, forehead on his hands, mindless of the heat. She stopped and stared.

After a couple of seconds, "Isn't that--hot on there?"

He shrugged. "What the hell matters anyway?"

She paused. "C'mon. At least the grass is cooler than that."

Kevin plopped down again in the open weeds after they had gone out past the trees lining the parking lot. After some internal debate, Mandy sat and looked at the utterly dispirited black head on the green denim knees.

"Sorry about that," he mumured finally.

"Hope they didn't hear us screaming at each other," she offered. He shook his head.

"Who cares anyway?" He sighed. "Right now, I'd rather be lynched than spend another six years like this. You're not...the only Ishmael here, Mandy."

She made a noise.

He continued. "Mandy--I've spent years pretending to be everything but- -before the Elms, I was posing as Matt's "nephew," even before I got the concept down. The last other...person...like me I met was Sera. That was two years ago. I could be the only Terran sympathsizer left in the entire contingent of bloody glorious Optera. I'm alone, Mandy."

"Kevin, I--"

"Mandy, it wouldn't be so bad if--I don't know. If I wasn't in constant danger of being found and killed by Invid, by my own people, mind you. If I didn't have to worry about whether I get a paper cut in front of Gerald, or worse, Fred. You seen how his eyes change if Invid are brought up? That's not an entirely sane person. At least if you're a hemophiliac you don't get people trying to murder you if you start bleeding." He admitted softly. "Yeah, and if only...you'd understand."

Amanda swallowed. "Kevin. I can't."

He lifted his grayed features. "I know. Sorry, for thinking..."

"Kev, what was I supposed to think? I--trusted you. And then--Kevin, you don't understand what it was

like to--to--" Suddenly, the memory, nine months old, was raw in her mind. "to see your friends rounded up, like animals, and my sister... I don't know what it's like, being you. But I know what it was like, being me. And finding out that..."

After a minute, he handed over a fairly clean square of cloth. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose gratefully.

"So that was it." he said. She nodded fitfully. He looked down at the ground, then back up at her, his gaze frank.

"Mandy, if it's any consolation at all, I spent weeks after that being literally eaten up with guilt. I'm ashamed to even admit I used to be that." He pulled up a blade of foxtail and studied it, the color of the leaves a couple shades lighter than Invid blood, then began to munch it ferociously. "And lying like a Persian rug to you the entire time didn't help much either."

She sniffled and blew her nose again. At last, she asked, "Kevin?"

He made an inquiring noise.

"What are you?"

He froze in mid-chew, eyes wide.

Oh mother. That was The Question that had haunted him for so long it seemed to be its own answer.

It took him a couple minutes before he looked over at her.

"Proof that Darwin was not up to it, I guess, Amanda.

"I look human, but bleed another color. I have psionic abilities to detect Invid, yet I think my own thoughts, make my own loyalities. And I'm still classified as an Invid." He started gnawing on his lip, face pained. "Invid don't fear, don't worry about dying, have a greater racial purpose to work for, have no selfishness, and complete, total harmony, something which I don't think humanity will ever attain without losing its nature.

"On the other hand, Invid don't feel. Invid don't laugh, Invid don't weep, were never able to laugh at absurdity." He looked off over her shoulder. "Except for maybe one case, an Invid never found a capacity to love. Everything's so wrapped up in hive-loyalty there's nothing left over." He sighed. "But I do that. And a lot more, as you know. And not much of what Invid are supposed to do at all.

"So what am I? I heard Marlene theorized we're something else now, both and neither, and not even the Regis knew what she was doing when she started to change us. We were evolved to replace you, you

know."

"What?!" He nodded.

"Yep. Got into her head the human form was the most adaptable for this planet, so wipe out the natives and replace them with her own kids, just like those bad 1950's movies." A grin flitted across his face. "But whether we'd've been what she wanted is really in doubt, considering how the first batch turned out. Mandy--if you ever find something out about what I actually am, I want to know, because I just don't know at all what's talking to you."

She did not know how to answer that and sat there, her eyes reddened.

"So when I froze you out, it hurt you."

"Ripped my guts out and stomped on them."

"Kev, I'm sorry."

He gave her a tentative wink. "It's all right. I keep forgetting that although I've had a lot of time being like you, you--don't know what it's like to be what I was. Amanda--do you know what you are?"

She blinked at his question incredulously. "Of course I am. I'm Amanda Pierson, a human being."

He grunted. "Why Amanda? What makes you Amanda?"

She opened her mouth to answer, shut it incredulously and wiped a tangle of yellow sweaty strands out of her face. Kevin looked knowing.

"See? It's a hundred times worse for me."

"Uhmmm."

He sighed. "It wasn't just that that threw me off. I took a trip with Gerald yesterday. Found out some unnerving facts about him and his home life." He hesitated. "Swore he'd kick my teeth in if I yapped it around but you may as well know, considering you're already acquaintanced with somebody evolved from a slug."

She managed a smile.

"His mother's a grand lady. His father's dead. As it happened, his name was Utan Shul-Marduk."

Her jaw dropped.

"My god. He's--"

"The son of a defector from the Botoru Battalion. Our Gerry's half-Zentraedi."

Mandy frantically scrambled through her memory of history taught to her in school regarding the events leading to the Robotech Wars. "Good god, you mean he's your enemy!"

Kevin looked peeved. "My verde-blooded ass he is. Yes, the Zentraedi defoliated Optera, but since I defected I've realized they were just as much abused by the Masters as the Invid were. My only argument with Gerald is he's a homophobe who knows more dirty lyrics to "Look Up" than any other being alive, not anything with his genes. The same goes for his father." Kevin's tone was wistful. "He seemed to be a good person, actually. No, my being annoyed's with Matt."

"Yes, you did, ah mention..."

"Talk about an insult to my intelligence!" he burst out. "Does he think I'm that stupid, that I need to go out with Gerald on the chance I'd find out his background? What's he trying to do, foster Peace and Brotherhood singlehandedly? He had to have been the one to stick me with him." He began massacring another grass stem. "I've heard of preaching to the already converted but this is the first time I know what it means."

"Kevin, will you calm down? What happened?"

"Blazing Tzuptum toasting marshmallows, I've known Wilson for six years now. If he thinks that finding out--hell. Sorry. Basically, he's had this yearly trip he makes, for his mother. I didn't know until now for what. His mother had an abusive drunken idiot of a husband before she met and fell in love with Gerald's father and divorced the first. Amazingly enough they consider it an obligation to check up on him, despite the fact he pickles himself in alcohol and is going to be dead of cirrhosis in a couple years from the look of things. Gerald had to go tell his mother about his condition, and I had to follow to make sure he didn't get hosed on the way. That's where I found out. Actually, Gerald wasn't all that enthused either about my knowing. And he doesn't even know my history."

Two minutes passed. A hot breeze sprang up, blowing dust and thinning dandelion parachutes into the air.

"It occurs to me," Mandy said distantly, "that the Elms racial mixture is absolutely nuts."

Kevin began to laugh uproariously, then cut off as a sudden shrill beep cut the air. Amanda's eyes widened as he ripped the pager/ communicator off his belt and gave a hasty acknowlegement to Mark's voice on the other end. Suddenly, he stiffened as though electrocuted.

The next second, he was dragging Amanda by the arm again, this time back inside the base. Panting, she heard the klaxon come to blatting life and saw chaos as loiterers poured through the cracked glass doors towards the interior.

"It's urgent! They're trying to take Rantoul!"

She screamed a curse.

Kevin let go and was pressing his right hand against his side where the Kraken wound lingered; although healed, it still pained him occasionally. "I'll see you in the Cyclone bay!" In a second, he was gone in the scrambling crowds; Mandy spun and headed for the garage, where her CVR armor and equipment waited.

It was to be the first engagement she fought in as an active member, and she was very aware it could also be her last.

There was a wedge of them heading directly towards the besieged town some ten miles from their base, eight Cyclones of varying make in all. Still others were circling around so as to not allow the aliens a fix on the location they were coming from. Fortunately, the enemy was already engaged by another group, which had called it in to the Elms and had allowed the residents time to get to shelter, but considering varying strengths in forces, they would be in serious trouble without quick reenforcement. Amanda, Kevin, and Miranda were among the first wave.

A couple miles away and the war was loud and visually clear, Cyclones dodging and juking with Attack Scouts; harrying Combat Troopers like grackles did hawks. The Apocalypse Riders were badly outnimbered, but many of them had relatives in the town and were not about to let the Invid ship them off to a slave camp without a fight.

Even as they raced toward the locale, they could see a plasma blast go home, and one of the small armored figures erupted into a blaze of gas. Miranda said something foul.

"Bastards! Okay, kids, you know the drill. Buddy each other, watch out for your butts and your partner's, and keep 'em busy until the rest arrive. Good luck, and let's all meet this side of the valley of the shadow! Go!"

"Hail Mary mother of grace be with us now and at the hour of our death..." Kevin's voice fervently chanted over the tacnet. Mandy spared a second to be bemused by the fact that the Catholicism said by the rogue alien seemed to be sincere, and then the wedge split.

Miranda, Kevin, and two others shot foward, exploding upward and beginning the shift to Battloid, and the rest went off the road to the sides to come in from the ground, fusion engines still on to avoid

detection.

Mandy was in company with Raymond Thieu, a skinny kid from the north who had come in June with tales of a crashed Shadow Alpha somewhere in the bombarded prairie and dreams of fighting Invid. The Elms had located and were trying to repair the first and had complied in giving him the second. He was now shadowing Mandy. Personally, she would have felt better with Kevin--even Kevin. Ray was too trigger happy.

"You know the spot we're to dive in, Ray!"

"Yeah!" he grinned verbally. "I'll buy the vodka!"

"Look, keep your mind on things. This is serious, Ray."

Abruptly, an annihilation disc fhwahmed in from nowhere, nearly dismounting them as it detonated a matter of yards away.

"I told you so."

"Yeah," he said, shaken.

A litlle more...A little more...please god if there was one, daddy if he was still able to listen, please help her, no more death marches for anyone. I want to live want to live let me live--

"NOW!"

She flicked the switch, in the last few seconds before the immediate conflict, with Thieu following.

She stood as the cycle erupted skyward, months of practice coming into play as the farings split and rose, shocks attaching to forearms, wheels sliding, and jets coming alive. As soon as the Forager encased her in battlesuit, she was back on the ground on fusion, Thieu following, and running toward what a sane person would have fled like mad.

An armored figure loomed out of the smoke at them, humanoid but far too large to be a Cyclone Battloid. Amanda barely had a split second to see the overdeveloped arms and shoulders that distinguished a Sentinel before a radiant blast obliterated its sensor eye in green steam. Amanda was reassured by the accuracy of Thieu's aim.

From what she knew from instruction, it was more likely that the troops actually used to round up Rantoul would be on the ground, which meant she and Raymond would have to deal with the Sentinels and Enforcers. This was good and bad: although the enemy's manuverability was limited, the castes occupying the Sentinel and Enforcer suits were a good deal more intelligent and autonomous than either

Scout or Trooper, according to Kevin. Plus, there was the possiblity the airborne troops might make a potshot at one or both of them from above.

And one decision could mean the difference between being alive and being a corpse, she remembered.

Her reasoning was immediately destroyed when a red clawed arm whipped out of the turmoil at her, the rest of the Scout following after. Acting on raw instinct, reliving her first confrontation, Amanda rolled under the deadly swing and the following plasma blasts, raised her H-90, and fired.

> They keep calling me...
>
> --*Nine Inch Nails* **"Dead Souls"**

The Scout's eye erupted as the missile plunged through it and into the iigaari's compartment, killing it instantly. The mecha shell had only begun to fall when the fragmentation missile completed its work and the mecha erupted into a glowing ball, spraying ceramic.

The Ferret whipped away and over to its next confrontation, the last cry of the Attack Scout still shrilling in its pilot's mind.

Forgive me, brother, he said. He began to target a Combat Trooper harassing a few Riders, trying to ignore how his eyes blurred.

The Invid think I'm dead as far as they know. Please send me out against the lower ranks if you can. If the Malarosm or the Sulagi pick up on my thoughts and realize I'm alive and working for humans, I am dead. So are you. That had been the rationale for his explaining to Matthew back in '40 why he wanted to target the lower castes. Of course it was true, but the other half had been that murdering iigaari and gurab'pa was all he could handle at the time. Even after all these years, the silent chant rang through his mind every time he extinguished yet another part of the Hive.

Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me.

He aimed and loosed another missile.

Miranda heaved, the plunge driven by her thrusters pulling black edges over her vision as she dove toward a clutch of Enforcers with Sentinels. After the rising retaliation of the human resistance to the slave roundups, the Invid had intensified their forces occupying towns. What had been only a dozen or so

Enforcers in Amanda's case was now six Enforcers, eight Sentinels, four Troopers and twenty Scouts.

Miranda did not care. All she could think was that the Invid had gone entirely too far now, in their recent history of breaking every vow of noninterference in the book. She growled within her helmet, targeting an Enforcer even as they started to take notice of her.

One exploded outright, one's sensor shattered, and one's firing arm exploded in green blood and alloy. Miranda hadn't been as long in the combatant game as her brother, but there was no sign of it in the strike that ended with half of the Enforcers dead or disabled as she reached for the air again.

She knew how risky the move had been and several Sentinels had to be aiming up her rear at that moment. She made a hairpin turn, only to see the hulk of a Combat Trooper plow into the ground with a shattering crash, flattening a building, a couple Sentinels, and the wounded Enforcer.

She could see the perpetrator weave around in midair and detected the acid-green armor. "Thanks for the assist, Kev!"

"You're welcome." He sounded strained. "Where's Gendt?"

"No idea. Lost him tangling with some Scouts. Yours?"

"Same. It's insane. You can't keep str--RANDA LOOK OUT!"

She cut out the thrusters, dropped, fired, and waxed the Enforcer she saw just then aiming, lifting again with a neck-wrenching jerk a couple dozen feet before she hit the ground. Kevin's quick eyes had saved her yet again.

"We gotta get the others." she said shortly.

The Scouts were beginning to regroup, presumably under the direction of the two remaining Enforcers. Miranda bit back a groan of horror. There were still twelve left. She didn't know about the casualties her side had sustained, but under no means was this a pretty picture.

The first Scout began to dive toward them, folded up in its clamlike attack configuration. The two Elms scrambled and blasted away from each other like repelled magnets as the Invid mecha screamed toward them.

In an instant, there was a screech and it exploded.

Miranda heard Gwen's voice over the tac net, froze, and began a whoop of elation.

The rest had arrived.

Round here we talk like lions
But sacrifice like lambs...

--*Counting Crows* **"Round Here"**

Mandy pushed back her visor, looking over the scene as the rest of the Elms dove into the fray, this time with the heavy weaponry that it had taken this long to set up. Behind her, she could hear the thump as Thieu landed behind her.

She shifted her position on the bank of the watering hole, and watched the general chaos over to the west. Matt had told her and her companion to withdraw, as both their payloads were nearly expended and it was now a matter of helping the Riders to mop up the mess. If the Invid were to take Rantoul, this day would not be the time.

She recalled with some misgiving the icy, remorseless accuracy she had dispatched three Scouts. Thieu had accounted for three others.

Thieu unhelmeted, his black hair dripping stringily onto his self- confessed quarter-Asian countenance. "Not a bad day's work, huh? You want a orange-drink screwdriver when we get back?"

"Ack." Amanda's face twisted. "Get your helmet on, Ray."

With puppy insolence, he teased, "Why, sweetie? We're done for the day."

"It's not safe, Ray. I've got the scars to prove it. Just do it." She with horror realized her own words; Raymond was no older than herself, and she was talking like Gerald or Dennis. What the heck?

"Oh all right, if you say so. Really, don't you?"

"Most disgusting thing I've ever dreamt of drinking. Flirt later, Ray, we've got--" There was a strangled choke behind her, and a wet noise. She whirled. And screamed.

Thieu was staring with blank astonishment. The crimson-slicked spike impaling his neck withdrew, a viscous gout of red fountaining out. The battloid suit and the figure inside stood for a second more, then crumpled to the ground, watering it vermillion.

The red optic of the Kraken Inorganic focused on her. The bloody tapewormlike tentacle arched like a cobra, and lashed forward.

Amanda tried to lift, was forced to stumble back by the strike, rolled down the slope and splashed into the rancid water, switching to public channel in her panic. "Pierson to Elms--Kraken, waterhole! We've been--"

The tentacle whipped and spat.

For a millisecond, Amanda's body arched in agony. Then there was an infinite void of time as completely beyond her control, her body began its slump, her eyes open on the hovering Inorganic as she folded into the water of the man-made pond. Then, there was only the lukewarm touch of the water as her armor dragged her into the shallow depths.

She realized as she sank that it had not been electricity it had been firing, but a sort of paralyzing bolt that shut down voluntary muscles. While it was not fatal of itself, she couldn't move a hair.

She wondered how long it would take for her to drown.

Targets eliminated, the Kraken's computer rasped to its guiding Brain. The Inorganic withdrew its tentacles and whooshed silently away from the bubbling water and the scarlet patch of ground with the still-warm meat at its center.

"Is that it?" Matt asked worriedly. "If even one gets away we're in deep crap. And we're close by here."

"I think so," Kevin whispered to him in private communication. "I can't 'hear' any others." Ulm's helmeted head nodded over to him in recognition.

The Riders' CO made a thoughtful noise. "I think you guys have 'em cleaned up," she said, her visor peering over the landscape as her first- generation Saber Cyclone battlesuit hovered above them. She gave a huge sigh of relief. "I can't tell you how grateful we are, Lieutenant Ulm. We're going to have to stay in the underground shelters for a good long while, but it beats having Rantoul enslaved." She added quietly, "My sister and my nephews and niece live here."

"I understand, Giraldi."

There was a sudden shout. The ground seemed to open up as the Rider CO yelped and lifted away.

"Shit, Matt, I was wrong," Kevin gulped.

The Scout was missing a claw and leaking fluid heavily, but somehow it still lived. The red sensor focused, as the crippled mecha lurched upward.

Before the three could move, another Saber had leapt foward, CADS humming, and ended the Scout's break with fluid ease. Kevin watched, sourness rising in his thoat.

"First time for everyone," Ulm said on their private channel.

"I think," the stranger commented, "that's the last one."

Kevin was badly shaken. "I certainly hope so. God." He panted, feeling the adrenalin spit into his system.

"It is," the other assured them. There was something vaguely familiar about the melodic tenor or baritone, Kevin couldn't remember which. "I counted when we went in. Experience, I guess."

"Saved us this time," Commander Giraldi said, relieved. "I suppose we now--"

The scream pierced their eardrums even over the radio, the soprano in such an extremety of terror it did not sound human. It seemed to drive a ice spike into Kevin's soul, for he knew whose it was.

"MANDY!" he cried. Even as the voice gasped its few words, he was in the air, rocketing toward the only body of water he'd seen.

"O'Shea!" Ulm barked in shock. "What--" The terrified voice on the other end cut off short. The second Saber was already gone. He and Giraldi followed after.

Kevin's Ferret ripped the air as he plunged toward the hole, unaware of the fact that the two Cyclones behind him had split off to pursue a retreating disturbance in the grass. The only thing he was aware of was the glassy surface of the watering hole, seemingly undisturbed but for the vicious bloodstain at one end in which Thieu was sprawled. And deeply rutted grass and earth just beyond that...

Mother, mother, how long? How long since the gasping voice cut off in bubbles?

"I'll take him!" the Saber shouted. Kevin gave a distracted acknowledgement, and plummeted, cutting out the engines as he hit the surface and sank, his armor filling as he did so .

Dark, murky, opaque water was all he could see. *Where?* He whipped out a hand, felt on the bottom, the gauntlet searching the way his eyes could not. It hit something solid, he could feel...

Frantically, he dragged the arm to him, got the body, thank Mother his helmet was halfway water-sealed, and lunged for the bank.

Liquid flooded out of the cyclone as he peeled it away from him, out of the still body's as he triggered the transformation sequence. He peeled the armor away. Her lungs had to be full of water... He picked her up, tilted her so it ran out of her, wrapped his arms around her torso, and lunged upward. Water poured out of the nose and mouth. How many minutes? How long did he have?... There was still a thready pulse. Praying to whatever deity would listen, he laid her out flat, pinched her nostrils, and began to administer artificial respiration.

Several cycles of eternity as he breathed for her, and he continued even after her chest began to rise and fall on its own. It was only after she began to cough that he stopped, panting, looking and not quite believing. Her eyes blinked.

"Mandy! Can you hear me?"

The light emerald irises focused on him, beginning to widen in terror. She was breathing, with liquid gurgles, her eyes were blinking, but the rest remained completely immobile.

The Saber shadowed them. "Is she--"

"Is Thieu--" Kevin began, remembering Amanda's partner at last. His heart sank when the helmet moved from side to side.

"Too late. His neck--was impaled. It hit the aorta. He was probably dead in a couple of minutes." Nausea shuddered the voice. The frantic green eyes below them closed in utter pain.

"She can't move. It's as though she were paralyzed."

The Saber pilot removed his helmet. "Can you understand us, Mandy? Blink once for yes."

The eyelids fluttered closed and opened.

The blue eyes, a couple shades darker than Kevin's own, glanced over at him, then down. "Do you know what attacked you? Blink twice if you don't." Another single blink. "Do you think it used electricity? Stun chemicals? Some other paralysis agent?" Two blinks for each of the first two questions, and one for the last.

"It was a Kraken Inorganic," Kevin supplied. "We've had a--tangle with one before. But I thought it was electricity at the time."

The other nodded. "It could be both. I have no idea who's creating them, but I've seen some--variety in

attacks. This and other types."

"No." the barely audible whisper came from below. Both men gaped. "Paralyze bolt." Amanda's throat worked, emitting another gurgling cough.

"It's wearing off!" Kevin said hopefully. "At least it's not permanent, Mr.--"

"Belmont," the other supplied, his dyed hair plastered with perspiration. "Probably long enough for the Inorganic to take prey." He helped Kevin to strip the remaining armor off her body, the water trickling out as they did so. "I've seen the Invid use enough combat techniques to give me nightmares for a lifetime. Funny, considering..." He trailed off.

"Isn't it though," Kevin answered shortly. "Watch my back." He proceeded to remove his torso armor and slung Mandy over his shoulder, trying to get the remaining water out of her with gravity and whacks on the back. By the time he was finished, she was breathing more normally and her hands had begun to twitch. He got her back down, holding her awkwardly as he crouched on the ground, shaking and not about to loose his hold on her. She lay quietly, the only indication of her internal state of mind the spasmodic twitches and her dilated eyes.

In another couple of minutes, the two officers arrived back, mounted on their Cyclones.

"Yep, it was a Kraken. WAS a Kraken," Giraldi said grimly, patting her H-90 rifle. "The last time that son-of-a-bitch will--jesusmaryandjoseph." She began to heave as her eyes lit on the corpse of Thieu. "So--that's..."

Ulm saw as well and groaned. "God, I knew I shouldn't have let him operate that soon..."

"No, Lieutenant," Belmont answered frankly, "It's always too soon to start fighting. He just was on the losing side. But the other's going to be okay, I think." Mandy's head began to move a little. There was still a bit of foul water inside her lungs interfering with her breathing, but she was breathing. She was slightly surprised by that.

Giraldi demurred. "I don't know, to be honest. We're thankful for your help, but I know damn well what happens with animals drinking and wading in that water and God only knows what's in there in the middle of summer. She needs antibiotics as fast as she can. As soon as the Hos-Box gets here and it's free I'm injecting her." Ulm whistled. The hospital sidecars the Icarus had dropped were only wishful thinking for the Elms.

Kevin realized belatedly he was wet, filthy and smelt like a slurry tank, but that was minor compared to the knowledge whom he had gotten into it for was still breathing and now beginning to move her legs. Hearing soft wordless complaints, he adjusted his hold and supported her head, catching her eyes as he did so.

"You're going to be okay, Mandy. You better be okay, because I went to all this work--you understand me?"

She nodded, incapable of the strength to form words. She looked into Kevin's face, mustering all the understanding attitude she could.

Kevin blinked, and continued staring at her further, fear and confusion in his eyes. She did not quite know what was going on, but suddenly she felt completely safe, as long as he held on. Green eyes stlil fixed on the blue, her eyelids dropped and she felt only quiet.

Amanda had fallen asleep. He looked down at her face, blinking in black exhaustion.

What had happened? What feeling had been passed to him in that look that made him feel so strange and defied all words? Kevin fumbled for an explanation, and it felt like nailing fog. That single moment had transcended all human language and every elaborate mental-and-vocal construct the Invid had.

"Okay, thanks, Commander, Belmont. Let me know when the Hos-Box is free to treat mine. I've no words to thank you for that."

"Lieutenant," Giraldi said firmly, "You don't need to waste words. Saving Rantoul was more than enough."

"Yeah. And I've got to radio mine so we can--take care of--Thieu." He ended it bleakly. "C'mon, Kev, let's get her back to rondezvous."

Shakily, he got to his feet with his burden, the confusion slipping his mind as he began to occupy himself with the gritty business of cleaning up.

"Hey, Mandy," Miranda said, sticking her wooden-beaded cornrowed head in, "You got a house caller."

Amanda sat further up in her bed in her living suite. "I do?" She winced as her still-balky muscles did not quite cooperate. "Who is it?"

Miranda made a face, her dark skin shiny with the heat from outside. "Wouldn't say except he helped with saving your butt, sweetie. You think you want to see him?"

Mandy shrugged. "Sure. It's been a couple days. I need to get active tomorrow." Miranda smiled and left, leaving Mandy in the darkened and empty room. Everyone else was out, leaving her with throbbing pains from the antibiotic injections and the residues of her paralysis slowing her responses, and occasionally,

the company of the other walking wounded. Except for that and the grief and nightmares over Thieu's death, it had been a dull time.

Her caller cautiously entered the room. Amanda recognized him from the disaster at the waterhole, but he was obscured in the gloom she preferred at the time.

"You want the lights up?" she asked. He smiled and shook his head.

"No, that's fine. But thanks for asking." He held out a store vase and its contents, which she slowly took and placed on the table. "Just a gift."

She looked and smiled. "Where did you get them?"

He chuckled. "A lot of roses seem to have gone wild in the area. I hope you don't mind the color. It's for friendship. Turns out it's also a nice match to your hair. I've always been fond of yellow," he said with a wistful tone.

"They're beautiful. Thank you. I didn't think you'd come, Mr. Belmont, what with you being with the Riders and all."

"Mnnh," Belmont said, sucking on a lip. "Actually, that was the reason why, Amanda. To be honest, I'm not a part of the Apocalypse Riders. I was passing on the way through and was staying with them for a couple days when the Invid attacked. Naturally I tried to help out. I'm going to be leaving tomorrow, so I'm paying my respects to you now. I'm glad to see you're doing fine, especially," he added slyly, "since you're a cute girl and the Earth needs a few more." Amanda grinned, blushing.

"Amazing you can think that after I took a swim in a cow spit resevoir. It wasn't the drowning so much as finding out what I'd inhaled," she shuddered in disgust. He laughed.

"Happens. I have a friend of mine I haven't seen for a few years now. She's about your age. I wonder what she's like now." He sighed and went silent.

"So why are you--passing through, then?" she asked.

"I'm...looking for people I know," he said at last. "They're scattered all over the continent. Besides...the Invid has taken an intense disliking to me."

"Ah," she said. "Should I ask why?"

"Better not. I want to leave as light a trail behind me as I can. Sorry."

"No matter," she affirmed, lapsing into an awkward silence. Belmont broke it after a couple of moments.

"Your friend is extremely brave," he said softly. "I don't think you realize how brave."

"W-who? Kevin?"

There was a nod. "Anyone who'd go into a body of water of unknown depth in full battloid is either courageous beyond belief or stupid. Maybe both. Or..." he trailed off meaningfully.

"Or what?"

"Or he thought your life was much more important than his own. You'll have to look out for him, Amanda. If he places that much value in you..."

Amanda was beginning to understand the implications and did not want to. Belmont rose from his seat and shook her hand. "I've got to leave now, because I need to get away before the Invid start seeing connections in the assault. I don't know if I'll be back in the area any time soon, so take care, and maybe we'll meet again."

She squeezed back, her mind racing. "Will you be all right? It's not a pretty world out there anymore."

He managed a chuckle. "I've crossed some hostile land in my time, so I don't think you ought to worry on that score." He went serious again. "You'd be better to keep an eye on your own affairs. Also," he rubbed his forehead under his chevroned headband, "keep in mind what I said about Kevin. People like him aren't liked by the enemy. Especially now--there's a marked rise in the rate of purges, and resistance is attacked first."

"Are you implying something?" she asked blandly, removing her hand from his.

His voice dropped to a whisper. "Nothing more than what you already know." Her intake of breath was met with an eyeglint and a knowing nod as he leaned in. "I've--been around--enough to see the signs, Amanda, although in his case it took a long time for me to realize it. The way he responds to attacks so much more quickly than a normal person, the way he doesn't flush in this heat after fighting that long--it's there. You don't realize how dangerous his position is now. I don't think he does either.

"Amanda, he's not the only one to object to this occupation. I've known a few--others. Over half of them are dead now."

Despite herself she gulped again.

"I don't mean to scare you, but if you at all care for him, you have to realize that you make him vulnerable in a way that makes things even more hazardous for him. It's a warning I'm giving you, because like it or not, it's the truth."

She was trembling. "Who the heck are you?"

"Me?" Belmont said, rising. "Just another fighter in this war, Mandy. That's all I am. Get better. People need you too."

Before she could protest, he was out in the hall. Rattled by his cryptic statements, she stared at the yellow roses in the vase and fought a losing battle with trying not to understand what he meant.

"Fucking tires!" Gerald growled, attempting to find a leak to no avail. Malcolm, helping keep the Super Saber steady on the jack as Gerald looked and exercised his vocabulary, raised his eyes to the concrete heavens in plea.

Kevin, kibtizing nearby, said, "Hey, look now, tires don't reproduce. You never can even get them together long enough even if they did." He followed this profound statement up with a glass of water upturned on his head, flooding his already sweat-soaked white undershirt and turning his hair into dribbling stringlets. The entire garage smelt like an unhygenic armpit, thanks to the 90-plus degree heat filtering in from the outside.

"Oh aren't you the genius--" A shattering crash followed. "My hand! The son of a bitch almost fell on my hand!" Gerald bawled. "Kevin, you twinky bastard, you broke my concentration!"

Malcolm was still snickering. "Nope, he broke mine." Gerald gave him a slow, gray-hot glare of indignation.

"'Look down, your pants are falling!'" Kevin yodeled back derisively. Gerald turned the look times two on him, and was answered with a sweet smile.

A repressed snigger burst out into a snort that was not from either of the three. The visitor looked apologetic and stepped out.

Now really, Kevin thought, *I know I seen the guy before... Is this what they call deja vu?*

"Could I speak to you for a second, Mr. O'Shea?" he asked him, still trying to hold in laughter. Kevin shrugged and complied, leaving the others to their work.

The air outside was thick with insects and cicada noise and was stifling, but at least there was a breeze. Kevin was thankful for that.

"Nice dye job," he commented.

"What? Oh, yes, thanks. I try and keep it up, although the ingredients are hard to get these days. Had to cut the length down," he said with some regret.

"Understand. What you want me for? Presume Matt wanted me to give you the recent moves over in this area. I've got a folder inside that I keep up in my glorious tradition as scout."

"Yes, that'd be nice. I'm going to pass the information on to the next group I meet and keep spreading it. It'll give us a way of comparing things regionally." Belmont looked over at the other. "With the way things seem to be going, there's been sometimes abrupt differences in how the Invid are running their campaigns in certain areas of the continent. What we need to know is why."

Kevin shook his head. "I haven't the faintest clue."

"Hmm," his companion said. Absently, he began to trace on the hot concrete of the garage entrance. "Do you realize that the Kraken Inorganic has only appeared in the area east of the Missisippi and north and west of the Shenandoahs and Appalachians?"

Kevin stared, stunned, and shook his head again.

"That's not normal behavior for distributing an Invid mecha."

"No it wasn't--in the last war. But then again, nor was cooperating with EBSIS factions, new mecha popping up all of a sudden, sudden enslavement operations, or weird hybrid mecha. This isn't the only case, Mr. O'Shea. Several other unique types of unpiloted mecha have shown up in other sections of the continent too, confined to certain areas. I don't know what's going on, but this is very worrisome behavior." His finger began to tap, then trace again. "If I were you, I'd watch out for new improvisations. A really nasty type popped up in an adjacent area, a little probe-spy droid. I gave its specifics to Lieutenant Ulm, but keep your eyes open."

Mouth a line, Kevin nodded.

That tapping and tracing was really annoying, he thought. Half against his will, his eyes were drawn to Belmont's finger.

"To be frank, I haven't understood what's been going on since '43, since the new mecha started to show up..." Kevin trailed off, trying to keep his train of thought with that tapping distracting him. Suddenly his eyes widened as comprehension hit him.

Belmont's index finger, now tracing again, was doing it in a specific manner.

Kevin glanced up, around, and listened in on the conversation sifting from inside the garage. There seemed to be no notice of them. He looked around for any hypothetical probe droids. He already knew for a fact there were no living Invid in the area, present self excepted of course.

"I'm a Friend," he said softly, emphasis on the capital letter. Belmont's eyes widened, and he nodded.

"I figured you would be," he said. "There was evidence."

"Any other Friends you've seen in the last six months?"

Belmont said, "I've seen only one, but heard of two others. They--had to leave."

Kevin inhaled, closing his eyes, and let out a breath that was half sob. "That many?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. They didn't leave easily, though." Kevin nodded.

"What about the other friend of ours?"

"Still alive, but hiding. Their family doesn't like them. Have you seen any?"

"Two years ago my elder sister came by."

A spark lit in the other man's care-aged eyes. "Which one?"

"The third one."

Belmont's face went so still that Kevin had a shock. At last, he said, "At least her family won't know where she is, if that's the most recent report."

"I haven't seen any other Friends of mine. Sorry, Belmont."

"It's just as well. The two that left were closely involved with each other. How many 'other' friends here do you have?"

Kevin's brows hiked. "Two. The second one was an accident, but she's not fair-weather."

"That's good news. Any other friends you got from elsewhere that came around? I'm looking for a couple for a reunion." Kevin shook his head, leaving his questioner looking disappointed.

"Hope you find them, though. Good friends are hard to find these days."

The intent look was gone as Belmont's eyes rolled up to the heavens. "Tell me about it." Kevin snickered. "Well, take care. I'm always glad to hear about the family. I've got problems of my own with them, and don't want to visit some on you. Show me your information and then I'll be on my way."

"Sure." They shook hands, leaving Kevin standing alone by the wall, watching the other's lavender-tinted head disappear down the ramp.

"Tell me about it," Kevin said flatly to himself, shaking his head. He then came back to himself and dashed down the ramp and back inside.

Six months had passed, long enough for the glassy hole in the ground to gain the first few tentative holds of plant life sprouting from the caved-in walls and passageways. A tangle of weeds straggled in the brooding heat of late summer over the blasted, hundred-yard wide depression, assuming strange and bizarre shapes in the gathering gloom of an August evening, lurching in the sporadic hiss of breeze. Except for the flitter of bats awakening overhead and the day's-ending complaints of robins and other feathered life settling in, there was no other sign of living movement.

Humans, despite everything, are poor observers, and it would have taken one a couple minutes to realize the strangeness in the atmosphere was the complete cessation of that movement, leaving nothing but the wind.

The breeze shifted, and shifted again, into strange and unnatural directions, as though struggling to escape. It became omnidirectional, began to blow into the clearings from all angles. Then it began to blow outward in the same manner, carrying a hot breeze that stank like ozone and cooked dust and metal, the focus a section of space near the collapsed complex.

There was a sudden hidden rush as all the small nocturnal life in the area scrambled away, and then the sound began.

Or rather, it had already been there, in the sullen cyclical depths shared by earthquake vibrations and thunder, but had finally decided to rise to a point where limited human hearing could understand it, if only as a dull rumble. The creatures of the night, though, had made it out much earlier, and ingrained genetic memory classified it immediately as Bad News.

The rumble grew, in pitch and volume, so a low roar filled the clearing.

And then, there was light.

It split in a jagged rip, suspended and described in a manner that even if it was not so bright to blind, it would have caused nausea to try and understand; it was not the normal dimensions of height, depth, and

width it was occupying. Reality was being torn apart like a piece of tissue, and it was not so neat.

The tear grew, and widened, until a second sun seemed to occupy the river-valley woods. In the middle of it, something dark and more understandable moved, walked, and somehow identified with the space the reality-rip had entered. The roar grew to a freight-train pitch.

And then, there was silence.

To describe the lack of noise after an overwhelming quantity of it is not possible. Silence gonged with aftervibrations as though the air molecules themselves hadn't gotten used to it. The same, perhaps, could be described of the darkness.

Some wind came up. Tree leaves rustled.

There was suddenly a crash, and yipes of pain. Then, human language filled the clearing:

"Aw shit, who turned out the lights?"

There were more collisions. At length, there were a few grunts and the source of the noises heaved itself out of the collapsed passageway into which it had tripped, whimpering.

Then light sprouted agian, this time reduced a hundredfold. It came from a small sphere that hovered, disregarding gravity and conventional means of production. There was a sharp intake of breath.

"Toto," the voice said, "I don't think we're in San Francisco anymore."

Limping, the figure began to wander around, making bemused noises at the wreckage. "Not only there's a big lack of streetlights, everything's had a nasty meltdown, and somebody's really been into a reforestation project. Either that, or--" There was a dull chunk, and another filthy word, breaking off the sarcastic monologue.

"And the trolleys they make were really interesting in design. In fact- -" It bent to study the source of the toe-stubbing.

There were no noises at all.

A minute passed.

"Oh. My. God." A sudden rise in breathing. "Don't tell me I, oh no, curse you, you little fool, you've you yourself into a fine pickle now..." There was a grunt, and then a stumble. "Have to get out, if they've picked up..." A pant, and then the lightsphere was gone, and there were crashes and gasps that distanced themselves into the woods..

Behind, the claw lifelessly dug itself into the ground, as the night covered all.

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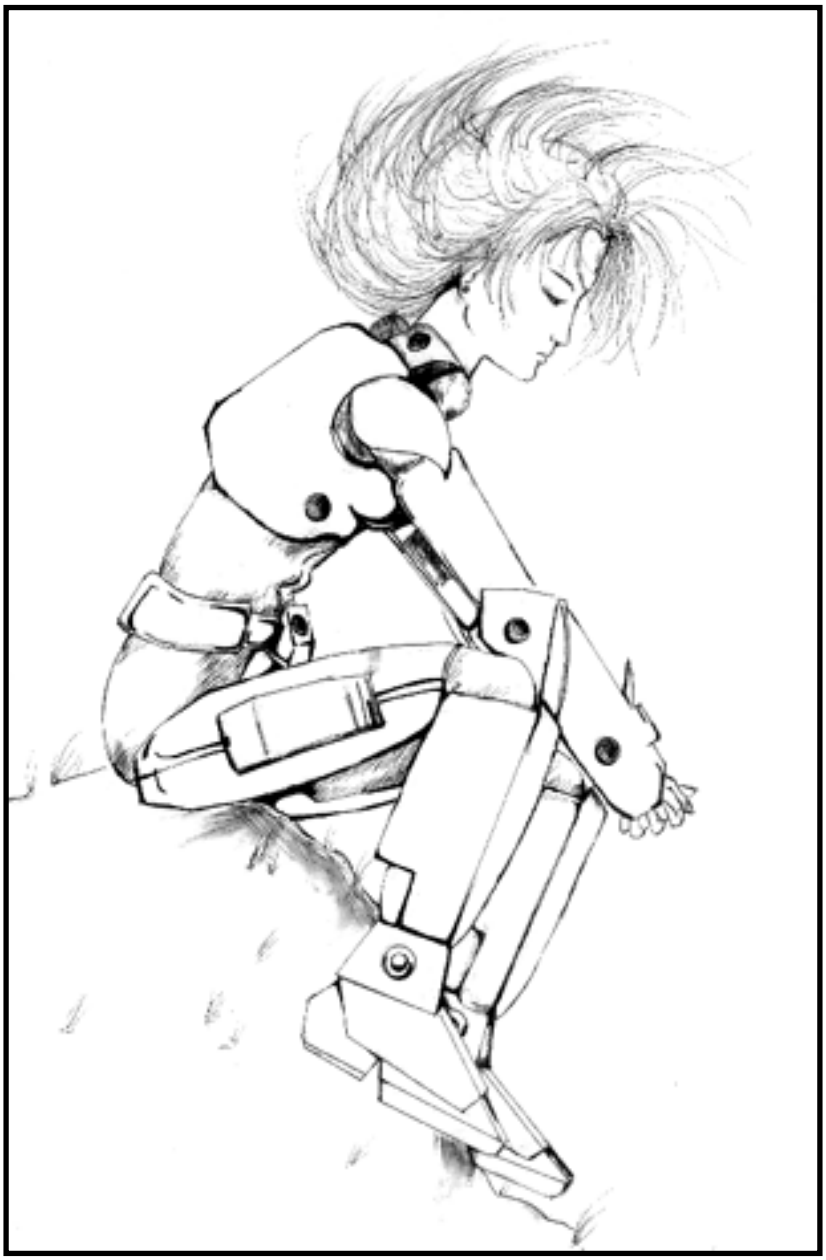

DANDELIONS

CHAPTER FOUR

The dawn was turning the beaten parking lot and the east facade of the ancient shopping mall a molten coral by six a.m. Figures were beginning to move inside the building's lower level, and wafting from the inside was the faint scent of cooking grease as Malcolm prepared the day's breakfast. From the ramp that led down below the lot and building to the parking garage, the rattles of Gerald and Sherry's efforts on the

mecha was already starting. When operations began again, having the Cyclones working at top form was a major priority. The problem was that the population had now grown to thirty-nine, which obviously was far more than the arsenal of eighteen Cyclones that the Elms core had arrived here with, even despite any equipment the arrivees came with.

More mecha had been procured through some adept wheeling and dealing with the Terre Haute underground and careful bargaining with their load of goods, but not all of them had been in very good shape. Furthermore, most of them were the old-line variety of the first Invid occupation that could run only on gasoline or Protoculture, the former which the group did not have in any large amount and the latter which was a veritable magnet for Invid. While they didn't want to use them, the logic was that repaired, they could make wonderful bartering material. So Sherry and Gerald had elected themselves to fix them all in preparation for the fights that had to come.

The best news of the two months since the arrival was that down south, below the old university campus, a cache of Icarus Mission supplies had been found. Although it had been a year since the LaGrange Massacre had put an end to the equipment drops the Icarus had executed, the mecha were in excellent condition, and gave them an additional fifteen Cyclones to work with, among them a much-needed Samson. This brought the deficit to only six, which was not quite as dire.

However, the two had their work cut out for them.

To the east, in the yellowing light of the rising sun, a plume of dust rose, turning copper in the glow.

Facing the orange misty tail, outside the east lower entrance on the bench, a young woman in battered REF coveralls sat, the sun turning her porcelain features into fire to match with her long hair and wide eyes.

Her face was carefully immobile, her eyes fixed on the disappearing dust trail until a voice inside called her within.

Malcolm cracked the shell of the egg and laid it into the pan, the white and unbroken yolk sizzling as it contacted the grease. He looked over his shoulder to Gwen. The air was already stifling inside the revamped store which served as the Elms kitchen.

"You can start in on making the pancakes if you like. We're going to need about seventy or about. Gerald eats enough for the rest of them." Silently, Gwen nodded and turned to get the flour and butter. She passed a couple of the new arrivals whom Malcolm had also conscripted, returning with a tupperware bowl, and began the process of mixing the ingredients up. Her continued silence was not unnoticed by Malcolm.

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Just hot." She brushed damp-dark hair out of her eyes and bent to her work, her gaze averted. Eventually, with the same precision as she used in her marksmanship, she carefully poured out several identical-sized pancakes onto the searing griddle. Malcolm concentrated on the eggs but kept her within the corner of his eye as he did so. The interior was a constant din of frying foods, clattering dishware, conversation, and the blast of an old Pink Floyd CD playing in the background. It was difficult to converse, but finally Malcolm felt he had to try and break the frosty wall Rutherford had erected around herself.

"You're pissed because they took Mandy and not you, aren't you?"

She jerked up her head, her eyes simmering, then bent it back down. "'S'none of your business, Malcolm. Anyway, I had kitchen duty slated for this week."

"Kid's not that great a fighter yet. She's going to be better off hiding later, so I s'pose she may as well get her part done while she can. It's nothing against you, Gwen."

She wrinkled her nose--admittedly a very delicate and pretty nose, Malcolm thought to himself. The look in her eyes, however, was anything but.

Oh-oh, Malcolm thought. *She doesn't like the mention.*

Gerald stomped in then, running a hand though his sweat-damp brown mop. "When d'you think it's going to be done?"

Malcolm groaned. "Keep a leash on the stomach, will you? It's not going to be for another thirty minutes at least. What's our wonderful leader have planned for the day?"

The big man snorted. "Mentioned something along the line of rewiring the security systems to tighten surveillance of the area we're living in. Plus he asked me and Sherry to try to fine-tune the reception in the communications array. You guys, I'm not as sure. I think a supply run to Rantoul is in order for Gwen and Miranda, though, and a tatical review on the current occupation situation for the rest of us in preparation for our return to strikes."

"Oh, fine," Gwen muttered. She gave a vicious slosh to the batter, splashing some onto the heating coils.

Malcolm wrinkled his nose as the smoke wafted up. "What's eating at you?"

Gerald snickered. "Oh, the fact that Loverboy's out where she can't back him into a--oouufff!"

Gwen's foot rocked back down from its lash into Gerald's stomach as the three other cooks' heads

whipped up in shock. "Shut up," she hissed, as he curled up in pain. The fair skin was shifting from dead white to red and back, and she was breathing far too hard. "Shut the hell up or by God I'll nail you lower, I swear."

"Gwen!" Malcolm yelped. He tried to grab her arm, but her foot came whipping back and he thought better of it. Suddenly she hopped helplessly on one foot, as the other--the offending foot--was grabbed in a viselike grip.

Gerald's eyes were almost white with fury. For a second, Gwen looked down, and her own affront and frustration drained away in the heat of his rage. He did not seem--human.

Suddenly, he whipped his head against the floor with a bonk. He winced, and his eyes, when they opened again, were sane.

"God fucking damn, woman, that hurt."

Malcolm could only look at the two and realize that there seemed to be things at work that he could not see and probably never would.

"Are you two gonna...?"

Gwen hugged herself. "No. Nah. Don't tell the Lieutenant. Sorry, Gerald. But if you make fun of me like that again--"

Gerald grunted, hauling himself to his feet. "Christ, you've got a foot like an anvil."

Malcolm looked over to the others. "You didn't see this." There were vigorous nods.

Now we're fighting ourselves. We're screwed. Malcolm continued with his eggs and felt Gerald leave and Gwen resume cooking with a leaden heart.

If Gwen's gonna go resent Mandy for 'taking' Kev away, and Gerald's going to do that, we're in deep shit. If it spreads to the rest, we ought to just advertise ourself to the nearest hive and say 'Come and Get It!'...

And with the way Gerald gets sometime...Jesus, that was only the tip of the iceberg. Sometimes I wonder--he really what he says he is?

It was much later.

It was somewhere in that indefinite portion between late night and early morning, when the full moon high overhead blanched the mall and the land around to a greasy silvered blue-black, the world alive with crickets and the occasional rasping cry of a nighthawk fluttering in the star-splattered skies. The night was filled with the life-drenched, timeless silence unique to spring.

Overhead, the slowly moving sparks of the Invid Orbital Hives drifted in malevolent counterpoint, nearly drowned out by the lunar radiance.

It was far past normal curfew for the Elms, but still inside, the flicker of a lantern could be seen as the sentries on duty continued their endless vigilance against attack. Someone with sharp eyes could also see the occasional movement of a figure, still up after all this time, and a fitful light left on within.

More than a quarter-mile away, completely contemptuous of the possibility of ambush, a small figure half-sat, half-crouched on a rise in the ground, surrounded by prairie growth and young trees, looking out over the direction of the forest and the ruined city. The soft night breeze lifted hair untrimmed and tangled, the moonlight turning it to platinum and glinting off the metal of cyclone armor. Barely over the breeze, an observer might have heard soft, trembling sobs.

Amanda Pierson sat, her eyes staring ahead unseeingly, her hands constantly wringing and rubbing themselves, her entire frame shuddering as to break apart.

Please. Tell me it never happened. Please tell me it can't have happened...

They had made good time out of base, and by eight a.m. they were twenty miles away, deep into the forests of the old Indiana border. Ulm said the environment here was as good as any for deer and rabbit hunting, and he was planning on getting some fish in as well.

"Oh course, it's going to be non-radioactive fish. Dennis is gonna love that." Kevin snickered, his Ferret taking the bumps with ease. "Doesn't have to worry about waking up with extra limbs anymore."

Matthew groaned and tried to hit him. Kevin cheerfully veered his Cyclone out of the way.

"Yeah, but we need more along the lines of venison and whatnot. The problem with this time of year's going to be that we need to identify and avoid the does. Bound to have fawns with them." Ulm shrugged. "I just don't like the idea of killing deer period."

Mandy had to agree. While like any other person growing up in a rural area post-Rain she had had to deal with plucking chickens and help with butchering hogs, they were not tasks she had ever liked. Sometimes she wished she had been back in the last century when one could get it off a shelf.

Matthew clunked along the old, shattered pavement of the roadway, the carrier jouncing awkwardly behind him with its cargo of a battery-operated freezer, their intended method of getting the kills back home in the May heat without their spoiling. Fortunately the Super Saber was not complaining about the extra weight, and the weather promised to be delightful. All three travelers had their jackets and armor off and were feeling the wind of their passage with relish. Amanda readjusted her goggles and raked her hair back, feeling it whip around in tangles where it hadn't been braided to keep out of her face.

Even over the engine rumble, she began to pick up a discordant noise. Eyes widening in horror, she realized what it was.

"Oh, shit, Matthew. Stop it! Not again!"

"Stop what?"

Amanda cringed as a discordant yowl destroyed the pastoral mood.

> *"Immanuel Kant was a real pissant who was very rarely stable,*
> *Heidigger, Heidigger was a boozy beggar who could think you under the table,*
> *David Hume could out-consume Shopenhauer and Hegel*
> *And Wittgenstein was a beery swine who was just as shloshed as Shlegel..."*

It was a matter of common knowledge among the Elms that compared to all the horrific singers known to mankind, Kevin O'Shea could make them sound good. Amanda howled in theatrical pain as with a free arm swinging and his bright green jacket waving at the end of it like a demented pennant, he broke into the chorus.

> *"There's nothing Neitzche couldn't teach ya about the raisng of the wrist*
> *Socrates himself was permanently pissed..."*

"Kevin, shuddup!" Mandy yelled at him. He stuck his tongue out and continued in the mistaken belief that volume would make up for talent.

> *"John Stuart Mill of his own free will*
> *on half a pint of shandy was particularly ill*
> *Plato they say could stick it away*
> *half a pint of whiskey every day*
> *Aristotle, Aristole was a bugger for the bottle*
> *Hobbes was fond of his dram*
> *And Rene Descartes was a drunken fart*
> *'I drink therefore I am!'*
> *Yes Socrates himself is particularly missed*
> *A lovely little thinker but a bugger when he's pissed!"*

There was a blissful silence at the end.

"Is it over?" Mandy asked. Matthew hunched over his Cyclone, shaking in silent hilarity. "That--that was horrible. Gee, Lieutenant, glad you're laughing."

"N-never mind." Ulm gulped, then burst out hooting again. "I've got to make him stop watching those tapes at one in the morning," he said, sniffling.

"And getting into the liquor store, too. There was a whole liter bottle of vodka missing last week."

Ulm wiped his eyes, replaced the goggles, and took a bounce from the road. "No, in my opinon, I think that was Sherry who stole that."

"Then what's gonna explain the fact that this idiot was wandering around last Saturday, smelling like a still and trying to do the Agincourt speech from Henry V? Miranda spent two days making me read that, and I don't think Henry'd do it hanging over the bannister, slobbering and--and unable to remember the next line."

"Ah, but I stole the Smirnoff's from her," Kevin interjected smugly, pulling up behind her and reaching over to swat her on the rear. There was a momentary tussle before he got away, waggling his eyebrows. She glared. "Interesting experience, but I guess I could have done without barfing up lunch the following day. Personally, I think the Branagh version was better."

"Dincha read it?"

"Oh yeah; that and Comedy of Errors, Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, you name it. '39 was a great reading year for me."

"Then the Invid blew my library up. Damn, well, such is life." Matthew commented, dragging behind.

"A library?" Amanda said in astonishment. "A personal library?"

Matthew shrugged. "Managed to save it after the Second Robotech War. It wasn't much, really. Lots of Shakespeare."

"When do we stop?" Kevin asked him.

"Mmmf. Another mile or so. We're going to have to walk at least another mile in order to find a spot that hasn't been disturbed by our passage before we start in on the hunting."

"Or disturbed by that noise Kevin's been making. Yuch."

"That wasn't noise!" Kevin complained.

"Yeah, and I'm the Invid Regis. The only thing worse might have been you doing the 'Lumberjack Song.'"

"Hmmm..."

"Don't even think it."

Ulm rubbed his bearded chin, his eyes sparkling. "Yep, definitely time for you to boycott Live At the Hollywood Bowl, I'd say."

Kevin looked martyred.

Amanda lay on her belly in the tall grass, barely able to see over the top and into the small meadow they'd staked out. The lieutenant was lying next to her, both of their faces smeared with mottled greasepaint and feeling sticky and hot in the May sun. The camoflauging musk smelt terrible, but Ulm had said it was second-to-none for hiding human scent. They had been this way for the past half hour, their hunting rifles held before them in a ready position.

Above them, a killdeer cried. There was no other signs of life in the area.

Suddenly Matthew tensed. He carefully raised the comset to his ear and listened to the barely audible noise coming out of it. He nodded, whispered an affirmative, then cut the connection. He raised his index finger so Mandy could see.

Kevin had managed to locate a buck, and was preparing to flush it towards them.

Matthew carefully rose to his knees, followed by Amanda, guns raised.

Suddenly, a crack rang out, and Ulm and Mandy clicked off the safeties on their weapons. Almost before it was done, a brown form exploded out of the woods margin at them.

Amanda got a fragmentary vision of flashing, delicate hooves, small velveted antlers, and a snorting, foam-flecked black muzzle as her perception narrowed and she tracked the onrushing body with the gunsight. There was an isolate, crystalline moment of unity, then her finger contracted on the trigger.

Boom.

Her body jerked as it absorbed the kickback, then the animal twisted and plunged toward the ground as if

diving. There was a stunning silence, and the human predator became sentient once more.

Even as they were less than halfway toward where the buck had fallen, Kevin had made his way out of the woods. He managed to reach them as Amanda was staring down at her trophy.

The bullet had taken it in the heart, killing it instantly. The huge eyes were open, not having yet glazed over in death, and a little trickle of blood had mixed with the foam still on its muzzle. It had been a young animal, probably less than two years old. Amanda tried to look for any sense of triumph in her accomplishment and only felt a little grayness.

Kevin knelt and put his hand on the dead animal's head, then inspected the bullet's entry hole. "Good shot, Mandy," he finally said.

"Yeh, I suppose it was." She rubbed at her forehead, getting a smear of gray-green on her fingers. "Guess we need to go butcher it now."

"And get it back to the freezer," Ulm said. "We seem to be making pretty good progress."

Somewhere in the woods, something whirred.

A large bundle of what looked like a bird's nest in the forest canopy shivered, then spat forth a flexible tube, on the top of which pivoted a red glowing sensor, staring blankly.

As it did four times every twenty-four hours, it pivoted on search, doing a routine scan of the area. Suddenly it halted, clicking and focusing in a specific area, where it saw movement of a particular kind.

It stayed that way for a long time, attention on that movement, the tube supporting the sensor array occasionally swaying.

Soon, the rest of the bundle shuddered.

Amanda tried to wipe her bloody hands off on the ground with little success. The butchering was an especially messy business, and she had not especially enjoyed watching the carcass hang by its hind legs in order to bleed it. The remainng business of viscera, skinning, quartering and storing she had liked even less. Although it was now near lunchtime, she had little appetite.

Ulm walked over to her. "You okay?"

"Yeah," she said shortly.

Ulm snorted. "I don't think so. You've been green the whole time." He poured some of the water supply over her hands to get the blood off. "Sorry," he said, apologetically. "I didn't know you were squeamish about it, or I've--"

Mandy shook her head. "No, it isn't that, really. I'm a country girl, remember? Just that--" she made a face.

"What?"

"Well, it sounds stupid, but what's the difference between the Invid and us, if we both go around killing things? I don't feel much better about doing this and what the Invid are doing."

Ulm sighed. "What's the difference indeed. Welcome to moral debating, hon. If I had an easy answer to that I'd tell you right off. Do you still want to help?"

"Yeah...I guess so. Sorry."

The Elms leader gave her a quick-one armed hug. "Must've been all that philosphy Miranda tries to stuff into your noggin."

"Where's Kevin?"

"Doing his lunchtime meditation thing. Don't bug him. He likes some peace of mind, believe it or not."

"Hmm. Are there any more of those muffins Malcolm stocked us with around?"

"I think so."

The twigs were almost completely shaken off onto the ground by now. What they revealed hung there on the branch for a minute, then began to silently drop.

Kevin knelt on a little rise twenty feet away, his eyes closed and his breathing slowed. Although the fresh breeze occasionally lifted the shoulder-length black hair underneath his headband and ruffled through his black shirt, his expression was completely blank, and for once, at peace. When the torrent of his usual facial expressiveness was switched off, the fine features were undeniably attractive. His hands, limp on

his green-denimed thighs, still had traces of deer blood under their fingernails. He'd been that way for over five minutes now. Zazen was good at stilling qualms of doubt, the inner voices of worry that tagged the trails of so many people these particular days.

He let out a deep breath, and then abruptly, his eyes flew open, dilated in worry. Was it his imagination he'd heard something out of the ordinary, or wasn't it?...

Kevin O'Shea had not spent almost six years alive in combat doubting his senses.

Mandy almost bit through her muffin and her tongue, when Kevin abruptly caromed up from his position and said suddenly, "Get your armor on."

"What? Are you--"

"Get it on!" he nearly shouted. Matthew looked up, eyes wide, then dove for his Super Saber. Amanda never doubted Ulm's judgement, and she followed suit.

"Forget the damned undersuit, you don't need it!" Kevin snarled as she fumbled for it, then threw the outer armor at her. She slammed it on, but even as she was finishing, Kevin was already fully armored and straddling the Ferret and Ulm had disconnected the trailer from the Saber. Mandy went for her Forager too, and with the two men waited, engines off.

Three minutes passed, and nothing happened.

Mandy was taking in a breath to second-guess Kevin's alarm. She was tugging at her braid, rolling her eyes, and feeling quite annoyed about the entire situation.

Kevin drew in an abrupt breath, and gasped, his voice so distorted with fear that it wasn't recognizable: "Oh sh--"

And then horror itself was flying straight at them.

Mandy was screaming her head off, suddenly reliving her nightmare flight from the Enforcer, but this was a thousand times worse. She jammed on the ignition and reversed like the damned.

Oh, my GOD!!!

The--thing coming at them was dull gray, a maniac's dream of jointed tentacles snapping, ended with pincers, blunt tips and vicious prongs at their free ends and ended on the other in a bulbous body about

four feet long and two feet wide, hovering off the ground as it rushed toward them in dead silence. Out of the center of the body a nozzle-like stalk swayed, ended in the characteristic red sensor eye of Invid mecha.

One of the tentacles at either end, flattened and ended with a spiked bulb so that it looked like a mutant tapeworm, whipped about and aimed directly at Amanda. She slammed on the power, her hair rising on the back of her neck as the huge electric bolt the spike suddenly spat grounded itself where she had been a fraction of a second earlier.

"Turn!" Ulm was roaring over the com net. "Turn and get the hell out of here!"

Although it was one of the hardest things she had ever done to turn her back on the tentacled monstrosity, Amanda complied and attempted the Earth's most extreme 180, her knee scraping the ground and the ceramic armor raising sparks as she did so. She caught a fragmented glimpse of Ulm's and O'Shea's brown and green mecha in front of her, and then beside her as she poured on the momentum.

"What was that?" she screamed.

"That was a Kraken Inorganic!" Ulm panted over the net. "It's a personnel hunter/killer unit. Silent and damned hard to locate. If Kevin hadn't heard it coming through the brush, we'd've been charbroil by now!"

"Let's get out of here!"

"No can do!" Kevin answered. "Love to, but that thing has a lock on our energy output signals now, even fusion. It won't quit following us--you want to bring that home with us?"

"What are we going to do?" Amanda cried.

"The only thing we can do--destroy it, before it gets us!"

Amanda fought down her fear, tried to rationalize how to get rid of the terror following them, and failed. "How?"

"Good question, " Ulm muttered. Her heart, already overtaxed, plummeted.

"We're dead we're dead we're dead..." she chanted in a horrified litany.

"--like hell we are!" Kevin growled. "Matthew, I've got an idea. Remember a couple years ago, when we met some of the James Gang? They were attacked by one and lived."

"Yeah--" Ulm said. "Are you planning to do what they did?"

O'Shea grunted an affirmative.

"You're going to get your ass killed!"

"It's a chance, dammit! The Ferret's the fastest Cyclone here! I turn on the protoculture engine and lead in on in a circle, you two wait for me to come back around, and you waste it with the missiles. Right?"

"Oh God... Kevin?"

Kevin's voice dropped. "Yeah, Matt?"

"If you don't make it, and we do...it--was good to know you."

Kevin sighed. "Yeah, you too. Mandy...I'm sorry."

"Wait!" she shouted at him.

"I can't! It'll be on us in a minute! Meet me back at the campsite, in ten minutes!"

"Turn off the road, Mandy!" Ulm ordered. "Now!"

He flung the Super Saber off the road, and Amanda followed, crashing into the underbrush.

At that same moment, the characteristic noise of Kevin's fusion engine quit, replaced by the thrum of the protoculture drive. It was a sound Amanda had only heard a few times before among the protoculture-paranoid Elms, during Cyclone-pilot practice.

She shut off the engine along with Ulm, and watched the retreating Ferret. Suddenly, it exploded foward with power it did not have with only fusion propulsion, broadcasting a spectacular radiation as it did so. It was lost in a second.

"Get down!" Ulm hissed.

They dove; in seconds a shadow passed overhead, writhing a Medusa's head of tentacles. It rushed by, following the magnet of O'Shea's output.

A silent eternity passed, then Ulm whispered. "It's taken the bait. It's so busy concentrating on Kevin's engines it won't notice ours on fusion. We've got to get back to the site as soon as possible to prepare the ambush."

Please be okay, Amanda thought. *I can't lose you too...*

Come on, you gruesome son of a bitch....

Kevin could feel the wind ripping through his unprotected midsection and through the hair trailing out of the helmet as he raced down the ancient highway at full speed, free of the handicap of fusion. He glanced behind him; the Inorganic was hot on his trail, having partially retracted its tentacles for speed. However, it wasn't as fast as he over a flat surface. Good...

Now if he could get enough of a lead-time over the thing, it would be more difficult for it to catch up with him once he got into the trees: there the Kraken would have an advantage. Its design seemed to have been made for close quarter ambush in crowded environments.

My, they've definitely gotten creative recently, haven't they?

Of course, it already had some advantages; unlike him, it wouldn't grow tired, it had no sense of self-preservation, it had no worries about damaging itself, it was remorselessly accurate, and it would never, ever give up.

The only good thing about the entire situation was that he could probably blast the protoculture output quite a lot without getting any extra attention. If the Invid had installed such an Inorganic here, they were either confident it could take care of any disturbances by itself or they didn't come by very often and put this here instead. *Well, count your blessings and all that...*

He found the trail he was looking for at last. Engines screaming, he went off the road so hard he was actually airborne for a second and came down with a crash, the shocks taking it with enough force to break necks. He went limp in order to take the shock, then crouched over the Ferret like a jockey, urging it on to maximum speed.

A patch of underbrush to his side evaporated, and then he was past.

Shit!

He dared a look down at his watch. Four minutes had passed.

I've got to give them enough time to get set up...

He began to weave, in order to keep the Kraken's targeting system from getting a fix on him, gritting his teeth as he did so. He was, in rough relation, about northwest of where the campsite was supposed to be. He was doing fine so far, but the next part was the extremely dangerous section--he would have to go into

the woods itself. He would need every bit of piloting skill he had in order to make it though--even if the Kraken didn't fry or electrocute him, he could end up wrapped around a tree, which would make him every bit as dead as if the Inorganic had done the honors, and it was at any rate its core objective. It would no longer need to worry about him...

And then would go after Matt and Mandy...

NO! He swallowed at the thought and accelerated as much as he dared.

He really wished he'd never seen that old movie with the speeders and the primeval woods.

Third arc, here we go...

Then the underbrush was shattering against his bright green armor, and the scent of the forest clashed with the sour stink of fear and sweat that was reaching him even in extremety. Gouts of mulch rained behind him as the Ferret's wheels dug into the loam. He narrowly escaped crashing against a silver maple only to nearly wipe out against a black oak still scarred with the fires resulting from the Rain of Death...he had to slow down.

His left hand twisted slickly against the clutch as he rutted in a large turn against the soft earth, veering madly against the onrushing black trunks, balancing on the very edge of losing control. His momentum sailed him over a narrow creek and landed him on the far side. Fortunately, here in the shade the underbrush was lighter and less apt to be an obstruction. He snapped over a sapling, only to have another blast sear into a trunk.

Oh, fuck, it's gaining on me! Where am I? Moaning, Kevin silently invoked the deities of several pantheons as he tried to remember on what leg of this hellish race he was on. If he had forgotten the immediate lay of the land, he was very shortly dead... The fine hairs on his hands rose as electricity crackled across his armor--too, too close.

Then bushes smacked against him again, and he was out in the open in a meadow.

Yes! He jammed the throttle as far open as it would go, shooting across the grass as though catapulted. He dared a glance behind him, and saw the hole he had made widen further as the Kraken's body hurtled through it after him across the same clearing they had shot a deer in only two-and-a-half hours ago. Two minutes late already for the rondezvous, two minutes of infinity.

Insects splattered against his faceplate and his armor as he plunged back into the woods again, but this time he knew where the openings were, and exactly where he was going. Kevin's teeth were bared in a primeval grimace as he began the last and most terrible arc, the one that would decide his fate and two other people's with him.

He opened the communication link and managed, "Here I come--it's right after me. Three minutes ETA. Godspeed."

He let go of the clutch and left no room left in his mind other than for survival, not even prayers.

"Here he comes! Get ready!"

The two Battloid suits crouched, tan and olive-green. Mandy could barely think, her mouth dust-dry, her pulse beating in her throat and temples. This quarter hour had seemed to stretch in agonizing leaps and bounds and yet seemed only momentary.

"You take this side of the clearing," Ulm advised. "I'll take the other. He's going to be coming in from the east from all appearances. Go for the eye if you can't get the main body. If you can't get that, try those flat tentacles at either end. Good luck, hon."

"You too, Matt." They took their positions, Matthew finishing fitting the rifle stock to his H-90 for full damage capacity. Then there was only the wait.

And you too, Kevin...

Amanda heard it, a low thrum in the suddenly deathly quiet woods, growing rapidly in volume. Quietly, she armed the GR-103 launchers and their payload of armor-piercers.

The thrum built to a roar.

Amanda tensed.

Then a green shape erupted from the eastern end, wheels blurring for all they had, the armored form on top flattened as though all Hell rode on his heels.

Amanda rocketed to her feet, shouting out the spoken codes to ready the missiles for launch.

And Hell itself exploded into the clearing, a nightmare of tubes lashing and aiming for the prey barely five yards ahead of it. Amanda targeted the staring red eye and the organic gray body, hating in that split second it and everything it stood for.

"FIRE!" she shouted.

"God--NO!" Ulm screamed, as the missiles whooshed away.

Even as she had cried the command, Mandy could see Kevin's Ferret begin to rocket upward and he begin to rise up in his seat in mode transition, and she knew she'd done something drastically wrong...

Kevin knew he had cut things too close for comfort--in the last couple of minutes, he had gained at least two scorch marks on his Cyclone and the Inorganic had been at times a hairs-breadth from having him a shish-kebab on the thing's leading tentacle spike. However, his plan had managed to remain intact--to change modes and rocket away while his teammates took care of the thing.

Unfortunately in the heat of things, he had forgotten to tell the others.

All he could think of when he heard the armor-piercers leave Amanda's launchers, even as he rose and the front farings began their rise to attach to his chest, was: *Oops...*

The missiles sailed home.

The Kraken's side exploded.

Shrapnel blasted out, one large piece ripping into Kevin's side and hip, where the armor did not protect him. His scream of agony was drowned out in the roar of the Inorganic's combustion, and he lost his seat from the partially-altered Ferret, dashing violently against the ground twelve feet down, where he did not move. The Ferret landed some distance away, its transformation sequence aborted.

Mandy heard nothing of it over her own screams.

Although critically damaged, the Kraken was still doing a grotesque parody of floating, its tentacles lashing around like wounded serpents, sparking random discharges of energy. Fluid was leaking out of the gaping hole in its side. Above it, the eye dunkenly swayed, and for a moment, focused on Amanda.

Ulm pulled the trigger, three times, and the remains exploded into shards.

In the present, Amanda covered her face with her hands, trying not to be sick--she had vomited so many times already that her guts ached.

Oh, but it wasn't that that had done it, not that...

Blood on the grass
And it changed my life

Seal, "I'm Alive"

"KEVIN!" she shrieked. The world tunneled, the only thing that she perceived not the crumbling remains of the Inorganic, but the figure in the green CVR armor sprawled like a dropped doll. She lunged forward.

"Amanda! NO!" Ulm shouted. She heard his tread coming up behind, but she ignored it.

Oh please oh please no.... I'm sorry Kevin I'm sorry. Don't die!

She was beside his side before Ulm could stop her, loosing the Cyclone from her armor, and crawling forward on her hands and knees to him, crying. He wasn't moving...

"Kevin..." she sobbed. To think his eyes closed forever was too much... She froze, her heart pounding and the sobs choked back in her throat.

One hand began to twitch. A tiny whimper, barely audible, was coming from the form.

"Kevin!" she gasped. After that fall, he was still alive--but there had to be a huge wound from that shard that hit him, maybe from others as well. She slapped out the first aid kit in her boot, and frantically opened it.

"AMANDA, FOR GOD'S SAKE GET AWAY!" Ulm roared. Good--he'd gone to shut off the Ferret's protoculture radiation, it would take him a bit, she thought distantly.

Kevin's head moved. Then, his right leg twitched, prompting a renewed scream of pain from him.

"Wait, Kevin, I'm getting the morphine!"

Her voice seemed to rouse him. Gasping in torment, he managed, "No, Mandy, don't--touch me! Please!" His hands spasmed helplessly on the ground.

"No, I'm trying to help you. You're gonna bleed to death if I don't!" She finally managed to get the ampoule in the needle, then reached down for his arm. Despite his feeble struggles, it was the matter of a second to find the big vein on the inside of his elbow below his shirt sleeve and to inject the morphine.

She did not see Ulm dash up behind, then halt, his shoulders slumping in despair.

Kevin was gasping, the quivers of agony lessening as the morphine kicked in. Amanda gently removed

the helmet, wiping the hair out of his eyes. They focused on her, as he moved his head a little, gritting his teeth.

"Amanda," he said deliberately. "Matt's got paramedic training. Get away from me. Let him take care of it. Please..."

"Don't move," she said in response, unwinding the roll of sterile gauze. His injured side was facing upward, good, at least dirt and worse hadn't been ground into it. Hopefully no shrapnel or Inorganic bits were lodged in there. But from the way the black cloth of his T-shirt was growing wet and dark, he was losing blood fast. She had to do something about it before it got any worse. She grabbed hold of the shirt, preparing to slit it with the knife in order to get at the wound. It was wet, warm, and slippery with Kevin's blood, and she shuddered at the touch. However, she managed to get it open and expose his side.

"Oh, no..." he whispered, shivering.

For a few blank seconds, Amanda thought that the dye from his pants had gotten onto her hands. She kept mechanically trying to wipe the wound clean of the stuff, wrinkling her nose at the pungent, odd smell, and finally exposing the seven-inch-long but luckily fairly shallow gouge in his side. She lifted the gauze pad she had perpared to put it on the wound, trying to use her other hand to press the damage closed.

Then she saw the color of the pad where her hands had touched it.

She blinked, then looked back down again.

The substance she had thought had been dye was not only on her hands and smeared on his skin, but on the pad, on the gauze, and she saw it beginning to puddle underneath Kevin's body and trickle out of the shrapnel tears. She lifted her eyes to the tiny needle wound she had made.

It had beaded there too.

Her eyes locked blankly on it, she began to breathe hard, and slid her gaze up to his face.

The blue eyes were wide with anguish that not even the morphine could remove, and fastened on her.

Amanda put her face down in her green-smeared hands, and blessedly the world went away.

Not him...

Her hands were covering her eyes, feeling the tears slide between them, and she shook.

It can't be him...

The same color; the same smell, like warm compost. The same stuff that had burst out of the Enforcer when Ulm had shot it, the same fluid that had leaked out of the remains of the Scout's eye when she had shattered it at Quincy. It had been coming out of Kevin's wounds as well.

Alone in the moonlight, Amanda wept brokenly.

She had blacked out most of the time following that. She remembered fragmented pictures of Ulm finishing the stitiching and bandaging, bracing Kevin's neck and spine; the harried radio to base. Matthew splattering what Kevin had spilled over the rest of his armor and exposed skin, then taking chilled deer blood out of the freezer and soaking that into the bandages. A shattered memory of the lieutenant gently shaking her, begging her to tell a story of a Scout and Kevin's proximity to its destruction.

Somehow, she had gone along with it.

She remembered very little after that; Miranda and a couple of new Elms arriving, Ulm murmuring something about "shock" and "trauma" to them, and the others hooking up the freezer and Kevin to their Cyclones. Kevin had passed out in the meantime, probably from blood loss, probably for the best. Disconnected pieces of the long, agonizingly slow ride back to base, while the afternoon whiled on, and an arrival amid an uproar. A rush of activity, questions asked while she droned out the answer Ulm had given her, and a dinner which, shortly after, she had rushed to the bathroom and wrenchingly thrown up, several times.

They had left her alone after that.

And now she was out here.

Kevin was a...

[His hands, gentle on her damaged ankle, as he and Matthew wrapped it up]

was a...

[Another time, fingers on her brow, as she burned up inside with fever]

can't have been...

["John Stuart Mill of his own free will..."]

Kevin was...

[His eyes hollowed with inner worry, hiding secrets he wouldn't share]

[The terrible agony on his face, emerald fluid on her hands]

Kevin was one of ***them.***

She didn't hear the thud of boots behind her until their owner was almost upon her. She jumped, giving a shriek.

"Shhh, Mandy, it's me." Matthew's voice. She was hunched up in a semi-fetal position, shaking, hands over her eyes. She convulsed away from his touch. He ignored it and began to gently stroke her hair as though she were a frightened animal. In time, her shakes slowed, and her posture loosened.

"God...if only you'd stayed away." he said, sighing. "But you cared too much... When did that become a sin?"

"W-why?" she choked out.

Matthew sighed again. "At least everybody else is asleep." he croaked. He sounded exhausted. "What a day."

As though an afterthought, he added, "He's going to be all right. He lost a lot of blood, and he's smashed and gashed up pretty good, but he'll recover just fine."

She shuddered. Ulm put an arm around her shoulders, leaving an arm free to stroke her hair.

"Why? God, this is going to be a story."

Amanda's face was on her knees, her shakes almost gone. He continued the gentle, impersonal strokes.

"It was all a front, you know. Only way we could explain why I had to get to him first when he got hurt. Our culture doesn't allow a lot of male/male interest in each other. Not outside that. We're no more homosexual than you're a man."

"But why?" Ulm could detect the multitude of questions in that one word.

"Lots of reasons, sweetie. Lots of them. Not the least being that some of us might kill him first chance they get if they knew what he was." He stopped, then said softly. "But he's on our side. Believe me. I've known him for six years...and he would no more betray us than I would, or Miranda, or Dennis..."

"Then--then how..."

Ulm sighed. "For that, you're going to have to ask him. That's why I'm out here. He wants to talk to you."

She began to shake again, wringing her hands, trying to get off the alien blood that still coated them in her mind. "No!"

"Mandy, he begged me to."

"I'm not going." The thought of confronting Kevin--whatever he was--was completely unthinkable.

Ulm's voice grew firm. "If you don't, I've been given authority to drag you there if I have to. I'm your commanding officer, remember."

"NO!" she repeated again, spitting out the words as the full force of the betrayal hit her. "He lied to me! You lied to me! Why the HELL should I care what you want of me???"

Ulm winced at that statement.

"And don't you think that those lies killed us every day we used them?" he asked, his voice filled with pain.

"No--I can't....Don't make me."

Matthew waited silently, for the inevitable reaction to the veiled threat, the If you try I'll tell... It failed to come.

Make the gamble, Ulm, he thought. If you win, you might have another person who understands... He tossed the dice.

He rose to his feet. "Come on." He started back toward the mall, not looking back. In a few seconds, he heard the thud of boot armor behind him.

All sixes. Not bad, old man.

The infirmirary was a storeroom in back of the TV room, still filled in spots with tape and laserdisc shipments that had never been bought. Although it looked as though it could be chilly winters, fortunately it had not progressed to that point yet. The best part, considering the situation, was that it was fairly soundproof.

Ulm quietly slipped inside, Amanda behind him, and he slowly turned up the light on the halogen lantern by the bed. Even with its golden radiance, the sleeping countenance it illuminated looked dead white and sunken. One of the arms lying on top of the covers was bandaged, and both bore the marks of ugly blackish bruises up to his bare shoulders, relics of his fall.

Amanda looked down, frozen. Somehow, the issue of Kevin's alabaster pallor had never seemed more important than now. Was it just his current condition that made it seem more pronounced, or had it always been like that? With a slipping sense of fear, she realized she could not remember. No wonder he had gotten away with it so long.

And she'd even allowed him to touch her... God...

Matthew bent down by the bed. "Kevin...Kevin, wake up."

It took another urge or so, but at last he prompted a muffled noise from the figure on the bed. Grudgingly, the eyes opened. It took them a second or two to focus.

"Muh-Matthew?" the breathy whisper asked. Ulm nodded.

"Feel like...Shock Trooper...stomped on me," Kevin muttered, his voice coming more strongly. "Where's a morphine when you need one?"

"Kev, I got her with me." The blue eyes popped more widely open, and managed to find the ashen-faced blond girl in her CVR armor.

"Mandy?" he asked.

She nodded, no warmth on her face. "Yes."

A shadow of the pain he'd felt that terrible moment when he knew that she knew brushed his features again. It cleared, leaving the face as carefully neutral as hers.

"Sorry about getting Matt to drag you here," he said. "I guess you'd want to know who...what...I am. And why I'm in here. And all that other garbage."

She nodded.

"Chair over there." He tried to gesture with his head and was transfixed with a spasm of pain. The coldness on Amanda's face was momentarily replaced with worry.

"Kev, you're not in any condition to do this," Ulm insisted. Kevin's eyes met his with an ironic expression.

"Matt, after all the b.s.ing we've done, s' the least I can do. T'hell with the stonewalling." Kevin gritted his teeth and tried to settle himself. Amanda found a chair while wearing a preoccupied look, and sat. "Anyway, I drop dead, one less burden you got to carry."

Amanda's brows furrowed, listening to the exchange.

"Mandy, listen up. Wanted to say this months ago. Should have said this months ago. Any rate, everything back to 2038 is more or less true. Before that--gets..."

"Kevin." Her voice was worn. "What are you? I want to know for sure. No lies. After all--you promised."

He stiffened, evidently fighting himself, then went limp.

He sighed, closing his eyes. After a minute, he began.

"I am Kayagh of the Invid race, Sulagi and prince of the upper rank, and far as I know one of the last evolved to the human form before the Ascension. About one or two days before the final battle, I recall." He swallowed.

"There it is, what you asked for. Unfortunately, you can't pass off my circulatory 'problem' as some hallucination from Malcolm spiking those muffins."

Mandy choked, host to the most bizarre composite of shock, horror, and hilarity. The debate on whether to scream, cry or laugh was causing a deadlock.

Kevin--Kayagh was looking at her with concern. "You all right?" He made a disgusted face. "Of course you aren't. Ha, for obvious reasons."

Mandy slowly recovered. "So why are you--"

"Long story. Has to do with the end of the war, Mandy. And a lot else as well."

Softly, with pauses, he began, remembering himself as he spoke.

The Gosu roared high above the lansdcape, heading east at twice the speed of sound, the light glittering off of the black and dark red trim of its metal exterior, brand new and formed by the Regis in order to protect the chosen ones that used them. It was in a rush; it had been called by the Queen-Mother to the main hive in defense from the invading forces of humans that now joined it in battle.

Its occupant looked out through the canopy, squinting a little and occasionally examining the pale-skinned, five-fingered hands he held up to his face and the black, red, and pale gray dermasuited body they were joined to. He had been transmuted to this form by the Queen-Mother less than a day ago and was still trying to get used to it. The hands, body and hair on his head was unsettling enough, but the color vision was unnerving. No more comforting red haze--the grasslands and woods below him were so--green.

Is that what it was? he wondered. *Color... So this was how the humans saw everything. Was it compensation, in exchange for being born mind-blind?*

Perhaps they had something there.

He rolled over the thought in his mind. Something about its character both disturbed and interested him. Another idea was following on its trail, something about the veracity of challenging the humans for this world... Was it he actually thinking these things?

He?

What was the matter with him? Why was there a sudden resistance to the idea of exterminating these creatures? Was it not his Mother that had stated the necessity for such an action?

And why was he being called to the Refles Point? He was a scientist by his role in the Hive, not one of the warriors, not like Kharoth, Sera, Lihra or Corg--

He shuddered. Only a matter of minutes ago, he had felt the agony through the Hivesong, as human missiles had shattered a Gosu battloid and the strangely irrational, changed hivebrother inside it to atoms. Corg was no more... And Lihra was missing...

He whipped over a human town, and for a second, he could see thorugh his sensors two small humans in the street, with a four-legged furry creature jumping between them. He could actually see the shock and the beginnings of terror on their small faces, so like his own now, before he was past and roaring into the distance.

No, little ones, my quarrel isn't with you. Go in peace... He felt strangely warm toward them. His brows

knitted as he began to realize the full magnitude of what changes were going on within himself.

Great mother, what is happening to me?

Why?

Is it this body? It must be...

Is it something more?

Please help me!

Moisture was trickling off his forehead. *No, nothing the Hive can do will help me--look at what happend to Corg! I don't want to end that way...the humans might be able to understand this madness...*

The humans?

But how will I ask one? They've no reasons to love us...

Because we've killed them! Why are we hurting them? They don't need the Flowers, we do, so why are we trying to displace them? Blazing Tzuptum, why have I never asked this before???

For the first time in his physical existence, he was fighting a terrible war of self-doubt. Outside, the mecha was showing it, pitching and bouncing in the airstream in tune with the struggles of its pilot. It was a good thing that nearly all Terran airpower in the continent was concentrated on the battle over the Invid central hive, for the Gosu would have been easy pickings, its stupendous firepower nonwithstanding. It was, in fact, only a matter of minutes from crashing, for the terror of its pilot--an unknown feeling compounding the mental oscillations he was experiencing--was nearly causing him to cut out the engines.

And then the fear ceased, as he felt his being taken control of by a Will far greater than his own.

In the horizon toward which he headed, a false sun began to blaze.

"You see," Kevin said softly, "the Regis had decided to leave. Bernard's group had gotten through to her exactly what she was doing to humanity, that it was no better than what the Masters had done to her. So, time to tell the Invid to pack up its suitcases..."

An eerie calm suffused his being, as the Motherpresence put aside all doubts and gave him Her direction.

His eyes were fastened on that sunrise, as the first prominences of the Invid hivemind's energy transition began to rise skyward. The voice of the Regis rang through his mind and soul, and through that of every Invid still alive and fighting.

> "Hear me, my children. When we sensed the first faint indications of the Protoculture resources on this planet, we thought that at last, we had found the world for which we have sought for so long. We called together all our people scattered throughout the Galaxy to begin life anew on this planet. We began to rebuild a world that had been destroyed by evil. And we constructed the Genesis Pits, in order to pursue the path of enlightened evolution.
>
> "The Earth is gradually reviving, and will eventually regain its balance, in accordance with the laws of Nature. However, the humans have been influenced too strongly by the shadow of the Robotech Masters, and are intent only on the destruction of their race. It shall not be!" The light reached out for the human cruisers that even now had released the weapons that would doom the planet, consumed them and what they had fired, and began to rise further
>
> "Nor shall the Invid be responsible for perpetuating any more of the misery that has been visited on both it and humanity. It will merely mire us both further in the evil the Robotech Masters have begun, twisting us in their dark image. Follow me, my children. We shall pursue our evolution elsewhere. Another world awaits us, for this one is humanity's to hold!"

By now, the light had become a searing column of radiance, pulling all Invid toward it to join with that transcendent fire, and he along with it. He increased his speed, sucked along helplessly in the current. It felt right to do it, to fall back in the old pattern of obedience. But with the last shreds of his volition, something cried against it.

He certainly could go with the great tide of exodus he was rushing toward, to whatever place the Queen-Mother had designated for them. But what would happen to him once they arrived? Would he resume this terrifying train of thought, only to go Corg's way in the end? Was that what had happened to Lihra? Would he never understand what had happened? Madness would be a pleasant alternative...

And somewhere, far in the back of his mind, he found the emerald fields and forests he had flown over to be unutterably beautiful, even pocked with bombardment craters. He had so wished to find out more of them., and was he going to have that opportunity ripped from him now? What if they didn't have any such thing where the Invid was going?

And he did not know how to eunciate or even admit all of this happening to him. The only thing he understood, coming in a rising scream from his heart as the light became blinding was:

I don't want to go!!!

Something deep inside dug in its heels, refused to move, even as the racial pull tore at him. For the first time, that something, seeded the instant he had taken on the human genetic code, fully came to life.

The blissful relaxation was gone, replaced by a war. He had not had practice exerting his will; he was clumsy, frantic and frightened, and the Gosu cockpit rang with his groans as he fought the drag, giving reluctantly inch by mental inch, as he tasted the sweat running into his mouth.

And then, the pull was gone, and he felt nothing in his mind but silence.

There was a long, screeching boom, a blow, and darkness.

Far above, the Invid Pheonix unfurled its wings and flew.

"It crashed," Kevin said, embarassed. "Don't do that sort of thing in midair."

It was deep into the night, the last-quarter moon shining unmoved onto the great rut of crushed trees and the heap of inert alloys that lay half on its back, all the land behind it devoid of plantlife for a half-mile. The local wildlife had just stopped feeling jumpy about what had happened.

There was a dull thunping noise, and after several minutes the cockpit popped open.

A head protruded from the opening. There was a pained grunt, a couple of failed heaves, and then a figure was sitting on the edge of the opening.

It was--or looked to be--a handsome, dark-haired human male early into his second decade, clad in an alien-looking flightsuit of black, dark red, and silvery gray panels that were bleached in the moonlight.

He also looked like he had seen better days. He swayed a bit, had a nasty black eye, and looked as though he could use a lot of rest and a few compresses to his bruised visage. He licked his lips, made a face, and put a finger up to his mouth. It came away dark. He winced and left off.

Carefully, he slid down, clumsily hit the ground, and passed out.

He woke a few minutes later, moaning, and sat up. Looking around, he could see nothing except the vague outlines of trees. Automatically, he reached out to summon an escort.

Nothing.

He began to panic. What happened?

He remembered, then began to panic further.

Alone... Forever. No minds to echo the Hivesong, alone with a bunch of primitives...

What on Optera had he been thinking?

Before the panic became full-blown, a cold clear thought made its way through.

You made your choice. Now do something about it.

There was a shaky sigh, then he began to look around. It was obvious that his mecha would never fly again. If it had ended up front down, he could have starved to death in there...He fought down that train of thought. He would have to walk. There. He would have to find a human trail or habitation sometime--and then? He would leave that for then. Now was more important.

He achily got to his feet, and looked around. Which way?

The moon was still near the horizon, lending enough radiance that he could see tree silhouettes and make his way in that direction.

That would have to do for now.

Stiffly, Kayagh turned and walked away from his old life and to whatever lay in his future.

"That's basically how I ended up staying behind," the Invid Amanda had known as Kevin O'Shea finished. It was, although he hadn't said so in so many words to her. What he had relived had been for himself only. "Come to think of it, I was one confused bastard." He stopped, and coughed. His tale had taken agreat deal out of him.

Amanda did not say anything for a long time, as she tried to absorb the information.

"So how did you meet Matthew, then?"

Matthew spoke up from where he'd been perched on the bed. "I can take this bit. He's talked himself half

to laryngitis on top of everything else. This was about three days after the Battle of Reflex Point. I'd left right after the battle, since there wasn't much for me to do there. It was actually pretty bloodless on the ground.

"Rolled into some putzy little hamlet on the way home to Springfield and had to take a nap. I didn't want to spend the money or goods on an inn, especially the fleahole they had there, so I dumped my crap by the road and expected to take a wink. I woke up and found my change of clothes was gone. I started looking around and saw some guy, bold as brass, sneaking around with my jacket on and some real funny bulges underneath it. I followed him and ended up seeing him inhaling a pie he'd stolen."

"Hey, I knew I had to wear something else if I knew what was good for me! You think anybody'd think I was Joe Average in what I was wearing?"

"Shut up. So I sneak up behind him, lay a hand on his shoulder, and he goes transatmospheric. Starts choking too, so I had to Heimlich him. I look under my jacket and shirt and sure enough, see a uniform that doesn't look like anything earthly I've ever seen.. I'd met one of the humanoid Invid the Regis had created at the battle site--Marlene I think, she was a redhead--so I had a sneaking suspicion. He was so damn scared he couldn't move. Bruised and starving, too."

"Three days with nothing to eat. No shit, Sherlock."

"So---what did--"

"Only thing I could've." Ulm looked over at Kevin, and smiled. "Paid for the pie, fed him, and got something decent for him to wear. Then I took him home. Everything goes from there more or less like you've heard it."

"I liked the Shakespeare," Kevin whispered wistfully. "Pissed to no end when it got destroyed."

"Rear-line desk job." Mandy said icily. His eyes met hers, looked away in shame.

"That's what I was, basically. I wasn't one of the Malar--the Enforcers--that did the sort of thing like--like--your village... Oh God, Mandy... I was only a scientist... I really can't remember...that life is like a ghost. Kayagh died so long ago he doesn't even smell anymore... " Face tight with pain, he closed his eyes. She looked on, her eyes green ice, the scar on her left cheek white against her flush.

Part of her wanted to hate him, to shriek insults and curses, to run outside and scream at the rest what was among them and to be the first one in the lynch party. The betrayal was overwhelming, and screaming inside of her for release, for vengance. Oh, God, she hated him. She wanted to see him bleed that green blood into the ground like she'd seen Grace's corpse bleed.

But there was a still, small voice inside, that remembered six months of friendship. And somehow, she

knew that love him or hate him, she could not be indifferent to him; she simply cared about him too much.

Oh, damn. She cared what happened. That was the worst part of it all.

And he cared too.

Or he would not have helped her on the rough path of becoming another warrior in the front lines of this war, would not have talked to her while she had wheezed in pain from her illness, would not have said "They loved that land so much they were willing to die for it..." Would not have enabled her to destroy his own race...

Ulm watched helpless from the sidelines, impotent in influencing what would win that inner war and knowing it.

"Ah..." It was half sigh, half sob.

"To hell with it," Amanda said. She reached over, mindful of his wounds.

Kevin gulped, then painfully reached up an arm to put around her back. He then realized what she was doing; the knowledge brought tears to his eyes.

Matthew watched, his shoulders slumped in exhaustion and his own relief.

All sixes. Hot damn.

After a minute, Kevin let go, sniffling. "Shit."

She didn't laugh. "It's all right. Past day's put us all through the wringer." She rubbed her eyes, which wer noticeably blue underneath. "Uh, Kayagh..."

"KEVIN. Same as always."

"Excuse me. Kevin, the Invid came back not all that long afterward. Why didn't you join them again?"

She jumped as he stiffened.

"Do you think I didn't care what happened to Matthew? I may not be human in the strict sense, Mandy, but I'll tell you I'm not that kind of traitor. Big difference between seeing humans as targets and seeing Ernest who likes dogs and tomatoes. And I've really gotten to like Ernest a lot, if you know what I mean.

"And another thing--"

The kind azure eyes went hard and terrible.

"Because she lied."

They left Kevin's room, leaving him to sleep off his pain. Matthew looked down at his watch and started. It was very nearly six. Had it been that long? God, Kevin needed his rest to heal.

Twenty-four hours, he thought. At this time then, we'd been two guys with a bad secret and a girl who'd come along for the ride. Now the equation had been forever changed. For better? For worse? Only time could tell.

"Mandy." She looked up, eyes glazed from exhaustion. "Go and get some sleep. You get the day off--I don't think even Dennis is going to argue you've had it bad yesterday, although," he whispered, "not for the reason he thinks. But basket cases make bad soldiers."

"What about you?" she asked. Bless her.

"I've done on worse than this. Besides, being CO means I do everything everybody else does and then again anyway. I'll live. Get to bed. That's an order."

And so began the inclusion of Amanda into the conspiracy.

Lord Shkud, the Living Computer said silently.

"What?" he snapped out loud, as he paced back and forth within the inner chambers of the hive, mentally ordering the Malar on their tasks. "I'm busy."

Something has happened in the Southeastern sector of your domain on the planet.

"Ah yes, the dead area. What's so exciting about it? Absolutely nothing in that area's ever made Flowers or labor grow there."

The mass of floating protoplasm elsewhere in the hive bobbed gently and paused.

Several lunar cycles ago, you set one of the Gitamma mecha out there to provide extra coverage.

"Yes?

The Living Computer monitoring that area has just reported its destruction.

"WHAT?" Shkud barked. A few of the Malar pivoted to look at him incuriously.

The transmission ceased, but not before the Gitamma managed to convey some images of the agents of its destruction to it. It has spent the intervening time trying to process the images for your consumption.

"I was to have been informed immediately!"

It begs your pardon. It wished you to have all information on the destruction when you were informed.

Shkud grunted, his eyes narrowed balefully.

"Send me the images."

Yes, lord.

Within a couple of seconds, images and perceptions began to flicker behind the Invid lord's mind, coming in a steady flow that stored itself in his memory. It stopped after a minute.

Shkud played the transmissions from the Gitamma back in his mind, looking thoughtful. Three resistance in human armor and small mecha had played a part. He was grudgingly impressed with the strategy they had used and forced himself to admit that the Invid dependence on tracking via protoculture had its faults. It would have to be addressed the next convergence with his fellows. The Inorganics had benefits, but obviously needed improvment.

Something...bothered him about the scenario. The mecha's silent movement should have had the targets eliminated before they even knew what had happened. Might it be possible? Pfah. No, of course not.

Thinking over the fine nuances would have to wait until later on.

"Transmission received. Very well. I want the forces patrolling the area increased and searches conducted within that radius."

Confirmed, the Living Computer answered.

Shkud began to leave the room. "Oh, by the way."

Yes lord?

"That laggard Brain?"

Yes?

"Have it... replaced."

Confirmed.

Satisfied, Shkud left.

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DANDELIONS

CHAPTER THREE

Interlude

"SHOWERS! HOT showers! Thank you, God, I believe in you again!"

"Hmm, soap that isn't sweat-scented."

"Water water everywhere. I love you, water..."

"Definitely an improvement."

"Improvement? IMPROVEMENT?? My god, Zinnert, how you understate."

"Been a while, huh, Gerald?"

"Stop smiling. Fuck you, Altman."

"Nope, that's Sherry's job. You can stop throwin' the soap at me, Kevin."

"The Invid are barbarians! They don't believe in showers! Shit, what do they do, wallow in that green shit all day? How can they stand it?"

"I love you water, hydrogen hydroxide baby. You're my fave."

"You definitely haven't gotten laid recently. Well, yeah, recent conditions..."

"Nope, just going orgasmic over cleanliness. Burblelblrubble blruubelble."

"Get your face out of the shower head, O'Shea. God, you're weird."

"Took you this long to find that out? I thought it was obvious before. I've worked at it. I haven't anything to lose, what with being a faggot already."

"What???"

"Just stating something already mentioned, Matt. And you're one too."

"Frederick?? Have you--"

"Just stating an established fact, I think. Lieutenant. The weirdnesss, not the other. I'll be in here until the crack of doom, if you don't mind. Send a bar of soap in every so often."

"Sorry, Fred, no can do. We've got a war going on."

"Yes, master. Any time, master."

"Burbleburbleburble burble."

Drip, drip, drip, drip.

"Look at this, man. What's a Sealy Posturepedic?"

"Whatever it is--" a bounce onto the plastic-wrapped package, "Ohhh-- this is to die for."

"And electric lamps. Where's those VCR machines Sherry's been talkin' about?"

"Over in the Hardware section. It's not going to go anywhere, Gwen. Besides, whenever the guys get out, I won't care if they spontaneously disappear."

"Oh, to be clean again..."

"Yeah, and look at what I found."

"What? Oh, god, Sherry. Flourescent pink dye? Are you gonna..."

"YES." A happy squeak of rapture.

"Christ, Sherry, the Invid will see you from ten miles off!"

"Don't swear, Miranda."

"Ah-ha, little Miss Toiletmouth telling me? And it's thirty-four years old! Do you have any idea what it's going to be like now?"

"Extra concentrated?"

"Well, it's her hair. Besides, we can all laugh at her later."

"Mandy, you're cruel."

"But honest." Giggle.

"Not going to be the only color."

"Uh-oh, what is it, you crazy wench?"

"Wench yourself, Miranda."

"Well, what is it?"

"Blue."

"Oh, no no no no no..."

"Why don't we hit a clothing store, girls?"

"You go ahead, Gwen, I'll stay right here. This is my mattress."

"Yeah. And these are our clothes, and the guys' clothes, dryin' on some cord we found. And those are our Cyclones..."

"Sarcasm isn't you, Gwen."

"Wake up, Mandy, I think the guys are done."

"I wasn't sleeping anyway."

"Look at what we found."

"Yes! Mattresses that aren't cut off in the middle. Where?"

"Ooof--over in that one department store. The JCPenney's. Those were the demonstration mattresses, stupid."

"Excuuuse me."

"We found the storage area. Not too roachy, all things considered."

"Now where did El Lieutenante say we were shackin' up?"

"Bottom floor. In the one store, next to the video and LD store. I think Sherry's turning Suncoast Pictures into our TV room. I saw her with the pallet, leaving the store same time we were. Huge-ass TV. What the hell is she intending on watching on it?"

"Knowing Sherry, I don't think I want to know. This is a woman who has Scouts for breakfast and then decides to curl up with a King novel. Speaking of which, that Waldenbooks up on the upper level..."

"Miranda went in there at nine. Hasn't come out since. Zinnert's thinkin' of organizing a search party."

"Aw, let her have her fun. You know, she used to be an English doctoral canididate."

"Anyway--really? Not bad. Where?"

"Some university out east. In Pennsylvania. Yeah?"

"Is there gonna be something where we girls can sleep and you guys can sleep elsewhere? Ain't gonna let any of you guys see my underthingies... "

"Oh yeah, but Kevin's got a free pass, doesn't he?"

"SHUT UP."

"Hmmm, I wonder what you were doing in that Victoria's Secret place."

"I am not listenin' to this." Aggrieved bootfalls faded.

"Hmm, you seem to have pissed her off over to the showers."

"Well, it's not like she's going to get into his pants anyway, no matter what she thinks. Have you ever seen O'Shea without Matt?" There was a thoughtful pause.

"Nope. And Ulm always insists on being the first to see to him when he gets banged up. Definitely queer, those two."

"Yeah. Help me get these damn mattresses downstairs. We still need to get three more."

A week later

Things had become more organized. Two stores, one on either side of a discarded video store, had become host to the respective male and female halves of the Elms. The racks and other paraphenelia that had formerly inhabited them had been moved out into the main corridor, and in some cases, were now being worn by the resistance. Considering the vast glut of still-usable products inside the old shopping center, it was decided that some of it would be used for barter with other resistance factions and towns in order to get food, ammunition and protoculture. The lighting and security systems had at last been found somewhere in the bowels of the place, and light, for the first time in three decades, illuminated their segment of the territory.

A population of cats had been found to be haunting the distant corners of the building, which most likely accounted for the lack of rodent damage to the goods. At first, Amanda assumed that they had been escapees from a pet store within the confines, but search had uncovered nothing of the sort. After Ulm had gently pointed out the fate of any animals caged and abandoned here, Amanda was just as glad there were not. The felines had apparently come from outside, looking for prey. They were wild, but Amanda had covertly seen Gerald and even Dennis set out food for them. She added her contributions as well.

They had become the most comfortably-equipped they had been since the war had started/re-started, and in some cases for the first time in their lives. Dennis seriously considered going on a barter trip to either nearby Danville or Terre Haute, two towns that had managed to survive the Robotech Wars somewhat intact and which were reputed to have caches of protoculture and ammunition. Miranda offered to go along. Amanda was privately unhappy at the thought of temporarily losing one of her closest confidantes, but made no mention. Kevin, though, seemed affected by it as well, if only exhibiting it by redoubling his snatch-and-infuriate attacks on the elder Altman.

Shiroikiku at last managed to hook up power and a video and laser player to an enormous television she had pilfered. She'd gathered together a stock of old movies she judged were "absolutively must-sees, got me?" and was planning to subject her teammates to an entire day of it--at least.

Ulm gave his blessing. This set off another conflict between him and Zinnert. Zinnert pointed out it was not millitarily correct. Ulm pointed out what the team had been through in the past month had not been millitarily correct. Zinnert said that it left them open to the Invid. Ulm said the Invid would find them when they were good and ready at any rate. Zinnert said they had better things to which to dedicate their energy. Ulm scowled and agreed, and then pointed out that Zinnert and Miranda were to leave very shortly, the others had some sick teamates to find again, the Elms had been through some very trying times recently, and Shiroikiku's improvisational film-fest might recover their battered morale. All of those things were quite energetic. Death and fighting could always wait.

Zinnert threw one last salvo regarding his ten years of experience in the REF and the Sentinel War and how the Admirals Hunter would have never allowed something so anti-regulations to be done. Ulm's soft hazel eyes went agate and he pointed out that if Zinnert hadn't noticed, this wasn't exactly the REF anymore, regulations had died about two years ago regarding the Invid War, and furthermore Ulm would very much like to meet the Hunters and discuss their cinematic tastes with them.

It was in fact the first time the two co-leaders had actually come to something like blows in Mandy's memory. As she watched the exchange, she raised her eyes and suddenly encountered Kevin's ironic blue stare. He rolled his eyes to the heaven and left the two to patch things up.

The filmfest went through.

"Check me out!" Miranda declared, strutting into the room. Gerald looked up and whistled raucously.

"Looking hot, babe! Arrooo." She smacked him. She actually was quite striking in a dark purple sweater (Bergner's) stirrup pants (the Gap), and a blazing collection of brass beads studding her redone cornrows. The heavy military field boots rather detracted from the rest.

"Where'd you get the couch, lumphead?"

"Penney's. Carrying it down the elevator was a bitch. But here it is."

"So I see. Where's--Oh, there's Amanda." He nodded and smiled at the newcomer, the past few months having eroded some of the distrust and reserve. She answered it. "Nice civvies. They look good."

"Thank you. I hoped they would." She looked down at loose khaki slacks, thick wool socks and beige suede boots. On top she had a spring-green sweater over a coral blouse and quite a lot of costume jewelry. Malcolm had also contributed a trim and french braid . "Guess we're dressing up for it."

"And why not? It is a party of some kind."

Miranda snorted lustily. "Plus I was really gettin' to hate those damned coveralls. Whichever Reefer designed them went into the Gunny Sack school of fashion, I swear."

"Yeah, I'll agree, 'Randa. Only good thing about 'em is that you can rip 'em on for an attack. Don't mind telling you what things vomit olive does for me." Gerald rolled his eyes.

"Well, yeah, does make you look washed out."

"I don't believe this," Mandy grumped. "The muscles of the Elms, and he's worried about color coordination?"

"Twerp, just because I have muscles doesn't mean I don't have a fashion sense." He yanked at his sweater haughtily. Not much could be found to fit him even here, but dilligent effort had turned up a few things.

"Shut up, Gerald."

"YEEEEEEEHAAAWWWW!" Gerald ducked as a screaming red, green and black blur dove out of nowhere and ricocheted off the couch.

"Kevin, you twinky son of a bitch!" Gerald roared. The two women, astonished, poked their heads up and got a impression of a body imploded into several of the beanbags also accquired for the day. Indistinct, mocking barking sounds could be heard emitting from the locale. Gerald settled back into his couch, steaming. Mandy had to bite down on an eruption of giggles.

In a huff of offended dignity, the Elms equipment manager turned back to Amanda. "See you finally got the stitches out."

She nodded, touched her face. "Yeah."

He examined her face a little more closely. "Hmm, not a bad job of healing at all. No puckering. Main problem with the big one is that it's a distinct straight trench in your cheek and they all tend to be a bit on the white side." One big finger traced a two-and-a-half inch healed slash in her cheek.

'It's not gonna go away, is it?"

Gerald shook his head. "I think you're stuck with it, unless you can get some fancy REF cosmetic surgery." Her shoulders sagged. "I've got plenty of my own to prove it. But hey, yours was a neat mess. It healed neatly. Gives you character, and you're still pretty even with it. Malcolm did a terrific job in the circumstances."

Kevin examined it too, ignoring Gerald's suspicious movement away from him. "He's right. Accept it, okay?"

She reluctantly complied.

"YOU look like Christmas," Miranda snorted.

The younger man grinned and bowed, showing off his red-shirted, green-jacketed finery to full advantage. "I try hard."

"What's with that stupid green bandanna around your head?"

"I'm going Japanese. Sherry explained it all to me. I'm gonna be the Cyclone Samurai. She started yammering something about Planet Ten and then I decided to get the hell out of there."

"Yep sounds like her. How Malcolm stands her is beyond me. I take this goes in with your Zen fetish?"

"Yup, and my kendo fetish, and my rice fetish. Nothing like whacking the crap out of each other with bamboo and then sitting down to dinner."

Gerald snorted, sinking into the couch.

"How Matt puts up with you is beyond me."

"He's a masochist. A very tolerant one."

"I've gotta be with your stealing other people's well-deserved food, like a certain lunch yesterday." O'Shea grinned ingenously at Miranda's glare.

Amanda, smiling at the verbal feud, perked up. "Hey guys, I can hear the others coming."

"About time, too," Kevin said. "Let's go see what this stuff is all about."

"That...Wow."

"Yeah, cool, ain't it?" Shiroikiku said proudly. "My favorite."

"Uh, what's the deal with the little gray bunny turning into...uhm..."

"Oh. Well, makes a cute ship, no?"

"But I mean, the mass conservation..."

"Hey, it's anime."

"Uh, well, the girl is a bit of a, um, babe I guess... Wouldn't want to be the guy, though. She seems pretty pissed about something."

"Okay, now explain why the guy turns into a girl when he..."

"It's a curse. See."

"Now it's cold water. He, uh, whatever, turns back when she gets hot water."

"Yep."

"So what if she gets into lukewarm water? She become a hemaphrodite?"

"Better yet, what if he, er, she gets pregnant?"

"Oh, for Kwannon's sake, dincha ever hear of suspension of disbelief?"

"Why is this funny?"

"Hee hee. I don't know. It just is."

"Pleased to meet you, Bruce."

"You too, Bruce."

"Ex-parrot, anyone?"

"Not at all a well cat, to come back from the trip and find a dead cat would be so--anticlimatic."

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, god, don't get me started," strained giggles, "on the huge," titter "soiled," tee hee, "BUDGIES!" Apoleptic laughter.

"He's going to piss his pants, he is."

"Those blonde and brunettes between 16 and 19 and a half can spank me anytime."

"Pervert."

"Oh, yuck, I'm not going to sit next to you."

"Hey, you come here."

"No."

"Hmm, anyone know about the flight speed of an African versus a European Cyclone?"

"Nope. Coconuts were good."

"Could it carry a coconut?"

"Help, I'm being repressed! Maybe we ought to start yelling that next fight."

"Yep."

"Any idea on whether the Regis was a hamster and the Regent smelt of elderberries?"

"You seem like a decent fellow, I'd hate to kill you??"

"Sure. Zentraedi turned out to be okay, didn't they? Even the Robotech Masters people, even though you can never really tell what gender they are."

"I resemble that statement."

"You would. You're not a clone."

"They'd resent it."

"Shut up. I'm watching the fight. You keeled my father, prepare to die."

"S'all right. I like those shrieking eels."

"What's with all this political analysis anyway? We're guerrillas, not Marx."

"Shut UP! I'm watching the fight! That's an order!"

"Ooo, testy, Lieutenant."

"You betcha, Rutherford."

"Aux armes, citoyens--"

"Oh, that. I think it follows with something like the enemy hiding in the underbrush and snorting and grunting or something."

"How would you know that, Kevin?"

"I speak pretty good French. Sort of like the literal translation."

"Will you shut up??? This is a classic we're watching!"

Some time later brought on some fascinated observation.

"Wow, is he doing what I think he's doing?"

"I think he's doing what you think he's doing."

"Aww, Gerald's crying."

Sniffle. "Shut up, Malcolm, or I'll kick your teeth in." More sentimental noises came from the mass on the couch. "It's so damned sad. Rick's still in love with the girl, but he can't let her husband get caught and so now he's..." Sniff. "God, I loved this movie. We used to play all the old ones at home all the time. Nothing like an old black-and-white."

"Bogey, that was the dude. Knew you'd like it."

They staggered out in the late night into the mall corridor, much later.

"That...that was really bad for my mind." Miranda blinked glazed eyes at the tiles.

"Yeah, great, wasn't it?" Sherry said cheerfully.

"Uh, Kevin's still in there. I think he's trying to replay the British comedy tapes." Malcolm nudged his lover in her shoulder.

"Really? Ah, let him. Which ones?"

"I think the one with the penguin."

"Let him."

"What, you mean you want him ever weirder than already?"

"Weird is good. I like him weird. I like everyone weird. If we were all weird, the Invid could never figure us out."

"It's two a.m. If he wants to be exhausted for hunting detail tomorrow, that's his business. I'm going to bed." Gerald stomped past them to the men's side.

"Has Dennis been on security watch all this time?"

"Yeah, I think so. He's been sulking. Gave him something to do besides whine about our unprofessionalism."

"Oh, well," Miranda yawned. "Hey, Gwen, let's go to bed."

Rutherford, bedecked in a black sweater that showed off her cleavage and heightened her flaming hair, sighed and followed them into the curtained entrance of the women's half.

"Uh, Kev, you want that button." Matthew yawned deeply and covered his mouth.

O'Shea's eyes widened. "So that's the play button. Thanks."

One month later, late April 2045

> *And these are the days when our work has come asunder And these are the days when we look for something other*
>
> **U2**, "Lemon"

First Lieutenant Matthew Ulm looked down at the message on the transported glass cafe table, the all too-familiar sour taste of fear in his throat. He sighed.

Second Lieutenant Dennis Zinnert regarded him steadily over the surface. "Let me guess."

Ulm nodded. "Invid got a town near Danville. Only reason we know it is that the resistance came in and found the place stripped of all human life. More, three other towns nearby had the same thing happen to them. One anti-Invid town was levelled. The rest in the area are running to the millitary, hoping they're going to protect them. Only thing it's doing is making it easier for the Invid to find resistance."

"Guilty party is either that damn great big stilt hive thirty miles east of Hannibal or that dome near Lafayette. Invid takeovers have been in a pretty rough radius from those spots."

Ulm nodded and took in another breath. "I take it you knew Major Catharine Howell."

Dennis nodded. "She was one of the Icarus team that managed to suvive the LaGrange Massacre. I got the new Cyclones from her. Good leader."

"She was killed two weeks ago." Dennis dropped his sassafras tea, the liquid sloshing out of the mug onto the surface of the table.

"God. What..."

Matthew sighed. "Looks like her group was caught by the Invid. Her Legioss was dismembered and crushed. What was left wasn't...recognizable."

Dennis went white. "You know what that means."

"Oh yes. I heard about the Viper's Nest as well as you. Somebody important in the enemy ranks really didn't like Major Howell. At least the rest were only just killed. Howell was tortured."

Dennis rubbed his forehead.

"At least we've managed to keep low since Quincy was wiped. Nobody seems to know we're still around. We haven't seen any major action or attacks since then. Once we begin anti-Invid operations again, that's going to change."

"You're right, though, Dennis. We can't hide forever. The old Niemoller saying."

"'And then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out.'" Zinnert quoted. "We need to get back up to strength, though. Even with our seven former invalids and a couple new guys we're only a little over half our old manpower. I've seen them practicing though, getting back their skills. God, I wish we had a combat simulator."

"Sorry, us hicks lack a few necessities." Dennis scowled. Matthew's bearded face grinned. "So damn much fun making fun of you it hurts sometimes."

"I can imagine," Dennis drawled, annoyed.

Matt sobered. "Because there's not much left on the planet that's fun anymore."

A muffled rumble increased in volume over their heads. Both officers startled, then shrugged. The rumble became a boom, a screech and a sudden silence, broken by shouts and swearing.

"Must be Pierson's turn at Cyclone training." Dennis sighed. "Not the most gifted mecha pilot under the sun, for certain. Good markswoman though." Matthew nodded. "That lover of yours seems to have done a fair job of that at least."

"She's only had the ability to try the conversion process for a couple weeks. This," Ulm tapped the missive, covertly handed to him on a supply trip to neutral Rantoul by a contact, "is the first news we've gotten since you returned. A comset would've been nice."

"On my list."

"Do it. Yesterday, if you can. We need one."

Dennis nodded.

The engines on the upper level roared again, with similar cacophonic results. Ulm winced.

"I don't know about you, but that noise is beginning to give me a migraine. Let's get outside."

Dennis rose from his seat. "Best idea I've heard yet."

"Doubt the Invid have found any reason to go around here recently. Good reason to go fishing anyway."

Dennis made a face, as he wandered toward the garage exit. "Radioactive fish. Nice."

"No, crater's clean, so's the fish. Toximetered it. It's edible, and a damn good excuse for goofing off. I do wonder about Invid activity. No such animal here in this area. Don't know if that's a good or bad sign for us."

"Let's not get ridiculous. No Flowers," Dennis snorted. "No resistance activity. No detectable Protoculture activity. No population to enslave. Let's get the hell outside."

*iiii

Greetings, Oryo'i. It wasn't Shkud, for certain. She ignored the thought and concentrated on her visitor. It was smooth and controlled as metal; that alone told her it wasn't her superior.

And to you, Kulagi Asaav. What do you wish?

To speak with you.

Oryo'i was surprised. A Kulagi ordinarily did not show an interest in a Sulagi not under his or her command. *For what, my lady?*

I wish to tell you that not all of my bretheren agree with Shkud's verdict. You made a mistake but it was a mistake with good intentions as regarding the Hive. Furthermore, my brother tends to...be presumptuous. I see devolving or demoting a subordinate with your particular talents to be unecessarily wasteful.

I was demoted, Lady Asaav. With good reason, your pardon.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. I wish to negotiate your return to your former station.

Oryo'i was so surprised by this sudden proposal that the Gamun rocked a bit, prompting a brief change in the Hivesong around her. *What? Your pardon.*

This has gone on long enough. You have learned a lesson, if lesson it was, Sulagi. The appropiate thing now is to resume your status. However, if I do negoitiate your return to the Orbital Hives, I wish an exchange.

Yes?

You will, of course, deem it appropiate to do something that I want. I will see about your transfer as soon as I can. Please consider. Farewell.

The connection was broken, leaving Oryo'i to return to her hive bemused.

*iiii

Finally, Fred said, "They passed overhead. It's all right, Gwen says. The bugs were in high-altitude and apparently on their way somewhere else. Too far away to detect anything." Gerald sagged in relief and got back up.

"God, I hate it when that happens." He rummaged around in the thigh pocket of his coveralls, his off-color hair glinting in the muggy light coming through the skylights. "Hope I didn't break it."

Amanda got for the briefest second a glimpse of something gold. "What the heck was that you were saying?"

"Good ol' Zentraedi, Zentran dialect. What it was you don't want to know. Learned it from someone I knew. Real bathroom mouth, but a great guy."

Kevin shakily got up. "Almost messed my pants when Fred started yelling like that. Worse than when Mandy tries to change modes."

Mandy gave him a raspberry, and the tension was broken.

And you don't know if it's fear or desire Danger the drug that takes you higher

U2, "So Cruel"

Kevin wandered back towards the showers, intent on cleaning up and getting ready for dinner. Trying to teach Amanda how to change modes was an exhausting job, and having that patrol pass overhead had not helped his mental stamina. Amanda seemed to think the Cyclone was out to eat her when the process started. She always forgot to stand up, which made for a pretty mess when the thing got snagged in between modes--not to mention all the bruises she accumulated.

Weariness aside, he kept an eye out, and his posture distinctly evolved a slink. Maybe he would be lucky.

He wasn't.

"Oh, hello, Kevin," Gwen said casually. There was the ever so slight suggestion of a purr to her voice. It reminded Kevin of the local cats when they had something to eat. "Nice to see you."

"Hi Gwen." He continued past her, looking for the shower door. He twitched when he felt the pressure of her hand on his shoulder. It seemed to burn all the way to the skin.

"Scary bit, wasn't it, hon?" she whispered.

"Uh...Yeah," he managed, trying not to let his breathing go too fast. He wanted out. Last time, she'd gotten far with him, way too far. How he'd managed to get out before--He wasn't supposed to be like that, he wasn't... But the sweat was already beginning to trickle down his back. So was her hand.

He whirled to push her away and actually found her up against him, which was triggering an entirely alarming and compelling set of instincts in his flesh.

"D--don't y-you k-know when to leave...me...alone?" He gulped, losing the fight with his breath and his rampaging heart. His will was beginning to go too.

"Why, Kevin?" The huge amber eyes gazed into the blue. "You can't really be gay, can you?" Her lips, five inches from his, parted and moved upward.

He stared at them, maddened. With a surge, he shoved her violently away and rear-first onto the floor, and dashed into the shower room. His body slammed against the other side, barricading it.

Gwen panted on the floor, wiping sweaty red hair out of her face, miserable. So much for trying, she thought. But the way he'd reacted, Gwen had seen before, usually in more successful and pleasurable scenarios.

"Maybe he's bi or something," she muttered. "Why hasn't he told his boyfriend yet, if he wants me gone?"

Limping, she got up, deciding that her infatuation aside it might be good to leave off. As she knew intimately well, jilted lovers in positions of power were a Bad Thing to cross. One of these days Kevin would spill the beans, and she'd be an ex-Elm pretty damn quick. No matter her shooting skills.

Her fist slammed down on her thigh. But she had been so danged close! Tears of frustration beaded in her eyes as she left.

Back behind the door, Kevin crouched on the floor, one shaking hand before his own.

The next day, Mandy wearily unhelmeted. It had been a long day. First, she had drawn PK detail and had to help Malcolm take care of breakfast for the increasing population of the mall, then she had spent another two hours doing target practice with a UV-light practice H-90, then after some of the newcomers were done, had spent a few more hours roaring up and down the mall corridors, trying to learn how to cleanly switch modes on her Forager. Nonetheless, her soul was singing with triumph.

I did it! I DID it!

She remembered what it'd been like; how at long last she'd not panicked and managed to stand just as the Cyclone suddenly rocketed upward toward the ceiling and as the front farings had whipped up and connected with her CVR chest plating. She had almost wet her pants when she felt the shift in weight as the wheels and seat had locked into position on her back almost instantaneously. Before Amanda had hit the ground, she had gone from riding a motorcycle to wearing one.

The sensation was like being painlessly eaten alive by a metal origami--origami something-or-other, anyway. She couldn't decide which of Shiroikiku's collection suited.

Gerald had made her do it several more times after that. And she had. Successfully. Within an hour she was doing some low-grade hovering and flying within the center court of the mall. He had sucked on his lip, shook his shaggy head, and smiled a bit bemusedly.

"I don't believe it, but you seem to've gotten the knack. Guess it all decided to fall in place at once."

She laughed in delight, hovering ten feet above his head.

"Come down now and get out of that thing. You might attract the Invid if you go for much longer."

I have got to tell Matthew about this! She half-ran down to the women's room, disarmoring and unzipping the suit to reveal her sweat-soaked coveralls on the way.

Shiroikiku had just gotten off security duty and was lounging on her bed, wading through the pages of a Glenn Cook paperback. She looked up as Amanda entered; the contrast between her scalding blue-and-pink hairdye and the dead black of the spread she had found was a thing to behold.

"Sherry, where's Matt? I've just managed to shift modes. I need to tell him I wasn't a total loss."

Sherry grinned and gave her a thumbs up. "We'll make a good little soldier out of you one of these days. I think he's out fishing at the hole in the ground."

"The crater? Okay. You think it's safe enough to go after him?" She began shuffling through a chest of drawers for her clothing.

"Should be if he went down there, the Invid scare yesterday regardless. His intuition's pretty good on this sort of thing, no matter what El Anallo thinks." She winked. "Be back by dogfood time."

Mandy was already out of her dirty coverall and into a clean one, and was transferring various precious objects to the numerous pockets on it. "Gotcha. I want to actually get outside." Sherry grinned and watched her

"I know. It's gorgeous." Amanda groaned in a-don't-remind-me tone and was out the doorway. Sherry noticed in passing how even the filthy coverall was folded neatly and placed on a chair, and the millitary neatness of Mandy's green-and-yellow bedspread. She found it amusing. During her short tenure with the Robotech Expeditionary Force Jupiter Group, Sherry had been continually upbraided for living conditions that had looked at best like something a Karbarran might have liked--that is, if the Karbarran had acted as beastial as he had looked. At worst, Shiroikiku Evelyn Doi's quarters were nothing short of catastrophic.

A couple of minutes later, Malcolm poked his head inside. "Hey babe." She batted her eyes coyly at him. "Didn't I see Hell's Daffodil just run for the hills?"

"Yep. She went to see the Lieutenant." Malcolm sucked in a breath.

"Uh-oh."

"What?"

"O'Shea went after him too." Sherry sucked on her lips as the implications became clear.

"Oopsie. You think they might be doing a little tete-a-tete?" Malcolm shrugged.

"Maybe, maybe not. She might be in for a shock, though."

"Well, it's not like it's not anything unlike what she knows we've been doing." She winked and wriggled against the covers provocatively. Malcolm wolf-whistled, then tutted.

"No no no, Dinner's cooking, no distracting the chef."

"Damn!"

"Maybe tonight."

"Certainly hope they're not up to anything. She's not that openminded."

Mandy wheeled her Cyclone through the phantasmagoria of spring vegetation mixed with building shells, a huge grin on her face as she sniffed the air. She tilted her head as she heard birdsong and recognized it. Dolza's devastation and the wars nonwithstanding, the common robin seemed indestructible.

Her smile faded and she touched the scar on her cheek and felt the wobbliness in one ankle. So had her

home, her baby sister, her father. The feeling had been in the town of her birth that if they were inoffensive enough, the Invid would ignore them. Although the Invid had arrived for the first time when she was eight, for most of her life they had been distant monsters, the stuff of bedtime nightmares. It had all changed that horrible day last November. Now the fact that this time last year they had begun to tear up the garden to prepare for planting was as dead as her former life.

She sighed and looked up, green eyes blinking, The spring cerulean sky of afternoon, still beautiful, was now poignantly sad.

Up ahead was Ulm's favorite fishing spot, and through the newly leaved shrubbery of the margin she could see the metallic glint of water. She hadn't thought a body of water that new could contain life, but Ulm said it was surprising what waterfowl brought in on their feet, especially over thirty-four years.

She could also hear soft voices. She was upon them before she realized who they were. At that same time, her CVR boot smacked against a hidden piece of rubble.

The conversers whirled or sat up, eyes wide, then relaxed.

"Hey, there," Matthew said. "Come join the party."

"I was going to ask that," she said sheepishly. She made her way through the last glassy ruins and into the clearing. "Is it safe?"

"Er, what do you--" Matthew began, then began to chuckle as the pink tint washed up her cheeks. "No, nothing of the sort is going on, I assure you."

Kevin, lying on the ruins of a wall, looked up, smiled and waved.

Matthew was seated Indian-fashion next to a young maple, attention on his fishing rod, and he was in a prime position to see the young woman walk into their spot.

And that was what she was, he realized with a bit of surprise. Looking at the stride, the posture, the gaze, and the face, it was obvious she'd matured over the past few months. He had found a frightened girl. Perhaps he'd only found the last dying shreds of a child that had been torn apart by the massacre and that had run, mortally wounded. Or perhaps her experience with the Elms had altered her, but she had crossed that breath-thin, indefinable line that had separated child from adult.

Now, he thought, *I've got to see that the young woman can make it through this war.*

Out loud, he said, "Have a seat."

"Sure." She propped her mecha and sat down on the wall, looking out over the lake.

"Sun," Kevin sighed. "God I missed it. I need a tan. I'm so pale I look damn near dead." Mandy nodded.

"I just get more freckles. It's disgusting."

"It's cute," Matthew said.

"No it isn't." Matthew rolled his eyes and grinned, his russet hair standing up in spikes thanks to the breeze, except for the bald spot on top.

"Hey, you know what?" Mandy suddenly said. "I finally changed modes without splattering myself all over the Bergner's storefront. That's what I came out here for, actually. I thought you guys needed to know the time wasn't wasted on me."

"I'll get the champagne."

"Matt, you yourself said that after three decades it was going to taste like cat--"

"Figuratively, Kev. Congraulations, Mandy. If you keep up, you'll probably in the front line with the rest in August. Whether that's a reward is up to debate."

"Maybe sooner. I've got the bit on flying."

"Quick. But as Kevin will tell you and as you probably found out at Quincy, practice isn't exactly like the real thing. You have room for error in practice, but in battle one decision can mean the difference between being alive and being a corpse. Believe it or not, I've got an interest in keeping you and the others alive."

"Yeah. I know, Matt. Thanks." She sat a while, braiding the hair out of her face, feeling the breeze from over the lake lift the rest into a sunny mess. For all that it had been conceived in horror, fire, and disaster, it was a somber, peacefully quiet place, and with two people she trusted the feeling was amplified. A thought hit her. "Matthew--uh, Lieutenant Ulm?"

"Hmm?"

"Why--why do you run the Elms ah, well, why don't you--"

"Turn the place into a little Gestapo gang the way all good millitary outposts should be?" he asked wryly. She was embarassed, but he looked thoughtful and after a second said, "You know, that's a very good question. Why do I?...

"I suppose a lot of it has to do with my experiences in the Southern Cross, to be frank." He tried to smooth down his hair with little success. "That army was so hierarchical, and so corrupt, it virtually had the seeds of its own destruction in it. I was a Valk flier, and I saw far too much of the crap that went down there. Between Leonard needlessly sacrificing troops to satisfy his hate for aliens, the personal agendas each segment of the army had out for other segments, the bureaucracy, and the total inflexibility of the command structure--well, small wonder there wasn't anything left after the Masters. We couldn't have thrown spitballs against the Invid to save our lives." He sighed. "The only leader in the lot worth anything was Emerson. If he'd survived, who knows?..."

"Dennis said something like this can't work."

"Dennis is full of it," Kevin snapped.

"Easy, she's asking a legit question. And never mind Lieutenant Zinnert, he simply comes from a different school of belief and thought than I do. In his own mind, he thinks he's doing things correctly.

"But the bit about the running things... Actually, it can and had worked. The German Bundeswehr--the People's Army--of the late twentieth century granted quite a lot of personal initative to soldiers in an effort to avoid the kind of mistakes they made with the Nazis earlier. And they did it effectively. So it isn't impossible to do. And that's why I'm still here. I supose I could've rejoined the REF and the Icarus mission, but I see too much of exactly the same thing there, and all the weaknesses they have. I think our way has a better chance against the occupying forces."

Matthew often made references that her limited education had not prepared her for, but she knew full well her limits and managed to get the gist.

"So it can work, you mean?"

"That's what I said. I personally believe that if you respect the intelligence of your suobordinates--they can help you in ways a hierarchical command structure won't let its soldiers help. Plus, they'll respect you the more for it. And frankly, none of you are stupid."

"Speak for youself," she sighed. "I feel stupid, most of the time."

"You ain't," Kevin murmured, his heavy field boots hanging over the end of the wall. "Trust me on that. Just because you never got past the sixth grade's got nothing to do with not having any brains to work with. And you've got lots. Heck, you could ask Miranda and she'd probably be glad to teach you."

"You know," Ulm said, "that sounds like a pretty good idea...." He slowly reeled the line back in and prepared for another cast.

Mandy looked down the wall towards Kevin's end. Her forehead crimped. "Kevin, are you all right?"

"Wha--? Sure I am. Why do you ask?"

Amanda was visually getting a different story. Something was drastically changed with his attitude. He did not at all look or act well, and the usual irrepressible demeanor was gone.

"Look, are you sure? You look awful. How much sleep did you get last night, and were you buried and dug up somewhere in there?"

"Mandy, I'm fine."

Amanda sighed, reached over, and patted what portion of his head she could reach. "I'm just worried about you, Kevin. You don't look so good. Besides, it's been half a year and I've never seen you like this before." Kevin shrugged as much as he could lying down.

"It's personal problems, Mandy," Ulm quietly told her. "Nothing that can't be taken care of on his own. He's just going through a rough spot."

"Ah," Mandy said quietly. "Sorry."

"It's all right," Kevin said.

"Can I ask what?" He shook his head. The light shattered off the lakewater and glistened off his black hair.

"It's kind of private. The only person that really needs to know is Matthew."

"Oh--" she started, putting two and two together. "I can leave--"

"Oh, sit down. You're not interrupting anything that can't be later resumed. Besides, we like you."

Mandy sighed in relief. For a long while, nothing was said, as the sun slipped towards their backs and the light gradually grew yellower. She inspected the newly sprouting plants by her armored feet .

"Heyyy, look at that."

Kevin's head popped up. "Look at what?"

"Oh, just the first dandelions I've seen this year. You don't need to get up. I just kind of like them."

Kevin's head had dropped back down but he rotated it towards the direction she was facing. "Huh, you're

right. There's a few little yellow flowers there."

"Dad always used to say they were weeds. But I liked them anyway." Her voice grew dreamy. "They looked so pretty on spring mornings, and when they went white I always liked blowing them around as a little kid."

Ulm made a grunt. "Who didn't?" He concentrated on his line. A couple of ducks whirred overhead, quacking noisily.

"My elementary school had a bunch of old books, printed in the '80s or '90s, and I read how dandelion roots could go down twenty feet and grow in the darndest places. You could try and rip them up, but they'd always grow back, and then they'd spread all over the place and never be completely wiped out." She smoothed down her hair, looking over the lake whose creation had killed thousands of living beings. She continued. "It probably sounds really goofy, but I always kind of thought that they were kind of like the people here, on this planet. It sounds completely conceited. We almost did get wiped out, after all."

There was no immediate answer from the two men, then Ulm said slowly, "No, I don't think so, hon. I've seen some amazing things happen in my life, and your metaphor seems to fit.

"Although I don't know about this time around."

"Er, what time is it?" Kevin mumbled all of a sudden.

Matthew looked down at his watch and snorted. "1720. I think we need to get back. Damn, no bites today."

Three weeks later, May 2045

"Hunting detail again," Matthew sighed, examining his lures. "I hate it," he muttered, rolling his eyes. Kevin groaned.

"Welllll, it does say on the chart we're next up. Guess Zinnert doens't trust the lake fish all that much."

"True. And, of course, he's right when he notes that in the next couple of weeks we're beginning operations again. It's just gotten too hairy recently for us to keep low any longer."

Kevin sighed, and keeled over on his bed, with its arrangement of almost unreally clashing sheets and spread. He stuck the pillow over his head.

"Any more news?" he asked, his voice muffled.

"The radius of attacked towns is growing. Too fast. They managed to free the people of Paducah at last, but the Shenandoah Boyz, the Sluggers, and the James Gang took pretty heavy losses. We've gotten back up to better than the strength we were before Quincy, so we're going to have to take up some of the slack the other gangs left and keep hitting at the enemy for them until they recover. God forbid that the Invid start thinking we're not going to scream if they decide to march in... And to do that, we need enough venison jerky, pemmican, and other rations to get out onto the field with." Ulm paused. "I truly wish to God I knew why of all times, the Invid are deciding to start in on us now. In a perverse way, I'm hoping it's because they got scared from us, but with those hives orbiting? Yeah, right."

Kevin had removed the pillow, and he was staring up at the ceiling. "I've no idea. Doesn't at all seem like the usual M.O. And I've been wondering about it for years. The fact that only now they're starting in on the prior occupation stuff makes it only the more bizarre."

Matthew slumped over on his chair. "And here I thought you'd have some bright ideas." He looked down at his flies, then shoved them back into his tackle box, then shut and pushed it underneath his drum-tight dark-blue bed.

"Nope. Afraid not. I'm as in the dark as you, mon freur."

Kevin rolled over and picked up one of the miscellaneous items he'd collected on his bedside drawers, then began idly toying with it. He stared down at the gleaming red and white stripes of the die-cast Valkyrie as he began to shift it through to Gerwalk mode. Once done, he set it back on the table, where the lamplight glinted off the five-inch high model, and stared at it for a long while.

"You got that in the toy store last week, didn't you?"

Kevin roused himself, then nodded. "As I told you sixteen hundred times earlier. This is a first-generation model, right?"

Matthew stared down at the ground, then nodded. "Yeah...it was. It was." He sighed heavily.

"That was the commemorative model made to celebrate the SDF-1's launch. I remember begging my mother and bawling my eyes out because she wouldn't buy that same toy for me. I especially remember it because two days later I saw on the news the launch--and the Zentraedi arriving." He paused then for a very long time, as he watched the agile hands of the younger man reconfigure it back into the shape of a foot-high red-and-white robot. "So much water under the bridge since then...and now I see you of all people messing with it. That's what started me thinking..."

"Lieutenant?" Kevin asked quietly. Matthew startled; Kevin very rarely used his title. The scout's blue eyes were gray with worry as he looked over. Matthew smiled, and gently punched him on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, Kevin, just the recollections of a middle-aged going on old fart going here." He rose to his feet. "We've got to get our equipment together. D'you know of anyone free we can bring for some extra firepower?"

Kevin grinned hugely, as he rose, setting the model back to its old home. "Well, let's see, according to the list, there's... What about our favorite mascot?"

"Mandy again?"

"Hey, the girl can shoot, and she's more or less free duty-wise that slot. Thank heaven we've got some more people to share the work. I can think of less suitable people--if you know what I mean." The grin dribbled away and his voice dropped. "Speaking of which, I think the interest has dropped off."

"Good."

"Well, let's go outside and get some food and pop the question."

"Yes! I get to go with you two?"

Matthew smiled. "Oh course."

Mandy certainly didn't seem annoyed by the prospect. Kevin smiled and dug into his serving of fish and ramen noodles as he watched the other two talk in the day's unofficial mess area. Due to the glorious weather outside, they were seated near one entrance on the benches there, with the doors flung wide to the outside and letting in the fresh air. One of the local cats stalked nearby and past them. While not tolerating human contact, the animals had pulled something of a truce with the Elms, what with all the food and whatnot.

Somebody'd also brought their new/thirty-five year-old stereo player into the entranceway, and something from a classic CD, The Downward Spiral, was vibrating the glass. It had to be Shiroikiku's choice--only she played music like that at that sort of volume. He could catch her psychedelic hair out of the corner of one eye and her loud hoot as she shared a joke with Gerald. Yep, something about "--baka didn't even get through her thick skull the pig was actually a guy. Imagine what her reaction's gonna be like later..." Gerald was laughing uproariously. She'd apparently managed to convert him to her personal anime cult of three.

Several of the other Elms that were not on duty were also there, enjoying the breeze and eating lunch. One of them was Gwen. She studiously ignored him and the Lieutenant.

Hmmm, he thought. *Very interesting. She's kept clear of me recently. I think maybe that veiled remark*

Matt dropped her a couple weeks ago told her to ease off. He said she turned dead white and right after that kept away.

He sighed. He could feel another emotion contrasting a little with the generalized sensation of relief. He prodded at it.

Regret? Uh-oh...

The terrible feeling was that what she'd almost accomplished with him had done things to him that still...burned.

No. I can't be like that. No... Biting his lip, he turned his attention back on the others.

"...Well, you know the situation with us and why we need it, so we need to get a lot of meat fairly soon so we can start operations by the appointed time. We've already taken a lot of time to get back on our feet, Mandy. Maybe too much, I'll grant Dennis that. Your arrival was only the beginning of the current situation. Once we start making hits again...we will no longer have the luxuries we've had here before. So it's now or never."

Mandy tucked up her knees and looked thoughtful. "How long will this take?"

"No more than three days. Everything on fusion, and we'll be using conventional weapons to hunt with. Of course, we're going to be taking along the H-90s and a full payload for the Cyclones--that recent Invid flyover may mean we might get surprises both here and where we'll be. If not Invid, maybe Inorganics."

"Yike."

"Yep. Believe it or not, you're one of the more competent markspersons, so we're going to make you useful. I don't know when you're going to be fully functional on the Forager yet, so this is your chance to shine."

Mandy nodded and yanked on a braid. "Gotcha, Matthew. We're going tomorrow?

Ulm nodded.

"Zinnert's in command then. The rest will be able to hold down the fort for a lousy couple days."

Amanda finished off the last scraps of her food, then said slowly, "Lieutenant--what if we do get 'surprises'?"

Kevin shrugged and answered for him. "Not very likely. How much attention do you think a couple or

three humans running on fusion is going to draw?"

She looked thoughtful. "Putting it logically, as Miranda likes to say when she grills me on my readings on philosophy, not a whole lot. But you've got to understand," she said, looking from one to the other earnestly, "I know firsthand that logic said the Invid wouldn't take interest in a lousy little neutral town either." She looked down. "Well, you both know logic lied, or I wouldn't be here."

"I know, hon. But it's not that likely. Start packing your goodies--we're probably going to leave at 0600 tomorow."

And I sure hope logic stays truthful this time, Kevin thought. *Because everything else logical is going down in flames.*

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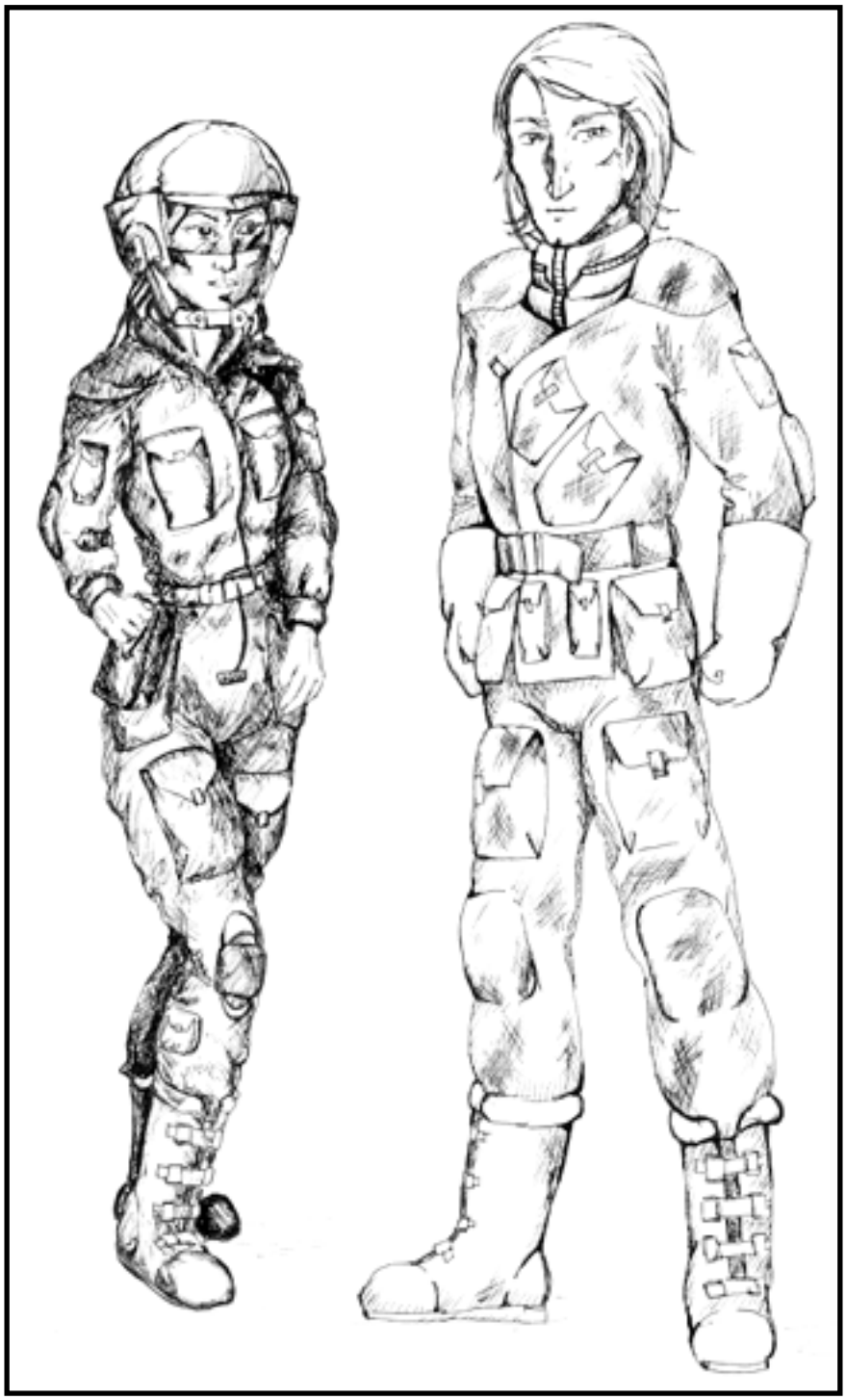

DANDELIONS

CHAPTER TWO

Mid-March, 2045

Two weeks ago, they had been a thriving band of resistance fighters. Now they were merely refugees.

There were only ten of them left now: after the destruction of the Quincy base, two had become deathly ill from pneumonia after an unexpected plunge into a creek and had to be left in a village to recuperate, others had to stop at towns on the way because of illness, and still others had deserted in the middle of the night, going back to wherever their homes were. Neither Ulm nor Dennis Zinnert made an effort to stop them, but they did leave them only the early-line Cyclones to take. The rest were closely guarded by either Ulm, Zinnert, Wilson, or O'Shea. The other mecha had been gleaned from the REF Icarus Mission that Second Lieutenant Dennis Zinnert, a Jupiter survivor, had met with, and were extremely difficult to find.

Travel had proceeded at a crawl. They had decided to go eastward for no good reason other than it was the direction they had started travel in; one of those days, they harbored a hope that they could find another spot in which to restart the Elms. The hope was growing thinner by the day; the attack had cracked morale and was part of the reason why they were now only ten.

The tenth they had picked up on the way. She was a slim girl with ivory skin, blazing red hair and amber eyes. She also had a dazzling ability with weaponry, which she said she'd gotten from a survivor of the Jupiter Group. It had saved their lives when they had been ambushed by a trio of Attack Scouts. Suddenly, she'd been there, accounting for two with Annie Oakley-like precision and leaving the third for Fred to pick off. After the obligatory blood screening, they had let her in. It was not as though there was much left for her to betray if she'd been a spy. Besides, Gwendolyn Rutherford was one more gun in a contingent that desperately needed them.

Many of the rest were too ill to fight well. Amanda was among them.

Even more than thirty years after the fact, dust thrown up in the Rain of Death still floated in the Earth's atmosphere, rebolstered by both Invid invasions and to a lesser degree by the Robotech Masters. All this contributed to a climate still frigid within days of the technical beginning of spring, due to a cold snap. Snow had just fallen a couple of days before and the ice had resolidified after an early thaw.

Out on a river, a figure knelt, fixing a line through a hole just chipped through the three-inch-thick ice. Finally, it was completed to satisfaction, and he rocked back on a stool. His breath came out in a pale cloud as he surveyed his surroundings.

"Ecch," Kevin O'Shea muttered. "Cold as me mother's heart, it is." He could barely see out of his hood, thanks to the fur lining it. What little of his face emerged was pinched with cold. He rubbed his nose for a

second, making certain it was all there.

He felt a vibration on the ice. "Watch it. You'll scare the fish, you--oh, Matthew!" The formerly guarded pale blue eyes lit up as he turned his head and saw the stocky figure of Lieutenant Ulm, similarly bundled against the cold.

"Hey there. How're you doing?"

"Pretty good, all things considering. Stupid hole took me almost half an hour to chip out. Hope you were right about this being a good perch stream."

"Positive." The lieutenant's bearded face parted in a chuckle. "Didn't you learn anything from the fishing trip back in '39?" Ulm chided. O'Shea snorted.

"Me? I slept. Most boring two weeks of my life. And that's saying something, mon freur." Ulm snorted and pushed at the younger man. Kevin shoved back and then leaned against his leg, letting out a deep sigh.

He opened his eyes again. squinting against the glare of the ice. "How's she doing?"

Ulm's voice dropped. "Fairly well, considering. Miranda shoves more antibiotics down her throat every two hours. Poor girl's so weak she can't walk more than ten yards. I doubt it'll become pneumonia, though."

"I hope not," Kevin said bitterly. "I'm damn near the only sound one left. We wouldn't put up a fight for a retarded Scout." Behind him, Kevin could hear Ulm snuffle. The Elm leader had had a cold for the past week. Kevin had been kept up nights hearing his incessant sneezing.

Matthew's voice was thoughtful. "You like Mandy, don't you?"

Kevin grunted something affirmative.

"Don't like her too much," Ulm warned.

Kevin barked laughter, which bounced off the ice in bitter echoes. His eyes were fixed on the line and the hole in the ice. "Oh, come on! Are you that jealous? It's not like I... Look, if we don't find a decent place to stay in a couple of days, it's going to be a completely moot point." He chafed his half-frozen face. "Like it or not, that attack crippled us."

Matthew crouched down by him. "I know. Saw exactly the same thing in a larger scale with the Southern Cross Army. Idiot Leonard didn't leave enough to defend Earth with after all was said and done."

"Any hope for us? Can we find a town that'll suffer us or some old ruin to shelter us, Matt? I'm really wondering."

Ulm inhaled, then started to sneeze again, while his companion rolled his eyes up to the brutal cerulean heavens. When Ulm had gotten it under control, he continued, "Sure, I hope. It's kept me alive through four invasions and the holocaust. When you despair, you die. Enough said."

"You're so optimistic sometimes it's disgusting."

Ulm grinned.

Kevin's eyes went back to the hole, then popped open as he saw a sharp, telltale jerk. In the next moment his nimble hands were on the line and tugging away, while Matthew occupied himself with reeling it in. In a minute, they produced a fat, sluggish fish that flopped freezing water onto Kevin's pale, exultant face.

"Peerrrrrcchh!" he yodeled.

"Told you so," Ulm drawled.

"Have some more, sweetie." Miranda said coaxingly.

"I hate that stuff," Amanda managed to wheeze, then barked a deep, liquid cough, trying to clear her lungs. "Tastes like hell." She slumped further into the bag, shivering despite the presence of the heater a scant two feet away. She had an impression one of the tortures of hell was either catching bronchitis in the first place or the medication used to fight it. Her throat felt like a cheese grater had been taken to it.

Miranda's incessant solicitude came close too.

"Well, you've got to take it so you don't get any secondary infections. Pneumonia is nothing to play with, Amanda."

Amanda shuddered but grudgingly took the syrup she proffered, making a horrific face as she swallowed. She looked up at Miranda, her viridian eyes bright with misery and her freckles standing out sharply against the chalkiness of her skin even in the dimness of the tent. Unthinkingly, she reached up and fingered the stitched wound on her left cheek. Unlike the rest of her, it and the smaller cuts were doing nicely and healing with a minimum of fuss, although Matthew's diagnosis had been that she would carry a scar for the rest of her life.

"Now what?"

"Here's some pills for the congestion." Mandy groaned.

"D'you think we'll try and make some more miles tomorrow?" she asked, shuddering. The last time had been two days ago, when the illness was setting in, and was not among her fondest memories. Miranda's full lips narrowed in thought, then she shrugged.

"Probably. I don't know. We can't stay in one spot too long, or so Matt tells us. Might attract unwelcome attention among the locals, or to the locals, if you know what I mean. Still a lot of Invid symps out there."

"Why are we still going east?" Mandy tugged up the bag, ignoring the proffered pills. "If we keep this up, we'll end up in Reflex Point."

"Where Reflex Point was. There's not much left there now. Few hives but that's it, Mandy. Whoever's or whatever's running this occupation is up in those orbiting hives. Besides, If there's anything that was following us, it might get thrown off if we go in the direction least expected. Trust what Matt and Dennis is doing." When there was a lapse in Amanda's concentration, the other woman shoved a pill between her lips. Outraged, Amanda swallowed it. Grudgingly, she took the second pill the older resistance fighter offered and a drink of water to wash it down.

"Besides, Dennis tells me that out that way is a Protected Zone from the SCA days. Entire area was hit during Dolza's Rain of Death."

"We're going there?" As a child of the post-Rain period, Mandy had had it drummed into her from infancy never to go in certain areas because of the lingering radiation of the countless blasts of the wars and of the Rain. She was appalled. "What's wonderful about dying from cancer?"

Miranda snorted. "Dennis' guess is that the background radioactivity has died down by now. It's been thirty years, mind you, and the radiation had a short half-life. It should be safe." She grunted as a followup note. "Besides, I never trusted anything the SCA said after finding out the entire bit about the Macross mounds being radioactive was a bureaucratic mixup. Maybe all this time..." She trailed off.

Mandy went into some more experimental, futile hacking. After coughing, she noted, "D'you mean there might be a place to start again?" She blinked woozily.

"Out there? Maybe. I hope so. Plus weaponry, goods left behind, who knows? We've got little to lose at this point."

A scratch came from the tent flap. Kevin poked his hooded head in, letting in a gust that forced Mandy to wrap the bag around her more tightly. He eased inside, sealing the entrance behind himself.

"Just caught dinner. Malcolm's cooking it right now."

"What is it?" Miranda asked.

"Fish. Few perches, plus a rabbit our new friend Gwen got."

Fish. Fresh fish, warm, salty, hot fish... Mandy shuddered in horror as her raw throat lived through the idea.

"How're you doing?" Kevin asked, taking his hood down to run fingers through his unwashed hair with a grimace.

"Fish. My throat will curse you." Amanda made a face at him. He looked contrite.

"I've got some anaesthetic for it," Miranda supplied helpfully. Mandy gave her a dirty look.

"Any more medicine and I'm going to bleed it." Mandy shrugged however.

"Malcolm's cooking. I can bully him into making it bland for you." Miranda's brother, younger by three years, was the de facto chef of the Elms and liked it that way. Unlike many millitary cooks, he could actually make good food, a point of great pride to him.

Mandy shuddered. She privately thought that even water would have gone down like sandpaper.

"You have to eat. Keep up your strength." Kevin nodded in confirmation.

"Yeah. Matt swears by fresh fish. Of course, this is a man who thinks Nirvana is a hundred pound test line." He snickered privately.

Mandy subsided into her pillow, blinking in exhaustion. She coughed again, too tired to do else except accept the medicine Miranda gave her with a little nod. Miranda then slithered out the tent entrance, on her personal agenda to browbeat her brother.

"I wish people would quit drafting in all this cold," she chattered, muttering querlously.

"Sorry about that," Kevin sighed, rubbing his hands against the heater. "You've got the best heater, like it or not. Then again, you're one of the sickest." After getting the feeling back to extremeties to his satisfaction, the Elms scout sat by her, feeling her brow. "Ye gods, you're hotter than six-alarm chili."

"Knew it was going to be a doozy when I almost fell off the Cyc a couple days ago. What'd you expect?" Kevin chuckled.

"Yeah. I got to ride it and carry you. I miss my Forager," he added a bit wistfully. Kevin's favorite mecha had been a casualty of the Invid attack back at Quincy. He had been forced in the heat of the moment to take the only Ferret instead. While a more heavily armed mecha, as well as a much faster one, he still had not properly adjusted to it. The Forager was one of the most easily maintainable pieces of Terran Robotechnology around. Kevin, as a self-described mechanical moron, had liked that more than arms or speed.

Amanda sighed, not entirely in weariness. Even after three months, the sour taste of thwartedness was still there. The comforting, casual touch heightened it as well as soothed her aching, fevered head.

Lieutenant, you're such a lucky scum...

"When I get better...D'you think I could get a little more practice in? I still think that Scout was a fluke. Plus, I'm not certain if I'm comfortable with the idea of shifting modes on the Cyc yet. And you said that being able to do it on a cinch and navigate it was important."

"It is. It's vital. This isn't the place or time to do it though. And you're not up to it. But I don't," he paused, "think the Scout was a fluke. I knew what I was doing, to be conceited here."

Mandy sighed again. "I'm gonna get you sick if you stick around."

"Naaaaah. Positive you won't. Legendary O'Shea constitution. Great-Aunt Fiona lived to eighty. Through the Rain too. Nice knack."

"Sherry's hacking her lungs out and she said she hadn't gotten sick since she was eight."

"Them's the breaks. But what the hell? I can stay here until Malcolm's done with dinner. Shouldn't be more than twenty minutes, and I can take yours back to you. Want to hear how my day was? I know how yours went." He rolled his eyes theatrically.

Mandy gave a wheezing giggle, then let him segue into his story, tired and relieved.

"Hold the salt on Mandy's," Miranda suggested.

Malcolm Jones Altman grunted abstractedly, his eyes fixed on the hissing skillet over the small campfire. In it was some rabbit meat and a fillet that had two hours ago comprised part of the perch Kevin had caught.

"Like we have any seasonings left," he grumbled after a minute, flipping the fish. "But yeah, your

highness." He grinned and dodged his elder sister's swat. Proceeding to ignore her, he stared into the fire, blunt fingers scraping the kinky stubble he had finally let grow on his chin. Malcolm often suffered from razor bumps, one of the great curses of the male of African descent, and without a decent razor he did not feel the frigid air tormenting his face was worth the trouble of being clean-shaven. After a second, he considered, carefully opened a sealed plastic container, and sprinkled some of his dwindling supply of dried parsley on the browning fillet. He lifted his face and studied the three people across the fire, some ten feet away.

Matthew and Dennis were in conference with the newest member of the depleted Elms, sitting on two felled logs, their breath steaming into the air. They were deep in conversation.

"...As we see it, there's growing indications that the Invid seem to be doing a concerted crackdown on both the organized resistance and on settled towns and enslaving the civilian population for work. We told you about what happened to the Quincy base, and about the refugee we got some months ago. Her arrival was the first unsettling indication, and the attack was just icing on the cake. With what you say happened to Cairo, and Paducah...." Matthew's voice trailed off into a silence that said more eloquently of the carnage envisioned than any mere noise could.

The slender, strong hands, muffled by heavy wool gloves, wrung a moment. Their owner looked over both at Matt and then at Dennis. The second-in-command of the Elms was silent, his brown eyes moving from Lieutenant to woman and then took them both in.

"I did say that," Gwen Rutherford confirmed in a lazy Kentucky drawl. "The bugs came for 'em one day, and the Enforcers started roundin' up the populace. Naturally, the resistance came to rescue them, and they were pounded into roadkill." Her formerly unaffected voice paused. "At least, this time they didn't kill the kids like your girl said happened to hers."

Dennis paused. "So they captured both towns?"

"Most of them, yeah, honey. The resistance did mess em' up enough that some of both managed to escape. But those Terminators--," by which she meant the Invid Sentinel, a near constant bodyguard to the Enforcer, "did for 'em right enough before the linebackers moved in."

Dennis sighed, rubbed at his eyes, then looked back up. He was one of those sorts whose appearance was average to the point of invisibility, but those blue-shadowed, creased brown eyes had looked on the landscapes of half-a-dozen worlds. Matthew had never even left Earth.

"Wish I could say that was done out of mercy, Gwen, but I have a bad suspicion the children were taken as ransom and a blackmail to keep the parents obedient. That's just what the Invid Regent did on Karbarra to the native people there."

Gwen's pale, oval face with its large, almost exotically slanted amber eyes twitched. "Yeah, I figured that

was it, although I didn't need no big horned bears to remind me." Zinnert ignored the dig. "I dropped some pretty important information to the surviving resistance on how to get 'em out of the farms and hives, though." A slow, slightly self-satisfied smile crossed her face. "Wouldn't ya know, it worked for Cairo at least. Still figuring out how they'd get Paducah without hurting the kids before I left."

Matthew's eyebrows rose. "Oh? How do you know?" His lips narrowed.

"Needn't give me dirty looks, leader-man. I'm not a symp any more than you are. I was prisoner on a protoculture farm and then in a hive near the end of the last war. Got me up close and personal to the ugly suckers." A shadow crossed her face. "Still remember too much."

Matthew reached out and patted her hand. "Experimentation?"

"Yeah. Sort of. They took blood and skin samples, but nothin' else. I know I'm among the lucky." Matthew looked mollified, although a trace of suspicion lingered on Dennis' face.

"Well, at least we know enough to expect some nasty things in the near future." He sighed. "We're not exactly in the shape to do anything at the moment, but we need to keep low."

"Continue east?" Ulm asked.

Zinnert nodded. "And go a bit north. We need to avoid open roads like the plague, and keep everything on fusion. Using snares instead of the Gallants to snag game is preferable. The one thing that seems to stay the same no matter the scenario is that you can stand in the open stock-still, with no Protoculture radiation, and they'll go right over you. Unless..." His mouth thinned, keeping in mind that there were those among the Invid now that no longer relied on protoculture to track and kill...

"Bad," he murmured. Having served in the Sentinels campaign, he had some basis of comparison. "Any way we can get the word out?"

Matthew thought. "There's ways. I've got contacts, so I can help spread the word. But you're right," his voice softened, "there's something very dark at work here."

Gerald stomped back into camp, and Malcolm's attention was diverted, just in time to see Frederick's retreating back head out to take over sentry duty. Masochistically enough, the man's medium-blond head was bare in the freezing temperatures, even though Malcolm could hear him snuffle a bit with what he presumed was the cold being passed around the remaining Elms.

He really didn't know much about Fred or his past. He held a silence and aloofness about matters, which precluded conversation and which Malcolm nervously considered a prime characteristic of mass murderers of the last century. The main thing Malcolm remembered was that every time the Invid were mentioned, Fred's gray eyes would glaze over into a quiet hate that trickled coldness down Malcolm's

spine.

I wonder what makes him like that. Then again, maybe I don't want to know...

Gerald began to stomp over to the fire, all three hundred pounds of him making themselves felt while he slapped feeling back into his hands and cheeks. He jerked to a halt when he saw Kevin slither out of Amanda's tent and make his way over to the fire, as Malcolm was dishing out the now-cooked fish. Quite deliberately, Gerald turned his back toward the other man; Kevin did not notice except for a slight shrug of green-clad shoulders. He knew full well the big man had only cordial dislike for him at the best of times and had so for five years.

"Here it is, unsalted." Malcolm passed the plate into O'Shea's waiting hands. Kevin gave him a thankful smile, prompting a return grin from Malcolm. As opposed to Gerald's sulleness or Fred's quiet fury, Malcolm liked the man, his sexuality nonwithstanding. He appreciated anyone who managed to keep a light mood in the misery of this filthy war.

"Thanks a lot, Malcolm. It's almost a pity to give it to her now--she's gone and fallen asleep, she's so tired. Poor thing." Kevin sighed, letting out a blast of steam.

"Either that, or let it get cold. She needs the nutrition." Malcolm spoke it with a little affection. He'd come to see Amanda as a bit of a pet in the months since she had arrived. She had certainly made a great deal of progress in the arts of war. He suspected Kevin had something to do with the fact that Malcolm could now trust her in training with an H-90 without inadverdently blowing off her foot. And that Scout... Malcolm shrugged. Amazing what a little puppy love can do, he thought, remembering certain events of his youth and smiling while remembering the same attitude Mandy sometimes had toward Kevin.

Damn, this place is a soap opera... He rolled his eyes as the thought and laid on the next fillet as Kevin went back into Amanda's tent with her food.

She lay asleep on the floor, swaddled up to the neck, the heater going full blast and not making much of a dent in the chill of the interior. Kevin stood and looked down at her thoughtfully, the fish steaming in the frigid air. She turned and sighed, a bit wheezily.

Kevin knew he was going to hate himself for waking her up; she needed the sleep just as much as she needed the food, and she'd been miserable the past couple days from her bronchial infection and unable to rest. This was the first sign it was getting a bit better. Since there was talk of another move east tomorrow, she needed her energy.

Kevin studied her features, noting that even the healing slashes across her face and the ravages of privation, grief, and illness hadn't taken away the heart-shaped farmgirl prettiness of the face in its

straight mane of blond hair and the slightly tilted eyes. Sleeping, she looked her age again.

Sighing, he squatted and moved a hand to wake her, but hesitated as her eyelids fluttered and she stirred a little.

"Gracie?" she murmured. "Here..." The weak light illuminated a little moisture coming from under her lashes.

The food forgotten, he swallowed and leaned back, staring into space and choked by a heavy sick emotion he knew the name of but did not want to admit..

> *Bow down before the one you serve*
> *you're going to get what you deserve*
>
> ***Nine Inch Nails**, "Head Like a Hole"*

ORYO'I!

The recipient winced at the telepathic bellow.

It seemed her lord was going into another of his fits. After shaking her head in a futile effort to clear it, she reached out and answered, her mind carefully neutral.

Yes? You called?

What do you think I was doing, you little fool? I want you in the Hive command center immediately.

"I hear and follow, Lord Shkud." she said out loud in High Opteran. She quickly clamped down on any emotions. He was able to feel any of the Hive to a far greater extent than she, and Mother help her if he knew how she felt. Shkud was notoriously bad-tempered, and tended to relish his subordinates' discomfiture.

Shoulders twitching, Oryo'i turned and began to walk inward toward the Orbital Hive's core, her long white hair stirring in the air convection.

This was the first time since she had returned from planetside that he had deigned to contact her. The intervening time had been, had the Invid understood the concept, a hell of ignorance. A cold sensation was crawling up her vitals.

She was unarmored, not expecting any human attacks on the hive, and her paneled flightsuit with its identifying colors of dark gray, carmine, and orange nearly blended into the dimly-lit, dull red organic tunnel of the hive. Above it, her pale hair seemed to glow in comparison, her skin almost as fair as it and tightly covering a face ferally thin and delicate in appearance. After all, Oryo'i was one of the Queen-Mother's prize children, evolved into something entirely unlike lower Invid.

As she made her swift way into the interior, not wishing her lord's irate thoughts to break into her mind again, Oryo'i passed.several of the Malarosm, armored and unarmored, and their attendant Gamir, going about the business of maintaining the hive. All genuflected as she went, which she acknowledged with a nod. Internally, all she felt was a hollow feeling as they did so. It was not her orders they followed, not any more.

She and her bretheren had been the pinnacle of evolution.

Then came Shkud and the others...

Just as the contact with Shkud's mind was beginning to grow even more irate, she entered into the command room. Oryo'i breathed a quiet sigh of relief. She knew she been very lucky when Shkud had decided not to devolve her for the debacle of half a lunar orbit ago, and she did not want to provoke him further. After getting a glimpse of the tall figure and the way it paced around in the room, she was glad she had arrived when she had.

Shkud whirled on her even before she was entirely inside. It was fairly dim inside the center, so at first all Oryo'i could see of the hivelord was a vague impression of a lean, predatory silhouette, the Kulagi-type dermasuit patterned in black, dark red and neon green, his face framed by past shoulder-length hair the color of bloody flame.

"What took you so long?" he snapped.

Oryo'i, choking down a very un-Invid response, knelt and lowered her orange eyes submissively. "Forgive me. I had to walk, and came as quickly as I could."

"Well," he sniffed. He stared down at the top of her bowed head in distaste. "I am still not--pleased--at the stupidity you took upon." His eyes, a perfect match to the green portions of his rainment, narrowed. "And without my approval.

"You are quite lucky, little Sulagi. Some of my brethren apparently think slightly better of your worthless reputation than I do. Personally, I very much wished at the time to order you to the Genesis Pits." The subordinate Invid could not quite hide a shudder, which the commander took in with a thin smile of enjoyment. "However, some decided to think otherwise. And one must follow the dictates of the Hive." It was his way of saying he had given in without actually admitting it, as Oryo'i knew and tried to keep from the forefront of her mind. Struggling, she tried to explain.

"But they should not have been notified! I have no idea how..."

"I know. Most interesting. Which is why I have decided to relocate you on the planet, in one of the local hives under my command. Perhaps you can indulge your curiosity on the subject there."

What he meant was that he was demoting her. Back into the fighting, back most likely into an agonizing, messy death by some human mecha. Unlike most of the Kulagi overlords and many of her fellow Sulagi, Oryo'i was willing to admit humans were very much capable of damage, and that she could be on the receiving end of it.

The evolution of the Invid by the Queen-Mother into the dominant life form of the planet they were occupying had had unexpected effects on their mental processes; triggering reactions, perceptions and feelings previously unknown and often terrifying to those experiencing them. It had shattered the Invid unity, turning what used to be the One into the Many. One of those new feelings was currently making itself known to Oryo'i.

She didn't want to die.

It was all very well for the unevolved to give themselves up for the survival of the hive, but Oryo'i had found since her transmutation into this alien body that there was an Oryo'i whose continued existence she valued. But that was not the Invid way. One did as one was told, no second-guessing or questions asked, for the Hive was all.

All this passed through her mind in a microsecond, as she rose to her feet and looked foward unblinkingly, intentionally not seeing Shkud's gaze on her face.

"You may get your Gamun refueled before you leave and get the hive coordinates logged into your mecha. I wish you restationed by the next time that area enters the sun. Do not fail me or the Invid again, or you will certainly have the Genesis Pit in your future."

"Do I at least get a guard of Torab to the surface?" she dared.

"I think not. Getting to the surface by yourself will be an educational experience for you, Sulagi. Perhaps the next time you will not be so quick to defy my orders."

And if she got killed on the way down, he'd have his hands washed of her. Unblinkingly, she genuflected, pivoted, and made her way past the crowd of monitoring Malar, hardly noticing the second figure behind Shkud as she did so. Perhaps an observer might have noticed just before she entered the shadows of the outside a slight shudder that might have been fear.

Shkud turned back to his companion. "Well, then, now that I have that slight distasteful business taken

care of, what were you telling me about the Flower shipments, sister?"

There was a slight contralto "hmm," of consideration from the slim figure in the brown, burgundy and aqua scheme. Shagged, shoulder-length pale green hair luffed foward as she inclined her head, her eyes the unnerving brightness of brushed aluminum.

"In actuality, brother, there has been a marked increase since we altered our policy these past few lunar cycles as regarding the planet. The humans seem to respond quite--well to a show of force." She paused. "I believe, to digress, that your treatment of your subordinate was a bit--extreme."

"She defied orders!" Shkud snarled. "Would you value one who not only executed an operation on a minor human resistance base without your permission, but ALSO managed to get her entire unit destroyed by some puny mecha piloted by punier monkeys, Lady Asaav? I said once and I said again that that type of behavior can not be tolerated among our ranks. You know full well that many of the Sulagi are not obedient. We cannot encourage subversion."

Asaav gave him a hard stare. "Unlike those you speak of, Oryo'i has always been loyal to the cause, and unlike many of those loyal to the cause, she has a marked gift for taking initiative. Personally, I believe that the action that you find foolish, while not normal, shows an admirable talent for improvisation on her part. Furthermore, her plan seemed to be sound. Events simply did not humor it."

"Destroyed by a tiny resistance base is not humoring by events? How new!" Shkud said sarcastically. Asaav's lips narrowed for a second, before she continued.

"She did destroy the base, brother. The humans would be adrift without one. And do you not remember, it was a 'tiny' resistance force that convinced Our Mother that this would not be the world to gain our enlightenment on? I think that teeth can be found in the strangest places."

"Think what you like then. I wish to hear no more of it." Shkud turned away.

I take it, Shkud, you do not like to hear of things you cannot have control over, or admit there are such things? Asaav thought, behind her mental shields.

Quietly, her mind went out and momentarily touched one of the Malar overseeing Oryo'i's departure for Earth. She ascertained that while the Invid had not yet left, she was in the full swing of preparations. Asaav decided to add her own features to it.

See that she gets two Torab to go with her, she ordered, then broke the connection before Shkud noticed, her silver eyes bright with satisfaction.

There, what will you think of that, Shkud?

Three days later

"Oof," Mandy grunted, as Sherry's Forager came down after a lurch into the air thanks to an inconvenient log. She was beginning to feel quite ill. She had started to regret choosing to ride pillon with the other woman about two minutes after the beginning of the day's trek: Shiroikiku might have more Invid kills than anyone save Gerald, Matthew, and Dennis, but she most certainly did not know the meaning of taking the path of least resistance when riding on a Cyclone.

Mandy's tailbone slammed hard on the seat. She winced in pain.

Well, maybe the good thing is that it'll shake the garbage out of my windpipe, she thought. She coughed deeply, to no success. The worst of the illness seemed to be behind her, thanks to the antibiotics and decongestants. The mucus it had produced remained behind to clog the breathing and to get nauseatingly coughed up, causing a quaint phenomenon that Sherry, a fellow sufferer, ever-so-tactfully called "harvesting lung potatoes." The rest also didn't trust her on her own Cyclone yet, after the near-disaster of five days ago. Her Forager, along with the rest of the unpiloted Cyclones, was being towed in a carrier by the Elms' only Samson, driven by Gerald.

Sherry found another boulder to flip off of, and Amanda swore. Any more of this and she would get her face torn open again. Time to ask Matthew if she could have her mecha back...

All of a sudden, Dennis, at the point position, slowed and halted. The rest followed suit, leaving Amanda to rub her smarting rear and to clear the lingering misery from her head.

She belatedly noticed there was a barrier in front of them, a dirt tumulus stretching out to either side and disappearing in the bare underbrush, some ten feet tall and topped by rusted electrical wire that had obviously been dead for years.

Dennis dismounted and scrambled up the earthen wall's sloping side. At the top, he seemed to search, eventually uncovering a fallen sign off to the side. It was almost illegible, but at long last he stood up and gave a nod.

"This is it."

They'd reached the Protected Zone barrier.

"You'd think it would be...better sealed," Amanda murmured.

Shiroikiku grunted. "Perimeter used to be patrolled by the SCA before the Invid. And the RDF before

that. Didn't want anybody fucking around inside and getting radiation poisoning." She barked a cough.

"What about since?"

"Can't hurt to try and see. Looters can't have gotten everything. And there may still be buildings left standing."

Dennis came back down. "Checked the radiation levels. There's nothing unusual so far, but if it gets about a healthy level of millirem we're not going any further. Let's go."

He cut the wire, leaving an opening wide enough for the rest to scramble up the side of the wall, pushing their Cyclones, and then to slide over into the mess caused by the remelt of the snow. The cold spell had snapped, and this time it seemed spring might have a tenative toe in the door. There was some swearwords as the traction went thanks to the slippery slope and people ended up slithering on their rears, almost having their mecha fall on them on the way down. Dennis widened the opening for Gerald and his towed equipment, and the rest watched carefully as the massive, blocky Samson slowly grumbled down, the trailer's wheels partially braked so it and its load of eight Cylones and miscellaneous millitary weaponry and ammo would not slide on top of either man or mecha. Malcolm followed, his combat Cyclone towing a slightly lighter load of food and supplies. Then...

"That's it," Dennis noted.

There was still a rough track on this side, although it had been grown over in the intervening three decades since the Rain of Death. Fortunately, the late winter still left the area reasonably free of undergrowth To Amanda's eyes, the locale this side looked no different than what was on the other, thirty years having covered the scars of the hasty barricading efforts. In the distance, the track disappeared into the naked trees.

They remounted, muddy and grumbling, and continued on, going slowly on fusion. A few muttered complaints by Amanda had Shiroikiku grouch a response, but at least from that point on, the little Asian-descent controlled her driving habits.

They drove on for some two or three miles, in a deceptively bright if chill day, with no noticable changes. Even so, the knowledge of what they were entering gave Amanda sweaty palms. Ingrained habits were hard to break.

Then, the patchy woods began to give way to buildings.

"My God..." she murmured.

"It doesn't look like it's been touched at all," Sherry said distantly.

True, thirty years of neglect had caused pavement to crack and shatter, trees to sprout in the strangest places, and structures to sag, buckle and warp, but there was no sign of bombing or air strikes. There was also no sign of human presence. There was the infrequent chirp of sparrows, numerous squirrels and rabbits looking at them in animal interest, but other than that, the Cyclone motors hummed on in a deathly silence.

Amanda and Sherry stared around them, haunted looks on their faces. They were not the only ones. In back, Gerald crossed himself, Fred looked on in stony silence, Gwen's lips narrowed, and Kevin swallowed convulsively. The Altman siblings murmured quietly amongst themselves as Miranda rode next to Malcolm. Matthew's face was set grimly at the sight. Of them all, only Dennis seemed somewhat unaffected.

"Perhaps we ought to case the area," he began.

"Uh, if it's all right with you," Gwen said for once diffidently, "I'd rather stick together. No tellin'--you know." There was a murmured chorus of assent from the others.

Dennis shrugged. "East?" Matthew nodded. They continued onward.

The buildings began to grow taller, congregating around a street which still had a mangled sign marked "NE-- -T." on a corner. They passed and it began to taper off again, although the buildings still had the look of an urban area. They had to dodge potholes, shattered pavement, and once or twice, thriving, thirty year-old maples cracking the roadway. It continued on this way for a few miles. Suddenly, Dennis held up a hand.

"I'm detecting radiation. It's weak, though; just a notice." They went on.

Almost as one, a chorus of gasps, curses and exclamations rose as the sight suddenly hit them. Before them, they saw the reason why the city had been abandoned.

Half of it no longer existed.

The crater was a mile and a half of fused rock and glass that stretched into a round bowl before them. Rains had turned it into a lake that glittered with deceptive purity in the sunlight and cloudless sky, and undergrowth had managed to spring up around the margins. Only the lake's shape and the partially melted buildings around its perimeter indicated its true nature. From the age of the thing, it looked to be a direct result of one of the blasts of Dolza's attempt to wipe out life on the Earth.

While the rest of them looked numbly on, Dennis drove the remaining two hundred and fifty yards to the margin of the crater/lake, then crouched and measured both the ambient radiation and tested the water in the toximeter he had with him. It was a good five minutes before he made his way back.

"There's radiation, but Matthew and I were right; it's an isotope with a short half-life, and the radioactivity isn't likely to give us problems. Actually, the water has even less radiation than suspected; it's drinkable, but I'd strongly say we run it through a purifier first. And it wouldn't be a smart idea to stay here for extended periods." Matthew nodded in assent, then looked thoughtful, scraping a hand through a week's worth of stubble.

"Obviously, going on this way is out of the question. Do we go around, south, back, or north?"

Dennis shrugged. "No opinion. Wish we had an Alpha, though; we might have been able to get a look then. We don't and we can't, however."

Ulm made a face, his features wrinkling across fault lines of past stress. His hazel eyes were cautious. "At least, I think there's no nearby hives. We haven't seen any Invid activity for eight days now, so I doubt there's any out here. And there's no sign of the Flower of Life, either."

"Plus the bloody things stand out like zits," Gerald mumbled in response. Matthew startled, then grinned at the big man.

"Yeahhh... Let's put it to a vote."

The results were four north, one back, two around and three south. Ulm hemmed.

"About equal for north and south. Let's divide by who voted. I'll take north, Dennis south. Miranda, Gwen, Fred, you go with him. Kev, Mandy, Gerald, go with me. Malcolm, Sherry, you're going to have to find a place to stay with the garbage. When do we meet?"

"Let's say 1600 hours. It's 1100 now, and it ought to give us enough time to look around and then find a place to stay for the night. Check in every half-hour on the net, and holler if help is needed." Zinnert looked questioningly at Matthew, who nodded agreement.

After a quick meal, the Elms divided, leaving Gerald and Malcolm to their devices in a building away from the crater. Amanda managed to beg back her Forager, and gratefully remounted, falling in with the rest.

It was still a bit jouncy due to the ravages of time on pavement, but far better than the open fields and woodland they'd traversed in the last three weeks. They made fairly good time down the streets, even with a stop every once in a while to scan the area for goods or potential habitation. It was disappointingly sparse. The surviving residents had obviously been rapidly evacuated by what remained of the UEG after the Rain, but they had made a thorough job of taking their belongings with them.

Kevin dropped back down by Amanda after an hour or so, when the buildings were beginning to get sparse. "How're you doing?" he said over the engine grumble.

"Pretty good, all things considering. Like I was still wondering about the use of living twenty-four hours ago." Kevin grinned.

"Yeah. I know the feeling. I remember my first hangover." Mandy chuckled.

"Thought you'd be up there with the Lieutenant." Kevin's smile dimmed a little, and he gestured with his chin at Gerald's broad back. "Oh."

He pulled his Ferret over another foot, dropping his voice as much as possible. "With him giving dirty looks at me? Fat chance." Mandy was a bit chastened to realize that although she knew full well of Gerald's attitude toward Kevin and his relationship with Matthew, she'd never thought Kevin might have had a similar antipathy toward Gerald.

Kevin's voice was thoughtful. "I just wish that he'd be a little more...accepting. I'm not asking any special treatment, you know." Amanda nodded. "Just because Matthew's my...friend...doesn't mean I'm getting favors."

"Always did think he was kind of grouchy."

"Can't help what he is, which is terminally grouchy." He paused, as the buildings began to drop away. They saw the other two turn left, and they followed suit. "I care about Matthew very much, and he does for me, which is kind of amazing. Actually, I think the entire Elms is his family." His voice grew soft. "It really hit him hard when Dalby, Blume and the others were killed and the rest left because they gave up. They--and we--are the only kids he has."

Mandy racked her brains, getting only mangled images of the hellish first days after they were forced to flee. "He didn't show it. He kept on leading, just like always."

"He puts on a good facade. I know."

"Does he have any brothers or sisters that he told you?"

Kevin thought about it. "One brother, who was a Jesuit priest, and a married sister. Both died when the Invid invaded the first time." He sighed. "Probably why he took such a liking to you. He knew what it was like." Mandy nodded, remembering her family.

And I alone am escaped to tell thee...

"Then there's Dennis," He snorted.

"Yup. Never met a man more dull in my life." Mandy muttered. He chuckled.

"Yup, his objection to me is the age differential. My objection to him is that apparently the last time he showed any emotion was when Malcolm mistook him for the furniture. Gad! But what really annoys me is--oops, watch it," as they nearly missed the others turning on what used to be an old highway, dividing the wrecks of what used to be department stores and restauraunts, "is his indifference to the planet."

Her brows furrowed, she turned on him. "What?"

Kevin made a sour face. "He was born on Earth, grew up on Mars, went from there to the REF, went over half the Fourth Quadrant playing Lone Ranger to the Sentinels races and their pets, so guess what happens? No connection to any world. The joker's more Tirolian than Terran. Earth," he said in disgust, "is just another job for him. And this is the world he came from." He spat over to the side of the road.

"But certainly his combat experience means something, Kevin."

"What experience? Matthew fought his ass off during the last war, and was in the SCA before that. He has just as much if not more combat experience than Zinnert, and he outranks him too. Zinnert also gives him a more cosmopolitan-than-thou attitude every so often. Makes me want to kick his teeth in. 'Course, I'm being loyal."

"Where were you stationed, then?"

"Cushy rear-line desk job, is how I'd put it."

She paused a few minutes, as the buildings began to drop away again to young woods and open countryside and they turned, and turned again.

"Uh, what does Matt's fighting on Earth have to do with anything?"

Kevin made a face and shrugged under his CVR armor. "To paraphrase Earth history, why did the colonists fight on in the American Revolution and win? Why did the Vietnamese manage to eject a force that was vastly more powerful than it? Why did the Afghanis manage to kick out the old Soviets?" He paused. "Two facts: All of 'em knew the territory and the enemy didn't, and all of 'em loved that land so much they were willing to die for it. Dennis is gonna get his ass killed if he doesn't understand the meaning of those two little facts in his heart." His voice grew from peeved to angry. "Hell, even I..." He broke off, looking alarmed.

"Huh? What were you saying?"

Instead of answering, he let out a long, drawn-out whistle.

She followed his gaze, and her eyes widened at the brick monolith they were pulling towards. She stared and kept on staring as the four pulled to a halt just outside it.

"What is it?" she whispered, as the engines went off.

"If Matt told me right," Kevin said, "it's an old shopping mall."

Mandy shoved back her visor, and stared further. "You mean...one of those big closed buildings with all those little shops they had way back when?"

Kevin nodded. Mandy puffed breath in awe.

Matthew motioned them over, and they dismounted and complied.

"Okay, folks. We may have something here. We'll have to case the area to make certain it hasn't been broken into, and then we'll see if we can get inside and see if there's anything we can salvage." Gerald raised a gauntleted hand.

"Probability of goods?" he asked.

Ulm thinned his lips. "When Dolza bombarded the planet, it was nighttime here, thus the 'Night of Fire' that we remember here. I ought to know; I was ten at the time. This means that every major business here had to be closed then, including this. From the looks of things, people were so hot to get out after the local blast they didn't stop to loot anything inconvenient. Furthermore, there still doesn't seem to be any marks of civilization or human presence since then, this place included. All of this, and the only conclusion I can draw is we may be looking at the single biggest resevoir of goods in the entire Midwest of this continent."

Gerald mumbled a slightly disbelieving profanity. Matthew shrugged.

"Can't hurt to look." He wandered over to the the entranceway in front of them, an absurdly small set of four glass swinging doors compared to the huge sunken brick awning they were under. He prodded at them experimentally.

Mandy wet her lips. "Matthew--Lieutenant--is this what you and Dennis were looking for?"

He looked up, a bit surprised. "Not exactly, hon, but I knew of a few towns in the protected area--or that used to be there before. This was the largest. And it wasn't just this building. We knew of other possible sources in the area. But this baby--" he patted the door he was examining--"was the consumer paradise of the twentieth century. Hey Kevin, got any picks on you? The damn thing's locked." He looked up at the

other two. "You guys, take off and have a look around the other entranceways. See you in half an hour."

"Oh, my god," Miranda Altman whispered.

As the others began to file in and search the shell of what had once been a room, she fell to her knees, surrounded by books. Rotting, molding, roach-eaten books. She was in a morgue containing the corpses of centuries of human learning.

"Oh, man, the waste..."

It hadn't taken them long to find, a half-mile or so from the crater, the shells of university buildings and within them what they had once contained. Fortunately, they had not yet found any human remains yet, but the paper and silicon remains were almost as bad in Miranda's eyes. Once upon a time, in a more hopeful year, she had pursued a doctorate. And then the Masters came, with the Invid hot on their heels....

"What's the matter?" Gwen asked.

"Look at this. All ruined," Miranda told the redhead flatly.

"So were human lives. That's more important." Gwen said finally.

Miranda bit her lips, her brown face showing the strain. "Okay, but you can replace human lives, Gwen. But this--" She waved a helpless hand around the dark, mildew-reeking room. "You...you can't replace knowledge."

She still did not look like she totally understood. Yet another post-Rain kid, happy in her ignorance, Miranda thought bitterly. God damn the stupid fucking Robotech wars, God damn them. They've put us all the way back into the seventeenth century. And where was the God-damned REF when we needed them most? At least Miranda herself had managed to keep her curiousity alive, despite her upbringing.

Miranda picked up a fallen title, the type barely legible from water stains, and managed to make out a fragmented title: -he Orig-n of Spe--es. She was thankful. If it had been Shakespeare she probably would have started crying.

Malcolm had never had the kind of intellectual drive his elder sister had, although he was no slouch mentally. Miranda knew full well that he and Shiroikiku had probably managed to find...other diversions by now. They had been an item for the past several months. Somehow, it only made her angrier. When Dennis came up behind her, it was all she could do not to turn and snarl at the REF veteran.

"Yeah, what do you want?" Her voice still came out harshly, and his eyes widened. He had remarkable compusure, though.

"We're going to go further south. If we're going to use any of these places for habitation, we need to find a spot that's more stable and drier." Miranda premptority nodded and dropped the ruined text where she found it, squeaking to her feet in her armor.

She sucked in the fresh wind when they emerged. The mildew inside had begun to make her eyes run. Grabbing hold of her Cyclone's handlebars, she proposed, "Let's walk."

Dennis shrugged, and Miranda was seconded by Gwen, and surprisingly enough, even Fred nodded as well. They began to wheel their mecha down the cracked pavement, past a couple of building shells.

"Not a bad day," Miranda offered, despite her upset. Fred grunted something affirmative.

"Nope. It is getting a little warmer. I'd say forty-five Farenheit." He brushed his hair out of his eyes. "Kind of amazing, considering a few days ago what it was like."

"Hell, the Midwest weather was always a bit psychotic, and the wars didn't help none." Miranda responded, astonished she'd actually gotten an answer from the normally taciturn man. She ventured a question, one of very few she'd tried around his uncertain temper. "Fred, where did you come from? I know you told me, but..."

"New York. The city. Or at least what's left of it. Probably you wouldn't have remembered. I'm not very talky." His long face glimmered with something that might have been humor. "I know some insulting names your roomie gave me. Just because I'm shut makes her think I'm deaf."

"Which--Oh, Sherry. Huh," she grunted. "I'm not surprised."

A thin smile. "I don't like talking about it much. Some nasty things happened there. In fact, the reason I'm with the Elms has a lot to do with it."

"The Invid?"

The look that passed his features momentarily was frightening. "Oh, yes...

"First time around, when the bastards occupied, they were either stomping down the streets or trying to wipe us out. I guess you know about what some asshole in the enemy command tried to do to Manhattan." His hands wrung around the handlebars. "Believe me, hearing about it is a hell of a far cry from being in it...."

"Sorry, Fred." She was beginning to wish she hadn't opened up the conversation.

He glanced over at her, and calmed a bit. "I could have taken that. It was when they decided to come back the second time..." His voice trailed off.

They investigated a few more buildings as the afternoon progressed, with similarly depressing results. Miranda managed to salvage a couple of texts, which she stored in her Cyclone's carriers. About two o'clock, she found herself strolling next to Gwen, who was enjoying the unusually clement weather.

"Pretty nice day," Gwen thought out loud, combing back her radiant red hair. "Maybe it'll stay this way now. Definitely could've been worse." She gave a sidelong smile at Miranda, who was examining with disgust her own unravelling cornrows. Time to have Malcolm rebraid it... Noticing the younger woman's gaze on her, she looked up and gave a sheepish grin.

"How's life with this illustrious band of merry human persons thus far?" she drawled. The Kentuckian chuckled.

"Oh, pretty grand, 'cept for the nasty lil' bit about getting stuck in the thumb, and here I saved you puppies." Miranda hooted. "Survived all this nastiness, become the best little target fiend I can, and that's my reward?"

"Well, there is this bit about possible Simulagents that might infiltrate us. We had to check. The bit about Bernard's group never guessing the girl they picked up was Invid warned Matt. One of the first rules the Elm core group put in was that. Haven't had any yet."

Gwen furrowed her brows. "What if..."

Miranda hemmed. "I have no idea. Our gut instinct might be to wipe 'em, but that's not completely fair. We'd either eject them or put 'em under quarantine for a while, depending on how we voted and the evidence. I think killing them would be out of the question." She shrugged. "After all, from what I hear, quite a few humanoid Invid have given us most of the information on the Earth occupation that we have. And I know at least one group was actually headed by one. Sera, I think her name was."

"Huh, I think that's the one that defected near the end of the last war." Miranda nodded, suddenly remembering.

"Any rate, that was one of the other core rules we put in. I think my brother, Matt, Kevin and Gerald overruled Dennis to put that in."

"Ohh, Kevin now, that's a sweet babe!" Gwen growled huskily. Miranda gave her a sharp look.

"Hands off, girl. He's taken, and he's not your preference anyway."

Gwen gave her a coy look. "Might not hurt to try."

"You do and he might nail you to the wall."

Gwne waggled her eyebrows. "With the way he looks, he can nail me any dang time he wants."

The double entendre was not lost on her companion, who groaned. She was worse than Sherry, and she was screwing Miranda's sibling. ("Don't you two ever do something else?" she'd shouted in exasperation when finding them slouching around the passages of the old base, arms slung around each other and with punch-drunk expressions on their faces that hinted what they'd just been up to outside.

(With one hugely grinning voice, they'd said, "Nope." Miranda had courted the idea of slugging her baby brother then and there, but Sherry probably would have gotten her then.)

"Hmmph, well, he kind of likes that little blond twit anyway." Gwen muttered.

"Gwen darlin', Mandy is not a twit, I know from personal experience. Anyone who runs a marathon to escape an Enforcer doens't deserve the title."

Dennis glanced back at them with exasperation. "Will you two stop that and come up here? I think we've got a couple promising buildings."

"Sure," Miranda said. Privately she thought, What, one that isn't half-fallen in? Be a miracle. The entire world does a pretty good job of it, some days.

"Found nothing," Gerald said, his bulk looking absurd above the Forager he'd borrowed. He dismounted and wandered over to where Mandy was sitting, watching Kevin and Matthew fiddle with a second door. One had already been picked and was propped open to reveal a dusty inner entrance containing several plastic seats, in which the two men were working.

"Yeah Gerald, Mandy said as much." He murmured a suggestion to his companion, who nodded. "We're almost done. Took longer than we thought, because this place may still have live alarm systems."

Gerald's brows hiked. "After almost thirty-three years?"

"Sure. Watch it," he warned Kevin. "A lot of major businesses had converted to fusion or perpetual-motion generators by then. I've got the feeling this is the latter, since it was the cheaper and cleaner source."

Kevin was sucking air through his teeth. "Just about--almost--got it." There was a snick, and the door squealed open as he pushed on it.

"You first," he told Ulm. The lieutenant rolled his eyes. The rest followed him tenatively into the darkness beyond. Kevin propped open the second door, then followed them in, switching on a halogen flashlight.

Amanda gawked.

"Wow..." Kevin whistled. "They sure didn't make 'em small."

The wing they were in could have easily had an Alpha or one of the smaller Destroids stand up inside. Besides a very fine layer of dust, the tile and benches looked as unaffected by time and just as they were the day the mall closed for the last time. Matthew had more than half expected the air to be stale, but it was moving and fresh. It was still very dark, outside the gently wavereing circle of the lantern, and deathly quiet.

"The venilation's still working," he murmured. "Which means, maybe, that the lights..." he trailed off.

They moved on inside. Mandy was slightly boggled. The hallway alone was higher and wider than anything she'd experienced in her life, and the entrances that the lantern light hinted at meant even more space inside.

Futher on, five minutes later, they came to a center court. Here, the time passed was a little more apparent. It was dimly lit by a glass skylight, mostly obscured by grime. The fountains were clogged, leaving only a foul-looking residue at the bottom, verdigrised with ancient coins. Skeletons of dead trees filled earthen depressions in the center of the walkway.

"Must've been pretty when it was open." Mandy said.

"Oh, it was." Ulm assured. "They all were."

Gerald started. "Hey, look over there."

Ulm walked in the direction of his pointing finger. "Aha. Steps. Let's go down."

Shrugging, the other man complied. "Aren't you going to explore the top floor first?"

"Ensign, it's not the top floor I'm interested in as much as the bottom ones. I'm looking for a spot where Protoculture radiations might be shielded, preferably as much by the ground as possible. That's why the old base was designed the way it was."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying, Lieutenant?" Kevin and Amanda, following them downward, looked at each other and shrugged.

"Yep."

"This place is wide out in the open, for Chrissakes!"

Ulm reached the floor. "Well, we'll have to see what Dennis' group brings back. Look at it this way, Gerald. We're not likely to find a better spot. Look at how far and how long we had to travel to find this."

Gerald sighed unhappily. Kevin cleared his throat. "Your pardon, but from experience the average Invid doesn't have the intelligence to look for obvious bases. If it doesn't move too conspicously like a millitary outfit, and it doesn't radiate Protoculture, it doesn't matter. If we find an adequate way to shield the stores, we ought to be halfway safe."

Gerald's lantern-lit visage scowled at him. "What do you know about it, O'Shea?"

Kevin shrugged. "At least as much as you do. We've fought the same battles for five years now."

"We're running out of Protoculture, energy clips and ammo," Gerald pointed out. "Where're we supposed to get more?"

"I'm going to tackle that problem next, Ensign. We've got to crawl before we can walk. I think there's a depository over in Terre Haute." Ulm looked down at his watch and swore. "It's almost 1500. Come on, we've got maybe a half-hour before roundezvous to check this place out."

An hour later found them back at their starting point, waiting with Sherry and Malcolm, watching the second group come in. Sherry and Malcolm seemed unusually content, but Mandy dismissed it with a roll of her eyes. She'd experienced Shiroikiku's semi-quiet sneaking out in the middle of the night countless times.

Privately she couldn't help but wonder how Sherry could ride her Cyclone in the spine-crunching, semi-suicidal way she had, and... She shied away from the thought.

Instead, she was regaleing Sherry with a involved tale of what they'd found north of town.

"You know what, there's even working lasercdisc players in there, and laser discs, and maybe there's electricity we can use. Let's not even get into those televisions we found in this one big store."

Sherry whistled, running her hand through the bleached strip she wore down the center of her hair. "Sounds nifty. My parents always were big into the old animes, dingbat pseudo-Nipponese they were. I'm good with wiring. Maayyybeee..."

Amanda's light green eyes lit up and she smiled, as the second team pulled up.

"Bonjour, o lost ones! What news do you bring to us?" Kevin gave a fiendish grin. Dennis shrugged, his mouth twitching upward, Miranda grinned almost as hugely as Kevin, Fred rolled his eyes, and Gwen smiled and batted hers.

"Uh-oh," Sherry muttered. "Trouble."

"Huh?"

"You blind? You notice she's been after him for the past week?"

Amanda was miffed. "How could I, what with coughing up glop and considering how much you and Malcolm--" Sherry hit her.

Amanda kept a closer look on the Southerner. Something about the way Gwen paid especially hard attention to her friend raised her hackles.

Yep, I'm jealous, she admitted.

"Good news. We found university ruins down south, complete with a few intact buildings. At least two of them are very large paper libraries, and one's underground and with power. With some work, we could make it into a perfectly good base." Dennis smiled and saluted. Matthew nodded back.

Miranda grinned, her teeth white against her face, and she swatted her bike carriers, which Mandy belatedly noticed were bulging with books. "And guess what I did?"

Amanda laughed. "I'm happy for you! You were ready to go bonkers after you lost your old library. You've hit the grand prize, hmm?"

"And how!"

The lieutenant's wry voice cut through the chatter. "Ahem... This is all well and good, but could we tell our side?"

He began talking about their findings, with periodic interruption by Gerald, Kevin, and Amanda to clarify points. A stunned silence began to spread, as the implications of the wealth uncovered began to sink in.

Fred whistled, once.

Dennis broke in. "This is great, Lieutenant, and I'm very glad this was found, but have you considered the strategic factors yet?"

Ulm ran his hands through his untrimmed hair. "Yes, I have. There's nothing wrong with the center's location that a little care in entering and leaving can't cure. There's an underground parking garage that Protoculture and mecha can be stored in, there's running water from a tank and from the PM generator's byproducts, and there's an enormous amount of space for us to live in. We have to keep in mind future base growth."

"True. But still, considering how bad the crackdowns seem to be getting, according to the grapevine... We're not talking stupid Invid running the franchise anymore. And they've ways of finding out, even if there weren't humanoid pilots. On Spheris, they used the Cougars to sniff out potential resistance enclaves."

Kevin was beginning to look annoyed. Amanda was wondering if this was part of Dennis' behavior that bothered him. He did tend to go into his offworld exploits rather much.

"As I recall, those tended to be a few miles underground. It won't make a difference in the end if we end up at the mall or your library." Matthew pointed it out with a sigh.

"The Invid army here doesn't even have Cougars," Kevin said. He rubbed his forehead, frustrated.

Matthew held up finger. "They've got other Inorganics--Ferrets, Krakens, God knows what. But the mall--has got a working security system, or one we can get going with a little work. That's why we spent a while trying to break in the nice way and not set it off or disable it."

"But do you consider it safe enough?" Dennis insisted.

"I don't know, ask them. They're the firepower. We're just the stupid leaders."

There was a brief silence, and then a babble of voices broke out. Dennis' contradictions were overwhelmed.

"Ah, democracy," Ulm murmured. "Not exactly millitary, but satisfying anyway."

Kevin looked over at Ulm with a grin.

"Got a sneaking suspicion what the results are going to be?"

"Oh, I don't know. Want to bet on it?"

"Hell no. I'm not that stupid. Sneaky move to pull on him."

"I'm not as stupid as I look. Take some pointers."

Kevin sniggered.

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DANDELIONS

CHAPTER ONE

November, 2044

You better
run all day, run all night
Keep your guilty feelings deep inside

Pink Floyd, "Run Like Hell"

Brush popped and shattered in the freezing air, tinder-dry and desiccated in the onset of winter. The source of the sounds was too big to be a deer; too clumsy, far too noisy, and the rhythm of the smashing through the woods bespoke a creature that ran on two legs, not four. It crashed closer and closer to the margin of the naked trees and undergrowth, and under the beat of footfalls, snapping branches and crushed leaves, the wheeze of tortured breathing rose steadily and insistently.

Whatever it was was close to the end of its endurance.

With a final shattering crack that took off an inch-thick brittle maple branch, the source burst far into the open, oak-dotted field in what had once been the American Midwest.

The figure staggered reelingly and blindly onward, hacking from oxygen debt, too exhausted to outright run. It almost paused near a rock outcropping; but whatever it heard in the temporary silence as the crows and starlings fled made it whimper in terror and resume its stumbling exodus.

The field was approximately two hundred yards wide from woods margin to next woods margin. For five minutes, the solitary refugee dashed from tree to tree, gasping, nearing bit by agonizing bit to the other side. At the last black oak, fifteen yards from the margin, it paused, preparing for the final dash. The hooded head glanced back the way it had come in renewed fear.

Then the trees exploded.

It was called in the terminology of the oppressed race the Enforcer; in its native tongue it was termed the Malar. To an unarmed inhabitant of the planet its race had harried nearly continuously for almost ten years, it was merely Death.

It had pursued its quarry for almost twenty miles now, since its object had had the ill grace to flee from the roundups that sent this planet's native people to work to further the pursuer's own species. Normally, the Malar would not have bothered with a solitary creature this inoffensive, but its lords had deemed that any possible extra labor was necessary, and when ordered, the Malar's pilot followed as had been the way time out of mind. The other castes did not have the initiative to search for a single body, but the pilot of the Malar had sufficiently evolved, and had comittedly sought over the miles of this alien world to fulfill its duty, even though it was not well-suited for the terrain.

The creature squealed like a trapped rabbit, then bolted. Ankles and legs already overtaxed no longer bore weight or responded to commands; a foot came down aslant on a boulder, and the ankle folded, sending the body crashing down with a scream of agony. Clutching at the damaged ankle, the refugee struggled upward in a last-ditch effort, then collapsed, sobbing in despair. Methodically, the Malar made its way across the field, the overcast of the day glinting off the dull gray of its armor, the garnet of its sensor eye fixed on the collapsed figure before it as it strode over. Eyes glazed, the prisoner watched the treaded feet step over the brown terrain toward her.

Inside the protective snout of the suit, the Malar pilot's own opaque black orbs narrowed in a clinical survey of the situation. It had traveled far afield in search of its prey, with no rapid method of getting back to its home base with its trophy. The sensor antennae at the end of its snout twitched. Most likely, it would have to call up one of the Iigiai patrols, or a Torab, even one of the Piraq units if all else failed.

While considering the possibilities, the three blunt claws the end of the unarmed arm opened, and descended toward the prone figure as a high whistle sliced the air.

The red eye exploded in a spray of fragments, the long head of the pilot inside evaporating into a mist of hydraulics, nutrients and blood that expanded outward in a fetid emerald cloud that splattered the refugee with green splotches.

Then the missile that had sailed to home detonated, and the shell that had once been the Malar burst into an incandescent cloud of flame.

Amanda Pierson lay there, singed and in a gray void in a vacuum of no reaction.

Maybe if I just close my eyes it'll all go away...

She could hear shouting, but ignored it. She had endured too much for one human body to take in the past thirty-six hours, and had decided reality had heaped one too many indignity on her now.

It wasn't fair, she thought ridiculously. *I'd gotten used to the idea of the Invid catching me and these idiots save me? What the hell's wrong with this picture?*

There was rapid heavy footsteps, then a gauntleted hand shaking her shoulder. After a couple of repetitions, she numbly shook her head and decided to take note. "No--" she rasped before her voice caught. "No, he didn't touch me. I don't think so." Irrational panic. "Don't let them get me!" She collapsed in a weak fit of coughing.

The heavy male baritone was compassionate. "Easy, honey, easy. You're safe. We won't let them get

you."

Amanda suddenly felt herself lifted in a pair of metallic arms, then carried rapidly to the margin of the trees. She was set down, back to a trunk, and her vision reoriented to include her savior.

Wow, she thought. *An actual Cyclone.*

The visor of the mottled-green battlesuit turned down to look at her. "Just a second, honey, I've got to switch modes."

As she watched numbly, the suit folded away, wheels rotating down and armor peeling away, until the battlesuit was a dull-green motorcycle and a man in CVR-4 armor dismounting from it. He quickly bent down and rifled through a pack on the armor of his leg.

"My ankle..." she said.

"I know. Saw you fall. Had to wait to plug the bastard." He bent down to squat by her side. "Lieutenant Matthew Ulm, by the way." He gently grasped the shoe. "Can't take too long at it. Your friend might have had a few buddies with him." Any response she might have made was drowned out in a squawk of pain as he peeled away her shoe, exposing a swollen, blistered, and now swelling-further foot. He bent to tend to it, pushing off the helmet to take a better look.

He was about five-ten, very solidly built under the armor, and getting well into early middle age. His graying reddish hair was fading at both hairline and crown, and from the length of his whiskers he was badly in need of a shave. The blocky face was lined from too much exhaustion and fighting, but both it and the clear hazel eyes it contained looked neither cruel nor inclined to cruelty when he had more sleep than he'd apparently recently gotten.

"What made an Enforcer decide it had to go after you?" he queried, spreading ointment on some of the blisters. She whimpered. His eyes darted up, looked away.

"Bad time. Sorry hon." He probed the ankle, prompting a cry. "Dammit. I'm sorry. You've got a beaut of a sprain on the way." Cautiously, he adjusted the injured ankle, and searched through the first aid kit. "Dammit, no elastic bandage. Right, right, Miranda had her wrist fucked when the Cyc wheel fell on it. Have to wait for Kev, then. Hope he didn't get any fun surprises casing the area ." He looked up and grinned. "Hon, you look like nine miles of death served up, but anybody tell you you've got the prettiest green eyes I've seen in a face?"

The green eyes in question, unnaturally bright in contrast to the purpled hollows of her sockets, widened in leafy confusion. "Unh?" They were beginning to glaze over in shock and exhaustion.

The man called Matthew Ulm suddenly jerked up his head, freezing, then relaxed. A quiet rumble grew

in volume from within the trees. Squeaking, Amanda jerked her head up, the hood falling back to reveal tangled daffodil-colored hair and a haggard but young visage. Matthew shook his head in reassurance.

"It's just Kevin, my partner. We were scouting the area; he ought to have some medical goodies for you." He gently pushed back the girl and rose as the engine roar filled the clearing. Abruptly, another Cyclone heaved into view, this one painted in olive and acid green. It braked to a jarring halt as its rider dismounted.

"Matt? You okay?"

Matthew snorted. "Barring no wash for four days, never been better. Can't say the same for our new friend here."

The cracked reflections of the bare tree branches slid across the transparent surface of the other's helmet visor as he turned to look at the figure seated by the tree. He jerked in surprise; then his light tenor said in clear surprise, "I see... What's with her, Matt?"

"Ankle. Got any Ace bandages on you? We've got to make tracks in minutes before we get more company, and I don't want the Cycs jouncing it around too much."

"Yes indeedy I do." Kevin went back over to the Cyclone, rifled around in the back for a second, before producing a first aid kit. He and Matthew squatted back down by her.

"What's the deal, Matthew?"

"Just sent another Enforcer to the big hive in the sky. Don't know if it fired off anything to any other Invid before it bit it, and I'm not gonna gamble on it."

"Enforcer? What the hell's an Enforcer doing out twenty miles from the nearest hive, Matthew?" Kevin's hands gently lifted the injured ankle, then began to unwrap the elastic as Amanda stiffened in pain.

"After her." Matthew began to carefully wrap the bandage snugly around the damaged ankle. "At least that's what it looked like."

Kevin took a hissing intake of breath, muffled through the visor. "What'd she do, blow up the hive or something? You don't find hive guards tromping out this far for one person. What's her name?"

"Haven't asked her yet." Matthew was surprisingly sheepish.

The second fighter's eyes, light blue under the protective visor, squinted in incredulity. "You haven't asked her yet?? Matt you numbskull, you go through all this and you don't even ask her?"

Matt finished wrapping the injury as tightly as he could. "Okay, wisenheimer, you ask--"

"Amanda Pierson," she managed. They looked up, having forgetten her in their exchange. "Most people call me Mandy--or at least they did--" Her face froze, the eyes looking into a vista better not thought of.

"They--they came for the town. Rounded us up--everybody--like we were cattle, made us walk..." The exhausted eyes pooled, ran over onto freckled cheeks. "The Enforcers watched us--the little kids...they shot them..." The emerald eyes widened, radiant with a terrible light. "They shot my little sister, and we couldn't even stop to pick her up..."

"Daddy lost it then. Late last night, when we stopped to rest, he shoved me into the trees, told me to run. I ran...and when I ran--I could--could hear the gun blasts behind me...my father... The Enforcer followed me--all this way..."

"'And I alone am escaped to tell thee,'" Kevin finished with soft finality.

Amanda Pierson nodded, her face contorting, and raised her hands to shield her quiet sobs.

"What's going on?" Kevin asked softly, as Matthew took her into his arms.

Matthew's eyes were stony gray and grim. "I don't know, Kev. But I sure as hell would love to find out."

Hush now don't you cry,
Wipe away the teardrops from your eyes
You're lying safe in bed
It was all a bad dream spinning through your head...

Queensryche, "Silent Lucidity"

Mandy awoke to the rattle of a shower on a corrugated tin roof. She stared in confusion for the briefest of moments, then her face froze as she remembered, choking the tears back into the black, hard place inside of her.

There's nothing I can do anymore...

She made the briefest of motions, then hissed in pain as she jostled the ankle. A quick glance down at her feet proved both that she was lying on a cot in a rather ramshackle shelter and that both of her feet were bandaged up and her ankle wrapped barely this side of gangrene. She began to tremble as she remembered how it had gotten that way, and the infinite gray hell beforehand of being prey run into the

ground.

But I'm safe. I think somebody saved me.

Am I?

As her sleep-dulled perception widened to include the area, she could hear footsteps, voices and activity outside the ill-fitting door. But it seemed to be friendly activity.

Where am I?

She vaguely remembered disconnected pictures of tipping one way and another between consciousness and unconsciousness as she was jostled on a motorcycle, her arms wrapped around the waist of a burly, kindly man--Matthew--her cheek pressed hard against the armor of his upper back in a waking dream. Another cycle riding by them....she had no idea how long it had taken or how far they had gone, but at last they had stopped, and then they had been nothing but gentle and loving darkness...

And then here...

Where was here? It was dark, lit only by the dark, grudging orange of a small fire in an improvised hearth and chimney made out of two fifty-year-old oil drums in a corner.

Her head flopped back onto a hard pillow, her eyes glazing over and trying not to remember too much.

An indeterminate time later, a voice rose outside the door, saying something to the effect "I'll go check on her now." Mandy rose her head toward the door as it opened, admitting a flood of pallid November daylight and a figure.

The woman pushed her beaded cornrows back, the pearly light shining momentarily on a face dark as fine ebony before she shut the door. She went over to the hearth and adjusted the air intake on it, raising the light level in the tiny little room, before pulling a homemade chair over to sit by Mandy's cot.

"Hi there, kid. Looks like you're awake." She opened a satchel and dug through it.

"Yeah..."

The woman took out a plastic container and peeled it open. Chicken-scented steam wafted out, hitting Mandy with an almost physical blow to the gut The newcomer saw the crazed look in her eyes and smiled compassionately.

"It's for you, trust me. When's the last time you've et?"

"Don't know...Two days ago..."

Her father had cooked up carrots and brown sugar, using the fat from some of the bacon in storage to fry up some pancakes for her and Grace... Suddenly, she was weeping helplessly.

The woman held her, letting her cry into her jacketed shoulder for a long time. "Hush, sweetie, it's all right, let it out..." It was several minutes before Mandy lifted her blotchy face away.

"They--they..."

"I know. Lots of us have gone through it. No wrong in feeling that sort of pain." Carefully, so as not to dislodge her grasp, she managed to bring up a tin spoon from her package and lifted the soup into Mandy's lap. The girl noticed that she winced a little from moving her right wrist, which had elastic binding it up. Though her throat was tight from emotion, the entire container was the work of only a couple minutes for Amanda to eat.

"I know your name is Amanda. Mine's Miranda Rosa Altman, call me Miranda. You're in a friendly place, which means any Invid that shows its claws around here is going to find out how many missiles a Forager can spit."

"Where's here?"

"Mmhh." Miranda's dark eyes slanted at her thoughtfully. "Since I suppose you make a hell of a shitty Simulagent--we took a blood sample while you were out, by the way--you're in what passes for the headquarters of Ulm's Elms, our little way of flipping the big middle at our friends the crab lice on steroids. You met Matthew and Kevin--Matt's the leader of the outfit. Let's say--geographically-wise we're about five or so miles from where Quincy used to be before the Invid hit it the first time around, back in '35."

"That far... I was only about eight then."

"You're eighteen?"

"Gonna be. In three months." Mandy grimly fought back the idea of what that birthday party would have been like only five days ago.

A knock on the door interrupted them, along with a vaguely familiar, diffident voice. "Uh, can I come in?"

"Yeah, Kev." Miranda took back the soup container. "You want a refill?" Amanda nodded vigorously. Miranda shuffled around inside her pack, producing a loaf of bread and a butter container as the door

opened and another visitor slid in.

"Hey there," Kevin said cheerfully. "How you doing?"

Mandy stared, grief, injury and exhaustion notwithstanding.

The second man who had saved her was about in his early- to mid-twenties, about six feet even and possessed a fair, clear complexion over slightly thin, well-formed features under the last vestiges of a summer tan. Slightly waved dark hair brushed the nape of his neck and contrasted startlingly with light, gentle blue eyes. For a girl raised in a village of less than seven hundred people, he was easily the best thing she'd seen.

He slid over and snatched the bread from Miranda's hands, prompting a yelp and then a swat from her.

"Kevin! Behave! It's for her!"

A drippingly sad whipped-puppy expression crossed his face. "Mirandaaaaa--I was only going to have a bit--"

"The whole damn loaf, knowing you! You're a damn human vacuum on two feet!"

Mandy was completely oblivious, trying to see how much of his physique his olive-drab t-shirt, baggy gray denim pants and bright green jacket hinted at. What it was hinting at her she liked so far.

In mid-mock fight, Miranda caught her intent stare in his direction, rolled her eyes and sighed. Kevin followed her eyes in time to see a ferocious red tide wash up Amanda's neck and looked sheepish. He handed the bread back to Miranda, who proceeded to slice it as he sat Indian-style on the dirt floor.

He coughed. "Hi, Amanda. We--sort of met. I'm Kevin O'Shea. No rank. This isn't an official REF resistance force, so... " He shrugged. "Take it you heard about Bernard's group."

"Who didn't? We're practically within spitting distance of where the main Invid hive used to be."

Kevin nodded. "Anyway, we're an irregular group like his. Only larger. Thirty, you think, 'Randa?"

Miranda shrugged. "About. A little less. Small is fine with me."

"I remember when the entire Elms consisted of Matthew, me, Dennis, Gerald and your brother. That's small."

Miranda snorted resoundingly. "Considering how the damn regulars have been hit to death by the Invid

lately, no wonder we've grown. The damned bugs can't put a pin on us as quickly."

Kevin suddenly grabbed a slice, the knife and the butter container.

"Kevin!" Miranda screeched. He gave her an evil grin, then proceeded to spread butter on the slice.

"Now now, Miranda, don't have a fit." He finished, dodging her attempts to grab the butter all the while, then proffered the result to Amanda. She took it, blushing.

"I was just going to go and help you out, here. See? She's got it, not me."

Miranda huffed in annoyance. "Kevin, you are impossible."

"That's me for you, the walking impossibility. What're you staring at?" he asked Mandy, grinning. "Eat, that, will you? I put lots of time into that."

Suddenly, Mandy was interrupted in mid-chew by a muffled voice outside, calling Kevin's name. His handsome features curdled in a resigned scowl.

"Damn, Matt needs me." He went to his feet, dusting off his rear. "Oh, duty calls. But, as a twentieth-century movie put it, Ah'll be bahk. See you in a bit, 'Randa." He slid out the door, closing it softly behind himself.

Mandy flushed again when she noted Miranda's dark eyes resting on her intent gaze on the door. Miranda sighed, and adjusted her heavy denim jacket over her olive coveralls.

"Nice to see that what you've been through hasn't put water on your libido."

"I thought he was nice," Mandy challenged, angry with embarassment and not certain what a "libido" was.

Miranda patted her pale, freckled arm with her oil-dark, callused hand, wincing as her wounded wrist was jogged.

"Oh, yeah, he is. Nice as hell, charming as the devil, even if his fingers are a bit too fast. He'd gladly give you the skin off his back if it'd save your life. Doesn't hurt that he ain't hard to lay eyes on either." She sighed wearily. "But I advise you not to get your hopes up, despite all that."

Amanda stopped chewing on her bread. "Uh...why, Miranda?"

"He's not...well, to put it this way, girl, it's not women he's interested in."

Amanda halted in midchew, as the information slowly sunk in. Somewhere, in some more refined plane of existence, one might have heard the tinkling of half-formed desires shatter to dust.

She swallowed, the bread all of a sudden tasteless. "Oh."

"I'm sorry, Amanda, but better you knew right off instead of later."

"Yeah." I guess, Amanda said bitterly to herself.

Miranda sharply punctuated the sudden silence with a smack to her thigh with her good hand.

"Well, besides that, why don't we get you to some better shelter?"

"Say?"

"This is a staging area for new incomees. Since you're not an Invid plant, and I'll bet good odds along with Matthew that you're not an Invid symp either, I'm here to help you into the main compound. It's going to get damn cold by nightfall." Miranda indicated that Mandy should get up, bodily supporting the girl on her bad side. "Between my wrist and your ankle," Miranda laughed a bit, "we ought to make a functional human being."

Mandy asked, "So what happened to your wrist?" The two began an awkward hop over to the door.

"Oh, that? You know how heavy a Forager is?"

"What's that?"

"Sorry. I forget. A Forager Survival Cyclone. It's well over two hundred pounds. Which leads to my second bit."

"Yeah?" Mandy asked in interest, holding on to the older woman's shoulder.

"When you got one jacked up, first, you always make sure to make certain the jack is holding before you change the wheel. Second, never put your wrist between the ground and the wheel in case the jack doesn't hold."

Mandy giggled a little bit. Strained as it was, it had been the first laughter she had made in more than three days. Miranda shifted her hold on her to grab for the door. She muttered disparagingly. "A lousy Forager... Geez, could've been a Samson, I suppose.."

Mandy was tittering as Miranda helped her out the door into the tepid gray daylight.

Mandy woke up later that night, fully clothed, her ankle throbbing. She started, then realized she was in a clammy room dug out of the loam of the Midwest. The room was also shared by Miranda, who was snoring discreetly on another narrow cot, and a small space heater that grudgingly warmed the immediate area.

Although the place was reinforced by cinder blocks and plasteel beams, it smelt like a damp cave, which came as no surprise. The entire base for Ulm's Elms was underground. Maybe it had been started as a tornado or bomb shelter in the last century, or maybe it had all been created wholesale. Either way, it had been expanded on a great deal in the years since the Invid's return. Mandy still did not know how much, but it was large enough to hide some thirty resistance fighters and an alarming lot of Cyclones and weaponry.

Her bladder ached; gingerly, trying not to awake Miranda, she hopped over to the door curtain, trying to remember where the privies were in the area.

There were voices further down the hall. As she limped past a loosely bolted door, she could hear voices raised in heated debate inside. Almost involuntarily, she halted and had to catch herself.

"--bad development," a black male voice said inside. "From what you said the new girl told you, the Invid are apparently beginning to grab people to use for work in the farms again. So far, they haven't screwed with the population like they did the first time around, but this--"

"Bad development my ass!" a woman's voice interrupted sarcastically. "What did you call the new mecha? The hives the REF said are orbiting us? They beat the shit out of the REF forces that came back, for Chrissakes! The god-damned bugs coming back? My point is, the damned Invid existing are a bad development."

A sigh. Kevin's voice spoke up, prompting Mandy's ears to perk.

"Sherry, the point Malcolm's making is that so far the Invid was halfway passive in its new occupation. They didn't bite back until we bit first. But this..." He trailed off meaningfully.

The deep voice that Mandy identified as Matthew took up. "The fact is, as we all know, is that the REF has been hit harder and harder in the last months, and a hell of a lot of mecha and people are now out of action. Now that the civilians are being attacked--to put in in precise military terms, we're up in it to our ears."

There were a few acquisent grunts.

"So what do we do?" someone else inquired in a bass.

"Go take a piss," someone else answered. "I'm leaking at the eyeballs."

"Cute, Fred."

"You said it ,Gerald, not me."

Mandy heard no more, for she was lurching up the hallway as fast as her good ankle would let her.

Through some miracle, she got there before Fred did, and he had to wait outside the door as she made use of the portable chemical toilets that passed for sanitary facilities in the place. As she left, she caught a fleeting glimpse of an ascetic face and medium-blond hair. She went back to her room, mightily embarassed and hoping nobody had noticed her listening in.

Days passed, and Amanda's ankle slowly healed until she could bear weight on it gingerly. Some six days after she had fled out of the forest, she limped down the hall, up the stairs in a pair of Miranda's old boots and back into bright daylight, wincing in pain.

There was the largest man she had ever seen, sitting beside the sunken doorway and cleaning the insides to an old-line Gallant. He looked up as she pushed up and slammed the door back to. He had blocky, carved features, bland in meditation as he lovingly greased the firing pin to the pistol. They sharpened as he squinted up at her under a mop of brown hair with an assessing gray gaze.

"Hey there. You the girl Matthew picked up?"

"Yeah."

"Gerald Wilson."

"Amanda Pierson. Are you the Gerald Kevin said was one of the original Elms?"

He nodded. He was not fat, but through sheer muscle and bone he seemed to take up much more space than he should have. His broad shoulders shrugged a bit. There was something faintly odd about the way his hair caught the weak sunlight.

"Last I checked." He snorted. "Wish he'd shut his mouth."

She sat down, gingerly, and felt the wind ruffle her now-clean and detangled fair hair. "Not to offend but

what's wrong with his saying--"

Gerald grunted. "Don't like the fact being known to everyone. Especially not new people, your pardon." He made a noise. "There was--confirmation you were what said you were, so..." He shrugged. "Besides, I don't feel real comfortable about him. That bugger's slicker than greased shit, and weird to boot."

Amanda was taken aback.

"D'you mean because he's--"

"Gay? Hell yes. I'm a homophobe and damn proud of it," he stated baldly. "But at least they're human, no matter which way they swing, and they've got it too by the Invid. It isn't all that though. Something about that guy gives me bad vibes. I'd've kicked him out, except he's got a bit a hold on Fearless Leader and he and Dennis wouldn't let me." A bitter snort and a sidelong glance. "You may as well know that he and Matthew are--" He made a limp-wristed gesture that was worth a thousand words.

"Oh." she said blankly. "Matthew's... He didn't seem like the type."

Gerald sighed and resumed putting the Gallant's firing pin back in its place. "Maybe I was too harsh. Matt's an okay guy, and a helluva leader. He's put his ass on the line for me a couple times. And...I'm not exactly normal myself." He looked out into the distance between the trees in which the base was hidden. The countryside rolled a little in dried prairieland, grown back in the time since Dolza's Rain of Death and the first Invid invasion, with a few crows flapping in the distance. Somewhere, a red-tailed hawk screamed piercingly.

It was some minutes before Mandy moved again.

"Why did you--join?"

"Before my dad died he asked me to fight to make sure the Invid didn't do the same number on us again."

Mandy swallowed a bit, remembering her own. She suspected the pain would never quite go away.

"Anyway, I knew Matt from when we were both at Reflex Point. We were both there the first time the Invid left. Got to say this for the Regis: she may be the original bitch from hell, but she sure put on a show."

"I know..." Mandy said distantly.

Her mother had died the year before, so it was her father who shook her awake and practically dragged Amanda and her baby sister to their shelter. In the clear spring evening, he had seen a burst of light from

the direction of Reflex Point, more than four hundred miles away. Terrified that a nuclear or neutron bomb had been detonated, he had run up to get his daughters to safety.

No sooner than they had rounded the corner of the house, it had been obvious that quite the opposite had happened.

As they watched in awe, a curl of fire blazed up from the horizon. Blindingly, the conflagration unsheathed into sheets of amber aurora as it cleared the stratosphere; a neck and head and wings of transcendent blaze. As the night turned to day, the flaming wings stroked the solar winds, and their very minds and souls reverberated with the cry as the Pheonix leaped towards a new home...

"Though to tell the truth, I didn't think he liked other guys at the time," Gerald continued bemusedly. Mandy had to shake her head before she realized he was talking about Matthew.

"Guess it goes to show you never can judge people by appearance," she murmured, half to herself.

Gerald snorted and snapped the pistol closed. "You telling me?" He stood up, seeming to block out the light. He was even bigger standing, near seven feet tall and with biceps thicker than Amanda's thighs. The gray eyes looked down at the girl with veiled irony.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Any damn thing you like." He flipped the Gallant and turned toward the bunker entrance. He hesitated.

"Some of us may take a trip to see if we can find any relatives of yours in the next few days. This is, to be blunt, kid, an establishment to kick crabs' asses, not a RGF refugee station. The crabs have been on our cases recently, and we can't get pinned down, or we're dead. This place might get hit at any time, and you don't want to be here when it is. So..." He opened the door. "I'll see you in an hour. Malcolm's going to have dinner done by then." The door shut with a premptory click.

Mandy glared at it, her leaf-green eyes hardening to something like emerald as she did.

"That jerk," she said angrily, when she thought he was out of earshot. Helplessly, as they had so many times over the past few days, the tears began to leak out again. Why did she never run dry of them?.... "I know damn well I have no relatives. He just wants me out of here."

She swallowed tightly. She had to admit she was a bit of a deadweight, having no experience of weapons, weaponry, or mecha. As she currently was, she was a liability, not an asset. Cold logic stated the truth of Wilson's statement, no matter how callously put.

She ought to do what he suggested and find a nice farming community somewhere, get hired as cleaning help or a hired worker. But which would be the next place to hear the tread of Invid Enforcers in its

streets? And the next time, she wouldn't be so lucky. Her father's sacrifice and her sister's murder would have meant nothing.

And she kept remembering the care of Matthew as he lifted her in the arms of his battlesuit, and Miranda's calm compassionate dark face...

They might be dead the next time she heard of them. So would be more of herself.

"Well," she said to the chilly wind, "looks like I'm going to have to learn to be an Elm real quick."

Three and a half months later, 2045

The attack siren screamed like a damned soul, propelling Amanda out of her cot and onto the floor of the room she shared with Miranda and Corporal Shiroikiku Doi.

"Oh Christ!" Miranda screamed to confirm her fears. "We're being hit!"

Even as she hurtled out the door, carrying her worldly goods in one tiny canvas bag, Amanda was still zipping up her field coveralls, REF issue that Matthew Ulm and Dennis Zinnert had procured for the Elms.

"How many?"

Miranda dashed with her, exchanging heated information in the chaos over the tac net. "Shitloads. At least ten clams, two linebackers. Somebody doesn't like us."

Ten or more Attack Scouts and two Combat Troopers. God help them.

Since 2043, new and deadlier types of Invid mecha had appeared on Earth, all but eclipsing the older, more predictable versions that had come before them. The Attack Scouts and Combat Troopers had come from the common Invid Scout and Shock Trooper. They were the bane of every resistance group--those that survived to relate them to the rest, that was.

Mandy gritted her teeth, stiffening her ankle as they turned a corner. It had never been quite the same since the injury; Miranda had said the ligaments in her ankle had been permanently loosened. The damn thing was always trying to reinjure itself, and right now would be the kiss of death.

Tiny Sherry Doi shouted to Miranda, "Get to the staging area! Kevin and Matt are saying that if this

place goes, we're going to remove what mecha we can." The diminutive Oriental woman led the way, her legs pumping, as the other two followed in her wake.

The tunnel branched into a warren-like tangled nightmare, dimly lit by flickering halogen lights, slippery in some places, damp and cold as a corpse. Over the pounding of their footfalls, the klaxon howled. It reminded Amanda not so much of Hell as the countless other times the town siren had screamed upon an impending Invid attack or enslavement attempt. After they had left, the officials had turned it off. It was the worst mistake they had ever made...

Although Hell was making a very close second.

The staging area suddenly opened before them, filled with ranks of Cyclones flickering in ancient flourescent lights. Suddenly, an explosion shook the place, nearly knocking them off their feet. Through the dust cracking from the loosened foundations, they could see the dim forms of Lieutenant Ulm and Kevin O'Shea stagger.

Shiroikiku was the first to regain her balance, and her compact figure bolted across to the two men. Ulm shoved what looked to be a bundle of CVR armor into her hands, and she was already half equipped by the time the other two women made it across.

Amanda felt a blow to her ribcage and blinked when she saw she was also grasping armor, CVR-4 type from the look of it.

"Put it on!" Kevin screamed at her. He was already fully armored except for the helmet. The flickering of the lights gave him a nightmarish strobe effect as it flared across the metal of his chestpiece. The tan had worn off during the winter and he looked dead-white in the unhealthy illumination. Mandy could see a bead of sweat drip off his nose.

"What?"

"Get it on!" he repeated. He grabbed her by the shoulders, eyes wild. "Those were annihilation discs that just hit us. It's minutes before this place goes. You've got to get as much of the mecha out as you can before it does! Got me?"

She nodded frantically.

"Dammit. Hoped to give you a better combat situation than this." Black hair flying, he pivoted and began to slam more armor into arrivals as they came.

Amanda quickly learned that armoring oneself in war was quite different from when in a quiet situation, especially when your hands were slick with terror, somebody had just told you the base's days were numbered, and two more explosions slammed into another segment of the base as you did so. Somehow,

she managed, most likely thanks to the private timing sessions Kevin had given her.

Ulm started up his Super Saber. "Fred, Kev, Sherry, Gerald, you're going to help me and Dennis cover everybody else's butts as we get this crap out. Everyone else, get as much garbage as you can and take it with you. GO!"

"Shit," Amanda could hear Frederick Bohms mutter.

"Take the Forager!" Miranda shouted. She half pushed the Cyclone at Amanda, who numbly took it, and the old-line H-90 Mars Gallant slapped into her hands so hard it stung. She helped load various pieces of equipment into the carrier attached to the back and shoved the pack in as an afterthought.

"Whatever you do, girl, keep it on fusion! Use protoculture in this situation and you're dead!"

"I know! I know!" Mandy screamed back.

"That way!" Kevin pointed, "Emergency exit. Hopefully the Invid haven't found it yet."

Wheeling the cycles, they dashed toward the narrow exit, Miranda's brother Malcolm manhandling the door open.

Within was little more than a propped dirt tunnel barely lit by phosphorescent tape and small incandescent bulbs. It forced them to go one by one, Miranda first, Amanda close behind, the rest coming up as they shoved the mecha through. It was a matter of seconds, it was an eternity; Amanda could not tell, although later she assumed over a quarter mile of darkness, stench of fear, sweat, grunts, prayers, and explosions from where they had come.

Strangely, at one of the latter Miranda perked up.

"Sounds like your basic Cyc missile to me, not an Invid one or an anni disc. They must've gotten out and are decoying 'em," she whispered.

Then, there was another heavy metal door.

Malcolm dashed foward, revealed a small panel, and pressed a sequence in. He then shoved the door open, letting in a blast of frigid but fresh March air. Moaning, they began to pile out into the predawn night. Miranda began to count heads

"I've gotta help the others," he said.

"Be careful," his sister returned. Nodding his helmeted head, he started the engine and ran his Battler

back toward the main bunker. A flare from that direction momentarily blinded them.

"Shouldn't we--" one of the others spoke up.

Miranda shook her head. "No. This is just to make sure we get out alive. The more we fight at this stage, the better our chances of getting killed. Tatically, the bugs have us by the short hairs." Her eyes, black under the visor, were emotionless. "We have no base anymore. Okay, Salwicki, Walters, Chen, Dalby--where's Dalby? And Heisner?"

"What do you mean, we have no--" Mandy began.

Night turned into day, an orange, sick sun sprouting, consuming trees under which the base had once been. Silhouetted against it, Amanda could make out outlines that bore nothing in relationship to anything on this earth, that she had only seen in the extreme distance over the past couple months. Combat Troopers. There were far smaller dots darting against the conflagration, that bore the outline of Battloid Cyclones, spitting missiles.

"They took care of it for us." Miranda noted laconically.

"Blume was still in there," Salwicki said quietly. Evan Blume had been wounded on a raid three weeks ago, and had been recuperating in what passed for their medic ward.

Miranda's face stilled, and she mouthed a curse, as she bowed her head. Amanda swallowed the sudden lump in her throat.

"Hear o Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Miranda said softly. There were assenting murmurs. "That was in case he didn't get the She'ma Ysorel out in time." Blume had been a practicing Conservative Jew. She stirred. "But I know Dalby got out. Where'd she--"

There was a horrific, animal scream, suddenly cut short in a liquid gurgle. Amanda whirled, suddenly knocked down in the ensuing panic, as CVR-clad resistance fled.

"Oh, God!" she choked.

The bisected remains of Henrietta Dalby dropped five feet to land heavily on the ground, where her brown eyes stared glassily. Her blood followed, dribbling from the arching claws that loomed above her.

It was black in the night, save where the bloody orange flames from the crater touched it. The single red sensor of the Attack Scout stared blankly down at them, then it moved a step foward, insectile legs jointing strangely. Another chorus of shouts from where the rest had fled heralded the presence of another.

"Shit," Miranda moaned. "They've boxed us in. They knew."

Amanda paid them no note, her eyes fixed on the black silhouette of the Scout. In a fasincated sort of horror, she reviewed the final seconds of her life from on her behind. The sensor eye of the Invid glared down at her in mindless aminosity, then it took another step foward. Mandy knew full well than in a matter of a minute she would be joining Henrietta in whatever place it was that agnostic resistance fighters went, thanks to those bloody claws.

She realized she still had the Gallant clutched in one slick hand.

"Sure, I can teach you," Kevin had said. "Heaven knows I don't want Gerry tossing you out on your ear because you can't fight. But keep in mind--Matt said no actual p-fire. We can't attract the Invid."

"Which means I--"

"Have to pretend."

The claws began to drop.

This wasn't pretend.

Mandy breathed in, breathed out, tried to ignore the descending blades over her head, She sighted the Gallant on that spot of glowing red, and pressed the trigger.

A dazzling blast caused images to go off in her retinas. She caught a fragmented image of the eye literally exploding in ruby shards and green blood before she threw up an arm to protect her eyes. She felt a sudden pain along one cheek, and more portions began to smart. She had not thought to put down her visor.

The Scout began to topple onto her, and Amanda barely managed to roll out of the way before the mecha collapsed where she had been, fluid leaking out of its shattered eye. She caught a clear, disconnected image of the claws that had killed Henrietta jerking in tune to whatever firings there were in what remained of the pilot's brain. The image was fighting with the knowledge that there was at least one other Scout back there preparing to cut down the rest of the Elms.

She pivoted; there was the second clam, slashing its claws at the others. Apparently, the Scouts had relied on surprise to eliminate the refugees; Henrietta's last scream had prevented that, and the Invid pilot's limited intellect was unable to come up with a new strategy. It looked as though it were trying to kill what it could and then confine the rest until its fellows or the Combat Troopers came to finish the job. Every time one of the Elms tried to bolt, the claws would whip down, and addled with fright, the fighter would abort it. The sudden ambush had thrown them into complete disarray, but Amanda could make out

shufflings that looked like Gallants being pulled. Whether they would take care of the Scout before it called the Combat Troopers was another matter. Swallowing, she took aim again, but the adrenalin had kicked in, and the shot was going to go wild...

The Scout exploded.

The Elms managed to hit the dirt as searing pieces of ceramic alloy rained onto them. Something wih rockets blazing set down a moment later, then another. The wreck was eclipsed by a dark form as Amanda sat, staring blankly. Her shoulder was suddenly shaken, and she started with a sharp cry.

"Mandy! You okay?"

Shiroikiku's face came into her field of vision, hidden by the Battloid visor of her Cyclone. The other woman peered closer at her, then mouthed a curse.

"Jesus Christ and Kwannon! Look at your face! It's all blood!" The tiny gold ankh that studded Sherry's right nostril flared with light as she spoke.

"What?" Mandy realized belatedly that the stinging had not gone away. She put up a hand and realized there was a wet stickiness there.

"I think the eye bits of the clam I killed sliced my face," she said blankly. "What happened?"

"We took care of the linebackers. A few good GR-215s in the right spots, and ptewh--no more Troopers. Look, you've got to take care of that or you're gonna look like Capone for life. You did WHAT?"

"I offed a Scout. I think." Sherry whistled.

"Give you a gold star." Sherry dragged her to her feet. "We've got to get what we can from what's left, bury the dead, and get out of here before daylight. No way we're going to let the crabs have another shot at us."

Amanda nodded, then began to shake.

Two miles away, a silhouette stood, defined only by the half-set constellation of Orion, the Dog Star, and a sliver of last-quarter moon in the east. The general outline was humanoid, but some three times larger, and metallic.

A red sensor array between the metal giant's shoulders whirred and focused on the glowing spot in the

distance.

Inside, a gloved hand dropped on a ceramic-clad thigh in frustration.

The plan had been to drive the humans out, then keep enough alive--for a time, at any rate--in order to ferret from them information on such establishments and find an effective method to put them down in the future. The humans' expeditionary force (curse them!) was being largely taken care of at this point and was a known quantity. But the small resistance groups...they had made the occupation difficult with their damnable secrecy.

It was a cause for nervousness.

It had been an airtight plan, originally--ambush them at near Earth-dawn, when they would be at their most addled and sleep-ridden, drive them out with a few carefully placed annihilation discs, then a quick capture and a look down to see the kind of warren in which rats lived.

But something had tipped them off...

Now the squadron had been cut to pieces, the humans were free and the battloid's occupant dare not go after them...it had to look like an isolated attack, not coordinated. With this catastrophic failure, she would be very lucky if her superiors didn not devolve her...

The Invid had no swear words as other races knew them, not having until recently evolved life-forms that needed them. But the pilot made a very fair try at one as the rockets on the Gamun roared to life and it soared towards the stars.

To the east, unknowing of the Invid Assault Battloid, the exhausted remnants of the Elms buried their five dead, gathered what food they could from their emergency cache off from the base, and began a convoy to the southeast, running on fusion, beaten but not broken.

Frederick Bohms looked up to the greying sky, his gold-blond hair blowing in the hot breeze blowing from the remnants of the base, his bony, saturinely handsome face planed in the weak glow from the still-blazingly hot crater.

Even with the onset of dawn, one could still see stars, cold and far in the late-winter sky. There were other spots up there, bright as stars, but unwinking and slowly moving against the background. They were not stars.

Bohms stared up at them, his face tightening into an expression that nobody else saw.

It was of raw hatred.

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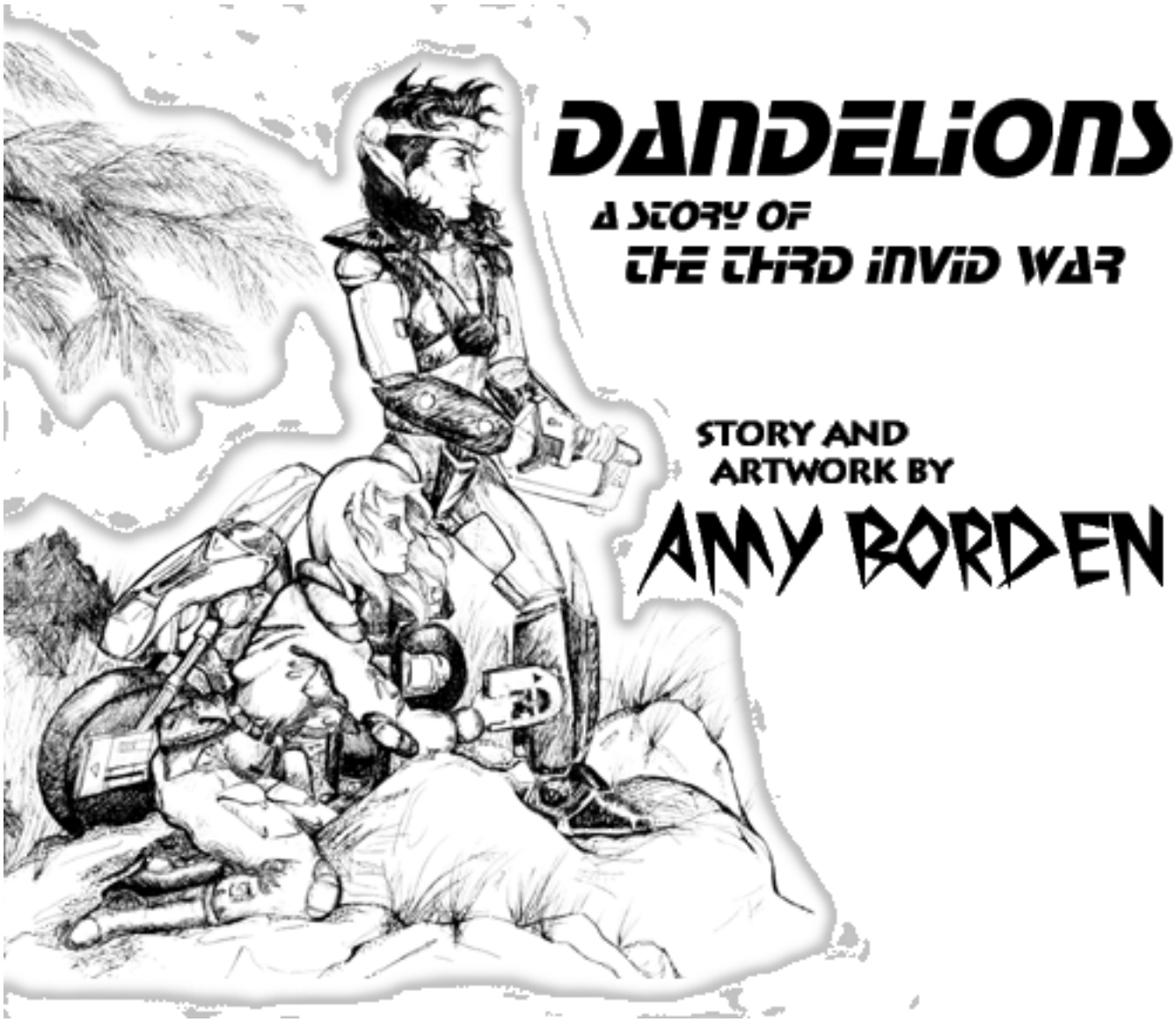

This story is based in the post-Robotech future timeline of THE THIRD INVID WAR, a supplement created by Dave Deitrich (deitrich@mcs.net) and Chris Meadows (robotech@eyrie.org) to the Palladium Robotech role-playing games . As such, it is only a "possible" or potential future to the Robotech series and should not be an impediment to the creation of other possible futures after the end of the series as stated in the show.

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The characters Lihra and Kharoth are from Peter Walker's fanfiction novel Objective: Reflex Point and should be given due recognition as his. If you haven't read it yet, what planet have you--uh. No, I suggest you the reader should check it out.

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my damndest to have them flayed alive, hung by the ankles in a saline bath, quartered, and then finally flung into that pit with that thingy--what was it? The big mouth thing in Return of the Jedi. Oh yeah, the Sarlacc. Flung into the Sarlacc to suffer in digestive agony for a millennium or two. Sounds extreme, but death'll be too good for them. Any bits left over I'll ship to the Kulagi to experiment on. If I can't profit off of this because of copyright laws, sure as hell nobody else will be able to either.

Enough ranting on that. ^_^

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Lastly but most certainly not leastly, this fanfic is dedicated to the legacy of the **White Rose**, who obeyed their consciences instead of the dictates of their government, and who paid the ultimate price as a result. The 21st century White Rose is dedicated to their memory.

Enough brainfarting, let's go!!

DANDELIONS BOOK ONE

- Chapter One
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- Chapter Three
- Chapter Four
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- Chapter Nine

NOTE: Also be sure to check out **The Reunion**, a short story of the Third Invid War by Amy Borden!

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THE REUNION

A Story of the Third Invid War by

Amy Borden

The Attack Scout plummeted.

One claw lashed out, attempting to gut the figure harrying it in midair. The attacker side-slipped, its jets roaring, and then dropped for the ground, some five hundred feet away. The Scout, employing its simple rationale of attack and pursuit, followed, seemingly pinning the harrier between it and its sibling scout roaring up to deal with the armored, flying gadfly.

The Invid Attack Scout never came in patrols of less than three mecha. However, the third, having been precipitately made into shards of alloy and atomized plasma by a well-placed GR missile, was currently decorating several hundred square feet of landscape and was in no further condition to fight.

The rising Scout's plasma cannons began to glow. At that moment, the object it intended to blaze into free elements was abruptly no longer there.

The VR-135 battlesuit gunned to full power, squirting out through the converging mecha like a grapeseed. The plasma blasts, instead of obliterating it, were unleashed on its own patrolmate.

The Invid pilot's wailing deathscream was heard by the other Scout's mind for only a second before the Scout was turned into a hail of raining ceramic debris. The remaining Scout whipped up through the remnants of the blast, charring its armor as it flipped through the air, temporarily unmade by the telempathatic sensations of the other Invid's destruction.

Above it, the occupant of the Cyclone armor hovered, one arm tracking it with remorseless precision. It was only a matter of a couple seconds before the Scout recovered its senses and whipped back toward the mecha-clad human figure, single-mindedly intent on the obliteration of its companion's killer.

The vulnerable sensor eye of the mecha became open for only the fraction of a second, but it was long enough for the Forager pilot.

The blast spat home, hammering through crystal, flesh, blood and alloy.

For the eighty-fourth time since 2039 Sera, former Princess Royal of the Invid, killed her own kind.

The sun had worked its way significantly further west before a figure appeared on the dirt track leading into a collection of accumulated clapboard, plywood, old mecha plating and occasional sound construction housing three or so dozen human souls.

It was wheeling an olive-drab patterned vehicle that looked to the untrained eye like a motorcycle of the last century, and was walled off from the outer world by armor plating and helmet of the same shade. It was obviously not enjoying the experience; the slender figure's steps dragged and in the summery heat a fine rain of sweat was dripping off its hands and neck, spattering the red Arkansas dust with dark, bloody splotches in its wake. Behind the cycle, several bundles hunched in the capacious carriers attached to the back.

Slowly, as if reluctant to relinquish its momentum, the figure stopped and looked at the vista before it, sighing from underneath the lowered visor of its helmet.

"Water?" it asked of no one in particular.

It crossed some intangible line into the area, and it abruptly gained attention from numerous eyes within

the shacks, eating their sparse dinners and trying to hide from the sun's lowering hammer. There was some movement.

A scrawny dog paced the trudging alloy boots of the newcomer, waiting for a moment's opening to lift its leg on the pristine wheels of the vehicle, but then lost hope as the armored figure pushing it resumed its metronome trudge further into the hamlet.

Here, there was some more activity, particularly around a rare brick building that in some obscure way immediately identified itself as a bar.

The figure stopped, its posture picking up for a brief second, then wheeled itself over. After proceeding to install the necessary anti-theft precautions, the cycle's owner seemed to brace itself, and reached hands up to remove the helmet.

Drops literally flew as it shook its head like a dog upon slurping the helmet off its soaked hair, and then the head resolved itself.

The hair was brown, brushing the shoulders, and even laden with sweat had a tendency to style itself into an odd upsweep at the end. Inexplicably, something about the hairstyle indicated that it was completely natural and not any concession to vanity. However, the glimpses of suspicious brown stains on forehead and cheeks attested to otherwise for its color.

The person underneath it sighed in relief, then fumbled around until it found a pair of sunglasses. Slipping on the slightly scratched lenses, the figure heaved another sigh of relief, and then lifted its face to the pitiless yellowing gaze of Sol.

Underneath the glasses, the face was oval and indisputably female, as was the slender body that clumsily fumbled out of its torso armor and forearm shields and dripped all over the ground even despite the CVR bodysuit. An H-90 Gallant was produced with the intention of caution. Then, after the upper half of the CVR was secured to the bike, the young woman squared her shoulders again and walked inside.

"You want who?" The bartender used his rag to wipe perspiration off of his forehead and looked at the entrant dubiously before using the same rag to wipe the bar. She looked down with a lip slightly curled in disgust. She was also being considered to various degrees of lust, curiosity, boredom, and hostility by the three or four other patrons that had decided to brave the airless heat of the interior. She knew it, and didn't like it very much, but the obvious questioning couldn't be helped. In her time on the road, she had discovered the common drinking establishment was the single best means of getting gossip.

Sighing, she began to explain again.

"Thank you so very much," the grateful mother beamed. The little boy sniffled, his tears lessening as the anaesthetic kicked in. He had protested in ear-piercing terms against the lancing of his foot to drain the infection that had come on the heels of cutting his instep with a broken bottle. Only now was he beginning to realize that the week-old hurt felt better.

The medic smiled as she found a clean piece of gauze and began to wrap the small appendage. "You don't need to thank me. Just make sure he doesn't walk around on that foot for a couple of days, and use the antiseptic and antibiotic I gave you. You're very lucky it wasn't any worse." The other woman nodded fervently, remembering her son had refused to let her know he had been walking around barefoot in the road until the pain was too great.

After mother and child left, the remaining woman's shoulders sagged, the heat inside oppressive even with the wheezing help of the twenty-year-old fan sitting in the small room. Making a face, she began to clean up her ad hoc operation--it had been a messy business--and thought longingly of showers. Nice cool showers, with a lot of water, enough to last a week. She cut off that train of thought when the logistics got too impossible.

When done, she raked wisps of dark red hair out of her face and thought about redoing the french braid that seemed to be coming undone as she wandered from the room into the darkening main room of her place in the village's only boarding house. She knew full well she was one of the more fortunate dwellers in the place, but it still felt like a furnace. Maybe she could get away with opening a few windows and the door...

She had to fight one open, grunting against a couple years worth of rust. Exhausted, she moved to the door, carrying a brick with her as she did to prop it open.

She squealed the door open, and the brick dropped onto the wooden floor with a boom from her nerveless fingers.

"I have this tendency to arrive when you least want it, don't I?" the newcomer in the entrance asked wearily.

"What?" the medic asked blankly. "Am I hearing right?"

The figure seated opposite her at her tiny table sighed. "If you mean that I said that it's vitally important that you come with me, yes I said that. I know it sounds ridiculous, but yes, I did say that."

"It sounds ridiculous. I'll grant that."

The other sighed again. "Why do you think I covered more than a hundred miles in three days? A--Marlene, I truly think your life is in serious danger."

"It's very nice you finally remembered my name, Sera, but as I recall a few years ago you also thought it was vitally important to save me from myself." Marlene's tone was dry, but she regretted it as soon as she saw the partially armored figure wince.

"It backfired, didn't it?" Sera surveyed her lap. Marlene gave her the grace of not answering the rhetorical question.

"Sera, I haven't seen anyone I've known for three years now until you, and I haven't done anything to attract attention. I've been doing what I can to help people, but I've done nothing to directly fight them. Are you certain?"

The other woman sighed. "Can I remove these filthy glasses? I can't see in here." When Marlene nodded, the other brought up her hands took the tinted lenses off, blinked, and rubbed her eyes.

The uncovered eyes that looked back up were the color of new rubies, a color that suggested an overexposed photograph but was the actual pigment of the iris. Somehow, it did not look demonic on her. It was not a color that had ever been in the Terran gene pool.

She looks terrible, Marlene thought. Although Sera retained the appearance of an athletic human female in her early twenties, the years of war since the second Invid occupation had taken their toll. While she retained her exotic, otherworldly beauty, it was blurred and worn. The eyes were puffed with fatigue and not near enough sleep, and there were fine lines evident around her eyes and mouth that no aging had carved.

She had the hunted look that was the communal expression of every resistance fighter these days; it was impossible to resent her sudden appearance when Marlene knew Sera had embraced the very agenda she had once tried to repress.

And furthermore, she seemed completely sincere.

"I swear, Sera, I've done nothing to get the Invid after me. Are you suggesting that I should just drop everything and follow you on some wild goose chase so I can get shot at by Attack Scouts? What if it's only a false alarm of yours?"

The red eyes flashed.

"Face it, Marlene. How many times in the past couple years has the Invid followed you? Any patterns of

attacks or Invid mecha in your path?"

Marlene's eyes went wide. There was a knowing nod from the other.

"I thought it was only me," Marlene said weakly.

Sera shook her head. "Don't think so. I've had my share of encounters. Do the locals know what you are?"

Marlene shook her head. Sera looked over, and her features softened.

"Ariel, I know how much you want to forget, to ignore that portion of yourself. But you can't. The Invid won't. And you may cause perfectly innocent people to suffer for it.

"I have a great deal of reason to think that the Invid are past just ignoring us even if we leave well alone. In the past year or so--attacks followed me wherever I went. It was months before I realized it was systematic. I've been on the run for more than a year now. And I don't think you ought to risk the lives of these people gambling. But--it's your choice. I just thought you should have known."

The other woman's soft brown eyes glanced down.

"I've--wandered a lot, Sera. And occasionally--there were close calls. I suppose--I was trying to ignore the facts--I'm very good at doing that, you know."

Sera looked at her, then shook her head. "You're not the only one, Ariel."

The fragilely lovely face framed by the deep copper hair stiffened, eyes wounded.

"Sera," she said with finality, "my name is Marlene."

"I still don't know why I'm doing this."

"Because you know that for once I'm right, that's why. Plus nobody wants to be responsible for a massacre." Sera took out the harshness of the words with a self-deprecating chuckle pitched above the rumble of her Forager Cyclone. She'd removed her helmet to take advantage of the wind of their passage, and her dyed hair, washed and dried, whipped in the wind. Sera had grown it a lot since the beginning of the war, but somehow, Marlene was tickled to admit, it resolutely kept to the upsweep of Sera's old hair length to what degree it could. Marlene, arms around her waist, could see at least half a centimeter of light green at the roots.

The air in her face below the protective goggles felt like the heat from an oven. Even though it was at least ninety degrees Fahrenheit in the humming Arkansas countryside, she wore the old orange jacket given to her by Rook Bartley years ago in order to protect herself from the bugs and nettles that whipped into them as they roared through the scrubby meadows and flying red dust of high summer.

They were now several hours out from where they had met. Somehow, Sera had convinced her; after Sera had thankfully accepted a cold bath and dinner, and a fitful sleep in the hot, sticky darkness (the single thing Marlene was grateful to her genes for was that mosquitoes somehow knew Invid blood wasn't useful), Marlene had quietly packed what useful belongings she could take in the predawn and stowed them in the VR-135's carrier. The rest she had written a note for and left on the table, hopefully delegating her belongings among those of the village that needed them the most.

And now, here they were. She tried to lick grit from her teeth and not think about the memories conjured up by Sera's sudden appearance on her doorstep.

They hadn't spoken much, and Marlene suspected Sera was feeling guilty about disrupting her peace. In an effort to start conversation, Marlene ticked over numerous topics, forcing a compromise between what she really wanted to find out and the possibility of hurting Sera's feelings.

"Sera--do you know how Lunk and Annie are doing?" she shouted.

The other woman startled. "What?" Then it sank in, and she began to chuckle. "Oh, them. Well, when I last saw them, they were still very much alive, and that was about a year ago. When did you see them last?"

"Three years. I went off on my own when they wanted to work more closely with the resistance. I figured I might put them--at risk. I'm not very good at fighting."

She could feel Sera's grin. "Well, you ought to know Lunk's done a fine job of regaining his self-respect. Mostly thanks to me reaching up and hanging from his collar while screaming in his face that he hadn't much to go on, considering I was doing precisely the same thing he was and I had some embarrassing personal questions to ask myself on top of it. That, and Annie was doing a share with me, playing little sister and all." Sera's voice turned as thoughtful as it could over the engine noise. "You know, she's really fairly attractive as an adult, as humans go. Plus, she's a good rabble-rouser. I suspect that's part of the reason we had to split up. We were just too tempting a target to the loyalists."

"Well, Annie was always good at running her mouth," Marlene conceded, getting another laugh from the front seat.

"And flinging snowballs. Never have let her live that down ever since. As for anyone else...

"Rook and Rand--rumors only. Ever since that business with Kosmas, may his hide be flayed in his Hell, I haven't seen anything of those two. I understand , though, that that explosion marked Rook up. She--WE--were lucky to get out alive, and that's the plain fact.

"That's discounting the--ungh" the Cyclone lumped over a ravine--causing a terrified scream from Marlene-- "fact that the Invid methods..." She trailed off.

"The Invid methods?"

"A sudden taste for randomly attacking towns. Unsettling types of mecha. Actively consorting with humans and using them as mercenaries. I could go into an entire list, Ariel--"

"Marlene."

"That's not the behavior I know, and you know that I ought to know."

"Sera." The other woman's head nodded. "Tell me--you haven't felt her either. Have you?"

There was a lengthy silence, as they jounced on.

"No," the once-Princess of the Invid admitted. "No I haven't. In the whole six years, I haven't felt the Regis."

Marlene didn't elaborate on the staggering pain she felt when she attempted to find the Invid collective mind, which made it near impossible for her to find out that fact.

It wasn't that she still rejected the fact she had come to awareness full-grown and nude in a wrecked house, completely ignorant that she was the very race and blood she was taught to fear--although that was certainly part of it. It was that she simply could not do it without experiencing tortures she would not have visited on anyone, regardless of race.

Sera had once posited that the precipitateness of the birth of the Invid Simulagent Ariel had had something to do with the telltale seizures she had experienced when Invid came near. It was possible that the ability that allowed an individual Invid to act as a portion of the whole Invid was damaged as she'd come to life. Somehow, the ability to detect others of the race had not only been shoved perpetually open, but was so malformed, the act of hearing Invid thoughts was like an intolerable noise.

Ever since then, the presence of Invid telepathic output literally sent Marlene to her knees in agony

Sometimes, she wondered if what she had accomplished in the skies above Reflex Point had been the act of a woman driven to the edge of desperation and beyond, or perhaps just an illusion. Never since had

she been able to duplicate that act. And nor had she wanted to. Doing something so patently inhuman had robbed her of the man she had come to love, perhaps forever.

Scott... Marlene thought, the word a lament.

"No, I haven't," Sera repeated as though to herself. "Whatever part She has in the current occupation, She is not doing it directly. And I haven't the faintest idea who or what is actually coordinating the Invid." She trailed off. "But whomever has control is...uncommonly good at... locating the rebels."

"Have you felt anything, Sera?"

The dyed head shook. "Not...as such."

"As such?"

"Nothing more than the others."

"The White Rose?" Sera snorted at the name.

"Whichever Sulagi coined that term read a little too much Earth history. Probably that Kayagh character over in Illinois. But yes. The renegades."

"Nothing more than..."

"What you probably know. We'd know the Queen-Mother from a parsec off. What's running things....isn't her. There's no single individual. But the glimpses I sometimes get, late at night, in bed..." Sera's voice faltered, and a shiver transmitted itself to the red-headed woman even through Sera's combat armor and the Cyclone's jouncing, "are wrong."

"I know, Sera. Trust me, I know already."

Sera chewed on the biscuit, her eyebrows jumping up.

"These are pretty good. I didn't know you'd learned to cook."

"I did. It helps with getting things if people like what goods you have to make." Marlene tucked up her legs underneath her, her eyes surveying the scene they were in. In the intervening time, they had come north, for no other reason than it had been the direction Sera had been going in when she had picked up Marlene. Besides, the high rolling hills made it difficult for Invid sensors to penetrate.

Sera grunted, licking crumbs off her fingers. "Good for you. Lunk can cook, Rook could cook, even RAND of all people could cook. I never seemed to get the knack. I thought it was a human thing. Did marvels on making edible things metamorphosize into carbon, but other than that..." Sera shrugged, scarlet eyes twinkling. "At least you can. I'd probably starve otherwise."

Marlene smiled, letting her dust-laden hair down in order to brush the worst of the dirt out and to rebraid it more neatly. She then sombered, her serious face still pale underneath a superficial tan. "Sera, where are we going now?"

The ex-princess did not answer for a minute or so. "I...really haven't thought of that just yet. I think I had in the back of my mind a stay with a resistance group up north called the James Gang. They'd be able to house us for a few days or so. But after that..." Sera trailed off, seeing Marlene's glare.

"So do you mean we'll have to wander around scared of the Invid for whatever period it takes until they get tired of it, if ever?" Marlene asked, incredulous. "I'd rather wait for them with a roof over my head. I've had too much running in my life..."

"Maybe we could find a group--one that's so securely ensconced that you and I could stay there for a long time. The area north of here, up by the Mississippi, is hollow with caves..." Sera fumbled. "As I know, humans in areas like that are very difficult to find." Sera poured some of her water supply into a collapsible cup. "Certainly a couple Sulagi can hide too. If they'll take us. Perhaps...but what if we draw too much attention from the loyalists?"

"Maybe--maybe that's why, Sera. Maybe..." Marlene looked off into the middle distance, her knuckles rising to her lips. "Sera--do you know what we are?"

"Ariel, I've been asking that question for the better part of the decade. Charles Darwin would have a fit with us."

"Marlene!" the simulagent snapped, waving a hand in frustration. "No, no, Sera! What WE are. What we represent to the resistance. To the population as a whole. Us two."

The other Sulagi stared at her, her eyes wide. "Spirit of Light...that's right. What we are."

"We're symbols, Sera."

The Invid nodded blankly. "We're symbols. We're proof we can transcend prejudices. That Human and Invid can...cooperate. Because of what we did during the last occupation...and this one...we've become a rallying point for the entire resistance movement." Sera's hands were trembling as she folded them around her cup. "What do you want to suppose that we're the single biggest reason so many other Sulagi defected?" Her eyes closed. "And what do you do to something that powerful a rallying point if it gets in

your way? You eliminate it." Her voice shook. "I had years to think that. Why did I never?"

Marlene looked solemnly at her. "For the same reason I refused to believe I wasn't like my friends, until I saw the evidence on my fingers, Sera. It's that simple."

They sat for a while, Sera trying to absorb the information.

Marlene looked on, knowing that amid the numerous hurts Sera was already suffering, one was still open and bleeding; not just the fact Sera had become fratricide and traitor to her kind, not just the constant grind of fear, not the burden of this new knowledge. She was willing to touch on all that, but the biggest pain hurt too much to get near.

Not once had Sera mentioned Lancer.

Marlene rubbed her temples, trying to eliminate the ugly dull throb there all this was giving her.

It was an exceptionally nasty specimen, thanks to all the moral thought going on, and getting worse too. In fact, it almost felt like...

She groaned, and then wailed as she clutched her head, doubling over.

Sera was already up. "Ariel! What..."

"Get the Cyclone! QUICK!" the simulagent choked out. Had she been capable of going any paler, Sera would have. In two seconds flat, she was helmeted and on the mecha, dragging Marlene after her.

Never before had Sera been so glad that the Forager was capable of running on fusion; the engines came alive and the two women were rocketed away from their stopping point, spurting a cloud of ocher dust behind.

Marlene gritted her teeth against the agony of the Invid hivesong so hard that a small trickle of green appeared on an otherwise perfectly human lip as the Cyclone jarred over stones and slashed through underbrush, the armor on Sera sparing Marlene the worst of the branch-whipping, but raising welts all the same.

Sera for her own part concentrated on nothing but clean, pure intent; the sheer strength of emotional thought sometimes involuntarily gave her position away to patrols. As she was, there was nothing for the Invid to latch on even had it or they been able to telepathically find the Sulagi's thoughts without her consent. Lancer had taught her well...

Pain there. She brutally shoved the memory of him aside and twisted the gas handle. Marlene's arms

around her tightened as the mecha leapt like a fish down an embankment.

Behind them, a tree erupted into ash and flames, and an Attack Scout plummeted through.

Sera gritted her teeth. No hope for it now...

"Get off!" she shouted at her passenger, and activated the protoculture engines.

Sera slowed for a fraction of a second, and Marlene leapt.

She landed hard, knocking the wind out, her hand scraped, her body bruised from the rock she'd partially landed on, but otherwise unharmed. She rolled into the underbrush as the other two Scouts of the detachment whipped past with a slap of hot wind, their entire attention on the allure of Sera's protoculture output.

Sera was already several hundred yards away, with enough clearance, and she flipped on the transmode switch.

She lurched into the air: the lightning reflexes of a chosen daughter of the Regis and alteration to the Forager's mechamorph controls enabled the motorcycle to shift and enfold the humanoid Invid's form in only two-and-a-half seconds instead of the usual five. It was barely in time; the Cyclone battloid shot upward as the Scout blasted through the area where she had been, the plasma cannons siding its eye roaring. Its brethren followed and blasted past, folded in attack configuration. They whipped past the Cyclone, than began to turn back toward it, evidently intending to catch Sera in between them.

Sera snorted in detached contempt. Did they never learn? Of course, they were only iigaari...

The last Scout most likely did not anticipate Sera's actual blasting for it at the last moment. Fumbling, it reached up a claw to protect its vulnerable eye, but the GR missile had already found its mark. A spurt of foul-smelling emerald blood, a last telepathic cry, and the mecha obliged gravity, erupting in a lurid fireball as it impacted the ground.

The others were marginally cleverer; they broke off their run and spun away, seeming to slow with distance. Then, imperceptibly, their speed picked up as they completed their arc and began to come back at her.

"Kara YAR!" Sera growled, and gunned her jets. Although she did not notice it, her cheeks were slick with her tears.

Below, Marlene rubbed at the dark green droplets beading where her skin had torn, beads of sweat trickling down her high forehead as she tried to cope with the intolerable shrilling in her head.

Sera twisted around, matador to a pair of surrealistic bulls, as the Attack Scouts slashed by so close the impact of their passing was like a body blow. Grunting from the slap of air, she gunned the rockets and shot up, the ground whirling crazily below like a vast lumpy carousel.

Somehow, the Scouts' simple minds were still convinced their tearing speed could deal with their tormentor; the reality was that their inertia kept them from achieving the same maneuverability as the far slower Cyclone. The balance of abilities kept either side from scoring an actual hit. Sera knew that she was able to deal with the next few passes if their tactics didn't change but once she got tired, one slip, and she would probably be joining her twin in whatever unlovely afterlife there was for their chimerical kind. And considering her late brother and her recent lifestyle choices, meeting Corg was something she definitely could put off.

She had no realistic resort except to use a tactic that she hated above all words. It almost always worked--but the filthiness she felt afterward almost made her wonder whether it was worth it.

The Scouts had circled back for another run at her. Taking in a breath, she concentrated.

One jerked in shock, wavering in flight. It had been happily concentrating on obliterating a human in human mecha; the last thing it had expected was a member of the Royals, out of nowhere, telepathically ordering otherwise. While it tried to cope with the conflicting information and was in its way struggling with the reasons why this might be, its attention momentarily left the hovering Cyclone Battloid. That confusion transmitted some of itself to its mate via the hive-bond, which similarly drew its focus..

They had a very short time to deliberate.

Two explosions roared through the Southern countryside, and the discussion ended. Below, Marlene sighed in overwhelming relief, as peace renewed its hold in her skull.

Sera looked on the raining pieces of her kindred, clammy-skinned and nauseated.

Eighty-five. Eighty-six. Eighty-seven...

Marlene ran up to the Battloid as it lit on the ground and peeled away, revealing a sagging figure within. Sera bent down and quickly shut off the Protoculture radiation to prevent it from attracting other patrols, then folded, gasping from the adrenalin drop after the skirmish.

"Sera! Are you..."

"I'm fine. I'm fine," Sera said blankly, her eyes glazed, the interior of her own mind telling her another

story. Her coverall and hair was wringing wet, and she shivered as the last of the battle-fever dribbled away to be replaced by exhaustion. "We've got to move before too long...but...I have to...rest. Just a second." With shaking fingers, she removed her armor. "Probably need to get the things back at the stop site, wherever that is..."

"We have to move."

"Not just yet, Ariel."

"Mar*LEEEENNEE!"* the simualgent screeched, her patience exhausted. Sera winced.

"Ooops. They didn't send anything back to the hive, and patrols are pretty infrequent in areas like this. Please." The armored boots came off next, as Sera ignored Marlene's indignant look. Mother, she was too Human by far--how would she be able to understand what Sera had done to save their lives was like bathing her insides in filth... Protected only by a dull-green jumpsuit and a light pair of shoes, Sera began to stave off cramps by walking around like a colicky horse. Her steps were slow, mechanical.

Despite herself, Sera was deeply grateful that Marlene's lover had executed their brother above Reflex Point. Corg would have had such a field day gloating over how far Sera had sunk she'd probably have murdered the Motherless bastard herself.

There was a sudden thin sound, as a sharp pain shot up into Sera's calf. Half-dazed, she didn't notice it at first.

Marlene looked down and screamed, a noise of such utter revulsion that Sera was taken aback, even as a numbness began to spread up her leg.

Then the simulagent, her eyes wide, teeth bared in revulsion, picked up one of the CVR boots Sera had been wearing and smashed it down at Sera's calf.

The gigantic timber rattlesnake released its hold and struck, but the boot came down again and again, as it writhed.

Sera watched, the realization coldly sinking in, her leg beginning to cramp, as the arm-thick reptile futilely tried to get out from underneath Sera's foot, rattling all the while.

Then the armor came down one more time, and the viper's head exploded in a splatter of blood, bone and brains.

"Oh sh--" Marlene whimpered, forcing Sera down and making a dry retching noise as she violently kicked away the still squirming headless corpse of the snake. She jerked up Sera's pant leg. "God god god--"

Sera stared down, her heart thumping, as Marlene's attention revealed two puncture holes on her ivory skin, leaking green fluid. The rattler had hit her just above the ankle, and had had several seconds to envenom the bite. "That thing was huge. How much poison did it have?" She produced a small Swiss Army knife she had kept around for such purposes, snapping out the blade.

"What?" Sera gasped. Marlene did not even bother to respond; ripping off the bottom of her shirt with her penknife, she wrapped the tourniquet just below the Sulagi's knee. Then she began.

Sera gritted in pain not from Marlene's knife incising her skin. Already, agony was flaring from the wound as the poison began to work its way in. Then the x-shaped slices in the bite marks were completed, and Marlene bent her head.

It was all she could do not to gag; Invid blood at the best of times smelt like rotting vegetation, and the taste was indescribable. Still, she sucked and spat, working with ruthless vigor on the wound. Marlene did not know how rattlesnake toxin would affect a Sulagi Invid, but with a human and a snake that size (*good god, it looked like a python!* Marlene thought. *How couldn't have we seen it?*), the bite was very bad news indeed.

It might not kill her, but it was quite possible that without treatment Sera could lose her leg.

Marlene prayed to various deities as she continued to spit the vile stuff of Sera's blood out over and over. At length, she stopped, feeling that she could do no more. Already, Sera was gritting her teeth against the pain as the venom Marlene hadn't been able to remove worked its way out from the entry point.

Marlene sprang up and dashed over to the Cyclone. Both of her prayers were answered; not only had Sera secured its cargo well, but in a couple minutes of frantic searching through her belongings, she found what she needed. However, the amount of antivenin left in the vial was hair-raisingly low.

I just hope it's enough.

Sera whimpered as the simulagent injected the remaining antivenin into her. Other than that, she made no response. She was already gone into the world of agony her careless move had brought her.

Night had fallen like a wet blanket, the only shining the tiny glow that Marlene permitted the lamp to emit. It fell on a bundle of blankets and the shivering form therein.

The antitoxin wasn't enough, Marlene thought. *If only that hunter hadn't gotten himself bitten two weeks ago...*

Marlene knew that even with the antivenin that there would be still some reaction; that much poison simply wasn't welcomed by the body. But in the current situation, and considering her current patient, she was gravely worried, going on terrified.

Maybe the venom had a different effect on Sulagi after all, or the toxin had been more than anticipated, or she hadn't had enough of rattlesnake antivenin in her supplies to counteract it.

Sera had shown promising signs at first. The swelling hadn't been great, and although the bite had been excruciating, it wasn't unendurable. But in the time since, the ankle had ballooned, and Sera had lapsed into delirium.

Now she lay shaking in blankets, muttering snatches of phrases in English, High Opteran, Zentraedi, and occasionally names; some that Marlene knew, and some she didn't. Currently, Sera seemed to be under the impression that she was lying wounded on a battlefield fought some years ago when she'd been in command of a human group.

Marlene herself was in pain. In terror that in her ravings her companion might attempt to contact loyalist patrols, Marlene had telepathically attempted to monitor Sera's mind to prevent such instances. Now she herself had beads of clammy sweat dewing her forehead.

I can't keep this up much longer. I can't. If only there was a decent shelter, I could check up on Sera regularly, keep her comfortable. But there isn't.

What if I sleep? Oh god, what if she takes a turn for the worse... The possibility was more than she could bear.

The thought of another Invid patrol she couldn't even contemplate.

If only there was a shelter, and help...

Cicadas screeched in their head-throbbing drone, and there was a hoot from within the woods--anyone's guess what that was. There was the thick, heavy feeling of an incoming front in the air.

Please don't let it storm. Not on top of everything else...

Hopelessly, she scanned the woods and paused, her eyes going wide.

No--it can't be.

Far off in the trees, about a mile or two--a small, yellow light.

It was undeniable. The skies had gone overcast and there was no chance that it might be the moon or stars.

Marlene feverishly debated the pros and cons--she had no idea what the light was or who was making it, but the silence in her head proved that it was not Invid, or at least not loyalist. She couldn't leave Sera, but at least she was showing no immediate change. It could be Invid sympathizers, it could be friendly types, it could be Invid haters. She might get lost en route, she might find important help.

At length, Marlene said a word Scott Bernard and her old companions would have found utterly shocking from her, and stood up. Tucking the blankets around the fevered Sera, she picked up the lantern and began to make her way toward that tentative beacon.

Marlene staggered at last out of the margin of the backwoods and into the edge of the yard, exhausted. It had taken at least forty-five minutes for her to work her way through the thick growth, her eyes perpetually on that light; even despite the care she had taken, she had gained her share of scratches, most of them on her hands and spots on her face smarted as well. There had also been areas that without the lantern Marlene could have easily broken her ankle or a leg in.

In addition, she had had to orient herself using Sera's position. The hurt from that combined with the chaos of Sera's hallucinations had made her into an automaton; but without, she would have become hopelessly lost. Still, she was shaking and coated with clammy sweat from the experience.

But that was nothing compared to what she had yet to do.

Swallowing, she walked up to the porch of the small, unwhite-washed edifice, and set one booted foot on the boards. They gave a chilling groan.

Immediately, the night erupted with the hysterical baying of a watchdog. Marlene shrieked in terror, reflexively turned to run, and tripped. Lying there in the damp grass, she waited for a set of salivating fangs to descend.

They did not come, although the racket continued from the other side of the house. Blinking incredulously, Marlene looked up into the light. She then realized the animal must have been chained in the back, and began to giggle hysterically. She stopped as she realized that the dog's uproar had made the house's occupant or occupants stir. Remembering herself, she got back to her feet, remembering at the last moment potential scratches, and raked hair over what might be the areas. About that time, there was movement from downstairs, and a door banging open. It was the back one.

"King, quiet!" The voice was female, and melodious despite its firm tone, but the dog shut up. Biting her lip, the simulagent limped back toward the porch as the back door slammed. About the time she'd reached the top, the door there had cracked open, revealing a figure with a flashlight.

"What?--who?" the occupant murmured. Marlene licked her lips and thought of something to say with no success. The door came open wider, and she blinked as the flashlight burned into her retinas. There was a murmured apology, and the light was lowered.

"Hello? I'm sorry about that. I--good God." The woman's voice trailed off in shock. Marlene swayed, trying to decide if it was my god-she's-bleeding-green shock or not. She realized the light wasn't quite that strong yet.

Marlene tried to see it from the other's perspective: a pallid waif of a young woman in a threadbare orange canvas jacket, clothing dirty, tattered, and torn, wide amber eyes glazed and staring, long red hair all over kingdom come. She must look like she'd been assaulted by a gang of thugs.

Yes, there'd probably be a bit of sympathetic horror there.

"Are you hurt?" the other gasped, the sincerity of her tone removing the remainders of Marlene's apprehension. Marlene, her eyes adjusted by now, could vaguely see a pretty and concerned face and short brown hair mussed with sleep. She reminded her of somebody, somehow.

Marlene swallowed. "No, not me--I don't need help. But I've got a friend out there, who does..."

"He's really a big sweetie," her companion said. "Once King gets to know you, he's very affectionate." The gigantic Newfoundland-Doberman mutt perked up his ears at his name and whined, then resumed his pacing alongside them. "I live alone most of the time, so..." She trailed off, as she followed Marlene's path. "A ferocious dog usually scares off the majority. And for the more unsavory types, such as frags, well, nobody knows I live out here anyway unless I let them."

"That's dangerous," Marlene commented abstractly, hoping this was the right way. "Don't you have anyone nearby?"

She said, "I had a husband, once..." trailing off. "And believe me, King knows when there's a real threat."

"I'm sorry."

"It's been a few years. It's nothing different from what anyone else has experienced."

Scott, Marlene said to herself, but kept private.

"Do you know where your friend is?"

Actually, Marlene did, but she hedged to allay suspicion. "I think...Over there. You're sure this is a better route?"

Her companion nodded, swatting at mosquitoes. King was snuffling vigorously at the air, then whined and set off. "King seems to have smelt her."

"Yes... I hope we don't endanger you."

The wavy brown hair drifted with her headshake. "I heard a bit of a clash earlier this afternoon. I didn't know it was you two--I'd taken the dog down into the shelter with me. It was over quickly however. It's a good thing those types of Invid can't or don't understand human habitation."

Marlene nodded. At least the dog hadn't taken any exception to smelling Invid humanoids or Invid blood, or things would have been uncomfortable indeed. They might still--she had no idea how she was going to explain Sera's bite wounds.

Maybe she's already seen my scratches. But if she has--then why hasn't she...

Could she be a Rose member? Should I--no, I can't risk it...

"There it is!" she exclaimed, suddenly jerked back from her disconnected imaginings. She stepped forward.

The dog sniffed the bundle of blankets, which moaned.

She paced nervously through the hive corridor, trying to figure out what was wrong. Or was it a fallout shelter? She couldn't make up her mind; it seemed to shift whenever she tried to concentrate on it. But she was fairly certain that directional signs in English didn't hang in Invid hives, nor should water pipes protrude from dark red, organic walls. She stared around, confused and worried. Her leg seemed to be aching in a glassy way, and she shook her head in an effort to make things fall into place.

Wait--what was with her hair?

She couldn't feel the now familliar weight of the upsweep on her scalp. Somehow, it seemed to be undyed, its native apple green color in a short, spiky affair save for the lengths in front of her ears that

came to her chin. And down there--she made a sound of disbelief at the pink, black and purple swathes of not-quite-cloth that clung to her slender body.

What was going on, that time had been reversed on her? And yet again she kinesthetically felt a nape-length bob and the weight of CVR armor. You couldn't feel both at the same time, could you? And there was that pain distantly throbbing like a white-hot poker in her ankle and naked confusion muddling her thoughts.

A scornful, unknown, but familliar laugh behind her. She whirled and saw nothing, the place going dark around her.

"Who's there?" she asked, her eyes darting around. There was no answer. "I'd like to know the people making fun of me. I can't say I enjoy the situation myself."

"What? No greetings to the family?" She went into a crouch, breathing hard, still finding it strangely hard to concentrate. "I'd have thought better from you, seeing how noble you were at Refles Point for the sake of a few humans."

"My friends now," she shot back. "I suppose you don't know the concept, whoever you are. The Invid never believed in much outside Hive-loyalty. Pity. It might have saved some needless identity conflicts."

Frankly she wouldn't have minded the voice's owner being her Mother, if only for the sake of giving Her a piece of her mind. Her impression, though, was that the mocker seemed to be the wrong gender. Gritting her teeth in frustration, she sat Indian-style on the floor, ignoring the voice with vigor. In order to occupy herself, and perhaps annoy the taunter, she thought of things from the intervening years. Rook and Rand's marriage, Annie's first attempt at a garden (rabbits ate the carrots), the hundred and one facets from leading a group of resistance in Colorado, the night she and Lancer had...(no not that, what had been joy then was only rending pain now in its place).

"You chose to be human," the voice pointed out, directly behind her. She flinched but did not move. "What you see with those pathetic ape-descents is beyond my comprehension, but the Hive was there for you. You chose to reject the Invid. It rejects you, if you're that fond of them."

"After seeing what the Invid's done to them these days, I have to think Humanity has a point." She gnawed on a finger, tormented by that naggingly-familliar and unpleasantly-related voice. She could not bring herself to turn around, though, and give her tormentor the satisfaction of reacting.

"How about what you've done to the Invid, eh, sister?"

"This world has taken enough abuse!" she snarled back at last. "Optera may have been turned into a wasteland, but these people have had to endure in all innocence four invasions now and have their planet raped because they were in the way." She never liked guilt, but it was raising its ugly head again; she

knew she was partly culpable for both races' suffering.

She forged ahead nonetheless. "And I can't say I precisely appreciate the Regis' convenient amnesia about leaving the Earth alone when it didn't suit Her. There are some things that need to have justice delivered for, and some people that deserve protection, even if," her voice caught, "the price is that high."

"Eighty-seven Invid worth? Quite high, I have to say."

She stiffened as though electrified. "How do you know?"

"How shouldn't I?" There was a hand placed on her shoulder, the shoulder that alternated between flightsuit and CVR-4 alloy at will, and she could stand it no more. She turned.

And gasped in disbelief.

The green-uniformed, cerulean-haired young man there grinned wolfishly; his narrow, sharp features predatory in aspect, his eyes nowhere near human or humane.

"Surprised, sister?"

"COOOOORRRRRRRRRGGG!!!"

Sera's scream of rage caused the dog, crouched near the door, to leap up and go into a frenzy of barking. His mistress snapped at him and he shut up, whining, his tail wagging in worry. The two women stared at each other over the prone Invid's body, their hearts still galloping with the shock. They then came back and tried to pin down Sera, who had decided to start struggling against whatever had caused that incredible fury. Her voice came loud and clear.

"Bernard killed you, you bastard! I felt you die! Why don't you stay dead, Mother damn you?! I'll bloody well finish the job!"

Marlene gritted her teeth, trying to deal with the writhing Sera's arms and upper body, which bucked in her waking dream. For a woman of her light build, Sera was strong. On the other end, Mrs. Maxwell was gritting her teeth as she dealt with Sera's jacknifing legs.

"Great!" Marlene gasped. "Now she turns violent!"

"Who's she--"

Marlene shook her head. "Considering who he was, I think she's got reason to turn violent."

Panting, Sera eventually subsided. "You motherless son... You've got the nerve to haunt me?" The crimson eyes were open, causing Maxwell to gasp in shock. However, the irises were tracking nothing in the room. Weakened by the venom and her earlier fight against the Scouts, Sera's fight had run out quickly. "Speaking of making your own bed, Corg, I'd hoped you ROTTED." Her head fell back as she dropped back into the deeps of hallucination.

Maxwell was still staring down at the body on the bed, the whites visible around her green eyes.

"Is she--"

"She is. But she's on our side," Marlene said, pleading. "She's hurt--we're hurt, and they're after us."

Maxwell stared at her, then, before Marlene could react, swept aside a concealing strand of red hair, revealing one of the smarting places on her face. "You're one too."

"I didn't enjoy knowing about it!" the simulagent shot back. In that moment of fear, Marlene hadn't realized until a couple seconds later that there was no loathing on the other woman's pretty but sorrow-worn face. She blinked, confounded, and was answered with a tired smile.

"Do you think I'd kick out you when you needed help, just because of your blood color?" Her savior shook her head. "You're not the first I've met, Marlene, and neither is Sarah down there." Her eyes indicated the softly moaning figure on the bed, whom Marlene had gifted with a quick pseudonym. "She's hurt, you're both exhausted, and I used to work with the resistance back in the last war. Besides, this war seems to have created quite a few conscientous objectors among your race." She bent back down to place on Sera's leg the first of several ice-packs she had brought from the cellar. "Now help me do something about the swelling in her leg before it gets damaged any further. "

Marlene nodded and went into the other room to get the supplies they'd gathered, leaving the patient and her nurse together.

She sucked on her lip and looked down at the puffy, swollen leg, the puncture marks an ugly blackish-green. "Well, let's see if icing it helps keep it down, Sarah..."

The patient whimpered something. Brows puckering, she bent down to comfort the woman, her fingers touching her clammy forehead. There was a trace of tears on Sera's lashes, and she murmured again, one word becoming coherent.

"...Lancer?" she whispered.

The fingers dropped, the face above it gone still and white.

"You done burning it yet?" Annie teased. Sticking a finger in the water, she playfully flicked it in the direction of the big, thickly-sideburned man making pork barbecue in a large kettle. He grinned and continued stirring. Over near him a wide-band radio was hissing out crackly communication.

Lunk? What was Jim doing in a hive, Sera thought, dazed. Wait, it wasn't in a hive, and her dead twin's ghost had quit tormenting her. Too, her clothing seemed to have settled down. She looked down, seeing a knit top and jeans. Something about the colors was ringing alarm bells--she remembered it, knew something dreadful about it, but she seemed to be confused and couldn't remember.

Over at the sink, Rook, Rand and Ariel seemed to be tormenting each other unmercifully on their vegetable-washing skills, or rather it was Rook and Rand torturing each other (humans had such STRANGE courtship rituals sometimes) and Ariel looking on and giggling like an idiot.

(Actually, the High Opteran name was closer pronounced as **Ar'yuel**, a title denoting stealth and reconnaisance as well as numerous other telepathic connotations attached to it. The humans had misinterpreted it as the name of a spirit in one of their plays. It was a moot point, though, since the subject had insisted loudly and at length she should be called that human name, Marlene. Sera kept forgetting, though.)

I remember this, don't I? Sera thought. *What's going on?*

"Hmph, what's taking Tomato God so long out in the garden?" Rand wondered loudly.

"Tomatoes, stupid." Rook elbowed him in the side, while Marlene raised her eyes in plea. "You seen how many those damn plants are putting out? Must be that Montana soil."

"Coming!" a new entrant singsonged, grunting as a bushel filled to the brim was navigated around the door. Sera looked on, smiling. "Oi, my back." The man who had once posed as the Americas' most popular female singer winced and grinned at the gathering, his lavender-tinted hair in his eyes. "I suppose nobody's thrilled by the idea of cooking up some tomato paste?" The blue eyes met the red over the table in unspoken intimacy.

Ignoring the warmth in her face, Sera said, "Not unless we love the idea of doing it for a week, thank you, Lancer." He grinned.

"Touche."

"Taken. Any corn?"

"Past peak, I'm afraid." Sera shrugged. He got a chair and sat. After a moment, she wandered over and leaned on the back of it.

She genuinely felt much better about her state of exile when he was around; she remembered just why she had elected to leave the collective, why she no longer could remain purely Invid. She hadn't been able to from the moment he'd dragged her by the ankles into three feet of water.

Although in the past couple of months their relationship had gone to an entirely new level--she felt her face heat again invisibly under her capillary coloration--it had a gentleness and companionableness to it. Lancer knew full well she still wasn't completely comfortable with the alien flesh and urges she'd been given, and had treated her accordingly. The wonderful--and frightening--realization was that she could no longer conceive of life without him somewhere in it...

But something was wrong. She'd experienced this before, hadn't she? And there was this pain in her ankle... but the play kept on, even as she was an unwilling player.

"I heard that, Rand," Lancer drawled. "You want to be appointed Dead Mammal God, I suppose, o great rabbit hunter?" Rand bronx-cheered back at him, and Rook punched him on the arm.

"Dead Rotted Mouse God, Lancer," she snorted. "He found that nice putrid one up in the flue, didn't he? The one that was stinking up the place?"

"Ewwwwww!" Annie interjected. "Totally gross. I mean, I wouldn't have wanted to touch that with a..."

There was a crash from the stove. Lunk was standing stock still, the ladle dribbling onto the heating coil and stinking. He didn't notice.

When Marlene moved at him, he hissed, "Shut up!" A deathly quiet fell over the gathering, broken only by the staticky hiss of the ham radio.

"...it was found on the margins of a farm in the area. We observed it for an hour or so, before it was done with whatever it was doing and took off. When we inspected the area where it'd been, we found Flowers of Life had somehow sprouted there. They were about a couple weeks old."

"You mean you saw an Invid Shock Trooper in the area?"

"Affirmative. God help us..."

A fork clashed onto the ground, as Rand forgot his grip. No one seemed able to speak, save for Marlene's whimper of fear.

Sera and Lancer stared at each other in horror, as the implications sank in, and as Sera-the-observer finally realized at last, the implications.

No! Not that again! She ran from the memory, through disconnected images and memories, some of them containing the ancient racial memory of the Invid, some from her time on Earth. Then the scene settled at last as something she'd rather forget.

"No," she said. "You're just a memory. Maybe not a dead memory, but a memory all the same."

The tall, lavender-haired man looked like her lover, but with one important difference. The fire, the spark of life that had buoyed him though years of devastation, and that had made Lancer Lancer was gone. They stood alone on blankness, wearing CVR, and she watched the slump-shouldered automaton look down at the ground, avoiding her gaze.

"No, damn you! Fight!" she cried. "You convinced me, didn't you? There has to be another way out of this too!"

He heaved a sigh, his hollowed eyes glazed. "Sorry, Sera...I can't...I'm so tired, and nothing seems to make a difference anymore..."

"It used to!" she hissed. "Curse you, if you roll over and die, Lancer, you'll be obliging the Invid anyway. At least you can make them choke, can't you?!"

"It didn't make a difference with Kosmas, did it?" He shuddered. "The Invid have got human help anyway... We're too self-interested a race, Sera, can't you see? They'll just look out for their own best interest, and if it means cooperating with the Invid, so be it. They never realize that it could be different, and they don't care, anyway. Are we even worth saving?"

"I thought so," Sera insisted. "Dammit, Lancer, I love you. That's the plain truth of it. If you leave, are you going to leave me to fight alone after you changed me like this? Because that's just what I'm going to do. I love you, you idiot, but I can't join you if you choose lying down. Make up your mind."

"...make up your mind..." she whispered.

Her face sunken with affliction, Sera had nonetheless calmed down. Mrs. Maxwell checked her leg and noticed the puffiness from the venom going down at last. Whatever was in Sera's hybrid biology had begun to retaliate against the substance damaging it. From the look of things, Sera was now on the edge of a peaceful rest and out of danger.

Marlene had sat down on a blanket to rest and had ended up curled up on it, in the comatose sleep of the exhausted. Their host had not awakened her, deeming it the kindest course.

Maxwell stood up, stretching, and sighed. The packs ought to keep at least until morning, and she herself was blank with fatigue.

She walked over to a window and looked out into the lightning-flickered darkness, seeing King pace on his chain and the fitful whooshes of the wind as the storm advanced.

As the lightning flashed again, it illuminated her face as she bit on her finger, her eyes silvered with tears.

The storm roared through that night and dawn with an elemental savagery not rivaled by anything else of Earth, shuddering the suddenly-fragile walls, making the dog cringe in his dry kennel. Even the Invid in the hives on the storm front hid; the gusts were so ferocious that they could smash Scout and Trooper carapaces like eggshells into the ground. The Invid controlled the world, but there were powers in nature even they knew well enough to bow to.

Neither the two Invid nor the one human, insensible in sleep, noticed it.

The storm's brutality was also hand-in-hand with its abruptness. In the space of three and a half-hours, it had blasted through, leaving at the end only tattered, patchy clouds and the suggestions of the far-distant stars blinking though the open areas.

When the skies lightened with dawn, the apricot light of the new sun was able to squeeze through the clouds, and off the droplets on the wet grass.

The eyelids fluttered and opened, the gentle copper of the early day lying across them and striking fire from the carmine irises they had hid.

"Ugh," she grunted as she felt the unfamiliar cushion. "Where'm I?"

She tried to lift her head and found that while she could do it, it took a great effort. She felt like she had been put though a mangle. Her eyes flicked down and noticed her numbed foot.

"Goddess of th' friggn' Hive," she murmured, as the memory hit her. Her head plopped back down.

She attempted to fork through a muddle of images and lost. Where had she been? Some of the things she remembered were murky, didn't fit...

While thinking, the doorhandle turned and opened.

"There you are! Morning."

"Ugh?" Sera inquired intelligently, dragging an arm up to wipe away sleep.

The attractive young human woman smiled at her, eyes warm. Sera remembered her from a couple of disconnected lucid moments last night. "I didn't think you'd awaken that early, considering what you'd been through, but just as well. I've been cooking breakfast."

"Mnnh." The smell suddenly hit Sera's olfactory nerves in one concerted blast and it was all she could do not to disgrace herself by drooling.

"Your foot's obviously been better, but it looks like it's recuperating nicely despite that venom. You'll definitely keep it in fine condition. Whatever else your race has, a sound constitution seems to be one of them."

The implications hit the other woman and she darted a horrified glance down at the iced appendage and then at her hostess, who shook her head, smiling. Sera looked flustered.

"Well, frankly, Sarah--if that's your actual name--it doesn't take a look at that bite to see what you really are. Those eyes aren't common even among Zentraedi. And your friend admitted both of you were Invid."

"Well, you can't believe everything the conventional wisdom says," Sera said a bit sharply. "That and I'm amazed Marlene even admitted to it. She's got a hangup in that area." She shook her head. "Ow." Half remembered pictures picked at the corners of her mind, causing severe upset. How much had she been ranting last night?... *Please don't let her know everything, for mother's sake...if she knows about my relationship to the others, my own role in the last war, then it's another lead for the Invid to wipe us out with.*

Her concentration, already spotty with hunger, finally switched to the problem of appeasing it. Unthinkingly, Sera rolled off the bed and tried to stand up, her leg almost buckling under her before she was supported by her arm slung around the other woman's shoulder. She blinked, clad in little else save a shirt and underwear and a bit confused.

"Watch it! What are you thinking to get up this quickly?"

"Hungry." Sera said shortly. "Sorry about that, my gut got in the way."

"Well, it should be about ready. Before it burns, let's take care of it."

Sera hopped awkwardly over with Mrs. Maxwell's support to the door. "Marlene?"

"Still asleep. She was just as exhausted as you. Do you realize what she risked to save you?"

The Invid winced. "No. I do now." A flush of embarassment hit her; it was her own stupidity, after all, that had led them to this pass. "Let her have some rest. She deserves some after all the dragging around I've been giving her." She quit hopping and put the foot down; considering what had happened to it, it was taking her weight suprisingly well.

"Don't do that!" Maxwell said. "Tissue damage."

"It'll live." Sera grinned, liking this woman, who'd been more concerned with injury to her patient than the race of the patient herself. Pity to have to leave here so soon, but the loyalists wouldn't be that understanding...

"Well, that's surprising good news," the sweet voice countered with some asperity, "considering there were a few points last night when I had my doubts about the rest of you."

Sera was chuckling ruefully as she closed the door behind.

"No, really, Marlene, what was I saying last night?" Sera leaned foward, her foot propped up, a cup of hot green tea between her hands. It had been Lancer's favorite kind; Sera was gratified to find a stock of it. Over the steam, she gave a pleading glance over at the other.

The simulagent sniffed in mock-disgust. "You actually got my name right." She shook her head, her fine, waist-length auburn hair flowing unbound in the breeze.

"Please. I'm concerned. I don't want her to pay the price for our loose lips."

The two were seated on the large back porch of the house. The ex-princess royal had coopted the swing and a stool for her foot; the simulagent was percariously perched on the walls encircling the area. Beyond, in the yard, the bent-over figure of their helper could be seen puttering in the garden.

Marlene looked at her and shugged. "All right. You might not like it."

"I remember enough to know what I'll probably not like. Out with it."

"You were screaming your head off about Corg. We had to pin you until you calmed down."

Sera looked grim. "Figures. I remember something about an intense desire to rearrange his face. Odd that I didn't have that urge back when he was available."

"And Lancer."

Sera looked grimmer. "How symnetrical. My demon on my left, my angel on the right, as the humans say, even though he gave up the position."

"Sera, he went through more than many people do in his life. Even he couldn't keep doing it forever." Unspoken, Marlene's own constant hurt, the pain of Contact, her identity unknown and her love missing...

Sera blinked rapidly. "I know. I know. But I don't feel it, that's my problem."

Marlene placed a hand on hers. "Sera. You do feel. Or else you wouldn't be as angry at him." Sera started, her eyes on Marlene's sincere amber ones. Marlene nodded. "Maybe that's why I keep...denying...myself. Because deep down..."

Sera shook her head, the fake brown fluffing out. "Yes and no. You taught me that, years ago--we can choose. We're what we want ourselves to be." Marlene nodded, reluctantly. "Do you remember anyone else?"

"Not that I knew. Well, pieces of your leading that resistance group, but nothing of the others besides Lancer."

"Thank Spirit of Light for small favors."

"So what do you think we need to do? We can't stay here very long, of course, but your ankle..."

"Actually, I was planning to leave here later today, tomorrow at the most."

"Sera, you got bitten by the largest snake I'd ever seen in my life yesterday! Are you insane?"

"No, just being me. Bad enough. But just because I was a fool doens't mean the loyalists have stopped looking for us. If we've got to get killed, let's not take her with us. At least the James Gang further up in the Ozarks has signed on for the slaughter. We have to move. That's all there is to it."

Marlene's pale, delicate face froze in shock, and she slowly nodded.

"Besides..." Sera trailed off, but Marlene could follow her thoughts even without telepathy. Perhaps we could find the others. Perhaps...there had been that mess out in the West Coast a couple years ago, with rumors of it coordinated by a lavender-haired man, grayer and sadder than before, but with spine-tingling familliarity to his description. Could Lancer have regained that fire?... Only looking and running would help confirm the guesses and the rumors--and perhaps together with their comrades, they could find the key to end this dirty sibling to the last Invid occupation...

"Do you think her knowing what she does about us'll make her vulnerable?" Sera spoke again after a few minutes.

Marlene looked over at the woman in the garden.

"I don't think so. I certainly hope not."

"Thank so much. But I don't think it'll give me too much trouble. I'm not walking on it, understand."

"Well, for goodness sake, at least take some supplies." King paced snuffling around Mrs. Maxwell's feet as she imposed a large bundle of goods on Sera, who'd obviously seen better days. Sera looked befuddled, but accepted and stowed it in the carrier when the human woman started to look obstinate. "This will keep you two from haivng to go into any unfriendly towns for at least several days."

Sera stared at her, ruby eyes blinking rapidly. "Just one question--why?"

The human's eyes flicked downward, then back up. "Why? Just because. Some things you can't rationalize."

Marlene left the house then, and moved over to them. As she passed their hostess, her fine brows puckered and she began to stare intently. The other woman blinked back, then began herself to stare very hard at Marlene.

Sera looked on, completely confused.

Is there something I'm missing on here? she thought.

"Um..." Marlene thought after a second. "Do I know you? You look..."

Mrs. Maxwell answered quickly, flushing. "What? No, I don't think so. You could be confusing me with somebody else."

Marlene blinked, then shook her head. "Probably. Heaven knows my memories aren't that good."

"Well..." Sera said at last, "I suppose you should take care. Perhaps we'll meet after all this is over without this ridiculousness. Our relatives might make a house call--" lopsided grin, Marlene making a face, "which is bad for all involved. And don't worry, I WON'T walk on it."

"I'll make sure of that," Marlene challenged. The two Sulagi glared at each other.

There was a final round of farewells. Sera gunned the engines on the Forager as Marlene seated herself and put on her goggles, and the two pulled down the overgrown track; lost to sight at the first turn, and to hearing within minutes.

King shoved at the limp hand with his nose and whined; automatically, it began to scratch behind his ears.

In the lightened breeze of the cooler post-storm weather, the brown waves of her hair stirred, held back by a simple headband. Still, for several minutes, the woman's slender figure stood motionless, staring in a direction, the afternoon sunlight shining off finally-shed tears that weren't entirely regret.

She knew why she'd seen that deceptively fragile-looking redhaired young woman before. And that gallant, conflict-stricken Invid shared a kinship with her that fates willing she would never discover.

I know why, Lancer, Carla Maxwell thought. *I know why*.

Turning, she went back inside the house.

GLOSSARY

ANTON KOSMAS

An ex-officer of the E.B.S.I.S. (Eastern Bloc Soviet Independent State) who became the first human to ally himself with the returning Invid during the Third Invid War. As part of his agreement with the Invid, he betrayed Rook, Lancer, and their friends and led them into an ambush. The heroes survived the attack, but agreed to break up and go their separate ways afterwards for a variety of reasons. Kosmas was later killed by resistance fighters after he fell into disfavor with the Invid.

ATTACK SCOUT

A new mecha used by the Invid that replaced the older Scout and Armored Scout designs used during the Third Robotech War. The new mecha design puts an emphasis on speed and heavier armor while sacrificing agility. Attack Scouts are piloted by *Iigaari*, the least evolutionary

advanced drone in the Invid hive race.

FRAGS

A slang term for humans who are working for the Invid, for personal profit, power, protection, or any number of other reasons. Frags are notorious for rooting out members of the terran resistance and their allies and handing them over to the Invid for extermination (or worse).

SULAGI

The Invid name for members of their race that have been evolved into a humanoid form. Many Sulagi are unhappy with the second Invid invasion of Earth, and some have even defected to join the humans in their struggle.

VR-135 FORAGER

A second generation cyclone design, developed on Tirol after the Third Robotech War and shipped to Earth in large numbers after the Invid returned. The most impressive aspect of the new cyclone designs is the replacement of the backup internal combustion engine with a fusion generator, which provides dramatic increases in the power available when the protoculture cells are shut off. Designed specifically for Veritech pilots shot down during combat, the Forager is highly sought after by the resistance for its durability and ease of repair.

THE WHITE ROSE

A secret network of Sulagi (humanoid Invid) that have defected from the Invid forces, and the humans that protect them. The White Rose works to help the terran resistance by keeping human fighters informed on new developments and troop movements among the Invid occupation forces. However, members of the Rose are in constant danger, as the Invid forces have begun a vicious campaign to root out and exterminate the renegades at any cost. The name of the resistance group has historical significance; the original White Rose was a group of German students who circulated anti-Nazi propoganda, and who eventually paid for it with their lives.

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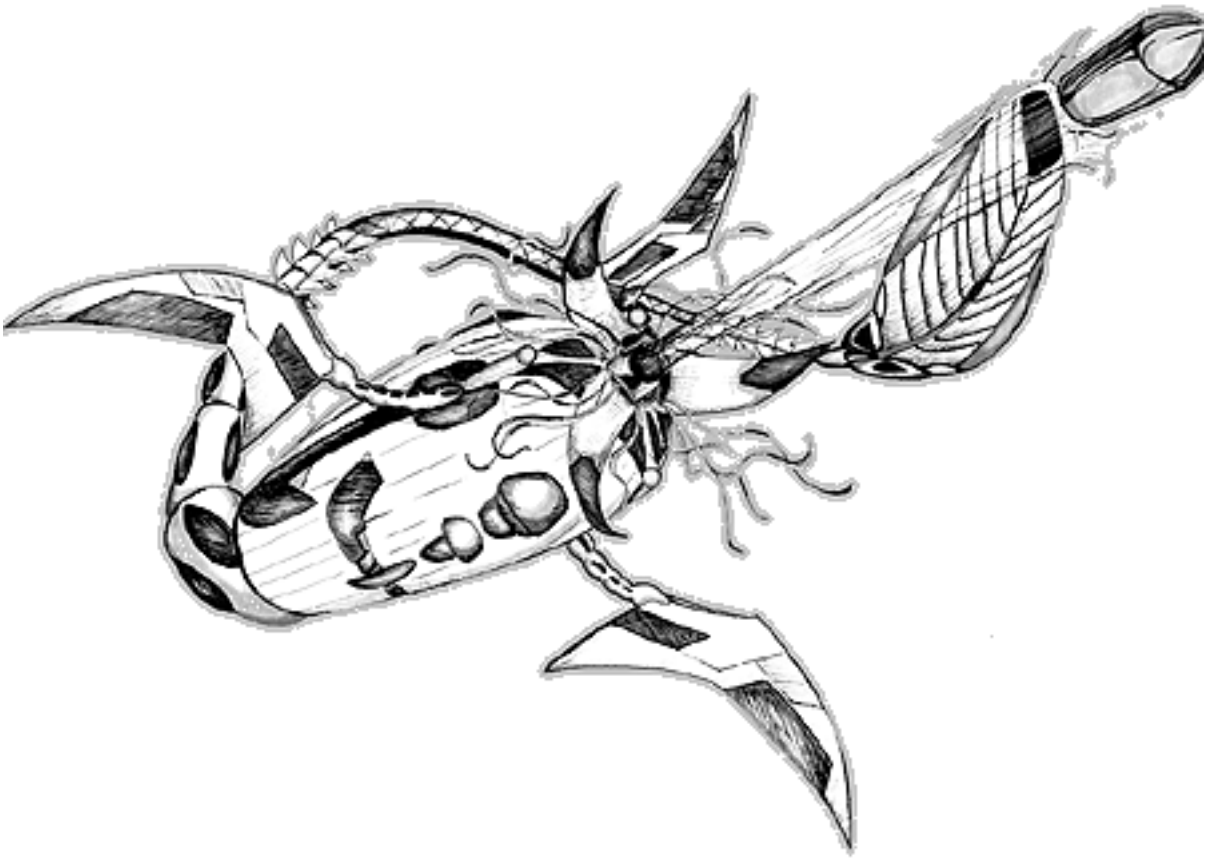
Mecha design and illustration by **AMY BORDEN** *(borden@alexia.lis.uiuc.edu)*.

THE LEVIATHAN INORGANIC



BACKGROUND

Prior to the Third Invid War the high seas had traditionally been a safe haven and refuge for resistance fighters. Since the flower of life will not grow underwater the Invid have had little interest in the Earth's seas and failed to patrol them with any great frequency. Therefore any resistance group who was lucky enough to find a stable base in the ocean or a large lake could escape pursuit and detection by fleeing out to sea. A number of resistance factions operated this way during the Second and early Third Invid Wars, working from abandoned oil rigs, old supertankers or even the occasional submersible military ship.

Such groups were extremely successful even though they were limited to attacking targets not far inland from the shoreline.

In late 2044 this changed with the introduction of the Leviathan Inorganic into Earth's oceans. Initially little was known about this new Invid weapon, except that it was seaborne and VERY powerful. Entire resistance bases on the ocean were destroyed in minutes with no survivors, giving the resistance and the REF very little information to go on regarding this new threat. It wasn't until 2045 when a Leviathan was successfully destroyed and the wreckage examined did the resistance finally learn about the new inorganic.

The Leviathan is a monstrous creation. Over 350 ft (106.7 m) long, the inorganic resembles a giant segmented worm with fins and a large, flat tail. When preparing to attack, however, the "fins" extend into large vibro-blade scythes, and numerous tentacles extend around an ultra-sharp beak-like mouth concealing a large torpedo launcher in the center of the beast. In combat the Leviathan acts like an enraged whale, constantly slamming into its target while using its scythes and tail to tear the ship or base apart. The tentacles and beak are primarily used for grabbing smaller boats and mecha, which are dragged underwater and quickly torn to pieces. If distance attacks are necessary, the Leviathan can respond with a trio of blue-green laser cannons (attuned for underwater firing) surrounding the beak of the mecha, or by firing torpedoes out of its mouth. If attacked by multiple enemies underwater, the inorganic has one final attack it can rely on. The tail of the mecha can generate an extremely powerful electric shock that can overload and disable mecha underwater, as well as possibly killing the pilots.

The Leviathan is propelled by a magneto-hydrodynamic drive that uses superconducting materials to propel water through itself, thus being able to achieve impressive speeds while being virtually silent underwater. The tail and body styling of the mecha is designed to create perfect laminar flow around the Leviathan's body, allowing it to reduce water resistance against its body when travelling at high speeds. The inorganic is equipped with both active and passive sonar for tracking targets, as well as normal vision and protoculture sensors for combat. Like all of the second generation inorganics, the Leviathan does not rely on an Invid brain for direction. In fact, the monstrous creation was designed specifically to operate for extended periods of time in large bodies of water without any communication or direction from an Invid base. The Leviathan possesses a moderate degree of intelligence, and if it encounters an ocean-borne force that it feels is superior to itself it will stalk the prey and look for signs of weakness, while calling out for other Leviathans to help it destory the target. Leviathans will also follow orders given by Stage 6 Invid and are occasionally called in to help in assaults against ocean targets.

Leviathans were first introduced by the Stage 6 Invid in late 2044 in the South Pacific, where they proved very effective and were quickly put into action in other locations as well. By 2045 they were found in all the oceans of the world, as well as in other large bodies of water such as the Great Lakes in North America. Most of the time the monsters operated alone, occasionally joining together in packs for brief periods of time or returning to base for repair and resupply after long battles. Leviathans can operate for years without support, and several surviving inorganics continued to strike at ships years after the Third Invid War ended. The last known Leviathan on Earth was destroyed by a USNA naval fleet with RGF assistance in 2057.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Gorstanna" **REF Nickname:** "Leviathan"
Vehicle Type: Submersible Anti-Naval Robot
Crew: None.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

	Front Beak Blade (3)	100 each
	Front Tentacles (21)	35 each
	Blue-Green Laser Cannons (3)	75 each
[1]	Torpedo Launcher	120
[2]	Main Body Segment	750
	Forward 1/2 Tail	550
	Rear 1/2 Tail	350
[3]	Flat Tail End	500
	Vibro-Scythes (3)	350 each
	Scythe Arms (3)	150 each

NOTES:

[1]
Destroying the Torpedo Launcher signifies that the exit port for the torpedoes has been sufficiently damaged to the point where the Leviathan can no longer launch torpedoes. The actual torpedo mechanism and the torpedoes themselves are in the center of the inorganic and cannot be attacked without destroying the main body of the mecha.

[2]
This is the main body for the Leviathan, which contains the brain, engines, sensors, and most of the weapons of the inorganic. Depleting the MDC of the main body segment will cause the Leviathan to self- destruct, doing 5D6x10 M.D. to everyone in a 400 ft (120 m) radius around the mecha.

[3]
Destroying the flat tail end of the Leviathan will deprive it of its shock attack and reduce the overall speed of the creature by 35% due to problems with stability. Destroying the front or rear halves of the tail of the Leviathan will reduce the mecha's speed by 55%.

SPECIFICATIONS

Swimming:
The Leviathan can propel itself under water at speeds up to 70 knots (81 mph/130 kmph) and can

dive up to 10 miles below the surface.

Land/Air/Space:

The Leviathan is specifically designed for underwater operation and cannot perform effectively in any other environment. On land the inorganic will be unable to move, and in space it will merely flail about with no means of propulsion.

Width:

40 ft (12 m) with fins/scythes retracted into main body. 150 ft (45 m) with scythes at maximum extension.

Length:

365 ft (109.5 m) from beak to tail.

Weight:

350 tons

Cargo:

None, though the Leviathan can capture and tow over 350 tons of weight if necessary.

Abilities:

- Swimming - 95%
- Tracking: Humanoid, Mecha, or Sea Vehicle - 60%
- Tracking: Protoculture Powered Mechanism - 85%
- Navigation: Air, Land, Water - 90%
- Detect Ambush - 45%
- Detect Concealment - 50%
- Protoculture Sensor - Range: 3 miles (4.8 km)
- Passive Sonar - Range: 40 miles (64 km)
- Active Sonar - Range: 10 miles (16 km)
- Thermal (passive infrared sight) - Range: 1000 ft (305 m)
- Nightvision (passive night sight) - Range: 4000 ft (1220 m)
- External Audio Pickup (above water) - Range: 1200 ft (366 m)
- Audio/Video Communications - Range: 200 miles

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **VIBRO-SCYTHES:** The main weapon of the Leviathan are the three huge vibro-blade scythes that are connected to the main body of the inorganic. In travel mode the scythes are drawn into the body, but in combat they can extend up to 50 feet away from the inorganic in order to swipe at attackers.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Physical Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Damage**: 6D6 M.D. when vibro blades are not active, 6D6x10 M.D. when active.

- **Rate of Fire**: The Leviathan can attack up to three times per round with the vibro-scythes (once per blade).
- **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.

2. **BLUE-GREEN LASER CANNONS (3):** Arranged around the central mouth of the Leviathan are three large laser cannons for energy attacks above or under water. The cannons are limited in range under water, but are still powerful enough to provide effective weapons in a fight. Above water the laser cannons are devastating, and the Leviathan will often surface during a raid to fire at ships or mecha trying to attack from above. The beams generated by these lasers are tuned to the blue-green area of the spectrum to increase their range and effectiveness underwater.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Surface, Anti-Aircraft
    - **Range**: 5,000 ft (1,515 m) above water, 1,000 ft (305 m) under water.
    - **Damage**: 6D10 M.D. per shot.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Up to three shots per laser, per melee round.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **TORPEDO LAUNCHER:** For underwater attacks the Leviathan is armed with a torpedo launcher mounted along the center of its body. The torpedo launcher fires underwater missiles guided by a sophisticated sonar and protoculture targeting system, making them difficult to avoid once a lock-on has been achieved. Fortunately the missiles are only moderately fast and can be shot out of the water if the target is lucky. Furthermore the Leviathan carries only a limited number of missiles, and once depleted must return to base for resupply.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Anti-Warship, Anti-Submarine
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Demolition
    - **Range**: 3 miles (4.8 km)
    - **Speed**: 55 knots (64 mph/102 kmph) underwater
    - **M.D.C. of Missile**: 15
    - **Damage**: 1D4x100 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Once per round
    - **Payload**: 12 torpedoes
    - **Bonuses**: +4 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses. +2 to dodge.

4. **ELECTRIC SHOCK:** If desperate the Leviathan can generate a strong electric shock from its body that can damage and incapacitate mecha and other attackers around the inorganic. The shock causes damage to mecha by overloading electrical systems and burning out sensors and computers, and can occasionally even penetrate armor and devliver a nasty shock to the pilot. Unprotected persons in the water are usually killed instantly by the shock. Due to the drain this attack causes on the Leviathan's own systems, it will use this ability only in desperation.

- **Primary Purpose**: Defense
- **Range**: 300 ft (90 m) radius
- **Damage**: 1D6x10 M.D. to everything within the radius of the shock. In addition every target mecha must roll 1D6 and consult the table below for possible additional damage from the electric shock.

    1. no additional effect.
    2. no additional effect.
    3. Sensors and targeting systems short out. Pilot must rely on visual displays only and loses any combat bonuses from tracking systems.
    4. Servo motors in mecha limbs short out. 1D4 limbs (determined by GM) becomes immobilized and unusable due to loss of motor control.
    5. Onboard computer crashes. Cyclones may still move normally, but Veritechs and other larger mecha are immobilized for 1D6 melee rounds while the computer reboots itself. The pilot may make no attacks or defend himself during these rounds.
    6. Pilot takes 6D6 S.D.C. damage from electric overload (armor does not help)

- **Rate of Fire**: Once. After generating a shock the Leviathan will be unable to use its laser cannons for 1D6+4 minutes after the attack. The inorganic will not be able build up enough power for an additional shock for 30 minutes after an attack.
- **Payload**: Essentially unlimited
- **Bonuses to Strike**: Instantly affects all mecha in target area. Parry/Dodge is NOT possible.

5. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The Leviathan has a number of physical "hand-to-hand" attacks available to it for use in close combat. In addition to the three vibro-scythes, the inorganic may use its tentacles and beak to capture and tear apart mecha and small boats, or it may use its body as a weapon to ram a target. Resistance fighters who are foolish enough to engage a Leviathan in close combat rarely survive. The smaller tentacles have an effective P.S. of 55, and the beak has a P.S. of 75.

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: 5
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +2 to dodge when moving at speeds above 40 mph (64 kmph), +1 to roll with impact.
    - **Damage:**
        - Crush/tear with tentacles: 1D4 M.D. per tentacle used.
        - Tear with beak: 5D6 M.D.
        - Tail Slap: 4D6 M.D.
        - Body Slam: 6D6 M.D.
        - Charge: 4D6 M.D.
        - Full-speed charge (takes 1 full round to get up to speed): 2D6x10 M.D.

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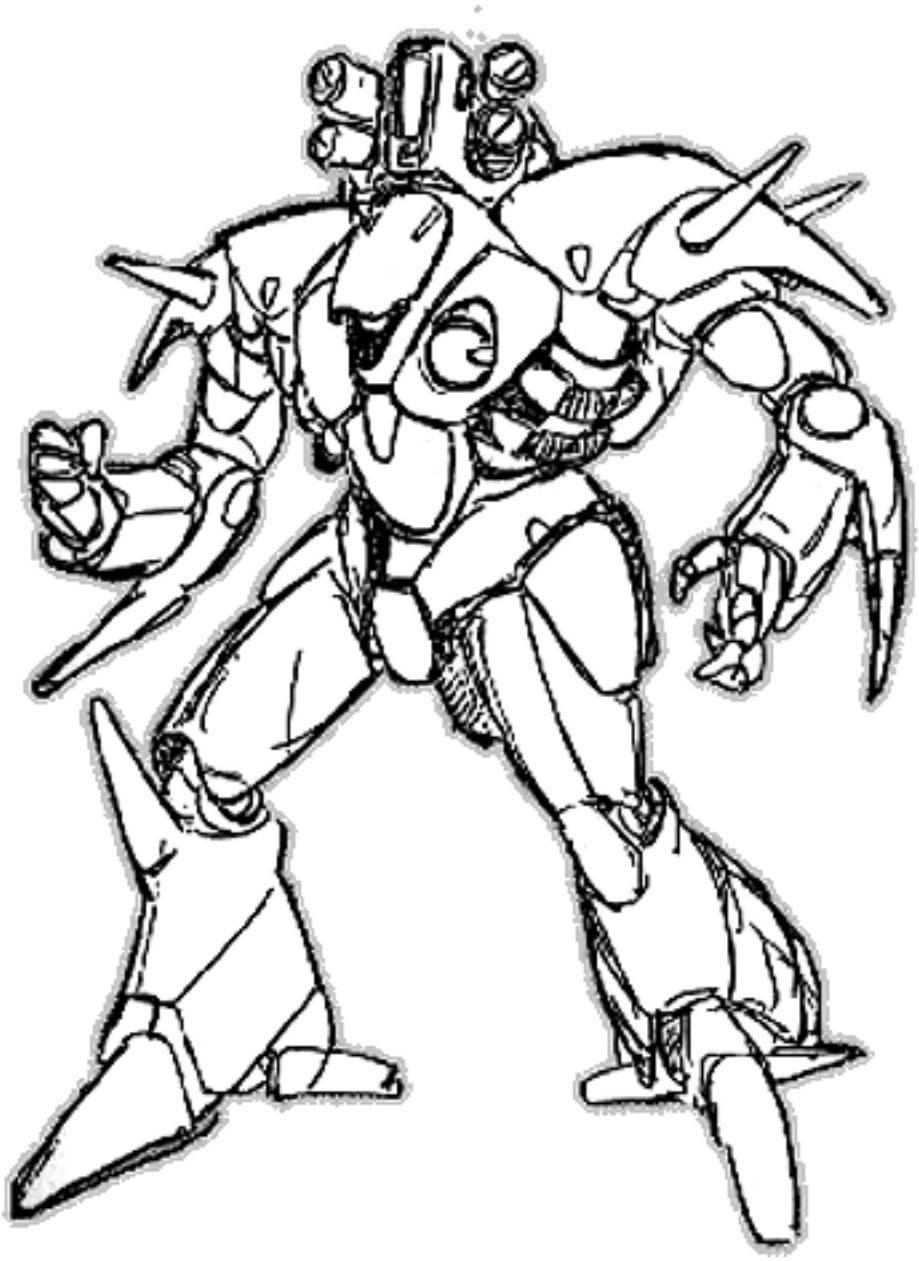
THE ODEON MARK II HEAVY COMBAT INORGANIC



BACKGROUND

One of the earliest goals of the Stage 6 Invid in their weapons research and experiments was to find a way to supplement their limited combat forces. It is therefore no surprise that one of the first new generation Inorganic designs perfected was the **Odeon Mark II** (or **Brawler**) **Heavy Combat Inorganic**, designed and built to fight alongside the **Combat Trooper** as the Invid's first line of offense/defense. The name "Odeon 2" is actually a misnomer given to the inorganic by a young REF Intelligence Agent who was among the first resistance fighters to spot the new design. Although the Odeon 2 does bear a moderate resemblance to its distant cousin from the Regent's forces, the Brawler (as it is also called) is a completely different design with no relationship between the two mecha.

The Odeon Mk. II is an enormous inorganic, standing over 41 feet (12.5 meters) tall and equal in size to even the massive new VBF-3 Beta Fighters. The mecha's body is designed to intimidate and frighten an opponent as it slowly and unstoppably advances across the battlefield towards its target. The Odeon 2 is also equipped with a jet thruster backpack, which allows it to fly at moderate speeds and thus keep up with Combat Troopers and other Invid mecha. Like the old Odeon, the amount of damage the Odeon 2 can endure is truly staggering. In addition to its great strength and devastating hand-to-hand attacks, the Odeon 2 is also equipped with a number of distance attack weapon systems. The main weapons of the inorganic are two lance-like laser cannons mounted on the arms of the mecha, which can be used to strafe targets from a distance as well as slice through enemy fortifications. In addition, some Odeon 2s are armed with an external missile launcher that holds 4 heavy-warhead missiles, ideal for smashing through fortifications and knocking out enemy defenses. The launcher does have a disadvantage in that the missiles can be detonated prematurely if resistance fighters can get close enough to shoot them before they are fired, however. Finally, the Odeon 2 is armed with a devastating plasma cannon on its left breast, which vaguely resembles the old plasma generators seen on EBSIS Battloids during the period of the Second Robotech War. The napalm-like plasma streams fired from this weapon stick to targets hit by the Odeon 2 and continue to do damage until the plasma is scraped off or neutralized. The plasma cannon is thought to be a legacy weapon left to the Invid from the time ex-EBSIS Lieutenant Anton Kosmos worked with them to build the Annihilator and SH-AT combat mecha.

The Odeon Mk. II was encountered in two variants; as a worker and as a heavy combat unit. In its worker configuration both the missile launchers and the laser cannons were removed from the inorganic, leaving only the plasma launcher as a distance attack weapon. Not all combat units were equipped with missile launcher units; usually only 25% of Odeons (3 out of a typical squad of 12) were equipped with launchers to provide support while their teammates advanced. Although the inorganics possessed independent intelligence and were not directly linked to Invid Brains like older inorganics, they required guidance and leadership from more evolved Invid to be of maximum effectiveness in combat. A Brawler without leadership will mindlessly attack an opponent until either it or the opponent is destroyed. Odeon 2 inorganics became very common after 2044 and could be found at virtually every Invid Hive, base, and slave camp around the world. No Odeon Mk. IIs are known to have survived the final battles of the Third Invid War.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Orotyug"; **REF Nicknames:** "Brawler", "Odeon 2"
Vehicle Type: Heavy Combat Inorganic
Crew: None.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

[1]	Sensor Eye/Head	250
	Armored shoulders (2)	350 each
	Arms (2)	150 each
	Arm Lasers (2)	85 each
	Hands	75 each
	Legs (2)	350 each
[2]	Main Body	700
	Plasma Cannon	80
	Jet Backpack	400
[3]	Top Missile Launcher (optional)	150

NOTES:

1. Destroying the protected sensor eye of the Odeon 2 will deprive it of its main sensor systems, but backup sensors will provide it with limited vision and allow it to remain in a fight. The Odeon 2 has a penalty of -4 to strike, parry, and dodge if the main sensor eye is destroyed.
2. Destroying the main body will completely destroy the Inorganic. The smoking remains will fall to the ground and crumble into scrap metal.
3. Destroying the top missile launcher will NOT detonate any remaining missiles, but will prevent the missiles from being fired. The missiles must be individually targeted to detonate them (see below).

SPECIFICATIONS

Running: 55 mph (88 kmph)
Climbing: Good; equal to a skill of 70%, reduce speed by 1/3.
Leaping: 30 ft (9 m) high or lengthwise without thruster assistance.
Flying:
Stationary hover to 200 mph/321 kmph, with a maximum altitude of about 4000 ft (1220 m).
Swimming:
Cannot swim, but can travel along the bottom of any lake, river, or ocean at 1/4 max land speed.
Space:
The Odeon 2 can operate in space or without air. It has full maneuvering capabilities in zero gravity so long as its jet backpack remains intact.

Height:
36 ft (11 m) at the shoulders, 41 ft (12.5 m) including missile launcher.
Width:
25.2 ft (7.7 m)
Length:
12.5 ft (3.8 m)
Weight:
11,500 lbs (5,218 kg)
Cargo:
The Odeon 2 can carry/drag up to 20 tons (40,000 lbs/18,150 kg) of weight with proper bracing.

Abilities: Standard invid sensors and capabilities, plus:

- Land Navigation - 70%
- Detect Ambush - 40%
- Detect Concealment - 50%

- Thermal (passive infrared sight) - Range: 1500 ft (458 m)
- Nightvision (passive night sight) - Range: 2500 ft (761 m)
- External Audio Pickup - Range: 300 ft (91.5 m)

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **LASER CANNONS (2):** When equipped for combat, each arm of the Odeon 2 is equipped with a lance-like laser cannon, mounted at the elbow and pointing forward. These lasers are aimed by moving the Odeon's arms and can be fired to the front or sides of the inorganic. The cannons can also be used to generate a continuous laser beam for cutting and demolition purposes.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Range**: 3000 ft (905 m)
    - **Damage**: 2D6 M.D., 4D6 M.D., or 1D6x10 M.D. per blast. Bursts are not possible, but the laser can be fired in a continuous stream for cutting/demolition if necessary (does 4D6x10 M.D. per round).
    - **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per cannon, per melee. Both cannons can be fired simultaneously at the same target; counts as one attack. The cannons can also be fired in a full melee continuous beam, but suffer a -6 to strike a moving target.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.

2. **PLASMA CANNON:** This weapon is roughly based on the devastating plasma generator/ejector weapon that was a favorite mecha armament of the Eastern Bloc Soviet Independent State

(EBSIS). On the left side of the chest of the Odeon is a plasma generator that can "squirt" a stream of high-temperature plasma at an enemy directly in front of the Odeon. This napalm-like plasma is devastating as it clings to its target and continues to do damage until scraped off, cooled, or the mecha is destroyed. Fortunately the plasma cannon has a short range and can ONLY be fired at targets directly in front of the Odeon; aiming at other targets requires the Odeon to twist its entire torso.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Demolition
- **Range**: 300 ft (90.5 m)
- **Damage**: 5D6 M.D. per round. The plasma will continue to do damage to any target it hits until it is neutralized. The plasma can be neutralized in one of three ways:

    1. **Scraped Off**: The covered mecha can attempt to scrape the plasma off itself with its hands. This takes 1D6 melee rounds, during which time the plasma does 2D6 M.D. to the mecha's hands and 3D6 M.D. to the covered area per round. Additional mecha can help scrape plasma off the target; subtract 1 melee round per mecha helping, but the helping mecha receives 2D6 M.D. damage to its hands.
    2. **Cooling**: If the covered mecha is near snow or water, it can dive into the liquid to attempt to cool itself off rapidly. Cooling the plasma in this way takes 2 melee rounds. After the first round the mecha will receive only 2D6 damage, and after the second it will take no additional damage.
    3. **Extinguishing**: If a friendly mecha nearby is loaded with fire-retardant missiles it can fire these missiles at the affected mecha in an attempt to neutralize the plasma. It takes two fire-retardant mini-missiles or one fire-retardant SRM to completely neutralize the plasma.

    The plasma will eventually cool and neutralize itself, but this will take 5D6 minutes, by which time the affected target is usually severly damaged or destroyed. If a limb is struck with the plasma stream (the arm, for example) the target ceases to take damage once the limb is destroyed.
- **Rate of Fire**: Limited to once every other round to prevent overheating.
- **Payload**: Unlimited
- **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.

3. **SHORT-RANGE MEDIUM-WARHEAD MISSILES:** As an optional weapon system, the Odeon 2 can be mounted with a missile launcher on top of the inorganic's jet backpack. This launcher contains 4 short-range medium- warhead missiles that can be used for assault, destruction of fortifications, or even anti-aircraft weapons. The disadvantage of the system is that the missiles are mounted externally and can be targeted and detonated prematurely before they are launched. Each missile has 5 M.D.C. and is a small target (-4 to strike). Hitting a missile before it is launched instantly detonates all remaining missiles and does full damage to the main body of the Odeon 2. For this reason an Odeon 2 equipped with missiles will usually fire them within the

first few rounds of combat.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-aircraft, anti-mecha
- **Range**: 2 miles (3.2 km)
- **Damage**: By missile type:

  - **High Explosive**: 2D6x10 M.D., 30 ft (9.1 m) blast radius.
  - **Fragmentation**: 2D4x10 M.D., 40 ft (12.2 m) blast radius.
  - **Armor Piercing**: 4D4x10 M.D., 10 ft (3.0 m) blast radius.
  - **Plasma/Heat**: 2D6x10 M.D., 40 ft (12.2 m) blast radius.

- **Rate of Fire**: One missile per attack, volleys are not possible. All four missiles can be fired in a single melee round by expending all four attacks.
- **Payload**: 4 missiles total.
- **Bonuses to Strike**: Each missile is equipped with a protoculture sensor. The missiles have a +3 bonus to strike an active protoculture source, otherwise they are treated as unguided missiles (no bonuses or penalties).

4. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT:** The Odeon 2 is incredibly strong and can do massive hand-to-hand damage if allowed to get into melee combat range. Smart resistance fighters will try to stay out of the reach of the Odeon 2 and engage it at a distance.

   - **Attacks Per Melee**: 4
   - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +2 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to roll or fall with an impact.
   - **Damage:**
     - Swatting Punch: 2D6 M.D.
     - Full Strength Punch: 2D4x10 M.D.
     - Crush: 3D6 M.D. per round
     - Tear/Pry: 2D6 M.D. per round
     - Kick: 4D6 M.D.
     - Stomp: 3D6 M.D.; effective only against objects 14 feet (4.2 m) or smaller.
     - Charge: 6D6 M.D.
     - Flying Tackle: (counts as all four attacks) 2D6x10 M.D.

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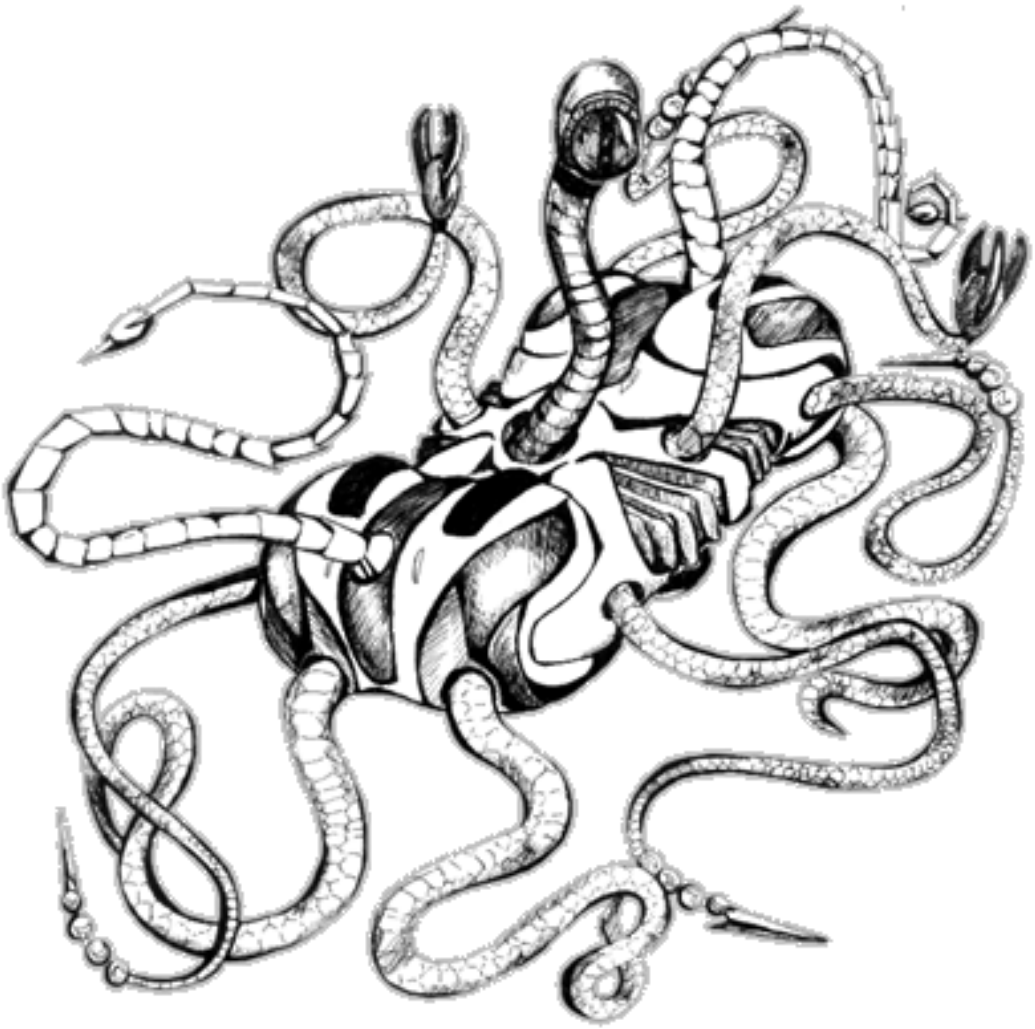
Mecha design and illustration by **AMY BORDEN** *(borden@alexia.lis.uiuc.edu)*.

THE KRAKEN INORGANIC



BACKGROUND

One of the first new Inorganic designs ever seen on Earth, the Kraken is a testimony to the ingenuity and cruelty of the Stage 6 Invid. The Kraken is designed to be an anti-personel weapon, able to quietly move

around the countryside and pick off any lone wanderers or resistance fighters it encounters. The basic design for the body is loosely based on the Invid Retrieval Drone reported seen in some hives (see Invid Invasion page 88). The cylindrical body of the inorganic is propelled by an antigravity field that allows the robot to move rapidly and with great agility. 13 different tentacles are connected to this central body, and can be extended up to an average distance of 15 feet (4.7 m) away from the main body or retracted completely into it. These tentacles end in a variety of different weapons, including vibro-blades, claws, lasers, and even paralysis beams. The central tentacle of the body contains an eye sensor that gathers visual and sensor data for the robot.

The most dangerous aspect of the Kraken is its stealthiness. The antigravity generator that propels the inorganic is virtually silent, allowing the robot to approach and attack its victim without making a sound. Krakens can lay hidden in trees, streams, rubble, etc. for days, weeks, months, or even years, and only pop out to attack when a potential target draws near. Unlike the Inorganics constructed by the Regent, the Kraken does NOT need an Invid brain to control it, and can operate on its own without any outside help or control. The inorganic does possess a limited amount of intelligence; for example, it will know enough to not attack a large heavily-armed party of resistance fighters since it would almost definitely be destroyed. Instead, the Kraken may track the resistance fighters at a distance and try to pick them off one by one while they are resting. Whenever a Kraken encounters a target it will communicate the location and type of contact to the nearest hive within its communication range, and the hive brain may give it special instructions at that time, if necessary (i.e. "capture a prisoner" instead of "kill the entire party").

The Kraken Inorganic was first encountered in the central United States area in early 2044. Distribution of the robot has been restricted mostly to the eastern half of North America, though some have been reported in Europe. They are most commonly found in the central plains/great lakes region (Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio) but it is likely that the design shall spread to other sectors if deemed successful by the Stage 6 Invid.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Gitamma"; **REF Nickname:** "Kraken"
Vehicle Type: Anti-personel Robot
Crew: None.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

[1]	Main Body	150
[2]	Eye Tentacle (1)	45
	Claw Tentacles (2)	35 each
	Spike Tentacles (4)	35 each
	Heavy-Duty Tentacles (4)	50 each
	Laser Tentacles (2)	35 each

NOTES:

[1]
Destroying the main body will completely destroy the Inorganic. The smoking remains will fall to the ground and crumble into scrap metal.

[2]
Destroying the eye tentacle will deprive the Kraken of its main sensor capabilities. It will not be able to see its targets and will flail its tentacles around rapidly trying to strike anything close to it (-5 to strike). If the eye tentacle is destroyed the Kraken will usually try to retreat and return to base for repairs (it can find its way back without sensors). The eye tentacle is a small target and imposes a **-4 penalty** to hit for attackers.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:
Stationary hover to 400 mph (640 kmph) in open air. Cruising speed near ground level is usually 100 mph (160 kmph) or less. The Kraken can use its antigravity generator to lift itself up to 300 ft (91.5 m) above any surface.

Swimming:
The Kraken can propel itself under water at speeds up to 75 mph (120 kmph) and can dive up to 2 miles below the surface.

Space:
The Kraken can operate in space or without air. However, without nearby mass to push against with its antigravity generator it will drift helplessly in zero gravity.

Height:
Main Body: 2.5 ft (0.75 m)

Width:
Main Body: 7 ft (2.1 m)

Length:
Main Body: 4.5 ft (1.3 m)

NOTE: The tentacles on the Kraken can extend up to 15 ft (4.7 m) in any direction from the main body. They can also retract completely into the body when not needed.

Weight:
2 tons

Cargo:
The antigravity generator (which was designed for speed and stealth instead of strength) can carry up to 5 tons.

Abilities:

- Flight - 85%
- Tracking: Humanoid, Mecha, or Land Vehicle - 70%
- Tracking: Protoculture Powered Mechanism - 88%
- Navigation: Air, Land, Water - 90%
- Prowl - 70%
- Detect Ambush - 55%
- Detect Concealment - 65%

- Thermal (passive infrared sight) - Range: 1000 ft (305 m)
- Nightvision (passive night sight) - Range: 2000 ft (609 m)
- External Audio Pickup - Range: 300 ft (91.5 m)
- Audio/Video Communications - Range: 25 miles

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **LASERS:** Two of the Kraken's tentacles end in high powered lasers that serve as the inorganic's main weapons. Since they are mounted on tentacles they can be fired in virtually any direction and can even fire around corners while the Kraken remains hidden.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **Damage**: 3D6 M.D. per laser blast. Bursts are not possible, but the laser can be fired in a continuous stream for cutting/demolition if necessary (2D6x10 M.D. per round).
    - **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per melee. Can also be fired in a full melee continuous beam, but suffers a -4 to strike a moving target.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **PARALYSIS BEAM:** The two clawed tentacles on the Kraken contain an experimental paralysis beam built into the center of the claw. This beam temporarily overloads the nervous system of a humanoid target, effectively paralyzing him or her. Involuntary reflexes (breathing, heartbeat) are USUALLY not affected, but there have been a few reported cases where the paralysis beam has been fatal. The beam can even work through high-tech body armor, but has an extremely short range.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Capture
    - **Range**: 30 ft (9 m)
    - **Damage**: None, but the victim must roll under his (P.E. - 12) or be paralyzed for 1D6x10 minutes. The character gets a +1 to his roll for every 25 points of MDC between him and the beam, including body armor and mecha. Characters with over 200 MDC are automatically immune to the beam. If the character rolls a 20 on his P.E. roll, he also goes

into shock and takes 4D6 S.D.C. damage, directly from hit points.
- **Rate of Fire**: One shot per tentacle, per round.
- **Payload**: Unlimited
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The tentacles of the Kraken make it a deadly hand-to-hand combatant. Four of the inorganic's arms end in vibro-blade spikes that can cut through high-tech armor easily. The other four tentacles are powerful constrictors that can crush a human to death even through body armor (P.S. of 50).

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: 4
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +1 to strike, +3 to parry, +6 (!)to dodge in flight, +3 to roll with impact.
    - **Damage:**
        - Vibro-spike slash: 2D6 M.D.
        - Vibro-spike jab: 3D6 M.D.
        - Vibro-spike power jab (counts as two attacks): 1D4x10 M.D.
        - Claw Jab: 1D6 M.D.
        - Claw Crush: 1D6 M.D. per round.
        - Strong Tentacle Slap: 1D4 M.D.
        - Strong Tentacle Constrict: 2D6 M.D. per round.

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Mecha design and illustration by **AMY BORDEN** *(borden@alexia.lis.uiuc.edu)*.

THE HELLCAT MARK II

BACKGROUND

The original Hellcat (a.k.a. Cougar) inorganic was probably the most successful robotic design of the Invid Regent. The inorganic was inspired by a predatory feline the Regent observed on Praxis after conquering the world prior to the arrival of the REF and the First Invid War. Once the Praxian cat had detected the scent of its prey, it would follow the scent relentlessly for hours or even days, eventually attacking the startled target when it least expected it. Impressed, the Regent designed a similar robot that could sense and track both protoculture emissions and trails left behind by humanoid life forms and then follow them back to their source. Fast, silent, and deadly, the hellcat was the perfect scout/exterminator mecha, and was widely distributed on all worlds under control of the Regent. However, the Hellcat was unarmed and lightly armored, which were great liabilities when facing armored or mecha-sized opponents. Although the Hellcat's claws could carve through the hardest of metals, the inorganic first had to approach the mecha and was usually cut down by defensive fire long before it could engage in melee combat. Usually the only time Hellcats ever won against organized REF forces were when they were encountered in superior numbers and could overwhelm their opponents.

Although most of the original Hellcats were destroyed when the Invid Regent was defeated at the end of the First Invid War, the original concept of the inorganic impressed some of the Stage 6 Invid on Earth. Several leader Invid tried to improve on the design themselves, since an independent mecha design that could track resistance fighters back to their bases was an ideal weapon to use against human rebels that hid in the many ruined cities and bases of Earth. They initially started with an in-depth study of fast open-land Earth mammals such as cheetahs, antelopes, and pronghorns, which led to radical redesigns of the old Hellcat design, especially in the feet and head area. The resulting inorganic is a synthesis of the best observed traits of both Earth and Praxian predatory mammals.

The feet of the Hellcat Mark II are specially designed to provide the robot with superb speed, traction, and shock absorption characteristics. The basic foot is a cloven hoof surrounded by four hook-shaped claws (two front, two back) for gripping and breaking. When not in use the claws retract upward into the feet so that they do not interfere with running or climbing, but when needed for extra traction or gripping they can be instantly deployed. All of the claws have built-in vibro blades which allow them to slice through steel and high-tech alloys.

The head of the Hellcat has also been extensively redesigned. The most notable facial feature of the new inorganic is the large black eyes that curve around the head almost to the neck. The eyes provide both excellent stereoscopic vision for precision tracking and aiming, as well as near-360-degree vision making it extremely difficult to sneak up and surprise the Hellcat. The eyes of the Hellcat can see both the infrared and ultraviolet spectrum, allowing it to see heat emissions and colors outside of normal human vision. In addition its eyes, the Hellcat also has multiple sensors that provide it with highly detailed senses of hearing and smell. Finally, the Hellcat has an echo-location system which allows it to use sound waves to determine its surroundings, similar to sonar. With this system the Hellcat can see in total blackness, sense movement, and even locate hidden doors and passages.

The Hellcat Mk. II design does not have the mouth or fangs of the older Hellcat. Instead, the head of the mecha is equipped with two vibro-blade tusks that are constructed out of super-hard materials. In addition, the Hellcat 2 has two blaster cannons mounted on extendible arms providing it with a long-

distance attack. The arms the cannon are mounted on can pivot and rotate in any direction, allowing the Hellcat to fire to either side or directly behind itself. When not in use these cannons are folded away in compartment on either side of the torso, near the shoulder blades. The Hellcat's advanced sensors combined with the cannons wide range of motion makes the inorganic *deadly* accurate in a firefight.

The overall structure of the Hellcat 2 gives it a very thin, almost emancipated appearance, somewhat resembling a skeleton of one of the great predatory cats of Africa. The large black eyes, tusks, and claws give the inorganic a devastating psychological impression, and resistance fighters who have survived being stalked by these creatures report having nightmares about them even months after their encounter. The new Hellcats are usually released in packs of 5 initially into the countryside, although they may split up and operate solo, or combine with other Hellcat groups to form larger packs during their travels. The Hellcat Mk. II was initially developed and released in central Africa, though it quickly spread to the jungles of Asia and South America, as well as the forests and plains of North America. Designed to operate independently for years, the Hellcats continued to plague resistance fighters throughout the latter half of the Third Invid War, and even for decades after the war ended. The last known Hellcat Mk. II was hunted down and destroyed in 2049 in the Rocky Mountains of North America, but it is unknown if more are lurking in the wastelands and jungles of post-Invid Earth.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Iiutyug"; **REF Nicknames:** "Seeker", "Hellcat 2", "Cougar 2"
Vehicle Type: Reconnaissance/Combat Inorganic
Crew: None.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

[1]	Head	60	
	Legs (4)	45	each
	Blaster Arms (2)	25	each
	Tail	30	
[2]	Main Body	120	

NOTES:

1. Destroying the head will knock out all major sensor systems of the inorganic. The creature will thrash about blindly and wildly for 2D6 rounds before suffering major system failures and "dying".
2. Destroying the main body will completely destroy the Inorganic. The smoking remains will fall to the ground and crumble into scrap metal.

SPECIFICATIONS

Running: 200 mph (320 kmph)
Climbing: Excellent; equal to a skill of 90%, reduce speed by 1/3.
Leaping: 100 ft (30.5 m) high or lengthwise
Swimming: 50 mph (80 kmph)
Space:
The Hellcat can operate in space or without air. However, it has no means of propulsion, and if knocked loose it will drift helplessly in zero gravity.

Height:
4 ft (1.2 m) at the shoulders, 7 ft (2.1 m) with shoulder cannons.
Width:
3 ft (0.9 m)
Length:
8 ft (2.4 m)
Weight:
1,000 lbs (453 kg)
Cargo:
The Hellcat can drag up to 3,200 lbs (1,452 kg) of weight if necessary.

Abilities:
Standard invid sensors and capabilities, plus:

- Tracking: Humanoid, Mecha, or Land Vehicle - 80%
- Tracking: Protoculture Powered Mechanism - 90%
- Land Navigation - 90%
- Prowl - 75%
- Detect Ambush - 60%
- Detect Concealment - 70%

- Thermal (passive infrared sight) - Range: 1000 ft (305 m)
- Nightvision (passive night sight) - Range: 2000 ft (609 m)
- External Audio Pickup - Range: 300 ft (91.5 m)
- Echo-location - Range: 500 ft (153 m)

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **BLASTER CANNONS (2):** The main offensive weapons of the Hellcat are a pair of cannons mounted on extendable arms on the shoulders of the inorganic. These cannons can pivot to fire in any direction around the mecha. The Hellcat's advanced sensors make it extremely accurate when firing its blasters.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
- **Range**: 2000 ft (609 m)
- **Damage**: 4D6 M.D. per blast. Bursts are not possible, but the laser can be fired in a continuous stream for cutting/demolition if necessary (3D6x10 M.D. per round).
- **Rate of Fire**: Five attacks per cannon, per melee. Both cannons can be fired simultaneously at the same target; counts as one attack. The cannons can also be fired in a full melee continuous beam, but suffer a -4 to strike a moving target.
- **Payload**: Unlimited
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT:** The Hellcat is of course well-designed to engage in hand-to-hand combat, even against armored and mecha-sized opponents. In combat the Hellcat will try and rush its target and use its vibro-claws to tear the target to pieces. If attacking a mecha, the Hellcat will try to claw its way into the cockpit and kill the pilot.

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: 5
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +5 to strike, +5 to parry, +7 to dodge, +4 on initiative, +3 to roll with impact.
    - **Damage:**
        - Vibro-claw Swatting Blow: 2D6 M.D.
        - Vibro-claw Jab: 3D6 M.D.
        - Vibro-claw Power Jab (counts as two attacks): 1D4x10 M.D.
        - Leap attack, clawing with all 4 claws (counts as four attacks): 2D6x10 M.D.
        - Skewer with Vibro-tusks: 4D4 M.D.
        - Charge & Ram: 2D6 M.D.

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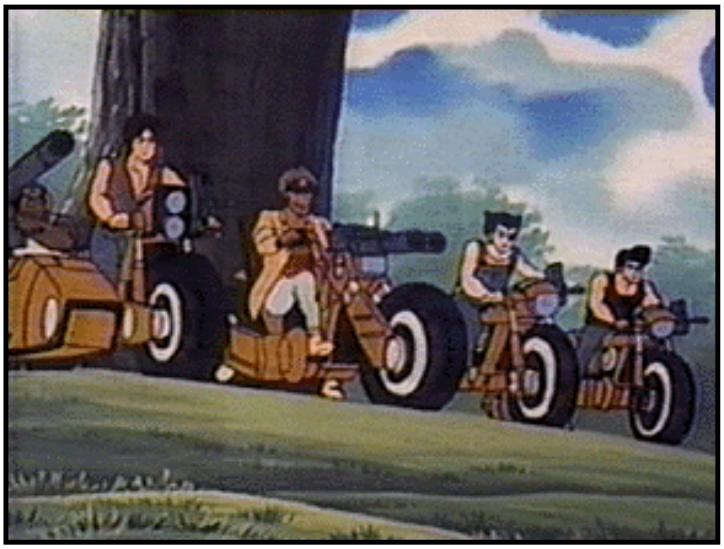
FRAGS (Invid Sympathizers)



In every war in human history there have been people who turned against their fellow citizens and worked for the "enemy". The reasons for their defection vary, ranging from a belief in the cause or virtues of the opponent, to the promise of wealth or power in exchange for their services, to the simple desire to survive at any cost. This is especially true in the post-apocalypse Earth of the Invid Wars, where "might makes right" and "survival of the fittest" are the laws of the land.

During the Second Invid War and the Regis' occupation of Earth, human allies were tolerated by the Invid but neither encouraged nor discouraged. The Invid, being a hive-mind society, had practically no experience with treason or greed, and were not sure what to do about these terrans who claimed to be obedient to them. Eventually in some cases human traitors and Invid worked out agreements with each other, exchanging information and captured resistance fighters for supplies and preferential treatment. The cases of Jonathan Wolff and the lake cities are good examples of this. However, the Regis never put much faith in either the loyalty or the ability of the sympathizers, and largely ignored them throughout the course of the war.

The policy towards Invid sympathizers changed radically during the Third Invid War, thanks mostly in part to **Lieutenant Anton Kosmos**, formerly of the Eastern Block Soviet Independent State (EBSIS) and leader of the **Krugatch** mercenary group. Lt. Kosmos was one of the first people to notice a difference in the actions and behavior of the new Invid invaders compared to the Regis' troops of the previous war. Unlike that war, the Invid did not seem interested in the domination of the Earth, but rather were concentrating on harvesting large amounts of the Flower of Life. The deployment of Invid mecha was mostly to defend their bases, and they only reacted to attacks by resistance fighters instead of actively seeking them out for extermination. It was obvious that the new Invid were interested only in the Flower of Life and not the Earth itself, and Kosmos saw a great opportunity for himself and his forces.

Anton Kosmos approached the Invid with a proposal. He explained that the Invid were putting themselves in jeopardy by not taking a more active stance against the terran resistance forces. By ignoring the rebellious humans instead of actively seeking out and exterminating them, they were just giving the humans more time to devise a way to defeat them once and for all. In order to ensure the safety of their harvesting, the Invid would need to strike quickly and decisively, shattering humanity's ability to resist and thus ending the threats to the Invid occupation. Kosmos further argued that the best way to defeat a human was using another human, since only a human could fully understand human tendencies and strategies. He proposed that his troops, together with Invid support and

technology, could root out and destroy all resistance in North America, and unite it into one state completely loyal to the Invid and their goals.

The stage 6 Invid were intrigued by Kosmos' plan; elimination of the rebel threat would certainly increase the speed and efficiency of their harvesting and food shipments to New Optera. They decided to form an alliance with Kosmos and the Krugatch, and ordered the forces of several hives in western and centralNorth America to cooperate with them fully. Krugatch scientists worked together with the Invid, developing new weapons and mecha such as the **Annihilator** and **SH-AT** combat mecha. (for stats on these mecha, see the Robotech RPG supplement ***LANCER'S ROCKERS***) At first, the new alliance worked; Kosmos succeed in disabling or destroying several major pockets of resistance, including the *Detroit Underground* and the *VIPER-3* resistance base. However, instead of pacifying the resistance, these defeats seemed only to strengthen their determination and resolve. The resistance became a tougher and tougher opponent, and the stage 6 Invid began to be displeased with Lt. Kosmos' performance. In a last-ditch effort to save his dream, Kosmos conceived and constructed the **I-K Mobile Sonic Cannon**, a monstrous mecha equipped with a new sonic weapon that could level cities. However, the I-K was defeated by the famous freedom fighter *Lancer* and the troops of the *California Freedom League* during its first actual combat. The Invid, now totally dissatisfied with Lt. Kosmos, withdrew all support for the Krugatch, which was then destroyed in short order by the California Freedom League.

Although Lt. Kosmos was now gone, his dark legacy continued. While the method had failed, the theory behind Kosmos' actions still made sense to the stage 6 Invid; the only way to guarantee the safety of their crucial harvest mission was the complete domination of the Earth. While the orbiting ring of Invid Space Hives was being completed, the stage 6 Invid reconsidered their entire plan for their mission, which led to a complete reworking of their strategies, tactics, and mecha designs (for more details, see the essay **"The New Invid"** (still being written)). Some stage 6 Invid also saw wisdom in Kosmos' words about human nature, *"the best way to defeat a human was using another human,"* and acted on that advice.

Lt. Kosmos and his Krugatch are considered the first examples of FRAGS, a new breed of Invid sympathizers and human traitors. The term **"frag"** comes from the phrases *"fragments of society"* or *"fragments of the EBSIS and Southern Cross"*, which are both good descriptions of the typical makeup of frag groups. Frags are tough, ruthless people who have given up their freedom and sworn to serve the Invid in exchange for safety, supplies, and power. They range in size from biker gangs of a dozen individuals to small armies of hundreds who help to manage the **Invid slave labor camps**. Although most frags are criminals and social outcasts, a sizable percentage of them are trained soldiers from the EBSIS or Southern Cross who are tired of fighting the Invid and wish to join the (currently) winning side. Regardless of

origin, all frags are brutal and immoral, and usually are only interested in themselves.

Not all stage 6 Invid use frags; many believe that humanity is good only for slave labor or extermination. And even those who use frags don't trust them completely. When frags are recruited, the Invid implant a cybernetic transmitter in the base of their neck, where it attaches itself to the frag's spinal column. The Invid explain that they need this transmitter in order to identify the frags and tell them apart from the rest of humanity, but in reality they are tracking devices that allow the Invid to keep constant track of where the frags are. Most frags consider it a small price to pay for preferential treatment from the Invid.

> **NOTE:**the transmitter can be extracted from a dead frag and used by a resistance fighter to infiltrate an Invid base, but the Invid will become suspicious if the impostor does not follow his normal procedure or go places he normally shouldn't. Frags don't like impostors much either; they threaten their good standings with their Invid bosses.

Frags are usually used as an extension of the Invid forces in areas that don't warrant a full force of Invid mecha. They are given supplies and weapons, and then are told to follow simple orders such as "Keep the inhabitants of this town peaceful. Kill any resistance fighters or dissidents who speak out against the Invid." As long as they keep the inhabitants in line, frags are pretty much allowed to do as they please with the town.

Another major use of frags are in Invid slave camps. The stage 6 Invid have found that frags make excellent slave-masters, and are usually very creative in finding ways to encourage maximum efficiency from the slaves. However, in a way the frags themselves are prisoners of the camps, since they are restricted from certain areas (like the spaceport) and are not allowed to leave the camps. Frags are NEVER allowed in Invid hives of any kind; no stage 6 Invid will ever trust a human enough to let him into a major Invid base.

Frags usually interact with the Invid via an Invid representative (a stage 4 or 5 Invid) or by a special Invid communicator provided by their Invid sponsors. Frags NEVER meet directly with the stage 6 Invid that sponsor them; indeed, most frags aren't even aware of the existence of stage 6 Invid. Frags don't question orders; when an Invid tells them to do something, they do it without question. They know that they will continue to have power and the Invid's support so long as they do so, and to oppose their Invid overlords is asking for death. In exchange for their services, the Invid provide frags with supplies, armor, weapons, and mecha (mostly from captured resistance bases) as well as support and occasional protection. The Invid do NOT supply things like food, water, servants, etc.; it is up to the frags themselves to procure their own living supplies. Frags are somewhat sparse in North America; the concentration of the Flower of Life is so great there that the Invid prefer to keep control of that section of the Earth for themselves. They are more common in Africa and South America, or the wastelands of Europe and Russia, where there are few flowers to harvest and many sectors of land to patrol. Frags don't move around much; they know that not all Invid like them, and if they move around much they may find themselves in the territory of an unsympathetic Invid overlord.

RANDOM GENERATION OF FRAG GROUPS

Frag groups provide an interesting alternative for GMs as opponents for players in a TIW campaign. Characters may run across small gangs of frags on the road, or a medium sized group holding a town hostage. Or they may be forced to match wits with a large group of frags AND Invid while trying to free prisoners or steal supplies from an Invid slave camp.

Below is a step-by-step process for creating frag groups. It is based on the mercenary creation rules from ***Rifts Mercenaries***, but is slightly different in several aspects (the Invid don't like large, well-armed groups of frags, and don't pay their servants anything).

1. **SIZE**

   First, decide on a size for your frag group. A small group of frags is appropriate for a chance encounter on the road, while a medium group is typical of a town occupation force set up by the Invid. Large frag groups are usually reserved for Invid slave camps or major occupied cities. **NOTE:** Invid will generally not allow a frag gang to grow larger than 150 members; at that point they become hard to control and potentially dangerous.

   - **SMALL GROUP:** A small gang, 10-30 members.
   - **MEDIUM GROUP:** A large gang/small mercenary force, 30-60 members.
   - **LARGE GROUP:** A large mercenary force, 60-150 members.

2. **COMPOSITION**

   Each member of a frag group may have a different occupation. The **Ganger OCC** was created to provide GMs with a generic set of stats for frags, but they may want to customize their group by assigning different OCCs to key members of the frag group. Roll percentile on the table below to randomly determine a frag OCC.

   FRAG OCC TABLE

01-15	Ganger O.C.C. (TIW)
16-30	Nonmilitary Personnel O.C.C. (Invid Invasion page 14)
31-45	Mercenary O.C.C. (Invid Invasion page 13)
46-55	Nomad Scout O.C.C. (Invid Invasion page 12)
56-65	EBSIS Military Personnel O.C.C. (Lancer's Rockers page 8)
66-75	SC Tactical Corp O.C.C. (Southern Cross page 22)
76-85	SC Civil Defense Unit O.C.C. (Southern Cross page 33)
86-90	SC Desert Squad O.C.C. (Southern Cross page 40)
91-95	SC Recon Escort Patrol O.C.C. (Southern Cross page 30)
96-00	Special O.C.C. (Roll on table below)

SPECIAL FRAG OCCs

```
01-30  SC Alpha Tactical Armored Corp O.C.C. (Southern Cross page 28)
31-60  SC Humid Climate Offensive Squad O.C.C. (Southern Cross Page 38)
61-80  Mecha Su-Dai Gladiator O.C.C. (Return of the Masters page 25)
81-00  REF Intelligence Agent O.C.C. * (Lancer's Rockers page 8)
```

```
* The NPC is not actually a frag, but an REF Intelligence Agent
  posing as a frag to get a closer look at Invid installations
  and operations.  If the PCs get into trouble while tangling
  with frags (s)he MAY lend a hand, but his/her first priority
  will be to remain undercover and gather information for the REF.
```

3. **WEAPONRY**

The Invid provide frags with their choice of weapons captured during raids on resistance fighters, as well as ammo, power packs, etc. It is up to the frags themselves to maintain the weapons; the Invid have no practical knowledge of the guns or their workings. All they provide to the frags is access to captured weapon caches and ammo dumps.

First roll 1D4 to determine how many weapons each special frag has, then roll on the table below to determine each weapon the frag owns. The frag will have 1D6 spare clips for each weapon he rolls on the table below.

FRAG WEAPON TABLE

```
00-11  RDF 9mm "Wolf" Auto-pistol (Invid Invasion page 59)
12-19  SAL-9 Single Shot Laser Pistol (Invid Invasion page 58)
20-25  PPL-12 Panther Pulse Laser (Southern Cross page 89)
26-30  P-20 Pulse Laser (Southern Cross page 89)
31-35  Lancer Laser Pistol (Southern Cross page 89)
36-39  L.P. Nightstalker (Southern Cross page 89)
40-49  Gallant H-90 Multi-Weapon System (Invid Invasion page 58)
50-54  Gallant H-95 Multi-Weapon System (TIW)
55-58  RFL-100 Rapid-Fire Pulse Laser (Southern Cross page 58)
59-61  Tri-Laser (Southern Cross page 89)
62-70  M-35 "Wolverine" Infantry Assault Rifle (Invid Invasion page 60)
71-75  FAL-2 Automatic Pulse Laser Rifle (Invid Invasion page 58)
76-79  LR-20 Laser Rifle (Southern Cross page 90)
86-80  Krugatch NM-30 Pulse Rifle (Lancer's Rockers page 38)
87-90  PR-30 Pulse Rifle (Southern Cross page 90)
91-94  LR-30 Laser Assault Rifle (Southern Cross page 90)
95-97  Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System (TIW)
98-00  RL-6 Heavy Rocket Cannon (Invid Invasion page 41)
```

4. **BODY ARMOR**

Frags are also provided with human body armor captured from resistance fighters. However, the supply of armor is lower than weapons since most captured body armor is destroyed when the rebel inside the armor is killed. Due to this shortage not all frags get body armor. Roll on the table below to see if the frag has a suit of body armor, and if so which type.

FRAG BODY ARMOR

01-30	No Armor
31-50	CVR-3 Body Armor (Invid Invasion page 43)
51-70	EBSIS Field Plate Body Armor (Lancer's Rockers page 38)
71-72	Southern Cross Body Armor-GMP Style (Southern Cross page 21, 85)
73-74	Southern Cross Body Armor-TC Style (Southern Cross page 23, 85)
75-76	Southern Cross Body Armor-ATAC Style (Southern Cross page 29, 85)
77-78	Southern Cross Body Armor-REP Style (Southern Cross page 30, 85)
79-80	Southern Cross Body Armor-CDU Style (Southern Cross page 33, 85)
81-82	Southern Cross Body Armor-CWOS Style (Southern Cross page 36, 85)
83-84	Southern Cross Body Armor-HCOS Style (Southern Cross page 37, 85)
85-86	Southern Cross Body Armor-MOS Style (Southern Cross page 39, 85)
87-88	Southern Cross Body Armor-DS Style (Southern Cross page 40, 85)
89-90	Southern Cross Body Armor-JS Style (Southern Cross page 41, 85)
90-97	CVR-4 Body Armor (TIW)
98-00	CVR-4C Body Armor (TIW)

5. **MECHA**

Larger groups of frags are sometimes given captured mecha to help them with their duties. Frags who are given mecha are naturally watched VERY closely, and any suspicious behavior by the pilot will usually be countered with a "shoot first, ask questions later" response by the Invid. Only Cyclones and small battloids are given to frags; absolutely NO functioning Veritechs or heavily armed mecha are provided, as the stage 6 Invid are not stupid enough to trust the resistance with these types of weaponry. Also, frags will not be allowed to own more than 1 mecha per every 10 members or so the group has.

FRAG MECHA

01-40	No Mecha
41-50	VR-038 Light Cyclone (Invid Invasion page 41)
51-60	VR-052 Battler Cyclone (Invid Invasion page 37)
61-70	VR-041 Saber Cyclone (Invid Invasion page 39)
71-75	VR-135 Forager Cyclone (TIW)
76-80	Civil Defense Corps Light Battloid (Southern Cross page 70)
81-85	EBSIS Soldier Battloid (Southern Cross page 72)
86-90	Tactical Corps Reconnaissance Battloid (Southern Cross page 66)
91-95	Veritech Hover Tank (Southern Cross page 62) - This mecha has been seriously damaged in the past and is now permanently stuck in battloid mode. The hover thrusters are destroyed and the main cannon is missing. However, the MDC values are at full strength, and the EU-11 and triple-barreled autocannon

are both functional.

96-00 VAF-6 Veritech Alpha Fighter (Invid Invasion page 47) - This mecha has been seriously damaged in the past and is now permanently stuck in battloid mode. The jet engines are ruined and only 6D6 missiles remain in the MM-60. However, the MDC values are at full strength, and the mecha has a fully functional GU-XX with 2 spare clips.

6. VEHICLES

If a frag group does not own mecha it will usually be provided with several captured vehicles for ground transportation. In general a frag group will have one vehicle per every 1-5 members, not counting those members who are lucky enough to have mecha. Roll on the table below to determine which vehicle(s) the frag group owns.

FRAG VEHICLES

01-10 Small Motorcycle (Invid Invasion page 62)
11-20 Medium Motorcycle (Invid Invasion page 62)
21-30 Dirt Bike (Invid Invasion page 62)
31-40 Hog (Motorcycle) (Invid Invasion page 62)
41-50 Three-Wheeled (Invid Invasion page 62)
51-55 Blitzkrieg Battle Bike (Lancer's Rockers page 37)
56-60 Hover Cycle (Southern Cross page 77)
61-65 RV-B Dune Buggy (Robotech RPG page 76)
66-70 RDF Land Rover (Robotech RPG page 75)
71-75 RDF Armored Assault Transport AAT-30 (Invid Invasion page 61)
76-80 EBSIS Command Car (Lancer's Rockers page 35)
81-85 GMP Land Rover (Southern Cross page 78)
86-90 Hover Cargo Hauler (Southern Cross page 79)
91-95 APT Tank Carrier (Southern Cross page 80)
96-00 Krugatch Urban Assault Vehicle (Lancer's Rockers page 36)

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THE THIRD INVID WAR
NEW INVID EXPERIMENTS (Cyborgs and Inorganics)

WARNING!
CLASSIFIED MATERIAL!

The following information is for the Game Master's eyes only! You will ruin much of your enjoyment of TIW as a player if you continue to read this page. If you plan on playing TIW as a PC, STOP READING NOW!

When the Regis sent the stage 6 Invid to Earth she gave them instructions to hold the planet at **ANY** cost, ensuring that the vital supplies of the Flower of Life continued to flow to New Optera until the new home of the Invid became self sufficient. This gave the Leader Invid considerable latitude, and as the war continued they began to exploit this freedom to come up with crueler and more elaborate strategies. At first the stage 6 Invid worked together, completely reworking the tactics and mecha of their forces, but as time continued they began to diverge and explore different ways to augment their personal forces. This led to the development of a number of *test weapons* by various stage 6 Invid, which were deployed within their domains for field testing. Some designs proved inadequate and were quickly withdrawn from service, while others were extremely effective and were eventually distributed all over the Earth.

A large concern among the stage 6 Invid was to find a way to augment their limited forces. Although the numbers of Invid on Earth during the Third Invid War were higher than initially estimated by resistance fighters (around 5 million compared to early estimates of 2 million), Invid forces were still spread fairly thin in some areas, especially considering the enormous amounts of troops it took to operate the orbiting Invid Space Hives. In order to ensure their domination of Earth and prevent interference with their mission, the stage 6 Invid needed new soldiers to supplement their own forces on the Earth.

Independent stage 6 Invid came up with three different approaches to solving this problem. The first was to actively recruit humans to work for the Invid in securing their planet. The stage 6 Invid discovered that they could quickly build up an army of followers with promises of supplies and preferential treatment, and that humans made very effective troops for maintaining order in towns and managing slave camps.

The Invid never really trusted the humans working for them, however, and so always kept a wary eye on them and used them only in positions of low importance.

Other stage 6 Invid tried to ressurect the Inorganic technology used by the Regent during the First Invid War on Tirol and the Sentinels worlds. In some ways Inorganics were ideal for the type of warfare being conducted on Earth; remote units that could be sent out into the field for weeks or months (or years) at a time and wander around the countryside searching for resistance fighters. Inorganics were also used as heavy combat units, supplementing the Combat Troopers as the first line of Invid offense. The stage 6 Invid did improve on the technology, however. Unlike the Regent's mecha, the new Inorganics were completely independent and did not rely on Invid brains for direction and animation. Also, the Inorganics were designed and armed more for special-purpose missions rather than the older general-purpose Scrimm, Crann, and Odeon, which tried to fulfill a number of roles and were successful in none.

Other stage 6 Invid moved along a darker path. They realized that in a sense they were literally sitting on top of a possible home-grown army; humanity itself. The Regis had for a time experimented in biological and cybernetic augmentation of humans, and the stage 6 Invid reopened that research with the goal of turning humans into useful tools for their purposes. Some Invid tried to use cybernetic humans discreetly as spies or saboteurs, while others tried to turn them into unfeeling workers or monstrous killing machines that could be used as disposable troops. Fortunately the cybernetic experiments were never widely distributed before the Third Invid War ended, but where they were used they caused widespread havoc among terran resistance forces. Had the Third Invid War continued for a few more years humanity may have found itself in a civil war against helpless victim of the stage 6 Invid's cruelty.

Invid Sympathizers

- "Frags"

New Invid Inorganics

- Stalker Reconnaissance Inorganic
- Hellcat Mk. II Reconnaissance/Combat Inorganic
- Kraken Anti-Personel Inorganic
- Odeon Mk. II Heavy Combat Inorganic

- Leviathan Sea Combat Inorganic

New Invid Cyborgs

- Invid Infiltrator
- Invid Bio-Drones

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THE INVID SPACE HIVE

BACKGROUND

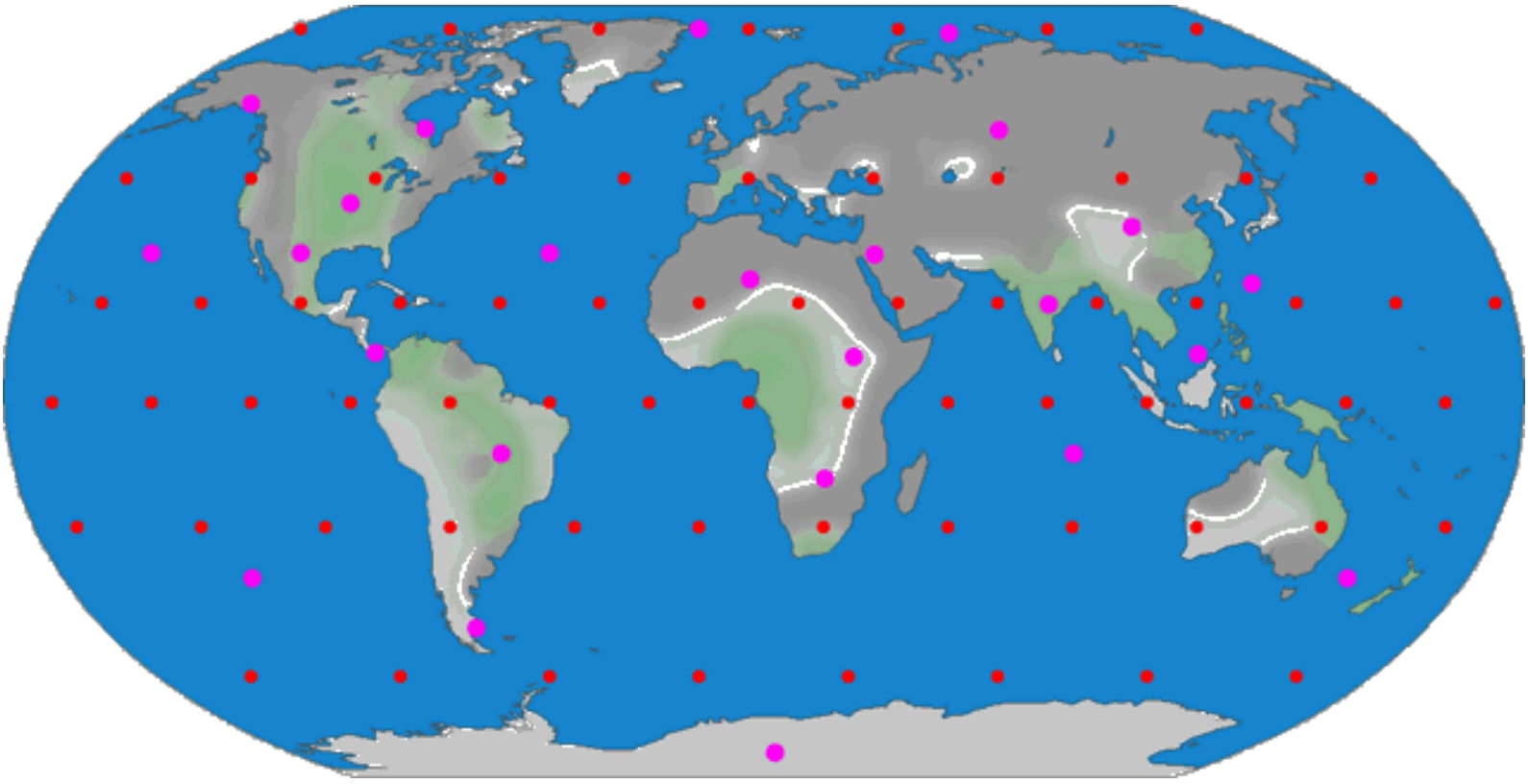
The tide of Third Invid War seemed to turn against the resistance in early 2040 when reports started coming in of dozens of new lights appearing in the night sky. Further investigation revealed that these "lights" were some sort of space stations being constructed by the Invid all around the Earth. What was even more disturbing was that initial reports showed that over half of the Invid occupation force was involved in the construction of the space stations. (This would also explain why the size of the Invid occupation force was so small during the first few years of the Third Invid War) This massive Invid construction effort would continue for two more years before their project was complete.

It would later be revealed that the Invid were constructing a series of Orbiting Hives, specifically constructed for anti-starship operations. The Stage Six Invid in charge had analyzed the results of the Second Invid War, and concluded that the humans' victory was for the most part due to the supplies and personnel they managed to get from the REF at Tirol. The Stage Six Invid decided that the best way to prevent a repeat of history was to prevent any REF ships or troops from reaching Earth. To this end, they constructed a series of "Space Hives" armed with powerful anti-starship weaponry and defended by a modified hive shield. These orbiting hives would also be able to serve as bases for the Invid space forces, which made up roughly 40% of the Invid occupation forces.

Invid Space Hives look somewhat similar to stilt hives, except that instead of stilts, the central hive has 6 large spikes sticking out of them, equally spaced along all of the sphere's axes. These spikes contain the massive anti-starship cannons that make up the main armament for the hive, as well as the shield generators that protect it. The cannons have no nozzle or any other feature that give them away, except for the fact that they're colored differently than the rest of the hive. The central globe of the hive consists mostly of docking bays, where the various space Invid can land to refuel and rearm. The major docking bays on the station are big enough to hold multiple Troop Transports or Cargo Transports. All docking bays are protected by force fields that keep atmosphere in while allowing ships and mecha to pass through them freely. These force fields can be strengthened in intensity to keep invaders out of the hive (though they are still vulnerable to Destabilizer cannons). At the center of the central hive is the massive power core that powers the entire station. The power cores of Space Hives are 30% larger than those typically found in Earth hives. This is due to the tremendous

amount of power that the anti-starship cannons and the defense shield require.

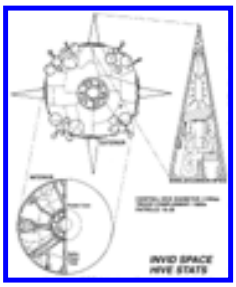
At the height of the Third Invid War there were 92 Space Hives orbiting the Earth. 24 of these hives were **Sector Command Space Hives**, which served as command and control bases for the Stage 6 Invid during the war. The sector command hives were 25% larger than standard hives and contained significantly more troops. Below is a rough map of the locations of the orbiting hives during the war. However, it is important to note that while the hives spent most of their time in geosynchronous orbit over their assigned location, they can and often did alter their orbit to circle over trouble spots when necessary.



Rough Orbital Placement of Space Hives, Circa 2045

Standard Space Hive Sector Command Space Hive

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Space Hive, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

REF Nickname: "Death Stars"

Size:

4 miles long, wide, and high. The central hive sphere is usually 3 miles in diameter. Sector Command Space Hives are 5 miles in diameter (including spikes).

Typical Number of Troops: ~1000

- 150 Armored Scouts w/ Space Boosters
- 300 Space Troopers
- 300 Attack Scouts
- 100 Sentinels
- 75 Enforcers
- 50 Combat Troopers
- 30 Troopers (Workers)
- 25 Strike Units
- 15 Pincer Command Units
- 15 Retrieval Drones
- 1 Brain
- 0-5 Assault Battloids w/ Stage Five pilots

NOTE: Increase the above numbers by 25% for a sector command space hive. Also include 1 Warlord Battloid w/ Stage Six pilot and 2 Brains in addition to the above troops.

Perimeter Defense: 10-20 patrols of 2D4 Space Troopers accompanied by 4D4 Armored Scouts or 4D4 Attack Scouts. Mixed patrols of other Invid mecha are also possible at the GM's discretion.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

```
(1)  Weapons Spike (6):                        10,000 each
     Anti-Starship Cannons (6):                2,000 each
     Outer Wall (10 ft area):                  400
     Inner Wall (10 ft area):                  200
     Antigravity Domes (50):                   300 each
     Energy Barriers of outer portals (40):    300 each
     Spherical Energy Force Field:             1,000,000
(2)  Power Core (1):                           2,000
(3)  Main Hive:                                20,000
```

NOTE: Increase all the above values (except for the Force Field) by 25% for a sector command space hive.

1. Depleting the MDC of a weapon spike will effectively destroy it. This will also completely destroy the anti-starship cannon inside (the other 5 will still function, though). However, the best news of all is that destruction of even ONE weapon spike will completely destroy the force field generator! NOTE: the force field must be down/damaged before the weapon spike may be attacked.
2. Depleting the MDC of the central power core will cause an explosion that effectively destroy the station. The Invid Brain will automatically be killed, in addition to (1D10x10)% of all Invid still remaining on the

station. The burning hulk of the space hive will fall out of orbit and burn up in the atmosphere within 1D6 days.

3. Depleting the MDC of the main hive will effectively destroy the station. 100% of all Invid left on the station are killed. The burning hulk of the space hive will fall out of orbit and burn up in the atmosphere within 1D6 days.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

The Antigravity Domes are mainly for station-keeping purposes only. If necessary, the space hive can adjust its orbit, or even travel to the moon's orbit or beyond. It will take a space hive 24 hours to transfer from Earth orbit to Moon orbit. Space Hives do NOT have fold generators!

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. ANTI-STARSHIP CANNONS. The main armament of the Space Hive are six massive anti-starship cannons that are even more powerful than the main gun of an Ikazuchi starship! The cannons are spaced equidistant around the hive so as to leave no arc undefended. In fact, most times 3-5 cannons can be brought to bear on a single target. Each cannon has an effectively unlimited arc of fire (except when blocked by the station itself).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Anti-spacecraft/assault
    - **Range**: 300,000 miles (480,000 km)
    - **Mega-Damage**: 1D6x1000 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Each cannon may fire ONCE every other melee.
    - **Payload**: Effectively Unlimited.
    - **Note**: These cannons are meant for use against spacecraft only. All bonuses/penalties for target size apply. See the table on page 53 of the Sentinels RPG.

2. FORCE FIELD. The weapon spikes on the hive can also generate a force field to protect the hive from harm. When this field is activated, the shield extends from each spike to all the other spikes surrounding it, effectively making the station look like it is encased in a diamond. NOTE: The Anti-Starship Cannons CAN still fire when the force field is up. HOWEVER, no mecha or ships may be launched from the hive when the shield is up. A Destabilizer cannon will penetrate this shield just like a normal hive shield.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Mega-Damage Capacity**: 1,000,000 MDC
    - **Note**: Can regenerate at a rate of 10,000 MDC per hour.

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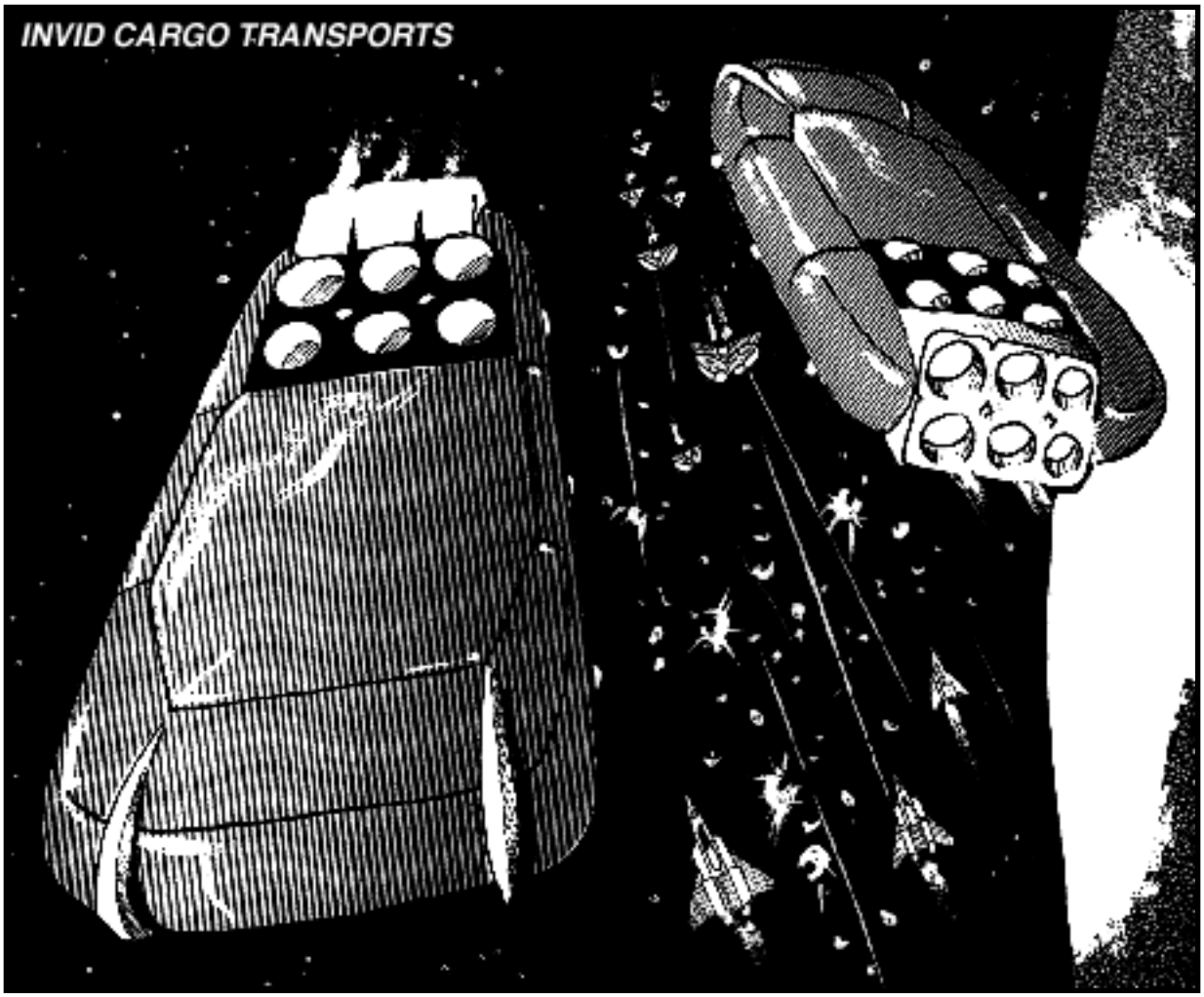
THE INVID CARGO TRANSPORT

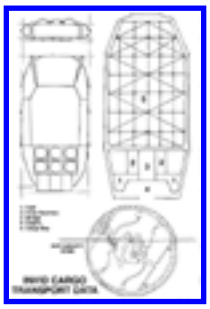


BACKGROUND

The Invid Cargo Transport is a new Invid starship designed to transport harvested flowers and protoculture from Earth to the Regis' new base of operations in an undisclosed system. Stylistically, it somewhat resembles the Invid Troop Carrier ("Clam Ship"). However, there are a number of differences. The basic shape of the Cargo Transport is a large flat oval with rounded edges. Six large thrusters and six antigravity domes are located on the back of one of the short edges, and look very similar to those of the Troop Transport. Unlike the Troop Transport, the Cargo Transport can NOT open up like a clam. This is not a design flaw; the Cargo Transport was never intended to carry troops or engage in combat.

The Cargo Transport is large and mostly hollow inside. The only compartmentalized area on the ship is near the rear, where the bridge and engines are located. The interior of the front of the ship is largely filled with frameworks and scaffolding, which hold hundreds of large containers, all carrying Protoculture or the Flower of Life. Any mecha larger than an Invid Trooper (16.6 ft high by 13 ft wide) will have a lot of trouble moving around inside the Transport. This includes all forms of Veritechs and Destroids. Anything smaller than a Trooper (e.g. a Cyclone) will have no problem hiding among all the containers, provided that their protoculture emissions don't give them away.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Cargo Transport, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

REF Nickname: "Egg Ship"
Vehicle Type: Cargo Transport.
Crew: 4 Invid Enforcers (1 pilot plus 3 backups), 12 Invid Sentinels, 4 Invid Troopers (workers), 4 Invid Retrieval Drones. (*Note:* only one pilot is needed to fly the spacecraft. All the other Invid are either Guards, Workers, or Backups.)

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

	Maneuvering Jets (24 small)	100 each
	Maneuvering Jets (6 large; bottom)	200 each
*	Main Thrusters (6 rear)	500 each
**	Antigravity Domes (6)	300 each
***	Power Core/Fold System	300
	Outer Walls (per 40 ft area)	80
	Interior Walls (per 20 ft area; rear only)	40
	Interior Scaffolding (per 20 ft area; front only)	5
****	Cargo Section (front 2/3 of craft)	3000
*****	Engineering Section (rear 1/3 of craft)	2000

Note: No reinforced pilot's compartment.

*

Each Antigravity Dome destroyed will reduce speed by 5%. Destruction of all AG Domes will restrict the transport to forward motion only.

**

Each main thruster destroyed will reduce speed by 10%.

***

Depleting the MDC of the power core will instantly cause an explosion that will totally destroy the spacecraft, along with anything and everything in it.

****

Depleting the MDC of the cargo section will fatally wound the spacecraft. In an atmosphere, the ship will collapse in on itself like a punctured blimp, and in outer space the hull will simply burst apart at the seams. The entire craft will explode in 1D6 melee rounds.

*****

Depleting the MDC of the engineering section will instantly cause an explosion that will totally destroy the spacecraft, along with anything and everything in it.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight Speed:

Stationary hover to Mach 5. Has full transatmospheric capabilities. Cruising speed is about Mach 1.

Space Fold:

A hyperspace system that catapults the vessel through space and time. The space fold system is used for traveling from one system to another quickly. Range: Unknown, presumably limitless. Note : When a Cargo Transport makes a space fold, it will also transport all vessels within one mile.

Height:

150 ft (45 m)

Width:

600 ft (180 m)

Length:

1200 ft (360 m)

Weight:

180 tons unloaded.

Cargo:

Up to 2000 tons fully loaded.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

NONE. However, Cargo Transports are usually escorted by 2-4 fully loaded Invid Troop Carriers. These

carriers will actually accompany the Cargo Transport on its voyage to New Optera and back. Cargo Transports will never stray too far out of the range of the Invid Space Hives' main cannons, for fear of attack from REF starships.

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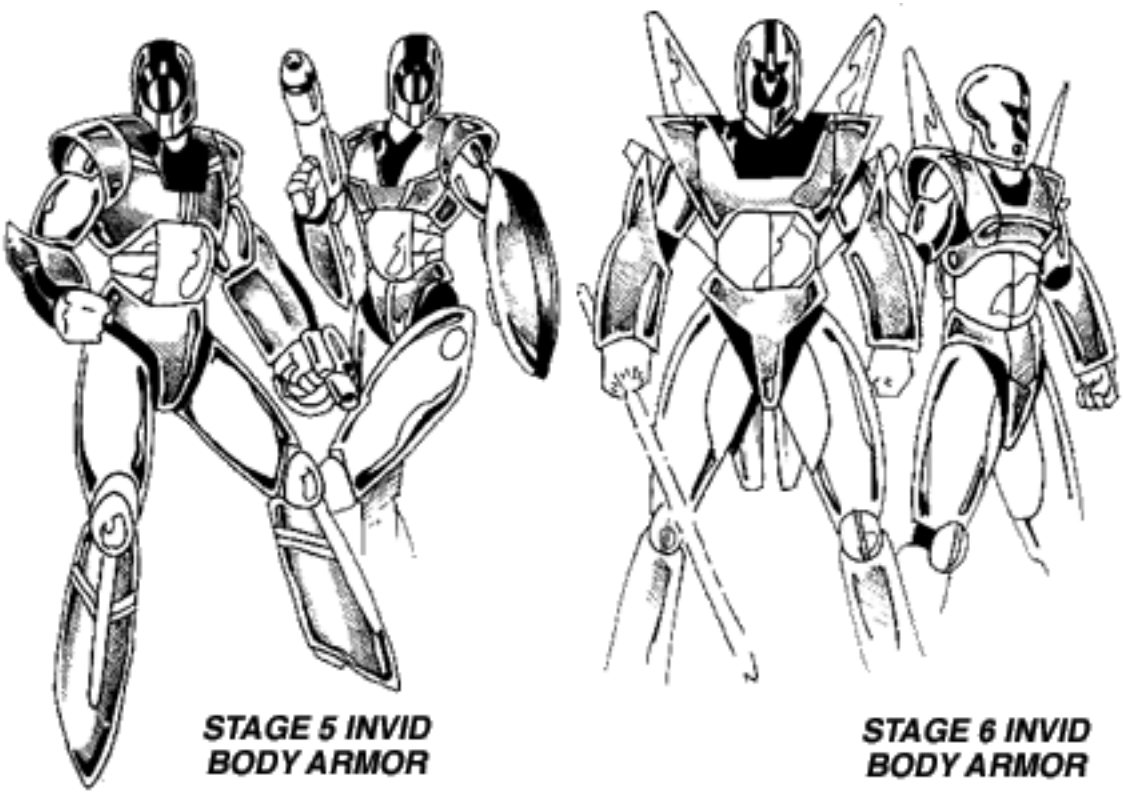
THE THIRD INVID WAR
NEW INVID EQUIPMENT

CONTENTS:

- Invid Body Armor
- Invid Type II Energy Pistol
- Invid Energy Rifle
- Invid Personal Energy Shield

INVID BODY ARMOR



Early on during the Third Invid War the stage 6 Invid began examining the mecha and tactics of REF personnel and freedom fighters that were fighting them. Inevitably the leader Invid started to emulate the resistance, building their own versions of some of the tools and equipment commonly used by the humans. One of the earliest pieces of human technology to be copied was the CVR-3 Cyclone Body Armor, which resulted in a new type of Invid Body Armor for use by stage 5 and stage 6 Invid.

Like the CVR-3 Armor, the Invid Body Armor is a durable and lightweight containment suit that covers the entire body. However, the Invid Armor is made up mostly of chitin-like ceramic alloys and plates instead of the metal and kevlar of the REF version. There are two different versions of the body armor, one for the stage 5 Invid and one for the stage 6 Invid. The stage 6 version is slightly stronger and offers better protection than the stage 5 version, but otherwise the suits are identical. There are also slightly different version for male and female Invid. Note that unlike the Invid Enforcer and Sentinel mecha, the body armors are NOT powered exoskeletons and do not increase the strength of the wearer. Like their REF counterparts, humanoid Invid pilots often wear body armor while piloting their mecha in order to have an additional level of protection from damage.

Invid Body Armors provides the following benefits:

MDC protection by location:

Stage 5 Version		**Stage 6 Version**	
Helmet	40	Helmet	60
Main Torso	50	Main Torso	70
Arms (2)	20	Arms (2)	40
Legs (2)	30	Legs (2)	50

*(**Note:** If you prefer the older rules for MDC body armor, use the MDC value of the **Main Torso** as the overall value for the armor)*

Standard Features (Both Versions):

- The ceramic plates of the armor are laser resistant; lasers do 1/2 damage.
- Complete Environmental Battle Armor suitable for use in space or other hostile environments.
- Automatic life support system that maintains atmosphere, temperature, and humidity for the wearer. The armor has an organic filter system that will allow it to provide air indefinitely in polluted or contaminated atmospheres. There is also a backup air supply that can supply atmosphere for 8 hours in a vacuum.
- Fire resistant up to 300 degrees centigrade. Normal fires do no damage, but plasma and nuclear fires have full effect.
- Radiation shielded.

- Helmet has light-sensitive irises that automatically adjust in bright light to prevent blindness. The organic optical system can also provide low-light and infrared viewing upon request.

Invid Body Armor CAN be worn by a human or humanoid, providing the wearer with all of the advantages listed above. However, the wearer will NOT be able to fool other Invid into believing that he is a stage 5 or stage 6 Invid. Invid communicate by telepathy and will be able to quickly detect if the wearer is not Invid.

INVID TYPE II ENERGY PISTOL

Like the CVR-3 Body Armor, the stage 6 Invid also emulated some of the hand weapons of the resistance fighters. Although they already had a simple energy pistol for use by humanoid Invid, the leader Invid came up with additional weapons for use in the field or outside of their mecha.

The Type II Pistol is a more compact version of the older Invid energy blaster (see Invid Invasion page 77), designed to be the new standard handgun for humanoid Invid. Most stage 5 and stage 6 Invid will have a pistol of this type on them at all times. Like the Gallant H90, this pistol can be converted from an SDC weapon to an MDC weapon with a simple flick of a switch. The Energy Pistol is powered by a special protoculture cell and is NOT compatible with energy clips.

Weight: 1.5 lbs
Damage:
SDC Mode: 3D6 S.D.
MDC Mode: 1D4 M.D.
Rate of Fire:
Aimed, Burst or Wild. Maximum of 10 blasts per melee on Wild.
Effective Range: 500 ft (150 m)
Payload:
SDC Mode: Unlimited.
MDC Mode: 50 blasts.

INVID ENERGY RIFLE

A heavier weapon used by stage 4 (unarmored), stage 5, and stage 6 Invid. Like the Type II Pistol, this energy rifle can also do varying amounts of damage. However, more power levels are offered, including a stun version for the capture of live specimens/prisoners. The Energy Rifle is powered by a special protoculture cell and is NOT compatible with energy clips.

Weight: 12 lbs

Damage:

Stun Mode: No Damage; target must roll under his (P.E. - 10) or fall unconscious for 6+1D6 hours.
SDC Mode: 5D6 S.D.
MDC Mode 1: 1D4 M.D.
MDC Mode 2: 3D4 M.D.

Rate of Fire:

Aimed, Burst or Wild. Maximum of 12 blasts per melee on Wild.

Effective Range: 1500 ft (450 m)

Payload:

Stun Mode: Unlimited.
SDC Mode: Unlimited.
MDC Mode 1: 80 blasts.
MDC Mode 2: 20 blasts (1 Mode 2 blast = 4 Mode 1 blasts).

INVID PERSONAL ENERGY SHIELD

This is a smaller version of the energy shield carried by the Invid Enforcer and Sentinel mecha. The shield is oval in shape and is 3 feet long by 1 foot wide. The shield resembles some of the shields used by Southern Cross troops. Like the pistol and the rifle, the Energy Shield is powered by a special protoculture cell and is NOT compatible with energy clips.

Weight: 10 lbs
Protection:
Unpowered: 5 M.D.C.
Powered: 50 M.D.C.; can regenerate at a rate of 5 M.D.C. per melee round.
Payload:
The protoculture cell can provide enough power for 24 hours of continuous use before requiring replacement.

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THE STAGE SIX INVID NPC

When the Regis decided to send an occupation force back to Earth, she was faced with a serious problem; it was simply impossible for her to be in two places at once. Her "enlightened evolution" experiments demanded her full attention, but the food supply problems on New Optera were critical enough that she had to ensure that the temporary re-occupation of Earth was successful. Plus her forces on Earth would need some way to rebuild all the Hives and fortifications that were destroyed during the Third Robotech War.

Finally, she reached a decision. She called together the best of the Stage 5 Invid that had survived the previous war with the humans. These Invid were the strongest, smartest, and most loyal followers of the Regis, who had proven themselves time and time again on the battlefields of Earth. These humanoid Invid would be the leaders of the Earth re- occupation forces, and to this end the Regis evolved them into a higher form of life, granting each of them a small amount of her powers. These elite Invid became the ultimate stage in Invid evolution; the Stage Six Invid.

The stage six Invid is completely humanoid in appearance, like the stage 5 Invid, but are usually taller and slightly more agile. The biggest difference is their eyes, which are slitted and catlike. They are always very attractive and have the same light Caucasian skin/complexion and long hair as their less-developed brethren.

But the greatest difference in these new Invid is the presence of psychic powers, similar to those of the Regis herself. In essence, the stage six Invid can be considered mini-Regents and mini-Regis of the Invid race. Individually, their powers are not incredibly impressive, but together they can perform acts equal to those of the Regis, including transmutation of Invid and mecha, and the alchemical ability to create Invid

hives and power cores. These new Invid were also the most intelligent and the most devious since the Regent. They were the ones who came up with the idea of the Invid space hives and the new Invid mecha designs. And they are constantly at work thinking up new plans to prevent the humans from interfering in their work.

Unfortunately, the evolution of the Stage Six Invid has had some unexpected effects on their mental stability. Most of the new Invid consider themselves far superior to lower stage Invid, especially the Stage Five Invid. This has led to a great deal of friction between the two Invid "races", to the point where some stage 5 Invid might consider betraying their superiors if they thought they could get away with it. This superiority complex borders on psychosis when it comes to humans. At best, stage 6 Invid consider humans a lesser race, who do not deserve the rights of freedom or self-rule. At worst, some stage 6 Invid see humans as vermin, suitable only for hard labor, laboratory tests, and extermination.

Stage 6 Invid are ALWAYS snobbish and overbearing. They care little for the concerns of others, and are often inconsiderate and outright rude to anyone who is not a fellow stage 6 Invid. They are loyal only to themselves, other stage 6 Invid, and the Regis. Temperament among leader Invid tends to vary; some are quite emotional, easily giving into bloodlust and berserker tendencies during battle, while others are analytical and emotionless, carrying out their plans and attacks with cold, calculated efficiency. However, no stage 6 Invid will ever allow his/her emotions to interfere with the occupation force mission.

NOTE: There are maybe only two dozen stage 6 Invid on Earth, including those stationed in the orbital hives. Gamemasters should not indiscriminately throw them at PCs, but instead save these characters for recurring villains and enemy masterminds. Combat with stage 6 Invid should only come after a long series of other adventures and battles, perhaps even saved for the final climactic battle of a multi-part adventure.

Pilot: Warlord Battloid
Hit Points: 24 + 1D6
S.D.C.:6D6
Alignments: Anarchist, Miscreant, Aberrant, or Diabolic

ATTRIBUTES

- **I.Q.** 10 + 2D6
- **M.E.** 10 + 3D6
- **M.A.** 10 + 2D6
- **P.S.** 10 + 1D6
- **P.P.** 10 + 2D6
- **P.E.** 10 + 1D6
- **P.B.** 10 + 2D6
- **I.S.P.** 2 x **M.E.**

NOTE: Any attribute of 16 or more (except ISP) gets to roll another 1D6 and add it to that specific attribute score.

Attacks per Melee: Four hand-to-hand, Six with Mecha Combat Training. Damage from punch or kick is 1D6.
Bonuses: +1 to strike, +3 to parry or dodge, +3 on initiative.

SKILLS

Basic Mechanics (general):	60%
Detect Ambush:	65%
Detect Concealment:	55%
Intelligence:	55%
Interrogation:	65%
Invid Mecha Mechanics:	90%
Knowledge of Protoculture/Flower of Life:	70%
Navigation (air, land, water):	80%
Navigation (space):	75%
Pilot Invid Battloids (all):	90%
Protoculture Alchemy/Transmutation:	70%
Tracking:	60%
W.P. Energy Pistol (+2 to strike)	
W.P. Energy Rifle (+1 to strike)	
W.P. Sword (+2 to strike)	

All skills are equivalent to Earth skills. In addition, choose 2D4 skills from the *Medical*, *Physical*, *Science*, or *Technical* categories.

PSIONIC ABILITIES

- **TELEPATHIC/EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION WITH INVID:** Stage 6 Invid have full telepathic/empathic powers with all Invid. This power does not include reading minds or mental probes. Range is about 5 miles without assistance. I.S.P. 1 per 5 minutes of communication.

- **EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION WITH NON-INVID:** Stage 6 Invid can sense the presence and emotional state of non-Invid beings, but not as reliably as with true Invid. Empathic range is only around 100 feet. I.S.P. 5 per 1 minute of communication.

- **PRESENCE SENSE:** Leader Invid can sense the presence of intelligent life forms around them. This sense is not exact; only direction and relative distance can be detected. It is this "sixth sense" that is responsible for the stage 6 Invid's high initiative bonuses. I.S.P. None; a natural function

that requires no effort on the Invid's part.

- **SENSE PROTOCULTURE ENERGY:** Stage 6 Invid can psychically feel the presence of protoculture energy being used anywhere near them (within a 1 mile range). They can also detect the presence of living Flowers of Life within 1/2 mile. Exact number and location of protoculture sources can only be detected within about 300 feet. I.S.P. None; a natural function that requires no effort on the Invid's part.

- **LEVITATION (SELF):**The leader Invid can lift and suspend themselves into the air. Limited to up and down movement only. I.S.P. 2 per minute of levitation.

- **BIO-REGENERATION (SELF):** Stage 6 Invid can regenerate 2D6 hit points, or 3D6 physical SDC points per melee. This power does not include the regeneration of lost limbs. I.S.P. 6 per healing.

- **BIO-REGENERATION (OTHER INVID):** Stage 6 Invid can restore 1D8 hit points, or 2D6 physical SDC points per melee to other Invid. They must physically touch the wounded Invid in order to heal them. I.S.P. 6 per healing.

- **MIND BLOCK (SELF):** Leader Invid can erect a mental wall that prevents the penetration of telepathy, empathy, and other mind probes. I.S.P. 4 per 10 minute duration.

- **PSI-SWORD:**The most powerful mental ability of the Stage 6 Invid is the ability to form a mega-damage energy weapon from their own mental powers. This weapon appears to be a shimmering blade of energy that looks almost like a glowing sword. The Invid can form and dissipate the psi-sword at will. The blade can do up to 1D6 M.D. to anything it touches, but damage can be lessened if the Invid desires. I.S.P. 20 per 5 minutes.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

When the Regis created the stage 6 Invid, she imparted each of them with a small percentage of her powers. Individually, these powers don't amount to much, providing the leader Invid with a few low-key psychic abilities. However, when multiple stage 6 Invid work together, they are capable of transmutation feats equal to those of the Regis herself. These powers allowed the Invid occupation force to rebuild their fortifications upon their return to Earth, and for the stage 6 Invid to create the new mecha designs and orbiting hives later on during the war.

By gathering together and combining their powers, the stage 6 Invid are able to perform the following feats. Each leader Invid can only participate in one such transmutation per day. All powers are identical to those described for the Regis on pages 75-76 of the Invid Invasion book.

- **Transmutation of Invids:** Requires 6 Leader Invids.

- **Transmutation of Mecha:** Requires 4 Leader Invids.
- **Transmutation of Power Core (for Hive):** Requires 12 Leader Invids.
- **Transmutation to Warp Speed:** Requires 24 Leader Invids.
- **Stasis Bubble:** Requires 2 Leader Invids.

Some stage 6 Invid have been able to augment their powers for short periods of time using other means, such as special Invid brain computers and genesis pits. These plot devices and their effects are left up to the imagination of the game master.

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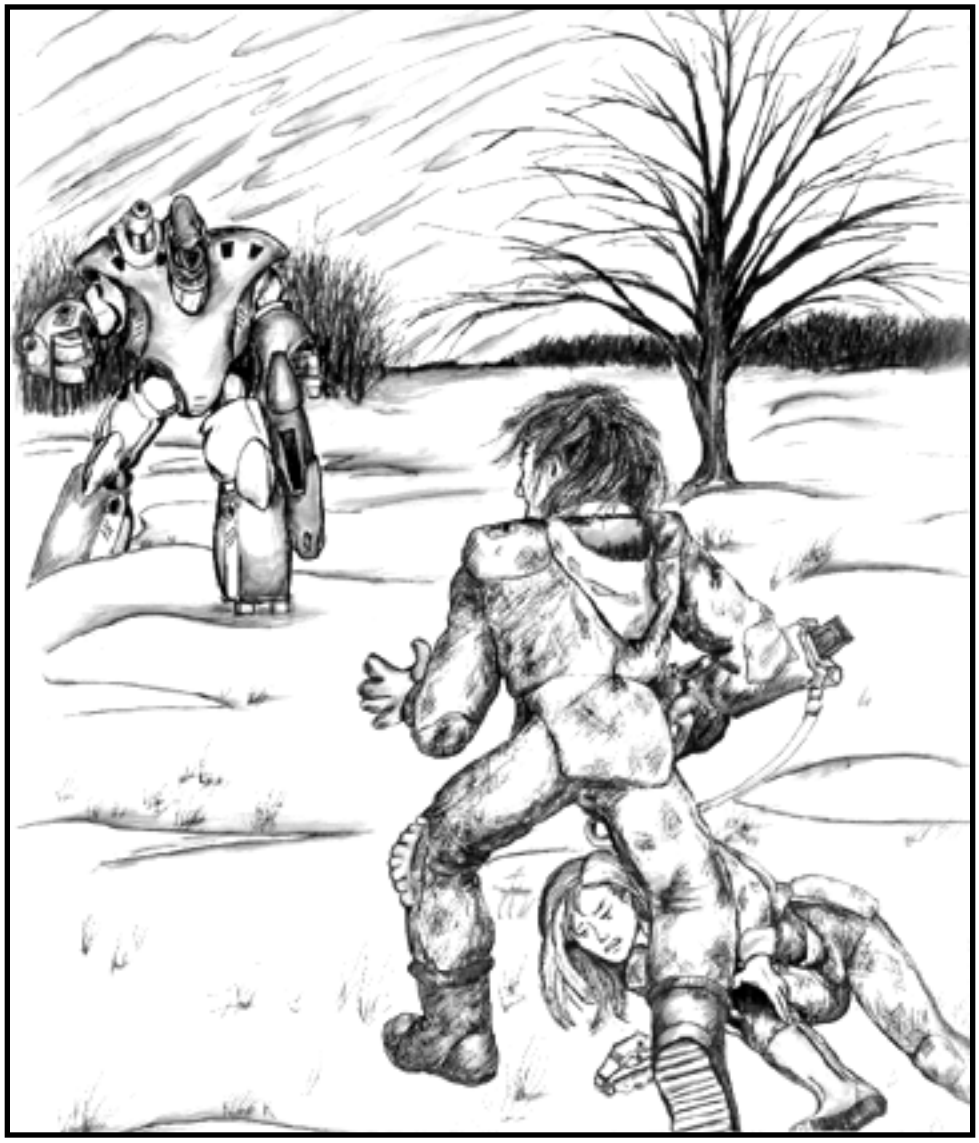
THE THIRD INVID WAR

NEW INVID NPCs, BASES, SPACECRAFT, AND EQUIPMENT

As the Third Invid War dragged on, it became clear to resistance fighters that the new Invid forces occupying Earth were definitely **NOT** the same as those that had invaded it during the Second Invid War. At first the Invid used the same mecha designs and tactics as the Regis did, but eventually new designs started appearing along with new, innovative strategies that took the rebels by surprise. It was almost as if whoever was leading these new invaders was becoming more imaginative (and more deadly) as time went on.

The first divergence from typical Invid strategy appeared in 2041, when new lights were noticed in the night sky by the resistance. Later reconnaissance revealed that these lights were in fact powerful orbiting **Space Hives**, heavily armed and armored, and designed specifically for anti-spacecraft warfare. Apparently the Invid had learned from their defeat at the *Battle of Reflex Point* in the Second Invid War, and were trying to make sure that the Earth was isolated from REF fleets returning from Tirol. Then, in 2043 as the Invid Space Hives were nearing completion, the first new Invid mecha designs began to appear on Earth. This took the resistance completely by surprise, and many rebels were lost while trying to adjust to the deadlier mecha.



Changes were also becoming apparent in the Invid's behaviour towards humanity. Before 2043, the Invid mostly ignored the civilian population of Earth. So long as terrans did not take up arms and attack the Invid, they were content to leave them alone. In early 2044 some Invid began actively recruiting gangs of dissident humans to work for them. These invid sympathizers, called **FRAGS**, were used to pacify towns and hunt down rebels, and generally supplement the forces of the Invid in areas of lower value. The Invid also started stepping up their attacks against the resistance during this time, conducting organized sweeps and strikes against towns suspected of housing or aiding resistance fighters, as well as attacking small towns to try and draw the resistance out of hiding.

However, even these increases in savagery by the new Invid paled compared to what was to come. In 2045 (known as the start of **"The Dark Years"**) the Invid began rounding up civilians from surrounding towns and herding them into massive **Slave Camps**, where they were forced to harvest massive amounts of the Flower of Life for shipment to places unknown (to the humans). After harvest, the flower was stored on huge **Cargo Transports**, which then took off from the farms and headed into Earth orbit.

These changes led to a decrease in morale among terran resistance, as more and more people died and the

Invid continued to gain power despite their best efforts. Unless something was done soon, there would be no hope left for those fighting for freedom during the *Third Invid War*...

WARNING!
CLASSIFIED MATERIAL!

The following information is for the Game Master's eyes only! You will ruin much of your enjoyment of TIW as a player if you continue to read this page. If you plan on playing TIW as a PC, STOP READING NOW!

New Invid Player/Non-Player Characters

- Stage 5 Invid PC/NPC
- Stage 6 Invid NPC

New Invid Equipment

- Invid Body Armor and Hand Weapons

New Invid Bases

- Invid Slave Camp
- Invid Communications Tower

New Invid Spacecraft and Space Hives

- Invid Cargo Transport
- Invid Space Hive

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THE INVID WARLORD BATTLOID

BACKGROUND

On January 4th, 2044, several resistance bases in the northwest quadrant of North America received a chilling radio transmission from the Viper-3 Silo Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The message, though heavily broken up by static, indicated that a powerful new threat now faced freedom fighters.

"This is Jack Halloran, commanding officer... Viper-3 Resistance Base. Have been attacked... by a large force of Invid. 20 Linebackers (Combat Troopers)*... 5 or 6 Commandoes* (Strike Units)*... and... and... some sort of new battloid. Looks like a demon from hell, complete with wings and fire. Bastard took out... all 6 of our Alphas by itself. Far more powerful than... anything we've encountered so far. Almost everyone... is dead. I've ordered anyone still... alive... to make a run for it. The Viper's Nest is gone. Will try to transmit... all data on the demon before I buy it. Give 'em hell..."*

Several groups of resistance fighters tried to assist Viper-3, but they arrived far too late to be of any help. The base was totally destroyed, and no survivors were ever found. What little data Commander Halloran was able to transmit before the signal stopped completely was garbled and of little aid to REF analysts. What was perhaps most terrifying of all was the condition in which the fallen REF mecha were found. Many had been literally dismembered and torn apart; their pilots crushed to death inside their own cockpits. Although the Invid were never known for their gentleness, the amount of carnage indicated an opponent who enjoyed making his enemies suffer.

Over the next month, a dozen other bases around the world reported encountering a new type of Invid Battloid. However, all 12 bases were totally destroyed before they could transmit any useful data. Then,

in mid-February of that year, resistance Wilderness Scouts discovered a survivor from one of the attacks. Corporal Steve White, an REF Intelligence Agent, had managed to escape detection by abandoning his Cyclone and hiding in a forest while his base was destroyed. More importantly, he had captured the new Invid battloid on film while it sadistically killed his teammates. Corporal White survived alone in the forest for seven days before he was eventually found. All the information the REF has on what was then named the Invid Warlord Battloid is due mostly to Corporal White's heroic efforts. Corporal White died of battle wounds 24 hours after being discovered.

The Invid Warlord Battloid is by far the deadliest mecha currently fielded by the Invid. Although the new mecha is obviously descended from the old Royal Command Battloid, and perhaps from the new Assault Battloid as well, this new mecha represents a quantum increase in firepower for Invid mecha. In addition, the Warlord Battloid seems to include brand-new Invid technologies never before encountered, including remote drones and portable force-field barriers.

The Warlord Battloid is human shaped and stands upright, similar to the old RCB. The head of the mecha is larger, and has a number of fins sprouting out of the top, making the mecha look like it's wearing a headdress. These fins are swept back, giving the mecha an almost hawk- like appearance. Two large fins are connected to the sides of the back pack, almost resembling wings. The function of these wings are unknown, but may have something to do with the remote-control drones.

The main body of the mecha has been redesigned. The cockpit of the mecha is higher and provides the pilot with more protection. The legs are similar to those on the RCB and Assault Battloid, but are broader and have a different foot design. The arms of the mecha have plasma cannons built directly into them, similar to the Assault Battloid. Instead of arm shields, however, the Warlord Battloid can generate a force field similar to the force field of an Invid hive. This force field resembles a disk from the old pinpoint barrier system on the SDF- 1, and acts as a hand-held shield for the Warlord Battloid. Both arms of the mecha can generate shields simultaneously. The energy shield does not seem to be movable; the Warlord Battloid must move its arm in order to reposition it.

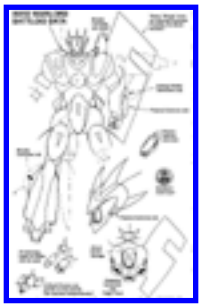
The other new weapon that is unique to the Warlord is a set of 6 small remote-control drones. These drones are little more than plasma cannons connected to a maneuvering engine, but are very fast and fairly powerful. The Warlord Battloid can use these drones to swarm enemy mecha and attack from all sides at once. When not in use, the drones are housed in the back of the mecha, between the two backpack nacelles.

In addition to the force fields and drones, the Warlord Battloid has a number of other weapons systems. There is of course a plasma cannon located in each arm, but there are also two small plasma cannons located in the head of the mecha, on either side of the sensor eye. The missile bays have been moved from the backpack to the shoulders and legs of the mecha. Presumably the backpack now contains the massive engines needed to power all of the Warlord's weaponry. Each shoulder launcher contains 15 missiles, and the pop-up launchers on each side of the leg (similar to those on the Invid Strike Unit) contain ten missiles per leg.

Warlord Battloids are rarely encountered alone; they are usually accompanied by an "honor guard" of Assault Battloids or Strike Units. They are always the highest-ranking units on the battlefield.

> **NOTE**: Warlord Battloids are incredibly rare; there may be as few as two dozen on the entire planet throughout the Third Invid War. Gamemasters should save these mecha for extremely important battles, such as the climactic final battle of a multi-session adventure. See the notes on the new Stage 6 Invid for more details.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Warlord Battloid, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Taf Gamun"; **REF Nickname:** "Demon"
Vehicle Type: All-purpose combat commander and director of operations.
Crew: One; Stage Six Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

	Hands (2)	60 each
*	Forearm/Plasma Cannon/Shield (2)	250 each
&	Energy Shields (2)	100 each/200 combined
	Upper Arms (2)	150 each
	Shoulders/Missile Pods	200 each
	Legs & Feet (2)	250 each
	Jet Thruster Backpack	180 each
	Wings (2)	100 each
**	Head Sensor Unit	75
	Head Plasma Cannons	20
***	Main Body	450
	Pilot's Compartment	200
	Drones (6)	50 each

Notes:

*

Destroying the Forearm will knock out the Plasma Cannon and Energy Shield. The Plasma Cannons and Energy Shields CANNOT be targeted separately; the forearms must be destroyed to get rid of these systems.

**

This head sensor is not like the eye sensor. Its destruction will knockout all sensor systems, leaving the pilot to rely only on visuals. The head plasma cannons will also be destroyed. The head's destruction will not destroy the mecha nor hurt the pilot.

***

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely.

&

The Energy Shields can regenerate at a rate of 50 MDC (each) per round. See the entry under 'Weaponry' below for a full list of stats.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Stationary hover to 2010 mph (Mach 3) maximum, with a maximum altitude of about 50,000 ft. Cruising speed for reconnaissance is 60 to 150 mph (96 to 240 kmph). Stationary hover and low speeds can be maintained at any altitude.

Running:

70 mph (112 kmph).

Jumping:

50 ft (15.2 m) up or across without boosters, or 300 ft (91.5 m) with booster assistance.

Height:

36 ft (10.9 m)

Width:

24 ft (7.4 m)

Length:

12 ft (3.6 m)

Weight:

34 tons

Cargo:

Can carry up to 6 tons

Abilities:

Pilot Mecha - 98%
Recognize Human Machinery - 70%

Navigation - 80%
Navigation: Space - 85%
Prowl - 75%
Detect Ambush - 98%
Detect Concealment - 85%
Track - 75%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAD PLASMA CANNONS**. Two small Invid beam cannons are mounted in the head of the mecha, just to either side of the sensor eye. The weapons are fixed forward, and must be aimed by moving the head. The head of the Warlord Battloid can rotate 40 degrees from side to side and 60 degrees up or down.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Close Range Assault/Defense
    - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **Damage**: One single blast (rare) does 2D6 M.D., dual blasts (simultaneous shots, same target) do 4D6 M.D. and a burst (6 blasts, all at same target) does 6D6 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Six attacks per melee. Dual blasts and bursts both count as ONE attack.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **IMPROVED PLASMA CANNONS**. The shielded plasma cannon of the older RCB design has been replaced with two newer plasma cannons, one mounted on each arm. These cannons CANNOT be ejected like the older designs. The only way to remove/destroy the cannons is to destroy the forearms of the Warlord Battloid.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **Damage**: Single shot does 4D6 M.D., and dual single shots do 1D6x10 M.D. A single burst does 1D6x10 M.D., and dual bursts do 2D6x10 M.D. (Single shots, dual shots, single bursts, and dual bursts all count as one attack) A strafing, continuous full melee burst (shooting wild), does 2D6 M.D. for each item or area hit if one arm cannon is used, or 4D6 M.D. if both arm cannons are used. Shooting wild counts as ALL attacks, regardless if one or both arms are used.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Equal to hand to hand attacks (6 single shots or 6 bursts).
    - **Payload**: Unlimited.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **SHOULDER MISSILE LAUNCHERS**. Two missile launchers are built into the shoulders of the mecha. These launchers are normally protected by an armored plate that pops open when firing.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft
- **Range**: Short range, 2 to 5 miles (3.2 to 8 km)
- **Damage**: Plasma missiles, doing 1D6x10 M.D. per hit.
- **Rate of Fire**: One at a time, in volleys of 2-15 missiles. All missiles from both launchers (30 total) can be fired as a single volley if necessary. Remember, one volley counts as one attack regardless of the number of missiles.
- **Payload**: 15 short range missiles in each shoulder for a total of 30.
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, but no protoculture targeting bonuses.

4. **LEG MISSILE LAUNCHERS**. Two missile launchers are built into each leg of the mecha. These launchers are normally concealed in the legs but pop open when ready to fire. Each launcher holds 5 missiles for a total of 10 missiles per leg (20 total).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft
    - **Range**: Short range, 2 to 5 miles (3.2 to 8 km)
    - **Damage**: Plasma missiles, doing 1D6x10 M.D. per hit.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time, in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 missiles. All missiles from both legs (20 total) can be fired as a single volley if necessary. Remember, one volley counts as one attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Payload**: 5 short range missiles in each launcher. 10 missiles per leg, 20 total.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, but no protoculture targeting bonuses.

5. **ENERGY SHIELDS**. The Warlord Battloid can generate a portable energy shield from each arm. This circular force field resembles the old pinpoint barrier system on the SDF-1, and is primarily used to block incoming fire from enemy units. Each arm can generate an individual shield of 100 MDC, or the two generators can work together to create a more powerful shield that has 200 MDC. An energy shield regenerates at 50 MDC per melee round. If the shield receives more damage than its MDC value, the additional damage is transferred to the mecha normally.

    EXAMPLE : A Warlord Battloid intercepts a volley of 3 missiles with its energy shield. The missiles do 30, 30, and 50 MD in damage, respectively, for a total of 110 MD to the shield. 10 MD get through and damage the main body of the mecha. Any other attacks that strike the Battloid in THE SAME MELEE ROUND will do full damage to the mecha. The Warlord Battloid's energy shield will have 50 MDC starting next melee round.

    A hit from a Destabilizer cannon will totally eliminate the energy shield's MDC, regardless of how much damage it does. However, the shield will regenerate normally at a rate of 50 MDC/melee after that.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense

- **Mega-Damage Capacity**: 100 MDC for one arm, or 200 MDC for both arms.
- **Note**: Can regenerate at a rate of 50 MDC per melee round (15 seconds).

6. **ATTACK DRONES**. The Warlord Battloid carries a complement of 6 attack drones in its backpack. When engaged in combat, the Battloid will launch these drones, which will then dart around the mecha in a seemingly random pattern. Each Attack Drone is armed with a high-powered plasma cannon. The Stage 6 Invid pilot can control these drones telepathically, and direct them to attack one or multiple targets. The Attack Drones will always stay near the Warlord Battloid, and if the Battloid is destroyed then the Drones will also self-destruct. NOTE: If the Warlord Battloid is heavily damaged, the drones will usually collide with an opponent to give the Battloid time to escape.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
   - **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
   - **Range**: 6000 feet (1800 m) max
   - **Mega Damage**: 1D6x10 per blast. Bursts are not possible. Collision Damage: 6D6 MDC per hit.
   - **Rate of Fire**: Each Drone can fire up to 3 times per melee round.

     The stage 6 Invid can combine the attacks of the drones with his or her own attacks. In this case, the simultaneous attacks from one or more drones count as part of the pilot's melee actions/attacks and fire at the very instant that he or she fires.

     For example: A Warlord Battloid is accompanied by three drones, who all fire at the exact same moment and at the exact same target the Battloid is shooting at. If the Battloid was using blasts from both Plasma Cannons, then the combined damage from the volley would be 5D6x10 MD (50-300 MD) from that single attack!!

     If the stage 6 Invid is not controlling the drones, then they will randomly circle the Warlord Battloid and attack the nearest target that is in range. Roll initiative and to-hit rolls separately for each drone.

   - **Bonus to Strike**: +3 to hit, NO protoculture bonuses (except in simultaneous attacks with the Warlord Battloid).
   - **Payload**: Unlimited.
   - **Size**: 5 feet (1.8 m) long.
   - **Weight**: 2 tons.
   - **Speed**: Equal to the Warlord Battloid; about Mach 3 (2010 mph).
   - **Main Body of the Drone**: 50 MDC. Attackers are at -4 to strike because the drones are so small.

7. **INITIATIVE BONUS**. Due to the telepathic/empathic powers of the Stage 6 Invid, the pilot can

often sense an attacker's presence as he approaches. Because of this, Warlord Battloids get a special bonus when rolling initiative. It is IMPOSSIBLE to surprise a Warlord Battloid, and the Battloid gets a bonus of +3 to all initiative rolls.

SPECIAL CASE: If the Warlord Battloid is attacked by a Shadow Fighter, then during the first round of combat the Warlord Battloid and the Shadow Fighter both roll a contest with a D20. Whoever has the higher number gets the first attack, and the loser goes the second attack. The rest of the combatants roll initiative normally.

For a complete listing of telepathic/empathic powers exclusive to the stage 6 Invid, see the stage 6 Invid stats.

8. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**.
    - **Attacks Per Melee**: Six
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +5 to strike, +6 to parry, +3 to dodge on the ground, +5 automatic dodge when flying at any speed (an automatic dodge works like a parry and does not forfeit an attack), +5 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact, +3 on initiative (plus special bonuses; see above).
    - **Types of Attacks**: Punch: 3D6 M.D. Crush with Hand: 2D4 M.D. per melee round. Kick: 2D6 M.D. Leap Kick: 3D6 M.D. Body Flip: 2D4 M.D. Body Block/Ram: 3D6 M.D., counts as two attacks. Stomp: 2D6 M.D., target must be 15 ft (4.5 m) or smaller.

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THE INVID ASSAULT BATTLOID

BACKGROUND

When it appeared in early 2043, the Invid Assault Battloid was quickly identified as an obvious upgrade of the old Royal Command Battloid design. However, REF field scientists also noted with much curiosity that it was also the least changed of all the redesigned Invid mecha encountered so far. It seemed clear that far more development had gone into some of the other designs, such as the Combat Trooper and Space Trooper, than the Assault Battloid. The mystery further deepened later that year when a FAR more powerful Invid battloid design, the Warlord Battloid, appeared on Earth. Judging on the data obtained from both designs so far, REF analysts have come up with two possible explanations for the different battloid designs. Either the Assault Battloid is a prototype version of the new Warlord battloid, or the two different mecha represent some new social stratification among Stage 5 Invid.

Despite it's seeming lack of development, the Invid Assault Battloid should not be underestimated. The basic body design of the mecha is very similar to the older Royal Command Battloid. In fact, the legs, main body, and head of the mecha are almost identical! The backpack unit for the mecha is also similar, and still contains the main jets and missile bays for the mecha. However, the new battloid is equipped with a much more powerful engine system which makes the unit faster and very powerful.

The big change in the Assault Battloid is a dramatic increase in the mecha's firepower. Two large particle beam cannons are now mounted on each shoulder of the mecha. These cannons are similar in style to the one on the Invid Sentinel; the cannons are mounted on a ball-joint system and can swivel 90 degrees upward, 20 degrees downward, or 30 degrees from side to side, measured from the front of the mecha. In

addition to the shoulder-mounted PBCs, the old shielded plasma weapon in the forearm has been redesigned. A new plasma cannon is now mounted on each arm, and is an integral part of the lower arm unit. The forearms are no longer protected by a detachable shield, and the plasma cannons cannot be detached from the arms. The Assault Battloid also has the same missile launchers as the older RCB design.

Resistance fighters and REF soldiers have had extensive battlefield contact with Assault Battloids. The mecha's higher firepower and maneuverability coupled with the unpredictability of the stage 5 Invid pilot make it a dangerous opponent, despite its lack of redesign. All troops are warned not to underestimate the new Assault Battloid in combat.

> **GM NOTE:** the reason for the two different mecha is that the Assault Battloid is intended for stage 5 Invid, while the Warlord Battloid is intended for stage 6 Invid. REF analysts are currently unaware that the Regis has become dissatisfied with the performance of the stage 5 Invid, and has "created" a new race of Invid to replace them. This is one of the reasons that stage 5 Invid aren't terribly fond of stage 6 Invid.

SCHEMATICS

Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Combat Trooper, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Gamun"; **REF Nickname:** "Marauder"
Vehicle Type: All-purpose combat battloid.
Crew: One; Stage Five Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

```
*    Forearm/Plasma Cannon (2)        200
     Upper Arms (2)                   100 each
     Hands (2)                        50 each
     Particle Beam Cannons (2)        60 each
     Legs & Feet (2)                  200 each
     Jet Thrusters/Missile Pods (2)   120 each
```

**	Head Sensor Unit	50
***	Main Body	350
	Pilot's Compartment	150

Notes:

*

Destroying the Forearm will knock out the Plasma Cannon. The Plasma Cannons CANNOT be targeted separately; the forearms must be destroyed to get rid of the cannons.

**

This head sensor is not like the eye sensor. Its destruction will knockout all sensor systems, leaving the pilot to rely only on visuals. Its destruction will not destroy the mecha nor hurt the pilot.

***

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Stationary hover to 1340 mph (Mach 2) maximum, with a maximum altitude of about 50,000 ft. Cruising speed for reconnaissance is 60 to 150 mph (96 to 240 kmph). Stationary hover and low speeds can be maintained at any altitude.

Running:

70 mph (112 kmph).

Jumping:

50 ft (15.2 m) up or across without boosters, or 300 ft (91.5 m) with booster assistance.

Height:

30 ft (9.1 m) with cannons lowered, 36 ft (10.9 m) with cannons raised.

Width:

13 ft (4 m)

Length:

12 ft (3.6 m)

Weight:

26 tons

Cargo:

Can carry up to 6 tons

Abilities:

Pilot Mecha - 90%
Recognize Human Machinery - 50%

Navigation - 80%
Navigation: Space - 85%
Prowl - 60%
Detect Ambush - 60%
Detect Concealment - 50%
Track - 65%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **PARTICLE BEAM CANNONS**. The main weapons of the Assault Battloid are a pair of powerful particle beam cannon mounted on each shoulder. The cannons are mounted on a ball turret, and can move 20 degrees downward, 90 degrees upward, and 30 degrees to either side. They cannot point behind the mecha.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
    - **Range**: 6000 ft (1800 m)
    - **Damage**: 4D10 M.D. per single blast. 8D10 M.D. per dual blast (counts as one attack). Bursts are not possible.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Due to an automatic cool-down cycle, the PBC can fire a maximum of THREE TIMES per melee round.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **IMPROVED PLASMA CANNONS**. The shielded plasma cannon of the older RCB design has been replaced with two newer plasma cannons, one mounted on each arm. These cannons CANNOT be ejected like the older designs. The only way to remove/destroy the cannons is to destroy the forearms of the Assault Battloid.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **Damage**: Single shot does 4D6 M.D., and dual single shots do 1D6x10 M.D. A single burst does 1D6x10 M.D., and dual bursts do 2D6x10 M.D. (Single shots, dual shots, single bursts, and dual bursts all count as one attack) A strafing, continuous full melee burst (shooting wild), does 2D6 M.D. for each item or area hit if one arm cannon is used, or 4D6 M.D. if both arm cannons are used. Shooting wild counts as ALL attacks, regardless if one or both arms are used.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Equal to hand to hand attacks (5 single shots or 5 bursts).
    - **Payload**: Unlimited.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **BACKPACK MISSILE LAUNCHERS**. Two missile launchers are built into the back section that connects with the jet thrusters, exactly like the old RCB design.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft
- **Range**: Short range, 2 to 5 miles (3.2 to 8 km)
- **Damage**: Plasma missiles, doing 1D6x10 M.D. per hit.
- **Rate of Fire**: One at a time, or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 12, or all (48). Remember, one volley counts as one attack regardless of the number of missiles.
- **Payload**: 24 short range missiles in each launcher pod for a total of 48.
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike, but no protoculture targeting bonuses.

4. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**.

- **Attacks Per Melee**: Five
- **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +4 to strike, +5 to parry, +2 to dodge on the ground, +4 automatic dodge when flying at any speed (an automatic dodge works like a parry and does not forfeit an attack), +4 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact, +2 on initiative.
- **Types of Attacks**: Punch: 2D6 M.D. Crush with Hand: 1D4 M.D. per melee round. Kick: 1D6 M.D. Leap Kick: 2D6 M.D. Body Flip: 1D4 M.D. Body Block/Ram: 2D6 M.D., counts as two attacks. Stomp: 1D6 M.D., target must be 15 ft (4.5 m) or smaller.

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THE INVID SENTINEL

BACKGROUND

The Invid Sentinel is unique among the new Invid mecha, because unlike the other new mecha designs the Sentinel seems to have been created to complement an existing mecha instead of replace it. The Sentinel appears to be designed specifically to work alongside the original Invid Enforcer. Appearing in late 2043, the Invid Sentinel seemed to take over the job as "Hive Guard", freeing the more advanced Enforcers for more delicate and detailed work. Invid Sentinels soon became the standard guard unit for all of the Invid's strongholds, working in Hives, Slave Farms, Genesis Pits, etc. Sentinels are commonly found with Enforcers, with the latter usually in command of the former.

The Invid Sentinel is human-sized and human-shaped, much like the Enforcer. However, the Sentinel design appears much more combat- oriented than the older Enforcer design. The Sentinel is far bulkier than its cousin, and seems to have much thicker armor than the Enforcer. The increased armor has done nothing to slow the mecha down; in fact, the Sentinel is actually faster than the old Enforcer! This is due to a much larger thruster on the back of the mecha, and the addition of several concealed vernier jets at strategic locations on the outside of the armor. The Sentinel also has powerful legs that are slightly longer than the Enforcer's, allowing it to run faster and jump farther than the older mecha.

The head and sensor eye of the mecha is shaped like a snout, similar to the Enforcer's head. However, the snout is smaller and more concealed. The arms of the mecha look almost identical to those of the Enforcer. One new addition is a large cannon located on the right shoulder. This cannon appears to be a particle-beam cannon and is the main weapon of the new mecha. The cannon swings upward when not in use, and rotates downward when about to be fired. The cannon is mounted on a swiveling turret, and can

move 45 degrees downward, 90 degrees upward, and 45 degrees to either side. It apparently cannot point behind the mecha.

The main weapon of the Sentinel is the new PBC on the shoulder, but it also has the same weaponry as the Enforcer. There is a concealed laser in each forearm (identical to the Enforcer's) and the Sentinel can use the same energy rifle and energy shield that the Enforcer does. Another new weapon is a pair of concealed mini-missile launchers on each arm. Each mini-missile launcher holds one missile (for a total of 4) and pops open when the Sentinel is about to fire. These launchers are located on the sides of the arms, while the concealed laser is located on the tops of the arms.

Invid Sentinels are piloted by Stage Three Invid, and are thus NOT capable of independent thought. While they are capable of doing simple tasks by themselves (such as patrolling the hive and guarding prisoners), they require a Stage Four or higher Invid to command them in complex tasks. Their first instinct in a battle will be to protect their commander.

SCHEMATICS

Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Invid Sentinel, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Gamir"; **REF Nickname:** "Terminators"
Vehicle Type: Power Armor
Crew: One; Stage Three Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

Hands (2)	10 each
Forearms/Lasers (2)	35 each
Missile Launchers (4)	20 each
Upper Arms (2)	40 each
Legs & Feet (2)	60 each
Jet Thruster (rear)	40 each
Particle Beam Cannon	45
Energy Rifle	10

```
    Energy Shield          150
*   Head & Sensor Eye      20
**  Main Body              150
```

Note: No Reinforced Pilot's Compartment

Notes:

*

The sensor eye is the most vulnerable place on the Invid's mecha body. Destruction of the sensor eye will kill/destroy the mecha and pilot (goes right through crew compartment). However, it is a small target protected by surrounding shielding, thus, to hit it the player/character must make a called shot and is at -3 to strike.

**

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely. There is no reinforced pilot's compartment in the power armor, so the Invid pilot inside will be blown to pieces.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Hover to 250 mph (400 kmph) with an altitude of 6000 ft (1828 m). Cruising Speed is usually about 100 mph.

Running:

60 mph (96 kmph) maximum.

Jumping:

35 ft (10.6 m) up or across without jet boosters, 150 ft (45.8 m) with thruster boost.

Height:

9 ft (2.7 m)

Width:

5 ft (1.4 m)

Length:

3 ft (0.9 m) with PBC raised, 4 ft (1.2 m) with PBC lowered.

Weight:

750 lbs (339 kg)

Cargo:

Can carry up to 1.5 tons.

Abilities:

Pilot Mecha - 75%

Recognize Human Machinery - 40%
Prowl - 45%
Detect Ambush - 45%
Detect Concealment - 55%
Track - 55%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **PARTICLE BEAM CANNON**. The main weapon of the Invid Sentinel is a compact but powerful particle beam cannon mounted on the right shoulder. The cannon is mounted on a swiveling turret, and can move 45 degrees downward, 90 degrees upward, and 45 degrees to either side. It cannot point behind the mecha.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Range**: 3000 ft (900 m)
    - **Damage**: Blast does 1D6x10 M.D. Bursts are not possible.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Due to an automatic cool-down cycle, the PBC can fire a maximum of TWICE per melee round. med shot. (see Modern Weapon Proficiencies)
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **FOREARM LASERS**. The Sentinel has a laser cannon built into each arm. The design is similar to those on the Enforcer, but is slightly more powerful. Both are fixed forward, and can only shoot in the direction that the arm is pointed. Destruction of the forearm also destroys the laser.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Range**: 600 ft (182 m)
    - **Damage**: A single blast does 3D6 M.D. A burst does 4D6 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Equal to hand-to-hand attacks (four per melee). A burst is considered to be one attack, but is not as accurate as a single aimed shot. (see Modern Weapon Proficiencies)
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER**. Two concealed mini-missile launchers are built into each arm of the Sentinel. The launchers are normally concealed when not in use, and pop open when ready to fire.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Cyclone
    - **Missile Type**: Almost always Plasma Mini-Missiles.

- **Range**: 1 mile (1.6 km)
- **Mega-Damage**: 1D6x10 M.D.
- **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 3, or 4 (all).
- **Payload**: 4 missiles.
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike (but no protoculture bonuses)

4. **(OPTIONAL) ENERGY RIFLE**. This hand-held energy rifle is identical to the one used by the old Enforcer mecha. When held, it patches into the Sentinel's energy supply for power. The rifle can be attached to the back of the mecha when not in use.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense
    - **Range**: 2000 ft (609 m)
    - **Mega-Damage**: 4D6 M.D. per blast or 5D6 M.D. per burst.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Equal to hand to hand melee attacks (four per melee). A burst is considered one attack, but is not as accurate as a single shot.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

5. **(OPTIONAL) ENERGY SHIELD**. This large, round energy shield is identical to the one used by the old Enforcer mecha. It can be stowed on the back or held in hand (usually the left hand).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Range**: Self/hand to hand
    - **Mega-Damage**: Can be used to hit or ram an opponent. Damage is same as hand-to-hand.
    - **Special Features**: M.D.C. of shield is 150. Adds a bonus of +3 to parry and can be used to parry/block energy blasts and mini- missiles. Size: 4 ft (1.2 m) round. M.D.C. capability (150 M.D.C.) can be recharged at a rate of 20 M.D.C. per hour.
    - **Note**: The shield can NOT function unless attached to the body armor. The Sentinel armor can NOT be modified for human use.

6. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The mecha's powerful reflexes makes the Sentinel a good hand-to-hand combatant.

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: Four
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +2 to strike, +2 to parry (+5 with shield), +3 to dodge on the ground, +4 to dodge when flying at any speed, +4 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact.
    - **Types of Attacks**: Punch: 1D6 M.D. Power Punch: 2D6 M.D. (counts as two attacks). Crush with Hand: 1D4 M.D. per melee round. Kick: 1D6 M.D. Leap Kick: 2D4 M.D. Body Flip: 1D4 M.D. Body Block/Ram: 2D4 M.D., counts as two attacks.

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THE INVID STRIKE UNIT

BACKGROUND

Perhaps the most radical new Invid mecha design is the Strike Unit. Although clearly related to the older Pincer Command Unit, the design has been changed so much that the result is an almost totally new mecha. Since its appearance in 2043 the Strike Unit has been seen in a variety of roles. Like its predecessor, it can commonly be found as the "squadron leader" for a patrol of Attack Scouts or Combat Troopers. It is also common for groups of four or five Strike Units to accompany Assault Battloids or Warlord Battloids as a sort of honor guard. The Strike Unit also accompanies Invid Sentinels in "resistance hunter" groups, tirelessly seeking out rebels for capture or extermination. The fact that the Strike Unit has almost as much power as an Invid Combat Trooper but is smaller in size makes it a perfect match for the new Invid Sentinels.

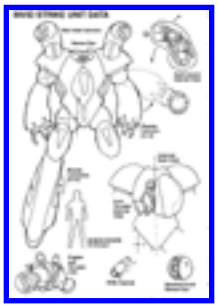
The Invid Strike Unit stands upright, and is vaguely humanoid-shaped like the older Royal Command Battloid. In fact, the long thin legs of the Strike Unit are identical to those of the RCB, leading to speculation that the Strike Unit is more of a modified RCB design than a PCU variation. However, there are a number of differences from the RCB design. The shoulders of the Strike Units are much larger and somewhat more rounded than the RCBs. The mecha has no head; instead, the standard Invid sensor eye is set into a small bulge between the shoulders where normally a neck would be. The arms are curved and "popeye-shaped," somewhat like the arms on the old EBSIS soldier battloid. Each arm ends in a 4-clawed circular hand, with the claws being evenly spaced among the circumference of the hand. There are two large thrusters on the back of the mecha that resemble the main engine of the Invid Enforcer. The humanoid shape and redesigned thrusters make the Strike Unit much faster than its predecessors. It is very agile and has lightning-quick reflexes, making it a deadly opponent in close range combat. Strike Units are usually light and dark blue, like the old PCU color scheme.

The main armament of the Strike Unit are two large HEAT CANNONS, very similar in design to those on the old Pincer Command Units. These cannons extend from the shoulders of the mecha like giant caterpillars, and end in a rotating inner nozzle, like the old design. The cannons can rotate anywhere from 60 degrees down to 80 degrees up, and from 30 degrees left to 30 degrees right.

A secondary weapon system on the Strike Unit are 8 MINI-PLASMA WEAPONS, almost identical to those that used to be found on the Pincer Command Unit. Four of these weapons are located on each hand, equally spaced around the wrist. When they fire, all four weapons on each hand shoot at once.

The final weapon of the Strike Unit are a set of concealed missile launchers on the legs of the mecha. There are four missile launchers on each leg (two on each side) and each can 2 short-range missiles, for a total volley of 16 missiles. Each missile launcher holds 4 missiles (2 in the launcher and 2 reloads), giving the Strike Unit 32 missiles total. These launchers pop out of the legs to fire, and retract back into the legs when not in use.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Strike Unit, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Piraq"; **REF Nickname:** "Cyclops Commando"
Vehicle Type: Squad Leader/Special Assault Unit
Crew: One; Stage Three Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

Heat Cannons (2)	120 each
Mini Plasma Weapons (8)	15 each
Hands (2)	30 each
Arms (2)	100 each
Shoulders (2)	200 each
Legs & Feet (2)	200 each
Jet Thrusters (rear) (2)	100 each

```
*   Sensor Eye                  20
**  Main Body                   280
    Pilot's Compartment         100
```

Notes:

*

The sensor eye is the most vulnerable place on the Invid's mecha body. Destruction of the sensor eye will kill/destroy the mecha and pilot (goes right through crew compartment). However, it is a small target protected by surrounding shielding, thus, to hit it the player/character must make a called shot and is at -3 to strike.

**

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely. Depleting the main body M.D.C. and crew compartment M.D.C. will blow the Invid to pieces.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Stationary hover to 1340 mph (Mach 2) maximum, with a ceiling of 50,000 ft. Cruising speed is about 150 mph.

Running:

100 mph (160 kmph).

Jumping:

50 ft (15.2 m) up or across without jet boosters, 300 ft (91.5 m) with a boost from jet thrusters.

Height:

25 ft (7.5 m)

Width:

13 ft (3.9 m)

Length:

7 ft (2.1 m)

Weight:

16 tons

Cargo:

Can carry up to six tons.

Abilities:

Pilot Mecha - 85%
Recognize Human Machinery - 50%
Prowl - 65%
Detect Ambush - 65%

Detect Concealment - 65%
Track - 75%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAT CANNONS**. The main weapon of the Invid Strike Unit is a pair of heat cannons, similar to those mounted on the pincer command unit but slightly more powerful. Both cannons fire simultaneously, though if one cannon is destroyed the other can still fire. Both cannons must fire at the same target.

   Although fixed in a forward position, the rotating inner nozzles of the cannons can adjust to about a 30 degree angle. To shoot in a different direction or greater angle, the Strike Unit must move its entire body. A favorite tactic is to fly several hundred feet (200 to 1000 ft) above the ground and blast opposing ground units.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
   - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
   - **Damage**: Single cannon blast does 4D6 M.D., and a dual cannon blast does 1D6x10 M.D. A Long Blast (counts as two attacks) does 3D4x10 M.D. A concentrated blast (both cannons, focused at same target all melee) does 4D6x10 M.D. A continuous-beam strafing run does 4D6 M.D. to everything it hits.
   - **Rate of Fire**: Five attacks per melee. Dual blasts count as ONE attack.
   - **Payload**: Unlimited
   - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike at all times, against any target. Add in protoculture targeting bonuses for targets that use protoculture.
   - **Note**: the mouths of the heat cannons glow white just before they fire, just like their predecessors.

2. **PULSE BEAM CANNONS**. Four small beam cannons are mounted in each hand, circling the wrist of the mecha, for a total of 8 cannons. The cannons are fixed-forward and cannot move in any direction; the cannons are aimed by moving the arms of the mecha. All four cannons on each hand fire in unison, but the cannons can fire independently if one or more of them are destroyed.

   NOTE: Since all four cannons fire at once, the Strike Unit only makes one roll to hit. If successful, the GM rolls 1D4 to determine the number of blasts/bursts that hit. Anyone trying to parry/dodge receives a -4 penalty due to the large number of blasts.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
   - **Secondary Purpose**: Close-range assault
   - **Range**: 3000 ft (900 m)
   - **Damage**: A single cannon blast does 2D6 M.D. A burst (3 single shots) does 6D6 M.D.,

but counts as two attacks. Make sure to roll damage for each blast/burst that strikes the target.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Five attacks per melee. A single blast from all four cannons counts as ONE attack. A burst from all four cannons counts as TWO attacks.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses. Targets have a -4 penalty to dodge. Roll 1D4 to determine number of blasts/bursts that strike.

3. **SRM MISSILE LAUNCHER**. Four small missile launchers are built into each leg of the mecha. The launchers are normally recessed into the mecha, and pops out to fire.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Cyclone
    - **Missile Type**: Almost always Plasma SRMs.
    - **Range**: 5 miles (8 km)
    - **Mega-Damage**: 1D6x10 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 8, or 16 missiles. Can only fire a maximum of 16 missiles at a time!
    - **Payload**: 32 missiles.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike (but no protoculture bonuses)

4. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The mecha's high speed makes the Strike Unit an excellent hand-to-hand combatant.

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: Five
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +4 to strike, +5 to parry, +3 to dodge on the ground, +4 automatic dodge when flying at any speed (an automatic dodge works like a parry and does not forfeit an attack), +4 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact. +2 on initiative.
    - **Types of Attacks**: Punch: 2D6 M.D. Crush with Hand: 1D4 M.D. per melee round. Kick: 1D6 M.D. Leap Kick: 2D6 M.D. Body Flip: 1D4 M.D. Body Block/Ram: 2D6 M.D., counts as two attacks. Stomp: 1D6 M.D., target must be 10 ft (3 m) or smaller.

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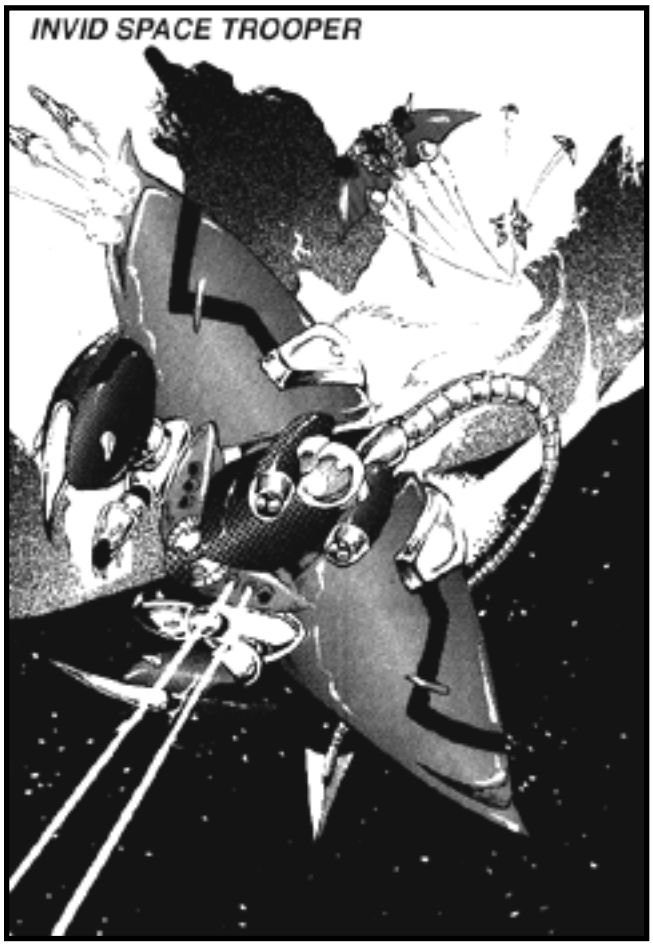
THE INVID SPACE TROOPER

BACKGROUND



The Invid Space Trooper was the hardest of the new Invid designs to analyze during the Third Invid War. The reason for this was simple; pilots who encountered the new mecha seldom lived to report their observations. Long range sensors had revealed that the Invid had a new space mecha as early as mid-2042, but data on the new design was sketchy at best. It was not until the summer of 2043 when the new VAF-8R Reconnaissance Veritechs began to arrive on Earth that the Resistance was finally able to get some hard data on the Space Trooper.

In its element, the Invid Space Trooper is a deadly design almost without peer. The basic design for the mecha is large and flat, and laid out much like a Manta Ray, or "Devilfish". There are two large wings on either side of the main body, which can fold up to 80 degrees up or down in order to adjust the center of gravity for the mecha; a very important ability in zero-gee combat which allows for tight-radius turns. There is also a long, thin tail extending behind the main body of the mecha, ending in a sharp barb. This tail is fully dexterous and can actually strike at mecha around the Trooper, like a scorpion. There are also two arms on the front of the mecha that end in a LARGE claw, designed especially for melee combat. Each hand also has a smaller claw for use in grappling. The Space Trooper does have six small insect-like feet underneath the main body, but these are normally retracted when in flight. The legs are very thin and small, and end in points instead of actual feet, making the mecha very poor at walking and jumping. However, the legs are very strong and the feet have retractable barbs, which make them perfect for digging into enemy spacecraft and holding the mecha in place. In combat with smaller starships and shuttles, the Space Trooper will often attach itself to the hull of the ship, and then use its claws, tail, and energy weapons to literally rip the shuttle apart.

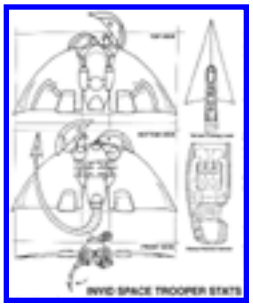
The firepower of this new mecha is equally as deadly as its hand-to-hand abilities. The main armament of the mecha is a pair of Heavy Plasma Cannons, identical to those on the new Combat Trooper design. These cannons are mounted on either side of a small rotating turret on the back of the mecha. This gives the cannons a superior firing arc, as they can rotate 360 degrees around the mecha. The secondary armament of the Space Trooper is a set of SIX mini plasma weapons; three on either side of the sensor eye. These cannons are likewise very similar to those on the Combat Trooper. Also, there are two small missile launchers, one on the front of each wing. These missile launchers are normally retracted into the wings when not in use, and pop up when ready to fire. Each launcher can fire 5 missiles at once and can hold 15 missiles total (including reloads). Finally, there is a high powered laser on the tip of the tail of the mecha. While not really suited to combat, this cutting laser is perfect for the Space Trooper's favorite tactic of cutting open spacecraft and larger mecha.

Perhaps the most impressive features of this new enemy mecha is the propulsion system. There are actually THREE main engines on the Space Trooper. The largest is mounted on the belly of the mecha, between the legs and just in front of the joint where the tail meets the main body. There are also two only slightly less powerful engines; one on each wing of the mecha. By varying the thrust of these three engines and combining them with wing movements, the Space Trooper can make sharp turns even at high speeds. There are also banks of maneuvering thrusters located all over the body of the mecha (mostly in the wings) which help to give the Space Trooper superior mobility.

An intriguing weakness about this new mecha is that some of the same features that make the Space Trooper a superior space combatant greatly decrease its performance in a planetary atmosphere. The turret, claws, and tail create so much aerodynamic drag that the mecha's airspeed is greatly decreased in atmosphere. Plus the engines of the mecha are designed such that the Trooper CANNOT hover in gravity greater than 0.5 G. The legs of the mecha are poorly designed for movement on land, and the mecha's movement is greatly slowed by Earth's high gravity (compared to outer space). It is probably for this reason that Space Troopers RARELY venture below the highest layers of Earth's atmosphere. There have been documented incidents where REF pilots have escaped pursuit by Space Troopers by rapidly diving into the atmosphere. 4 out of 5 times the Space Troopers will break off rather than risk being caught in Earth's atmosphere.

Space Troopers rarely operate alone. They are usually encountered in groups of 5 or more, and are often accompanied by either Attack Scouts or Armored Scouts with space boosters. REF pilots and resistance fighters are warned to avoid contact with Space Troopers whenever possible.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Space Trooper, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Varrab"; **REF Nickname:** "Devilfish"
Vehicle Type: Space Combat Unit
Crew: One; Stage Two Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

	Large Claws (1 per Forearm)	75 each
	Small Claws (1 per Forearm)	25 each
	Forearms (2)	150 each
	Upper Arms (2)	75 each
*	Legs & Feet (6)	50 each
	Main Engine Thruster (lower rear)	100
	Wings/Secondary Thrusters (2)	120 each
	Tail	75
	Tail Laser	50
	Heavy Plasma Cannons (2)	150 each
**	Plasma Cannon Turret	100
	SRM Launchers (1 per wing)	100
***	Pulse Beam Cannons (6)	20 each
****	Sensor Eye	25
*****	Main Body	240
	Pilot's Compartment	100

Notes:

*

The legs of the Space Trooper can retract into the main body. When they are retracted they are effectively immune from attack; attackers must destroy the main body to get at them.

**

Destroying the Plasma Cannon Turret will disable both Plasma Cannons. However, the turret is a difficult target to hit (being low on the back and between both cannons); -3 penalty.

***

The pulse beam cannons are slightly difficult to hit; -2 penalty.

****

The sensor eye is the most vulnerable place on the Invid's mecha body. Destruction of the sensor eye will kill/destroy the mecha and pilot (goes right through crew compartment). However, it is a small target protected by surrounding shielding, thus, to hit it the player/character must make a called shot and is at -3 to strike.

*****

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely. Depleting the pilot compartment M.D.C. will blow the Invid to pieces.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Can accelerate up to a maximum speed of 5360 mph (Mach 8) outside of an atmosphere. However, due to its poor aerodynamic design the maximum speed drops to 2010 mph (Mach 3) in an atmosphere. Also, the Space Trooper CANNOT HOVER while in an atmosphere; minimum airspeed to remain aloft is 200 mph (320 kmph).

NOTE: I KNOW there's no such thing as a "maximum speed" in space. This junk was added to make the mecha fully compatible with the Robotech RPG. If you have a vector-based space combat system that can use thrust instead of velocity, then by all means please ignore these stats.

Thrust:

[To be calculated]

Running:

20 mph (32 kmph). Rarely runs.

Jumping:

10 ft (3 m) up or across. Rarely jumps.

Height:

16 ft (4.8 m) with legs extended. 10 ft (3 m) with legs retracted.

Width:

25.5 ft (7.8 m) with "wings" fully extended.

Length:

40 ft (12 m)

Weight:

25 tons fully loaded.

Cargo:

Can carry up to 6 tons (in Earth gravity).

Abilities:

Pilot Mecha - 75%

Recognize Human Machinery - 50%
Navigation: Space - 85%
Prowl - 45%
Detect Ambush - 45%
Detect Concealment - 45%
Track - 55%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAVY PLASMA CANNONS**. These large plasma cannons are updated versions of those originally found on the old Invid Shock Trooper. However, they are much more powerful and have a far greater range than the older models. The cannons are mounted on a "turret" on the back of the mecha, which allow them to rotate 80 degrees up, 40 degrees down, or 360 degrees around the unit. Both cannons can fire independently or simultaneously. The plasma energy is still released in Frisbee-like "annihilation discs," just like the older models.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Space Fighter
    - **Range**: 6000 ft (1800 m)
    - **Damage**: One single blast does 4D6 M.D., dual blasts do 8D6 M.D. and simultaneous bursts do 2D4x10 M.D. A continuous stream, lasting one full melee and directed at a single target, does 3D6x10 M.D.!! A strafing run (wild shooting) does 4D6 M.D. per hit.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Five attacks per melee. Dual blasts and bursts both count as ONE attack.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.
    - **Note**: the mouths of the plasma cannons glow white just before they fire, just like their predecessors.

2. **PULSE BEAM CANNONS**. Six small Invid beam cannons are mounted in the main body of the mecha, three on either side of the sensor eye. The weapons can rotate to a maximum of 30 degrees in any direction. All six cannons can fire in unison or independently of one another.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Close-range assault
    - **Range**: 3000 ft (900 m)
    - **Damage**: One single blast (rare) does 2D6 M.D., dual blasts (simultaneous shots, same target) do 4D6 M.D., quad blasts (all four cannons aimed at same target) do 6D6 M.D, and sextuple blasts (all six at one target) do 8D6 M.D. A six-cannon burst (18 blasts, all at same target) does 1D6x10+10 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Five attacks per melee. Dual, quad, and sextuple blasts and bursts count as ONE attack.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited

- **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

3. **SRM MISSILE LAUNCHER**. A small missile launcher is built into each wing of the mecha, near the front. They are normally recessed into the mecha, and pop out to fire.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Space Fighter
    - **Missile Type**: Almost always Plasma SRMs.
    - **Range**: 5 miles (8 km)
    - **Mega-Damage**: 1D6x10 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 missiles. Can only fire a maximum of 10 missiles at a time (each launcher can only fire 5 missiles at a time).
    - **Payload**: 30 missiles.
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike (but no protoculture bonuses)

4. **TAIL LASER**. The Invid Space Trooper has a high-powered laser mounted on the tail. However, the laser seems to be designed more for cutting than as an offensive weapon. In combat, the Space Trooper will often attach itself to a mecha or the hull of a starship with its legs and then used the tail laser to literally cut into its prey. The laser is powerful enough to cut through starship hull in less than 30 seconds (2 melee rounds).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Demolition/Sabotage
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Close-range defense
    - **Range**: 1000 ft (300 m)
    - **Damage**: Quick shot (less than a full melee) does only 2D4 M.D. However, a continuous beam against a non-moving or immobilized target can do as much as 2D4x10 M.D. per melee round (!!).
    - **Rate of Fire**: The Space Trooper can fire the laser continuously without need to stop. However, for game purposes the laser is limited to 5 attacks per round against a moving target.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.

5. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The Space Trooper has been specially designed to do lots of damage in hand-to-hand combat. This fact combined with its high speed make it a deadly combatant in space. However, in an atmosphere the Space Trooper is a mediocre combatant.

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: Five (Three in Atmosphere)
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses *IN SPACE*** : +4 to strike, +5 to parry, +5 automatic dodge when flying at any speed (an automatic dodge works like a parry and does not forfeit an attack), +4 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact.
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses *IN ATMOSPHERE*** : No bonus to strike, +2 to parry, no bonus to

dodge on the ground, +3 to dodge when in flight, +1 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact.

- **Types of Attacks**: Punch/Claw: 6D6 M.D. Crush with Pincer: 2D6 M.D. per melee round. Full Body Crush: (Trooper grapples target in a bear hug while the smaller claws and barbed legs attack the victim) 4D6 M.D. per melee round. A variation is the "Scorpion Strike" in which the Space Trooper attacks with its tail while grappling the opponent. 1D6x10 M.D. per round. High-Speed Claw: (Trooper swipes at target with large claw while passing at high speed) 1D6x10 M.D., counts as two attacks. Body Block/Ram: 6D6 M.D., counts as two attacks. Stomp: 3D6 M.D. from barbed legs.

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THE INVID COMBAT TROOPER

BACKGROUND

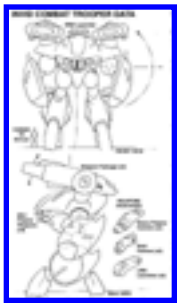
The first new Invid mecha design to appear on Earth was the Combat Trooper in 2043. The new trooper mecha seemed to suddenly appear all over the Earth simultaneously, completely replacing the older Shock Trooper design wherever it was found. Within a month reports of Shock Troopers had dwindled to almost nothing, while the deadly new Combat Trooper became the main front-line battle mecha for the Invid forces.

Stylistically, the Combat Trooper design is so close to the old Shock Trooper mecha that the two could almost be mistaken for each other at a quick glance. The Combat Trooper has the same long broad legs, large forearm shields with three-fingered claws, and compact central body design as the old Shock Trooper did. However, the similarities end there. First off, the Combat Trooper stands 32.2 feet tall; almost twice the size of the Shock Trooper and larger than a VAF-6 Alpha in battloid mode! The twin plasma cannons on the back of the mecha are now longer and more powerful than their predecessors. These cannons are modular and can be replaced with other weapon systems for specialized attacks. Two common weapon packages are a pair of heat cannons (like the ones on the old Invid Command Unit) and a pair of heavy missile launchers. In addition, the Combat Trooper has four pulse beam cannon, similar to those of the Attack Scout. Two cannons are located on either side of the central sensor eye. A Short-range missile launcher on the back of the mecha between the plasma cannons completes the new armaments. Invid Combat Troopers are dark green and grey in color.

As a ground combatant, the Invid Combat Trooper is far superior to the old Shock Trooper mecha. It does have one major weakness, though; its slow speed. The Combat Trooper's air and ground speeds are approximately equal to those of the Shock Trooper, which means that REF mecha are much faster and

more agile than the Invid units. REF pilots must still be careful, though; the Combat Trooper can do devastating damage if any of its weapons ever manage to connect...

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Combat Trooper, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Torab"; **REF Nickname:** "Linebackers"
Vehicle Type: Mainline Combat Unit
Crew: One; Stage Two Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

	Claws (3 per Forearm)	25 each
	Forearms (2)	200 each
	Upper Arms (2)	100 each
	Legs & Feet (2)	175 each
	Main Engine Thruster (rear)	100
+	Heavy Plasma Cannons (2)	150 each
+	Heat Cannons (2)	120 each
+	Heavy Missile Launchers (2)	120 each
	SRM Launcher (top)	100
&	Pulse Beam Cannons (4)	20 each
*	Sensor Eye	25
**	Main Body	250
	Pilot's Compartment	100

Notes:

+

The combat trooper will only have ONE pair of main weapons. Choose one weapon type for each combat trooper. Heavy plasma cannons are the most common type of weapon for the mecha.

&

The pulse beam cannons are slightly difficult to hit; -2 penalty.

*

The sensor eye is the most vulnerable place on the Invid's mecha body. Destruction of the sensor eye will kill/destroy the mecha and pilot (goes right through crew compartment). However, it is a small target protected by surrounding shielding, thus, to hit it the player/character must make a called shot and is at -3 to strike.

**

Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely. Depleting the pilot compartment M.D.C. will blow the Invid to pieces.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:
Stationary hover to 300 mph (482 kmph) maximum, with a ceiling of 10,000 ft (3048 m).

Running:
60 mph (96 kmph).

Jumping:
30 ft (9.1 m) up or across.

Height:
32.2 ft (9.9 m)

Width:
25.5 ft (7.8 m)

Length:
25.5 ft (7.8 m)

Weight:
24 tons

Cargo:
Can carry up to twelve tons.

Abilities:
Pilot Mecha - 45%
Recognize Human Machinery - 20%
Prowl - 40%
Detect Ambush - 30%
Detect Concealment - 30%
Track - 35%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAVY PLASMA CANNONS**. These large plasma cannons are updated versions of those

originally found on the old Invid Shock Trooper. However, they are much more powerful and have a far greater range than the older models. One cannon is mounted over each shoulder, and both cannons can fire independently or simultaneously. The plasma energy is still released in Frisbee-like "annihilation discs," just like the older model. The cannons can point up or down in a 90 degree arc.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft
- **Range**: 6000 ft (1800 m)
- **Damage**: One single blast does 4D6 M.D., dual blasts do 8D6 M.D. and simultaneous bursts do 2D4x10 M.D. A continuous stream, lasting one full melee and directed at a single target, does 3D6x10 M.D.(!!) A strafing run (wild shooting) does 4D6 M.D. per hit.
- **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per melee. Dual blasts and bursts both count as ONE attack.
- **Payload**: Unlimited
- **Bonuses to Strike**: Protoculture targeting bonuses only.
- **Note**: the mouths of the plasma cannons glow white just before they fire, just like their predecessors.

2. **(OPTIONAL) HEAT CANNONS**. The Combat Trooper can also be mounted with heat cannons, similar to those mounted on the pincer command unit. Both cannons fire simultaneously, though if one cannon is destroyed the other can still fire. Both cannons must fire at the same target.

   Although fixed in a forward position, the rotating inner nozzles of the cannons can adjust to about a 30 degree angle. To shoot in a different direction or greater angle, the Combat Trooper must move its entire body. A favorite tactic is to fly several hundred feet (200 to 1000 ft) above the ground and blast opposing ground units.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
   - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
   - **Damage**: Single cannon blast does 3D6 M.D., and a dual cannon blast does 6D6 M.D. A Long Blast (counts as two attacks) does 2D4x10 M.D. A concentrated blast (both cannons, focused at same target all melee) does 3D6x10 M.D. A continuous-beam strafing run does 3D6 M.D. to everything it hits.
   - **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per melee. Dual blasts count as ONE attack.
   - **Payload**: Unlimited
   - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike at all times, against any target. Add in protoculture targeting bonuses for targets that use protoculture.
   - **Note**: the mouths of the heat cannons glow white just before they fire, just like their predecessors.

3. **(OPTIONAL) LONG-RANGE MISSILE LAUNCHERS**. A third optional weapons package for the Combat trooper is a pair of long-range missile launchers. Each launcher can hold 4

missiles, and all missiles can be fired independently or in volleys. This weapons package is typically only used in siege operations.

NOTE: There is only one type of Invid long-range missile. It is a combination plasma/high explosive missile that seemed to be designed with fortification destruction in mind. Although extremely powerful, it is an UNGUIDED missile and gets no bonuses to strike.

- **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Destruction of fortifications
- **Maximum Range**: 200 miles (320 km)
- **Speed**: 1400 mph (2251 kmph)
- **Damage**: 3D6x10 M.D. per missile.
- **Rate of Fire**: One at a time, or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, or 8 (all).
- **Payload**: 4 missiles per launcher, 8 missiles total.
- **M.D.C. of Missile**: 20
- **Bonuses to Strike**: **NO** bonuses to strike.

4. **PULSE BEAM CANNONS**. Four small Invid beam cannons are mounted in the main body of the mecha, two on either side of the sensor eye. The weapons can rotate to a maximum of 30 degrees in any direction. All four cannons can fire in unison or independently of one another.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Defense
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Close-range assault
    - **Range**: 3000 ft (900 m)
    - **Damage**: One single blast (rare) does 2D6 M.D., dual blasts (simultaneous shots, same target) do 4D6 M.D., and quad blasts (all four cannons aimed at same target) do 6D6 M.D. A four-cannon burst (12 blasts, all at same target) does 8D6 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per melee. Dual and quad blasts and bursts count as ONE attack.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

5. **SRM MISSILE LAUNCHER**. A small missile launcher is built into the top of the mecha, in between the shoulders and plasma cannons. It is normally recessed into the mecha, and pops up to fire.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Cyclone
    - **Missile Type**: Almost always Plasma SRMs.
    - **Range**: 5 miles (8 km)
    - **Mega-Damage**: 1D6x10 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of 2-5 missiles. Can only fire a maximum of 5

missiles at a time!
- **Payload**: 20 missiles.
- **Bonuses to Strike**: +3 to strike (but no protoculture bonuses)

6. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. Though a slow combatant, the Combat Trooper can do lots of damage if it manages to hit!

    - **Attacks Per Melee**: Four
    - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: No bonus to strike, +2 to parry, no bonus to dodge on the ground, +1 to dodge when in flight, +1 to roll with a punch, fall, or impact.
    - **Types of Attacks**: Punch/Claw: 6D6 M.D. Crush with Hand: 2D6 M.D. per melee round. Body Block/Ram: 4D6 M.D., counts as two attacks. Stomp: 4D6 M.D., target must be 15 ft (4.5 m) or smaller.

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THE INVID ATTACK SCOUT

BACKGROUND

The Attack Scout first appeared in late 2043 in the skies over North America, but soon spread to areas throughout the globe. This new high-speed mecha quickly became a feared aerial combatant, as it was faster and more maneuverable than a VAF-6 Alpha Fighter. The design also had heavier armor and more powerful plasma cannons than its predecessors, making it an even more dangerous threat to older REF mecha. By the winter of 2043 the Attack Scout became the most common Invid mecha around, constantly conducting high-speed patrols in search of resistance fighters.

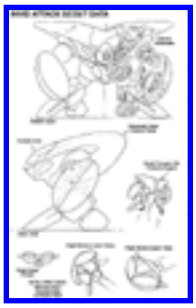
At first appearance, the Attack Scout looks very similar to the old Armored Scout. However, a close examination will reveal many differences. The upper body of the mecha is a single super-hard metal plate that curves around the rear of the mecha and ends about halfway underneath it. There is a single slit in the rear of this plate where the main engine thruster is located. The engine itself seems to be a combination thruster/antigravity unit. It is tremendously efficient, allowing the Attack Scout to achieve very high speeds with little thrust. The sensor eye is identical to the old Scout, but new plasma cannons are located on either side of it, just under the edge of the plate. The forearm shields of the mecha are much larger, though the legs are skinnier. The Attack Scout is red in color, just like its cousins.

The most unique feature about the new scout is that it can "convert" into a special configuration for high-speed aerial attacks. The legs fold into the main body and the claw units retract into the forearm shields. The scout then pulls up its forearm shields, completely covering the legs and weak areas on the lower front main body. At this point the scout looks like a jet-propelled arrow head. By rotating the forearm shields down slightly the scout can form a small "gunsight" in the front of the armor, allowing the Invid

to use its protoculture sensor and plasma cannons. (The effect is something like a cartoon oyster opening its shell slightly to peek outside) The shields can quickly rotate back to protect these vulnerable systems if necessary.

Attack Scouts are NEVER encountered alone. The smallest number they are ever found in is a trio, though they can often be encountered in FAR greater numbers. The scout is much weaker on the ground, so if it is ever necessary for a patrol to investigate something on land, ONE mecha will descend and look around while the other two remain in the air to cover it. The landed scout will quickly take off if it is attacked or startled. Attack Scouts will seldom explore caves or underground structures. They will instead call in a patrol of Invid Sentinels to investigate while they remain above to attack anyone who emerges.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view the schematics of the Attack Scout, based on data collected by REF Intelligence.

RPG STATS

Invid Name: "Igiai"; **REF Nickname:** "Kamikaze Clams"
Vehicle Type: Fast Attack Mecha
Crew: One; Stage One Invid Pilot

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

+	Hand/Claw (2)	10 each
	Forearm Shields (2)	150 each
+	Upper Arms (2)	25 each
+	Legs & Feet (2)	25 each
&	Main Engine Thruster (rear)	30
+	Pulse Beam Cannons (2)	20 each
+*	Sensor Eye	25
+**	Lower Front Main Body	50
***	Upper/Rear Main Body	200
+	Pilot's Compartment	20

Notes:

+

These areas are fully protected when the mecha is flying (the forearm shields are pulled in and form a flush surface with the upper main body). If the Invid lowers the forearms to fire at an enemy or simply take a quick look around, then the beam cannons and the sensor eye may be targeted, but this is an **EXTREMELY** difficult shot; -5 to strike in addition to normal penalties.

*

The sensor eye is the most vulnerable place on the Invid's mecha body. Destruction of the sensor eye will kill/destroy the mecha and pilot (goes right through crew compartment). However, it is a small target protected by surrounding shielding, thus, to hit it the player/character must make a called shot and is at -3 to strike.

**

Depleting the M.D.C. of the lower front main body will shut the mecha down completely. Depleting the lower front main body M.D.C. and crew compartment M.D.C. will blow the Invid to pieces.

***

Depleting the M.D.C. of the upper/rear main body will NOT shut the mecha down. Instead, any damage to the main body will go directly to the pilot's compartment. (!!) Once the pilot's compartment is destroyed the mecha will effectively be dead.

&

The Main Engine Thruster is NOT protected by the Upper Main Body and is thus always vulnerable to attack. However, the engine is recessed into the mecha, so the only way to hit it is to make a called shot **AS THE MECHA PASSES!** -4 to strike in addition to normal penalties.

SPECIFICATIONS

Flight:

Stationary hover to 4690 mph (Mach 7.0) maximum, making the attack scout effectively transatmospheric (able to blast into outer space under its own power). However, at speeds greater than Mach 4.0 (2680 mph) the mecha becomes effectively unmaneuverable and can only travel in a straight line (-3 to hit due to speed, but the Invid cannot dodge). Cruising speed for reconnaissance is 120 to 300 mph (192 to 480 kmph).

Running:

30 mph (48 kmph). Rarely runs.

Jumping:

100 ft (30.5 m) up or across. Rarely jumps.

Height:

8.3 ft (2.5 m) with legs extended. 5 ft (1.5 m) retracted.

Width:

12.3 ft (3.75 m)

Length:
10.7 ft (3.25 m)

Weight:
4.75 tons

Cargo:
Can carry up to one ton.

Abilities:
Pilot Mecha - 85%
Recognize Human Machinery - 25%
Prowl - 45%
Detect Ambush - 45%
Detect Concealment - 45%
Track - 45%

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **DUAL PULSE BEAM CANNONS**. Two small Invid beam cannons are mounted in the main body of the mecha, just to either side of the sensor eye. The weapons are fixed forward, but the inner nozzle of each cannon can rotate to a maximum of 30 degrees in any direction. Though both cannons fire in unison, one cannon will still function if the other is destroyed.

   These weapons are blocked and cannot when the forearm shields are retracted. However, the Invid can "crack" the shields by leaning them down slightly, forming a gap large enough to fire through.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
   - **Range**: 5000 ft (1500 m)
   - **Damage**: One single blast (rare) does 2D6 M.D., dual blasts (simultaneous shots, same target) do 4D6 M.D. and a burst (6 blasts, all at same target) does 6D6 M.D.
   - **Rate of Fire**: Four attacks per melee. Dual blasts and bursts both count as ONE attack.
   - **Payload**: Unlimited
   - **Bonuses to Strike**: +1 to strike, plus protoculture targeting bonuses.

2. **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. The Attack Scout can engage in hand-to-hand combat if necessary. This is rare, though, as the Invid must lower its forearm shields in order to strike.

   - **Attacks Per Melee**: 4
   - **Hand to Hand Bonuses**: +1 to strike, +3 to parry, +1 to dodge on the ground, +5 to dodge in flight, +7 to dodge at speeds between Mach 3 and Mach 4, +1 to roll with impact.

3. **RAMMING ATTACK**. The Attack Scout will sometimes launch a "suicide" attack on an enemy by accelerating as fast as possible and then ramming the enemy mecha. This attack is especially likely if the scout is badly damaged or surrounded, with no chance of escape. This attack is very likely to destroy the scout as well, so it is usually used only in desperation.

    - **Bonuses to Strike**: +2
    - **Damage**: 1D4x100 M.D. (!!) to the target. The **SAME** amount of damage is inflicted on the upper main body of the scout. The scout is automatically destroyed if it receives 200 M.D. or more of damage.

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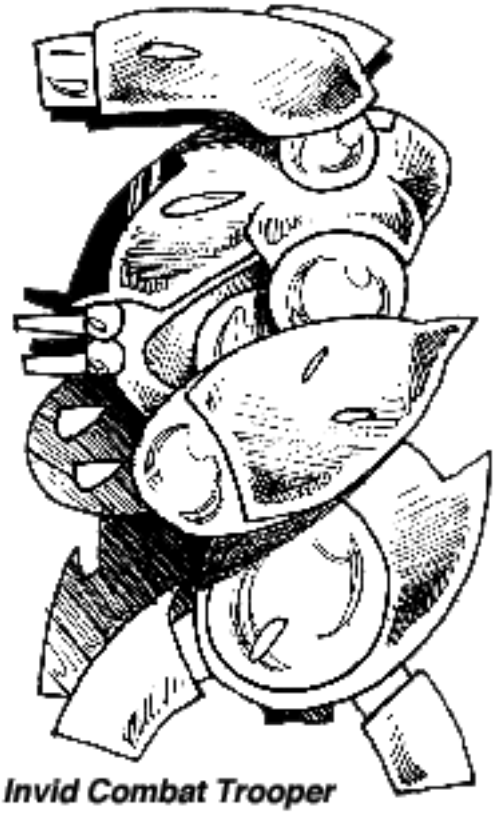
NEW INVID MECHA OF THE THIRD INVID WAR

When the **Third Invid War** first began, the new Invid occupation army used the exact same mecha and tactics as the Regis' orginal troops did. This was a boon to the resistance fighters, as most of them had fought the same Invid mecha during the First and Second Invid Wars and thus knew their weaknesses. The lack of originality of the Invid during the first months of the war led to several major victories for the Earth resistance, and people began to believe that the new conflict would soon be over. However, the Invid's superior numbers of mecha combined with a lack of supplies and support for the REF caused the war to drag on.

The predictability of the Invid started to change in early 2043. The first new Invid mecha that appeared were highly experimental units, largely inspired by ex-EBSIS engineers who had decided to work for the Invid. These mecha were never deployed in large numbers and usually operated only in conjunction with Invid-sponsored EBSIS strike forces. The most radical of these experimental mecha was the **Kurgatch I-K Mobile Sonic Cannon**, a 200-foot-tall man-shaped mecha with an experimental sonic cannon as its main weapon. The MSC was destroyed in Los Angeles by the California Freedom League in the summer of '43. No other MSCs were ever constructed. *(NOTE: The stats for the mecha mentioned above can be found in the Robotech RPG supplement LANCER'S ROCKERS)*


Invid Combat Trooper

After the destruction of the MSC the Invid seemed to return to their traditional tactics for several months. Then, in late 2043 new mecha designs began to appear in North America, replacing and phasing out the older standard units that had been used until now. The first new mecha design to appear was the Attack Scout, a revamped version of the standard Invid Scout mecha that was faster, stronger, and **DEADLIER** than its predecessors. The Attack Scout was quickly accompanied by the Combat Trooper and Strike Unit, also obvious upgrades to the older Shock Trooper and Pincer Command Unit designs, respectively. Unlike the earlier Krugatch mecha, these new designs did not seem to have any human influence, and were deployed in large numbers very quickly around the globe. The tactics used by the Invid changed along with the mecha designs; the new Invid seemed smarter and sneakier than their predecessors, even though examination of destroyed mecha by resistance fighters revealed they were being piloted by the same types of organic beings. The invid seemed to have rapidly learned the arts of deception and subtlety, and were using them to the fullest effect possible.

These new mecha designs were the primary reason for the rapid decline of the terran resistance in late 2043 / early 2044. The new mecha and tactics came as a complete surprise to the resistance fighters, and many were eliminated before they could adapt, or even realize what was happening. Although new mecha from the REF forces at Tirol also began to arrive during 2044, the newly-operational **Invid Space Hives** made the availability of these mecha rare. The new mecha quickly made the humans realize that these invaders were NOT the same Invid that had invaded them before, and that there was a real possibility that the new opponents may win the Third Invid War.

WARNING!
CLASSIFIED MATERIAL!

The following information is for the Game Master's eyes only! You will ruin much of your enjoyment of TIW as a player if you continue to read this page. If you plan on playing TIW as a PC, STOP READING NOW!

New Invid Mecha Designs

- Invid Attack Scout
- Invid Combat Trooper
- Invid Space Trooper
- Invid Strike Unit
- Invid Sentinel
- Invid Assault Battloid
- Invid Warlord Battloid

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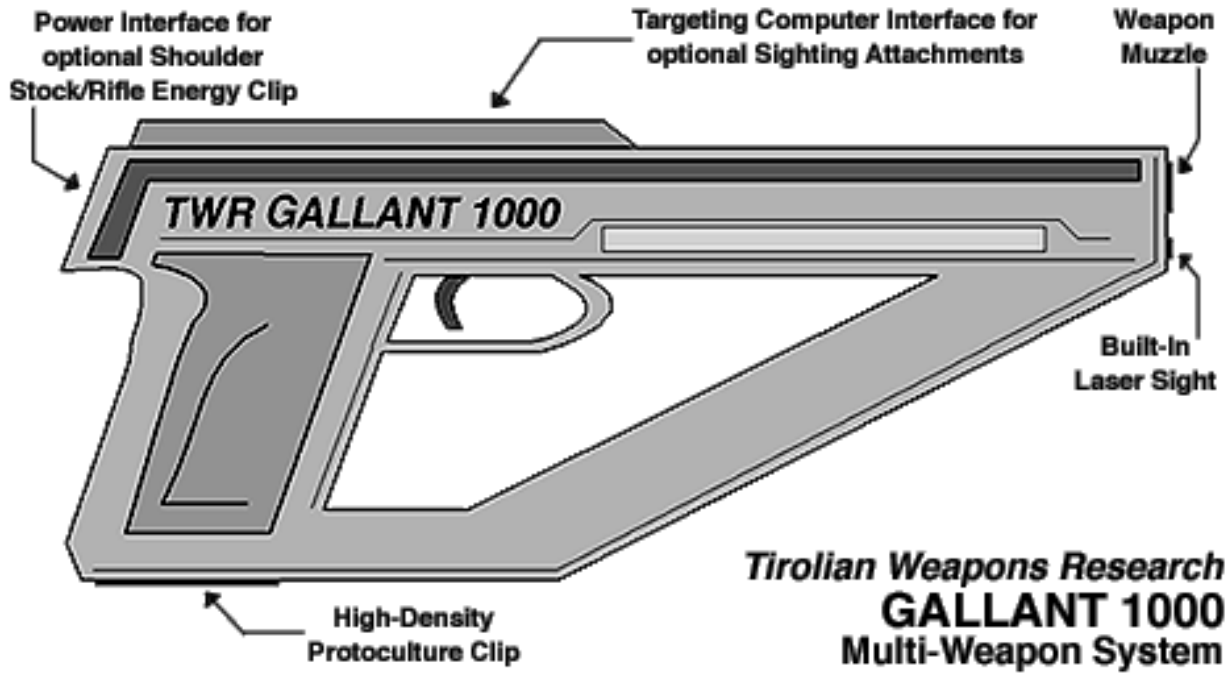
THE THIRD INVID WAR
NEW REF WEAPONS AND BODY ARMOR

CONTENTS:

- Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System
- Gallant H-95 Multi-Weapon System
- Mark IX "Parasite" Rifle-launched Magnetic Cluster Mine

- REF Combat Body Armor (old style)
- CVR-3 Body Armor (new rules)
- CVR-4 Body Armor

GALLANT 1000 MULTI-WEAPON SYSTEM



The **Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System** first began production in 2038 shortly before the beginning of the Third Invid War. The Gallant 1000 was the first weapon system designed by **Tirolian Weapons Research (TWR)**, a new company recently started on Tirol by several ex-REF weapons researchers who retired from the service and started their own production company. Despite accusations of favoritism from several rival production firms (most notably the **Kabarran National Weapons Factory**), the Gallant 1000 proved to be an excellent weapon and quickly became the standard sidearm for the REF, replacing the aging Gallant H-90 system.

The Gallant 1000 is an extremely durable weapon, requiring minimal maintenance and functioning well in any type of environment. The most notable feature of the system remains its versatility; being able to vary power levels with the flick of a switch. The Gallant 1000 has 4 weapon settings, with various ranges and damage for each setting. All four settings can be used without the additional rifle stock (an improvement over the original H-90), although using setting 4 without the stock will exhaust the energy cell in only four shots. The Gallant itself is shaped somewhat like the original, with a complete circular housing instead of the traditional handle design. However, the top of the gun nozzle is higher and completely flat to make the gun easier to aim. The Gallant 1000 comes with several detachable options, including a electronic sight with computer targeting interface, a flash suppressor, and a shoulder stock which can also hold additional e-clips. Like the older Gallant H-90, the Gallant 1000 can be used as a pistol, submachine gun, or a rifle depending on what options are attached.

The success of Gallant 1000 allowed TWR to land several lucrative contracts with the Robotech Expeditionary Force, including the design of the energy weapon systems on the new VAF-8 and VAF-9 veritech fighters. The Gallant 1000 remained the standard sidearm of the REF until 2055. Although somewhat rare compared to the Gallant H-90, the Gallant 1000 can still be found often on Earth, a legacy to the violence of the Third Invid War.

Weight: 2.5 lbs (1.1 kg) without stock, 6.0 lbs (2.7 kg) with stock.
Damage: By Setting:

- Setting 1: 5D6 S.D. per shot.
- Setting 2: 1D6 M.D. per shot.
- Setting 3: 3D6 M.D. per shot.

- Setting 4: 5D6 M.D. per shot.

Range: By Setting:

- Setting 1: 800 ft (244 m)
- Setting 2: 1200 ft (366 m)
- Setting 3: 1600 ft (488 m)
- Setting 4: 2000 ft (610 m)

Rate of Fire:

Settings 1 and 2 can be fired as aimed, burst, or wild shots. (see modern weapon proficiencies, ***Sentinels*** page 47) Settings 3 and 4 are automatically limited to semi-automatic shots (equal to the character's combined number of attacks) to prevent overheating of the firing mechanism.

Payload: By Setting:

- Setting 1: The SDC laser draws so little power that it is effectively unlimited. (1500 shots estimate)
- Setting 2: 40 shots, or 120 with Rifle Stock.
- Setting 3: 20 shots, or 60 with Rifle Stock. (1 setting 3 shot = 2 setting 2 shots)
- Setting 4: 4 shots, or 12 with Rifle Stock. (1 setting 4 shot = 10 setting 2 shots)

Features:

Automatic Laser Targeting (+1 to strike). Optional Computer Targeting Sight provides passive IR and nightvision targeting, as well as an additional +2 to strike.

NOTE: The Gallant 1000 still uses protoculture energy.

GALLANT H-95 MULTI-WEAPON SYSTEM

The **Gallant H-95** was developed by Tirolian Weapons Research in response to a request for a smaller version of the standard H-90. Although rugged, reliable, and versatile, the Gallant H-90 was somewhat bulky and difficult to conceal. This was especially inconvenient for REF mecha pilots who already had very little space to work with in their cockpits. The Gallant H-95 was therefore designed with pilots in mind, packing the power and versatility of the H-90 in a much smaller frame that could be more easily concealed in a flight suit or in CVR-series armor.

Like the H-90, the basic design of the Gallant H-95 is circular, with the handle being at the back and the firing mechanism curving forward around the holder's knuckles. However the H-95 compacts this design significantly so that the gun resembles a "D". This has resulted in the H-95 being given the nickname "brass knuckles" among REF soldiers. Because of recent advances in power systems and accellerator barrel design TWR engineers were able to increase the number of shots the H-95 could deliver while keeping power levels and damage capacity about the same. The H-95 still uses standard protoculture cells for power; despite the risk of detection by Invid protoculture sensors, protoculture cells still remain the most compact and efficient type of energy cells available.

The H-95 is 100% compatible with the H-90's systems, meaning that the weapon can use the same suppression barrel and stock that the H-90 does for increased power and range. The H-95 is now standard issue for all REF mecha pilots, while the newer Gallant 1000 is reserved for ground soldiers, cyclone riders, and others that need greater firepower. The Gallant H-90 is no longer manufactured, although many thousands still remain in service both on Earth and in the REF fleet.

Weight: 1.0 lbs (0.46 kg) without stock, 5.0 lbs (2.31 kg) with stock.
Damage: By Setting:

- Setting 1: 4D6 S.D. per shot.
- Setting 2: 1D6 M.D. per shot.
- Setting 3: 4D6 M.D. per shot.

Range: By Setting:

- Setting 1: 200 ft (61 m)
- Setting 2: 500 ft (152 m)
- Setting 3: 1400 ft (427 m)

Rate of Fire:

Settings 1 and 2 can be fired as aimed, burst, or wild shots. (see modern weapon proficiencies, ***Sentinels*** page 47) Setting 3 is automatically limited to semi-automatic shots (equal to the character's combined number of attacks) to prevent overheating of the firing mechanism.

Payload: By Setting:

- Setting 1: The SDC laser draws so little power that it is effectively unlimited. (1500 shots estimate)
- Setting 2: 30 shots, or 180 with Rifle Stock.
- Setting 3: 10 shots, or 60 with Rifle Stock. (1 setting 3 shot = 3 setting 2 shots)

Features:

Automatic Laser Targeting (+1 to strike).

NOTE: The Gallant H-95 still uses protoculture energy.

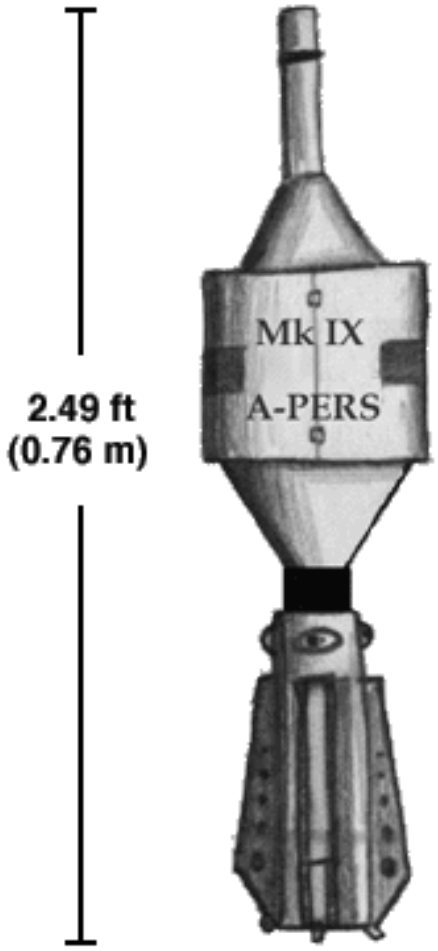
GALLANT H-95 with FLASH SUPPRESSOR and RIFLE STOCK

MARK IX "PARASITE"

RIFLE-LAUNCHED MAGNETIC CLUSTER MINE

Written by the Armyman (armymaniii@aol.com)

The Parasite was developed initally during the first few years after the Malcontent Uprisings, around 2021. Though it is unknown where the weapon originated from, it is believed that it was first produced either by the Merchant Republic or by state factories in the E.B.S.I.S. Regardless, it has become widely copied by many black marketeers, as well at least four other major arms manufacturers in the Congo Quadrant, the former Zentraedi Control Zone and North America.



Employed successfully by the R.D.F. and other forces against the larger Zentraedi and their Regult combat pods, the weapon found itself shelved during the Robotech Masters assault on Earth in the intervening years before the coming of the Invid. This is due in part because of the Master's tactics and their equipment rather than any shortcoming in the weapon itself. However, with the resurgence of Invid activity after the assault on Reflex Point and the Invid's new willingness to "duke-it-out" on the human's level, the Parasite has once again found a place in the resistance's arsenal.

The Parasite is a rifle-launched munition of considerable size. To fire, one places a parasite over the suppression barrel of a Gallant H-90, H-95 or Gallant 1000 laser rifle. The **lowest S.D.C. setting** is used to ignite the Parasite's own propulsion system and the mine leaves the barrel with explosive force (a good, steady firing position is a must), while small nozzles at the base of the warhead impart a stabilizing spin to the whole projectile. Within range of a target and using its radar proximity probe, the mine detonates a small, core explosive that spreads up to twenty-five of the tiny M21 submunitions in a controlled pattern. Each submunition is highly magnetic and will adhere to any ferro-magnetic objects within a 30 foot (9.1 m) blast radius. Once an internal chip in the submunition detects that it is settled (2-4 seconds after the initial blast), it activates a highly sensitive motion sensing device that will detonate at the slightest movement (more than .5m/second is sufficient for detonation). Additionally, the M21's casing is pressure sensitive meaning that it will detonate if squeezed or stepped on, so even the munitions that fail to find a target are still dangerous.

As a separate feature, the Parasite can also be used as a area denial mine as evidenced by the four folding legs arranged around the base propulsion module. In this capacity, the mine is set in position by hand and a priming pin is pulled inside the bottom propusion module. After the pin is pulled, the mine has a short, fifteen second delay before it is armed and begins scanning the area with its radar proximity probe. Anything coming within the 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius will activate the mine, spreading its M21 submunitions in a circular pattern. Targets in the blast radius will be struck by 1D6+1 submunitions. This

feature is not used often for obvious reasons: though most Invid will walk right up on the mine, humans and stage four (or higher) Invid will recognize the weapon and either avoid or destroy it.

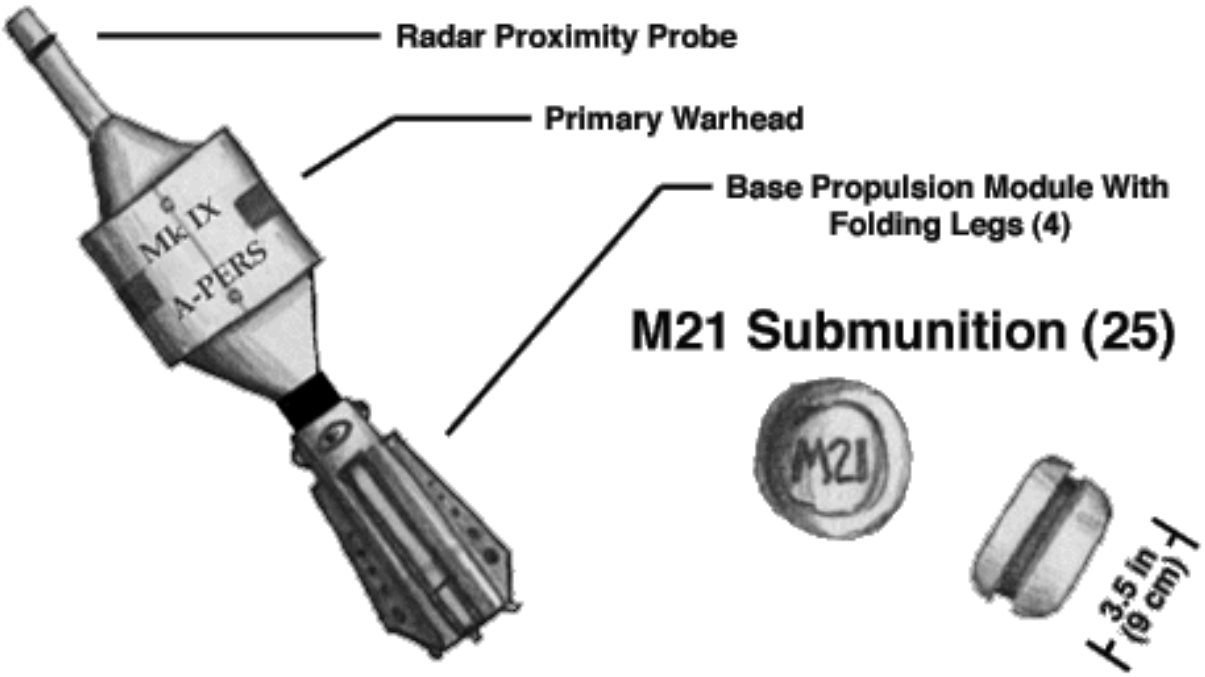
Weight: 24 lbs (10.9 kg)
Damage:

2 points of M.D. per submunition. To determine the number of submunitions that strike a target, the firer takes his attack roll (without modifiers) and adds one (1). A *natural 20* means all 25 have struck and the target suffers maximum damage (50 M.D.).

Range:

500 ft/1150 ft (150 m/350 m), if fired from a flat or ballistic trajectory. Though firing it ballistically (an arced trajectory, called "lobbing") has greater range, most weapons have no provision for a special ranged sight. Additionally, the extreme weight of the projectile makes firing the mine difficult at best. Regardless of the method used to aim, for every 50 meters beyond the initial 50 meter mark, the firer suffers a cumulative -1 to strike.

For Example: *a Freedom Fighter spots an Invid Attack Scout 200 meters away and readies his Parasite from a concealed position. He will need at least an 8 to strike because he will suffer a penalty of -3 to strike his target (50 meters [no modifier] +150 meters [-1 to strike per additional 50 meters]).*



REF COMBAT BODY ARMOR (Old Style)

The REF Combat Body Armor was the immediate predecessor to the now-legendary CVR-3 Cyclone Body Armor. First produced in 2021 during the final planning stages for the SDF-3 Pioneer mission, the armor provided REF personnel and foot soldiers with better protection than the standard REF flightsuits of the time. The CBA was constructed out of new (at the time) high-strength ceramic and laminate materials that provided better protection than the RDF Heavy Combat Armor while only minimally restricting movement. Although not quite suited for Veritech or Destroid pilots who required a wide range of motion, the armor proved excellent for crews of ground vehicle such as the AAT-30 and the MTA Titan. The Southern Cross also adopted the CBA and used it with the Garland-series transformable motorcycles. Eventually both the REF and the Southern Cross improved on the CBA's design, resulting in the CVR-3 and SC series body armors respectively. During the Second and Third Invid Wars CBA became extremely rare on Earth, only occasionally being found in long-forgotten Southern Cross weapons caches and abandoned bases.

The REF Combat Body Armor is NOT compatible with REF Cyclones. The Cyclone program was in the earliest planning stages when the CBA was produced.

MDC protection by location

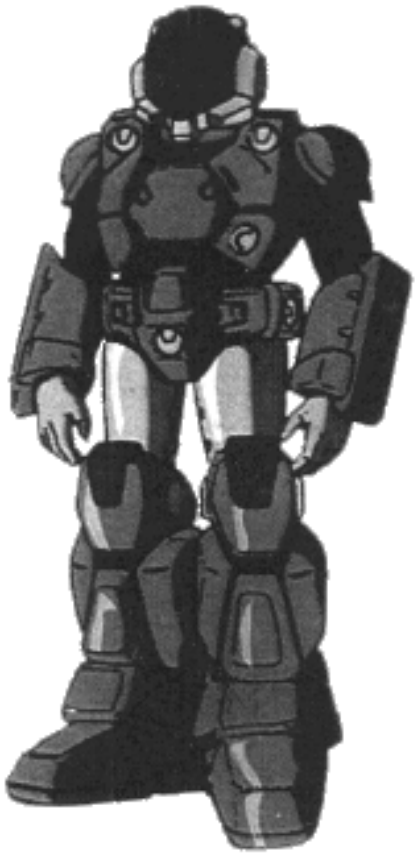
Helmet	35
Main Torso	40
Arms (2)	15
Legs (2)	30

*(**Note:** If you prefer the older rules for MDC body armor, use the MDC value of the **Main Torso** as the overall value for the armor)*

- Complete Environmental Battle Armor (EBA) suitable for use in space and other hostile environments.
- Includes helmet with removable face plate and a tinted, light sensitive visor. A short range tactical radio and a flashlight are also built into helmet. Radio range is 3 miles (4.8 km).
- Gas filtering and artificial circulation system, with an independent oxygen supply for use in low oxygen or polluted environments. The system can supply oxygen to the wearer for up to four hours maximum.
- Insulated, high temperature resistant weave of nylon, synthetic fibers, and metal mesh that is fire resistant up to 245 degrees centigrade. Normal fires do no damage, but plasma and nuclear fires have full effect.
- Radiation-shielded.
- Includes utility belt/holster.

REF CVR-3 BODY ARMOR (New Rules)

> ***Note:*** *This description uses the new armor section MDC value rules for personal body armor introduced in recent Palladium* ***RIFTS*** *supplements, which I prefer to the "one-value-covers-all" versions in the original Robotech RPG. If you like the older rules please feel free to ignore these numbers.*



The CVR-3 series armor was the standard REF body armor during the Third Robotech War/Second Invid War (2035-2038). Developed in the early 2030s near the end of the Sentinels War the CVR-3 was a total redesign of the outdated and obsolete combat body armor that had served the REF since the launch of the SDF-3 Pioneer. The CVR-3 was a durable blend of metal alloys and ceramics that was lighter and far stronger than earlier armors, and allowed for the inclusion of many additional features such as an environmental control computer, an independent oxygen supply, and a more powerful tactical radio. The CVR-3 became an integral part of subsequent weapon systems, most notably the Cyclone Veritech Ride Armors. Thousands of suits of CVR-3 armor made it to Earth during the Second and Third Invid Wars, and the CVR-3 became a popular symbol of the terran resistance. Although no longer in use by the RGF military CVR-3 armor is still very popular among police and civilian defense forces.

MDC protection by location:

Helmet	50
Main Torso	50
Arms (2)	25
Legs (2)	40

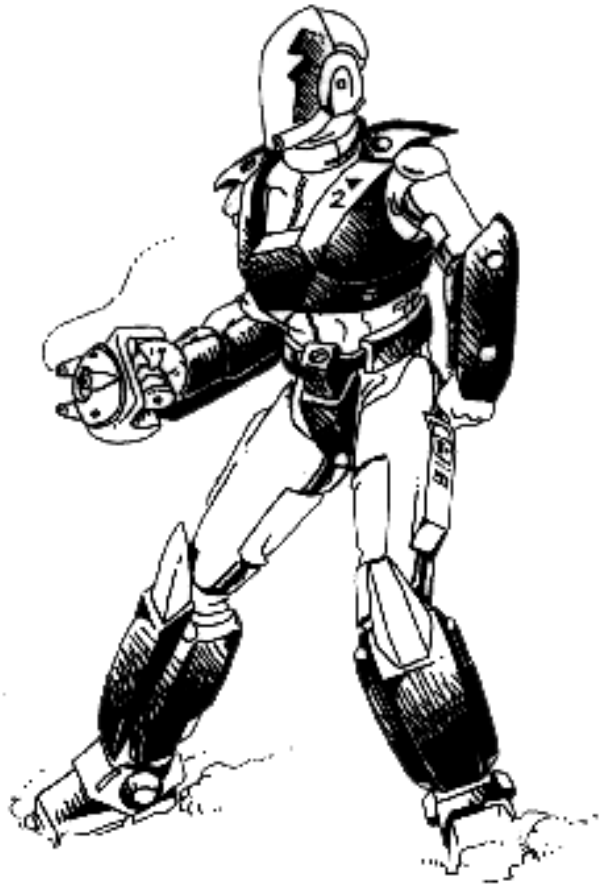
Standard Features:

- Complete Environmental Battle Armor (EBA) suitable for use in space and other hostile environments.
- Chemically coated to be laser resistant; lasers do 1/2 damage.
- Includes helmet with removable face plate and a tinted, light sensitive visor. A short range tactical

radio is also built into helmet. Range is 4 miles (6.4 km).

- Computer controlled life support system with humidifier, internal cooling and temperature control.
- Gas filtering and artificial circulation system, with an independent oxygen supply for use in low oxygen or polluted environments. The system can supply oxygen to the wearer for up to eight hours maximum. The system automatically engages when necessary.
- Insulated, high temperature resistant weave of nylon, synthetic fibers, and metal mesh that is fire resistant up to 300 degrees centigrade. Normal fires do no damage, but plasma and nuclear fires have full effect.
- Radiation-shielded.
- Includes utility belt/holster.

REF CVR-4 BODY ARMOR



In 2038 the REF command approved a proposal to update the CVR-3 series body armor with new technology. The alliance with the sentinels races following the First Invid War led to an exchange of technical knowlege and many new discoveries that could be used to improve the military designs used by the REF. One of the most dramatic new discoveries was molecular aligned metallic alloys taught to REF engineers by the Spherians. MA alloys were chains of molecules arranged in interlocking geometric patterns which eliminated material flaws and dramatically increased alloy strength. The procedure was similar to how turbine blades for jet fighters were produced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries but was far cheaper and could be manufactured on a much greater scale. MA alloys were used as the basis for the new CVR-4 body armors that would replace the older CVR-3 armors currently in service.

CVR-4 body armor comes in two different versions, a standard version and a CVR-4C heavy combat version which features increased strength at the cost of some flexibility and agility. CVR-3 and CVR-4 armor is interchangeable, meaning that a CVR-4 armor will work with older VR-0XX cyclones (and CVR-3 armor will work with the VR-1XX second generation cyclones). CVR-4C armor is specifically designed for the VR-152 Battler II and the VR-112 Samson and will not work with other cyclone models. Like CVR-3 armor, CVR-4 armor is available in separate styles for men and women.

MDC protection by location:

CVR-4 Standard Version	CVR-4C Heavy Combat Version

Helmet	60	Helmet	70
Main Torso	70	Main Torso	90
Arms (2)	40	Arms (2)	50
Legs (2)	60	Legs (2)	70

*(**Note:** If you prefer the older rules for MDC body armor, use the MDC value of the **Main Torso** as the overall value for the armor)*

Standard Features (Both Versions):

- Complete Environmental Battle Armor (EBA) suitable for use in space and other hostile environments.
- Chemically coated to be laser resistant; lasers do 1/2 damage.
- Includes helmet with removable face plate and a tinted, light sensitive visor. A short range tactical radio is also built into helmet. Range is 4 miles (6.4 km).
- Computer-generated HUD (heads-up display) overlays on inside of tinted visor. Can be used to display sensor displays and status readings when linked to the onboard computer in a Cyclone or other REF mecha.

- Computer controlled life support system with humidifier, internal cooling and temperature control.
- Built-in medical sensors that monitor the life signs of the wearer. The computer can transmit the readings to other REF mecha or a command center.
- Gas filtering and artificial circulation system, with an independent oxygen supply for use in low oxygen or polluted environments. The system can supply oxygen to the wearer for up to eight hours maximum. The system automatically engages when necessary.
- Insulated, high temperature resistant weave of nylon, synthetic fibers, and metal mesh that is fire resistant up to 400 degrees centigrade. Normal fires do no damage, but plasma and nuclear fires have full effect.
- Radiation-shielded.
- Includes utility belt/holster.

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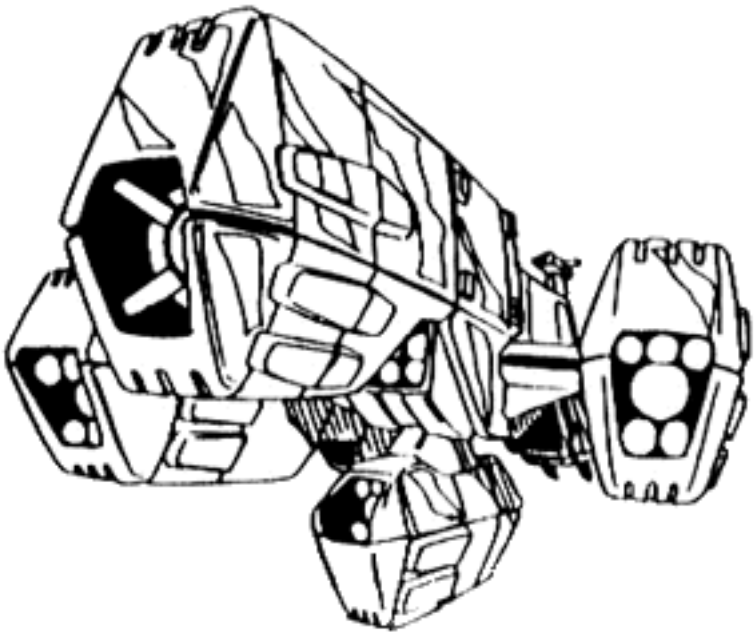
THUNDERER-CLASS BATTLE FORTRESS

*RPG Stats by **NATHAN BABCOOK** (hellcat@computerland.com)*
*Background info provided by the **ROBOTECH TECHNICAL FILES***

BACKGROUND



The ***SDF-4 Thunderer*** was one of the first new starships built following the end of the Sentinels War (First Invid War). The design for the new battle fortress had actually been developed during the height of the war, but difficulties experienced during the repair and refit of the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards prevented construction on the warship from beginning until late 2031. The Thunderer was finally launched in 2034, two years after the fall of the Invid Regent. However the *Thunderer* and her sister ships would play an important role in the Second and Third Invid Wars.

The Thunderer class drew heavily on the design studies of the Ikazuchi class command carriers, but was expanded to include more reflex weaponry and a larger mecha complement. The main body of the vessel retains the 'brick on its side' shape for much of its length, though it can be divided into three sub-sections: A narrow, downsloping aft central section, an enlarged and heightened forward cannon section, and a wide and low engine block aft. In addition, three additional modules are attached; two connecting by a passage to the two sides of the central body and directly to the engine block, and one to the keel. At the front of the side bodies the heavy particle cannons are mounted, which, in concert with the main reflex cannon in the main body, can bring an enormous amount of fire to bear on the forward arc. In addition, the forward subsection of the main body shields much of the vessel from return fire, and the side bodies shield the aft main body and the engine block from flanking maneuvers. At normal battle

attitudes, the Thunderer's vital aft central body is usually only exposed on its top and bottom sides, and only in a very limited way forward of the engine blocks. This all combines (because of the ships' attitude) to make the central section the least vulnerable section of the ship.

Hangar decks and crew spaces are distributed through the vessel, including eight quick-launch bays first used on the Ikazuchi command carriers. There is a large Horizont bay located in the lower body, capable of a high turn-around rate on the shuttles. The lower body also contains Destroid hangars, to facilitate unloading. The Air Group hangars are all in the main and side bodies. There is no command citadel, though there is a command tower that rises above the main hull, shortly before the deck begins its aft downslope. The flag bridge is located in this tower.

The *SDF-4 Thunderer* and the *SDF-5 Izumo* were both destroyed in the final battle of the Second Invid War when the Regis and her forces fled from Earth. The *SDF-6 Prometheus*, named in honor of the Prometheus Attack Group and intended to be the flagship for the fleet, was completed and launched in 2042. Two more Thunderer battle fortresses were under construction at the end of the Third Invid War, but both were converted into newer **Olympus-class Battle Fortresses** prior to completion. The *SDF-6 Prometheus* is the only surviving example of this starship class, and still serves proudly as the flagship of the 2nd RGF Starfleet. The *Thunderer*, *Izumo* and *Prometheus* were all built at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard.

RPG STATS

Government: Robotech Expeditionary Force, later Sentinels Alliance
Ship Type: Super Dimensional (Space Fold) Battle Fortress
Class: *Thunderer SDF*
Manufacturer: Tirol (Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard)

Crew: 7,850 total
Officers: 420
Main Crew: 4,150
Flight Crew: 2,800
Mecha Pilots:
Troops: 1,800

Notable Ships of Class:

SDF-4 Thunderer	launched 2034, first new battle fortress constructed at Tirol, assigned as flagship of REF Jupiter Attack Group #2 in 2038, destroyed above Earth by Invid Regis same year
SDF-5 Izumo	launched 2037, assigned as flagship of REF Jupiter Attack Group #3 in 2038, attempted to destroy the surface of the Earth using Neutron-S missiles, destroyed above Earth by Invid Regis same year

SDF-6 Prometheus launched 2042, assigned as flagship of the REF Prometheus Attack Fleet in 2046, survived final battle of Third Invid War, assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces in 2051, assigned as flagship of the 2nd RGF Starfleet in 2054, still in service circa 2080

MDC BY LOCATION:

(1)	Forward Primary Hull (forward 1/3 of ship)	60,000
(2)	Rear Primary Hull (rear 2/3 of ship)	55,000
(3)	Port Secondary Hull	45,000
(3)	Starboard Secondary Hull	45,000
	Hull Nacelle Connectors (2)	20,000
(4)	Dorsal Secondary Hull (main hangar bay)	30,000
(5)	Command Tower	10,000
(6)	Alpha Launch Bays (8)	1,200 each
(7)	Main Engines (3)	15,000 each
(7)	Auxiliary Engines (14 total)	
	- Side Body (6)	3,000 each
	- Central Front Body (4)	3,000 each
	- Central Aft Body (4)	3,000 each
	Guidance Thrusters (60)	200 each
	Forward Reflex Cannon (in nose)	5,000
	Particle Beam Cannons (2)	2,000 each
	Zentraedi-Style Laser Cannons (17)	150 each
	Zentraedi-Style Missile Launchers (12)	150 each
	Point Defense Turrets (12)	100 each
(8)	DS-2 Full Barrier Shield System	80,000
(8)	DS-1 Pin Point Barrier System (4)	5,000 each
	Main Hangars Doors (2)	1,000 each
	Alpha Launch Bays Hangar Doors (8)	800 each
	Secondary Hangar Doors (14)	500 each
	Main Airlocks (15)	500 each
	Small Airlocks/Access Hatches (200)	100 each
	Outer Hull (per 40ft area)	200
	Interior walls (per 20ft area)	40

NOTES:

1. Depleting the MDC of the forward primary hull will knock out forward reflex cannon, 5 of the laser cannons and 4 of the main missile launchers. Crew casualties will be heavy; 30+(6D6)% of the crew will be killed instantly when the forward section is destroyed.

2. Depleting the MDC of the rear primary hull will essentially destroy the battle fortress. All power systems, the main engines and the auxiliary engines will be eliminated (see below). Crew losses will be heavy; (8D6)% of the crew will be instantly killed. In addition, all internal systems will shut down due to lack of power, including life support and internal gravity. Finally, there is a 50% chance that the reflex furnace will overload and explode, doing 6D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 5,000 ft (1,525 m) radius.
3. Depleting the MDC of either the port or starboard secondary hulls will knock out one of the particle beam cannons, 4 of the laser cannons and 2 of the missile launchers. Four of the eight Alpha launch bays will also be destroyed. Crew losses will be significant; (6D6)% of the crew will be killed (primarily mecha pilots and flight crew).
4. Depleting the MDC of the dorsal secondary hulls will kill (6D6)% of the crew (primarily horizont pilots and flight crew). In addition, the battle fortress' ability to recover mecha will be greatly reduced due to the loss of the main hangar bay Under normal circumstances a Thunderer SDF can launch or recover 30 mecha or small ships per turn excluding the Alphas in their launch bays. For every 1,000 points of damage the flight deck takes reduce this number by 1. If the flight deck reaches 0 MDC then it is *destroyed*; no mecha can be launched or recovered, 40+(1D6x10)% of the flight crew will be killed, and any mecha that have already been launched will need to find another place to land (this includes the Alphas in the launch bays).
5. Destroying the command tower will instantly kill anyone on the bridge, as well as (2D6)% of the overall crew. Radar and primary communications will be knocked out. There are two auxiliary bridges in the main body of the ship that the surviving crew can take command from. However if the command tower is lost then the ship will be at -5 initiative and -3 to dodge due to loss of sensors.
6. Destroying the Alpha launch bays will greatly impair the carrier's ability to rapidly deploy mecha. For every launch bay destroyed 24 Alphas will be eliminated, along with their pilots and support crews.
7. Depleting the MDC of the main engines will force the ship to rely on its auxiliary engines. Depleting the MDC of the main engines AND auxiliary engines will leave the ship adrift in space. If in an atmosphere, the ship will crash (destruction of the main engines will render the antigravity system useless due to loss of power).
8. The DS-2 Barrier System regenerates at a rate of 40 MDC per melee round, and the Pinpoint Barriers regenerate at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round. If destroyed, both barrier systems will eventually completely regenerate themselves. See the DS-2 Barrier System and the DS-1 Pinpoint Barrier entries for details.

SPEEDS:

Speed (sublight): 0.18 speed of light (25,600 miles/41,200 km per second)
Speed (conventional): equvalent to 5,360 mph (1,635 kmph)
Space Fold:

Range unlimited (1 light year every 6 minutes). The Thunderer's spacefold drive will transport all vessels within a three mile (4.5 km) radius with it when it executes a fold. Up to 100 smaller craft

can be transported with the command carrier when it folds.

Planet bound:

The Thunderer has atmospheric capabilities through its thrusters and anti-gravity system. The maximum hover time on the anti-gravity systems is limited only by the protoculture supplies and maintenance requirements. Due to the ship's design, it cannot land on open ground without crushing the lower body, the use of the anti-gravity system will enable the ship to attempt a landing, however, while landed, the battlefortress must operate her antigravs at -99% local g at all times to prevent damage to the lower body. The Thunderer will float in an ocean, and this is the preferred landing method for planetary operations.

Maximum Range: Unlimited (powered by a protoculture reactor with an estimated life span of 40 years)

STATISTICAL DATA:

Length: 5,310 ft (1,618 m)
Width: 2,832 ft (864 m)
Height: 1,915 ft (583 m)
Weight: 30,000,000 metric tons (standard)

Main Power System:

RRG mk 15 protoculture-fueled Reflex furnace, Mk8 Fusion-Plasma Reaction Thrusters with protoculture energizer. Mk-3 Fusion-Plasma Emergency Reaction Thrusters with protoculture energizer.

Fold System:

Robotech Research Group (RRG) Mk. 4 fold system cluster

Sublight Drive:

REF Naval Engineering Class XXIV macro nozzle cluster

Gravity Control System:

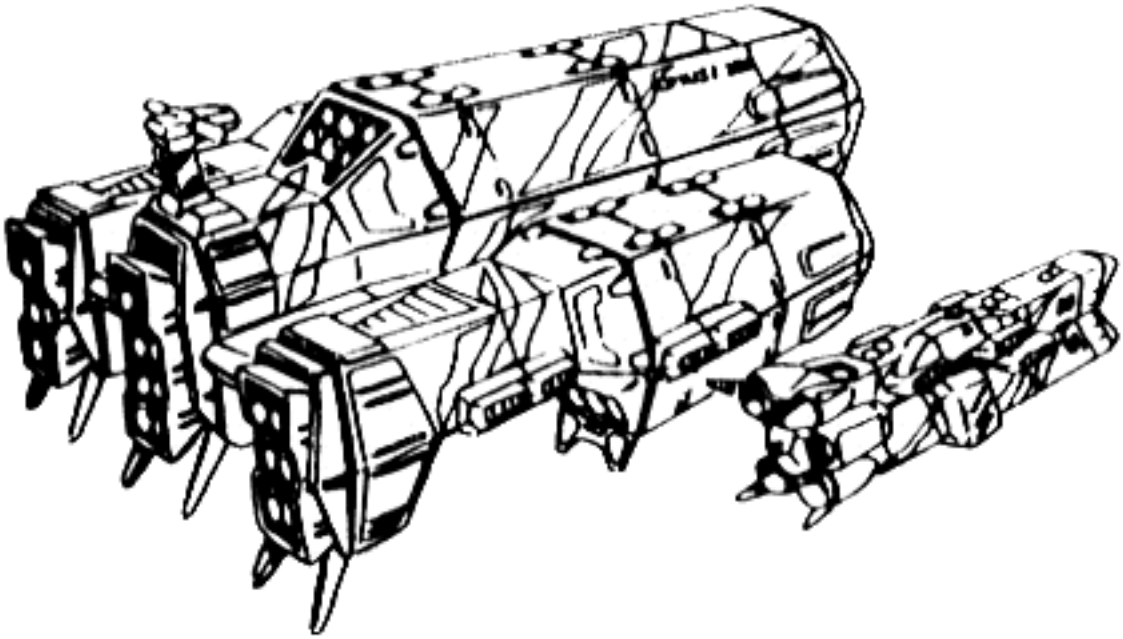
Thurian internal gravitic field system

Auxiliary Engine:

REF Naval Engineering Class XXII mass-conservation thrust system

Radar System:

RRG Type XX Alpha Hyperspace Sensor Cluster



WEAPON SYSTEMS:

1. **REFLEX CANNON:** This is the heaviest of the ship-borne weapons, at full power it has the effective yield of a 14 MT fusion weapon, approximately equivalent to the firepower of a fully-powered Zentraedi Monitor. Unlike the Zentraedi Monitor and Flagship as well as the SDF-1, this weapon does not require a split-boom firing design. The weapon is located in an aperture in the center forward body and is concealed much like the mega-laser on the Ikazuchi and Icarus-class command carriers.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Anti-Warship/Anti-Planet
    - **Range:** 300,000 km
    - **Mega Damage:** Destoys everything in its path. Fires a 2 mile wide beam of destruction.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Once every 20 Melees (5 Minutes)
    - **Payload:** Effectively Unlimted

2. **PARTICLE BEAM CANNONS (2):** Located in the forward Port and Starboard Hulls These weapons can fire 2.5 TJ of particle energy per shot once every fifteen seconds. The cannons can fire separately at different targets or fire coaxially (by themselves, or with the main Reflex Cannon) at a single target.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Anti-Warship
    - **Range:** 100,000 Miles in an atmosphere, 200,000 miles in space.
    - **Mega Damage:** 1D4X1000
    - **Rate of Fire:** each may fire once per melee.
    - **Payload:** Effectively Unlimted

3. **ZENTRAEDI-STYLE PARTICLE GUN TURRETS (17):** Each turret is capable of delivering 3000 MJ of particle energy. These weapons are mounted on the upper central hull, aft (2) and forward (3), on top of the side bodies (2 each), under the side bodies (2), and under the central bodies aft (2) and forward (2).

    - **Primary Purpose:** Anti-Spaceship.
    - **Range:** 50,000 Miles in an atmosphere, 100,000 miles in space.
    - **Mega Damage:** 1D4X100
    - **Rate of Fire:** 5 shots per melee
    - **Payload:** Effectivly Unlimted

4. **ZENTRAEDI-STYLE MISSILE LAUNCHERS (12):** Four launchers are located near the engines, two others near the bridge, two on the side bodies, and the remaining four are located forward.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Defense/Anti-Missile, Anti-Ship
    - **Range:** Varies with Missile Type
    - **Mega Damage:** Typically 4D6X100
    - **Rate of Fire:** twice per melee, in volley of 2 or 4
    - **Payload:** 350 missile per launcher

5. **PL-2A POINT DEFENSE TURRETS (12):** Mounted behind movable panels in the side bodies (4) and the central bodies (8), these standard REF weapons can fire 56 MJ of particle energy four times per second.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Anti-Mecha
    - **Range:** 30 miles in an atmosphere, 60 miles in space
    - **Mega Damage:** 2D6X20
    - **Rate of Fire:** five shots per melee
    - **Payload:** effectively unlimited

6. **DS-2 FULL BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** The Thunderer battle fortresses are equipped with a full barrier system similar to the one fitted on the SDF-3. When activated the force field encompasses the entire ship, which prevents the launch of mecha, firing of weapons or even using the main thrusters while the shield is up. The shield can be erected or dropped in 5 seconds; in game terms, the shield can be dropped, mecha recovered, weapons fired and the shield raised in the same melee round, but the rate of fire for all weapons and the number of mecha that can be launched/recovered is reduced by 2/3. The DS-2 can regenerate its MDC at a rate of 10,000 MDC per hour (40 MDC per round).

7. **DS-1 PINPOINT BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** The Pinpoint Barrier System generates four small disc-shaped force fields that can be positioned anywhere along the ship to deflect missiles,

energy beams or projectiles. Each pinpoint barrier is about 200 ft (61 m) in length and can absorb up to 5,000 MD in damage, which then regenerates within 30 seconds (2 melee attacks). The barriers can also be layered on top of each other to generate a field which provides 20,000 MDC and can even deflect heavy particle beams (usually). The DS-1 is considered a backup system for the DS-2 Full Barrier System.s

The four barriers are controlled by operators in the command tower of the carrier. These operators are instructed to defend (1) the command tower, (2) main engines, (3) flight deck, and (4) weapons systems in that order. The operators primarily concentrate on defending the ship against larger spacecraft and leave defense against mecha attacking the battle fortress to the Veritechs and retractible weapon systems.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense (the pinpoint barrier system cannot be used as a weapon)
- **RANGE:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) from the surface of the vessel.
- **DAMAGE CAPACITY:** Can sustain up to 5,000 MD per round. Regenerates at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round.
- **RADIUS:** 200 ft (61 m)
- **DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT:** Can move from one end of the carrier to the other in less than a single round. Trained operators can attempt to block attacks up to 8 times per melee (counts as a parry) and are at +7 to block. Untrained characters can parry up to their number of hand-to-hand attacks with their normal parry bonuses only.
- **PAYLOAD:** Nearly inexhaustible. Will work as long as system is functional (see below) and engines are intact. If main engines are destroyed, the barrier will loose power and not function.
- **NOTE:** If all four barriers are grouped in a single spot they can deflect a heavy particle beam attack, such as the one generated by Zentraedi or Robotech Master warships. However, the beam will completely destroy all four barriers and put incredible strain on the pinpoint barrier system to the point where it may short out. After deflecting an energy beam, roll percentile dice on the table below to determine additional effects/damage.
    - **01-15:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **16-30:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **31-45:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair (yes, DAYS of work).
    - **46-60:** Completely destroyed! System can be rebuilt, but will require new parts and 2D6 DAYS of work to replace.
    - **61-75:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair.
    - **76-90:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **91-95:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **96-00:** It's a miracle! Trivial damage only, system will be operational again in only 4D6 melee rounds!

ENDURANCE NOTES:

The dry stores endurance is limited to about 20 years, as the on board recycling installations are very extensive, and only incidental biomass losses need to be replenished. Water stores are recycled almost completely. The hydroponics installations on board will provide the crew with a steady supply of fresh foods, and some can even be 'exported' to smaller ships in the fleet.

The mecha consumables supplies (mainly missiles) are very extensive, and can sustain continuous combat operations for over twenty-five days against the Invid. However, battles against the Zentraedi or other powers with capital ships will exhaust the anti-ship missile supplies at a faster rate, and the Thunderer-class cannot sustain those operations for more than two or three days. The ship launched missile magazines should suffice for three large battles or five or more skirmishes.

Several small Robotech Factories are located in the ship which are designed to produce spare parts and ammunition for the Thunderer's mecha complement. If necessary, they can be used to construct complete mecha, however the rate of production is fairly low. The factories can produce roughly 10 Cyclone-sized mecha per day or 3 Veritech-sized mecha per week.

SYSTEMS OF NOTE:

- **ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION SYSTEM:** The Thunderer battle fortresses are equipped with anti-gravity propulsion systems which are used for planetary landings and liftoffs. The system is good for vertical ascent/descent only and can lift the ship at speeds of up to 1,320 feet (400 m) per minute. The system will function so long as the main engines can supply energy to it.
- **HYPERSPACE COMMUNICATIONS:** Thunderer SDFs are equipped with hyperspace communications relays which allows faster-than-light communication between the ships and other vessels or planetary bases. Hyperspace communications are still not instantaneous, however. Audio/video communication travels through hyperspace at a rate of about 5 seconds per light year, so messages communicated over vast distances can still take days, weeks, or months to arrive.
- **LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS:** The Thunderer SDFs have sufficient life support to provide breathable air and comfortable temperatures for 12,000 people for up to 20 years (air is recycled). In an emergency the life support system can support up to 16,000 people at one time, though living conditions onboard will get extremely cramped at that point.
- **LONG-RANGE LASER/SATELLITE RELAY COMMUNICATIONS:** The impressive communications array of the SDF can communicate with up to 1,000 craft simultaneously at ranges of up to 1,200 miles (1,920 km). This range can be boosted indefinitely by using satellites or other spacecraft to relay communications.
- **LONG-RANGE RADAR:** The radar array of the Thunderer can track and identify up to 800

craft simultaneously. The radar system has a 3,000 mile/4,800 km range.

- **SPACE FOLD SYSTEM:** Thunderer SDFs are equipped with a Robotech Research Group fold drive, capable of propelling the ship through hyperspace at speeds up to 3.28x10^10 mps (5.25x10^10 kmps), or 1 light year per 6 minutes. When executing a space fold the cruiser will transport any ships within a 3 mile (4.8 km) radius with it, allowing it to transport up to about 100 smaller ships with it, if necessary. The range of the fold drive is theoretically unlimited except by the life expectancy of the spacecraft.
- **SUBLIGHT ENGINES:** As a backup to the Fold System, the battle fortress is equipped with sublight engines that can propel the ship at speeds up to 0.18 speed of light (28,800 miles/46,350 km per second) in space. Note that these engines are mainly intended for rapid movement inside a planetary system and are not suited for long voyages between star systems.
- **SUBSPACE MASS SENSORS:** Thunderer SDFs are equipped with subspace sensors which are based on the same principles as the hyperspace communications array. These sensors can essentially instantly detect mass readings and movement of objects up to 1 AU (93 million miles) distant from the carrier, and the readings are used both for early warning and for navigation when travelling at sublight speeds. Readings taken with the subspace sensors are not very detailed (-25% penalty when trying to identify a detected object) and cannot detect objects of less than 60,000 kg (this includes most veritechs and Invid mecha).

MECHA COMPLEMENT:

The immense landing bays of the Thunderer SDFs can hold and support a grand total of 1,218 veritechs/destroids of any type, in addition to the 192 Alpha fighters in the 8 Alpha launch bays, as long as the mecha are smaller than 50 ft (15.2 m) and weigh less than 40 tons each. In addition, there are 18 special berths for larger mecha up to 100 ft (30.4 m) tall and 300 tons in weight (i.e. Mac II or III). Below are some typical mecha complements, though changes may be made if required by a particular mission.

RSS Thunderer Mecha Complement (circa 2038)

- 192 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters housed in 8 Alpha launch bays (*Sentinels* pg. 82)

- 258 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 40 VAF-6R Reconaissance Alpha Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 290 VBF-1 Beta Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 87)
- 24 VF-1V Vindicators
- 96 VF-1 Veritech Fighters (*Robotech RPG* pg. XX)

- 3500 VR-052 Battler Cyclones (*Sentinels* pg. Z)
- 600 VR-041 Sabre Cyclones (*Sentinels* pg. Z)
- 900 VR-038 Light Cyclones (*Sentinels* pg. Z)
- 50 VR-055 Devastator Cyclones

- 40 Mk III Gladiator Destroids (*Sentinels* pg. 63)
- 40 Mk II Gladiator Destroids (*Robotech RPG* pg. Q)
- 50 Mk VII Excaliber Destroids (*Sentinels* pg. 61)
- 100 Mk VI Excaliber Destroids (*Robotech RPG* pg. Q)
- 70 Mk XIII Spartan Destroids (*Sentinels* pg. 68)
- 30 Mk XII Spartan Destroids (*Robotech RPG* pg. Q)
- 50 Mk XI Raidar X Destroids (*Sentinels* pg. 66)
- 50 Mk X Raidar X Destroids (*Robotech RPG* pg. Q)
- 12 M.A.C. III Destroids (*Sentinels* pg. 65)
- 6 M.A.C. II Destroids (*Robotech RPG* pg. Q)

- 60 TBP-Z1 Tactical Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 70)
- 20 OBP-Z2 Officer's Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 72)
- 4 CRP-Z3 Cyclops Theatre Scouts (*Sentinels* pg. 73)

- 40 AAT-40 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 60 AAT-30 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 36 ARRAV Rocket Launchers (*Sentinels* pg. 108)
- 3 MTA Titans (*Sentinels* pg. 114)

- 12 Cat's Eye Recon Planes (*Robotech RPG* pg. R)
- 9 T.A.S.C. Pegasus Assault Shuttles (*Southern Cross* pg. S)
- 20 Horizont Transatmospheric Shuttle (three are modified to carry MTA Titans, *Sentinels* pg. 94)

RSS Prometheus Mecha Complement (circa 2047)

- *(to be written)*

In addition the Icarus carries 100 TCH-4 Tractor-Haulers, 200+ ML-3 Forklifts, 30 MOV Moles, 12 AMR-10 Mecha Retrieval Transport Vehicles, 24 REF Personnel Shuttles and 16 REF Cargo Shuttles onboard.

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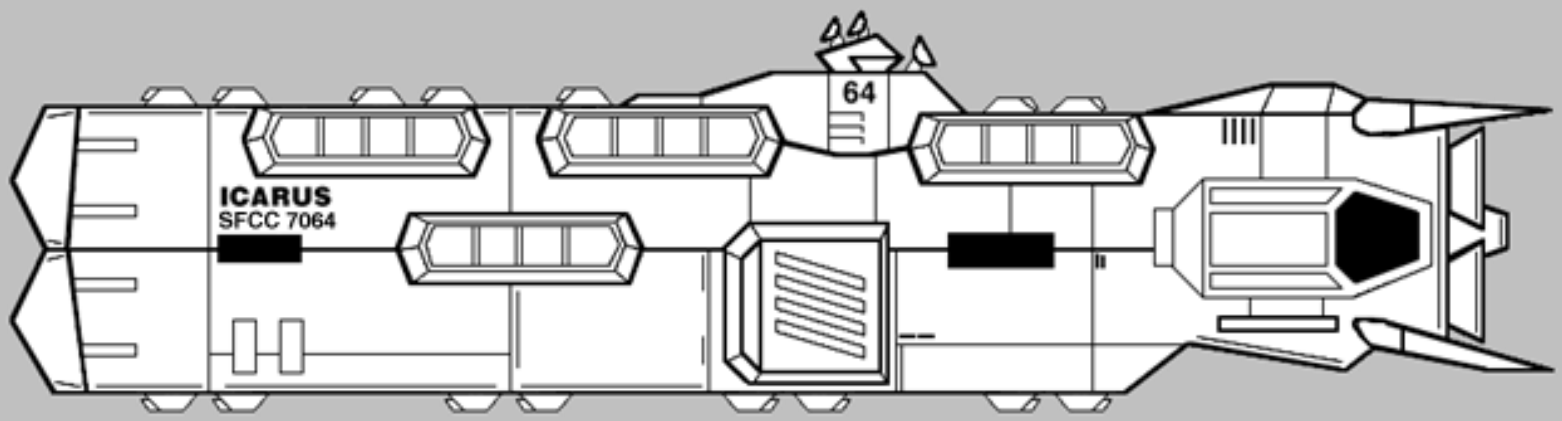
The following material is from **THE THIRD INVID WAR**, a fan supplement by **Dave Deitrich** and **Chris Meadows**. Please feel free to use, copy, and distribute it as you see fit. All we ask is that you give proper credit to us and do not claim that it is your own work. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

REF *ICARUS*-CLASS COMMAND CARRIER

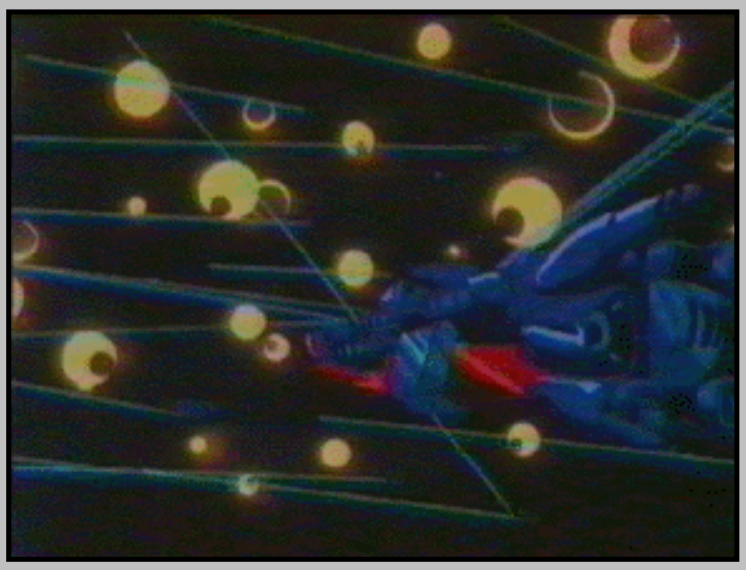


BACKGROUND

On August 12, 2037 the *Starlift*-class transport *RSS Cipolla* suffered a severe thruster malfunction while resupplying the *Ikazuchi*-class command cruiser *RSS Icarus*. The Cipolla lost control during docking maneuvers and slammed into the Icarus' docking bay, exploding on impact. The explosion caused massive damage to the interior of the Icarus and ignited raging fires within the ship that took 38 hours for emergency repair crews to bring under control. Over 800 people on the Icarus and the entire crew of the Cipolla lost their lives in the disaster. Following the incident the burnt-out hulk of the Icarus was towed back to the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards for repairs. Unfortunately the massive damage meant that the command cruiser would not be available for the REF Jupiter Mission, which was being sent to retake Earth from the Invid Regis in 2038. The Icarus was left alone in drydock for approximately 11 months while all resources were directed towards preparing the Jupiter Attack Fleet. Finally, in August of 2038 following the end of the Second Invid War work resumed on the broken hull of the ship.

REF engineers decided to extensively redesign the Icarus and equip the ship with newer technology discovered following the Sentinels War. The hull was lengthened by 210 feet (64 m) in order to accommodate more powerful engines and larger hangar bays. Two additional Alpha fighter launch bays were added near the bow of the vessel providing the Icarus with 48 more rapid-launch fighters than the standard Ikazuchi design. The weaponry was also augmented with the addition of two more dual-barrel heavy laser turrets on the top of the vessel and two heavy missile bays on the rear of the ship. The main laser cannon on the bow of the ship was replaced with a newer design that provided more power and greater range than its predecessor. Finally, several dozen anti-mecha cannons were distributed across the Icarus' hull to increase the ship's defenses against Invid mecha.

The extensive modifications to the Icarus took almost 3 years to complete. When Colonels John Korcheck and Roger Harris receive approval for an Earth reconnaisance mission in 2042 the Icarus was chosen as the flagship for the mission, and subsequently the new recon force was named the **REF Icarus Recon Group**. The Icarus was then further modified to include enhanced tactical and subspace sensors, as well as an improved hyperspace communications suite. REF engineers felt that these improvements would greatly enhance the Icarus' role in the recon mission. Work also began on three more *Icarus*-class command carriers; the *Excelsior*, *Endeavor* and *Defiant*. Unfortunately these ships would not be ready for the Icarus mission, but instead would be included in the Prometheus Attack Group in 2047.



The Icarus performed well as the flagship for the Icarus Recon Fleet during 2044. Unfortunately the mission was betrayed by an unwilling double-agent planted among the fleet by the leader Invid Varron. During a rescue mission the Icarus and her escorts were ambushed by a large force of Invid, and within minutes all ships except the Icarus had been destroyed by concentrated Invid fire. In a last-minute decision Col. Harris took command of the Icarus' mecha forces and made a diversionary run for Earth, while Col. Korcheck took the heavily-damaged Icarus out of orbit and executed a space fold back to Tirol. Korcheck and the Icarus managed to escape back to Tirol with reconnaissance data from the Icarus mission that would prove invaluable to the Prometheus Fleet's assault on Earth. Harris and his forces managed to rendezvous with resistance leaders on Earth, although he was later killed in action while leading an evacuation from a compromised resistance safehouse.

Following the end of the Third Invid War Icarus-class command cruisers became the standard cruiser design of the REF (and later the RGF) until the introduction of the *Lexington SFC-7500* class command carriers in 2057. Many Icarus and Ikazuchi carriers are still in active service with the RGF fleet and remain a common sight in the Sentinels Alliance. Icarus carriers were produced at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards, and later also at the REF Factory Satellite. At their height the command ships were manufactured at a rate of 3 per year.

RPG STATS

Government: Robotech Expeditionary Force, later Sentinels Alliance
Ship Type: Super Dimensional (Space Fold) Command Carrier
Class: *Icarus SFCC-7200*
Manufacturer: Tirol (Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard, REF Factory Satellite)

Crew: 7,850 total
Officers: 300
Main Crew: 2,970
Flight Crew: 2,000
Mecha Pilots: 1,340
Troops: 1,240

Notable Ships of Class:

SFCC-7064 Icarus originally launched 2033 as *Ikazuchi*-class, assigned to REF Mercury Defense Fleet same year, severly damaged in collision with *RSS Cipolla* in 2037, refit as *Icarus*-class 2038-2041, relaunched 2041, assigned as flagship of REF Icarus Recon Group in 2042, severly damaged by Invid during rescue mission in 2044, repairs completed in 2045, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Fleet in 2047, survived final battle of Third Invid War, assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces in 2051, still in service circa 2080

SFCC-7202 Excelsior first original construction (non-refit) ship of class, launched 2044, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Fleet in 2046, destroyed above Earth by Invid Space Hives in 2047

SFCC-7203 Endeavor launched 2045, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Fleet in 2046, destroyed above Earth by Invid Space Hives in 2047

SFCC-7204 Defiant launched 2045, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Fleet in 2046, survived final battle of Third Invid War, assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces in 2051, still in service circa 2080

MDC BY LOCATION:

(1)	Main Body	24,000
(2)	Command Tower	4,800
(2)	Communications Arrays (3)	100 each
(3)	Bow (forward 1/3 of ship)	20,000
(4)	Engineering (rear 1/3 of ship)	28,000
(5)	Main Hangar Bay	8,000
(5)	Alpha Launch Bays (8)	1,200 each
(6)	Main Engines (4)	6,000 each
(6)	Auxiliary Engines (2)	2,500 each
	Guidance Thrusters (80)	200 each
	Forward Mega-Laser (in nose)	1,000
	Laser Turrets (18 - 10 top and 8 bottom)	150 each
	Heavy Missile Bays (10 - 8 forward and 2 rear)	100 each
	Retractable Laser Turrets (48)	100 each
	Retractable Missile Launchers (12)	100 each
(7)	Pin Point Barriers (4)	5,000 each
	Main Hangars Sliding Shields (2)	3,000 each
	Alpha Launch Bays Hangar Doors (8)	800 each
	Secondary Hangar Doors (10)	500 each
	Main Airlocks (12)	500 each
	Small Airlocks/Access Hatches (60)	100 each
	Outer Hull (per 40ft area)	200
	Interior walls (per 20ft area)	40

NOTES:

1. Depleting the MDC of the main body will destroy the Icarus carrier. The ship will be literally broken in two. All internal systems will shut down, including life support and internal gravity. In addition, there is a 45% chance that the power systems will overload and the ship will explode, doing 8D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 5,000 ft (1,525 m) radius. Regardless of whether it explodes or not, the ship itself will be an unsalvageable floating wreck.
2. Destroying the command tower will instantly kill anyone on the bridge, as well as (2D6)% of the overall crew. Radar and primary communications will be knocked out. There are two auxiliary bridges in the main body of the ship that the surviving crew can take command from. However if the command tower is lost then the ship will be at -5 initiative and -3 to dodge due to loss of sensors. Destroying all three communications arrays will have the same effect without the loss of the bridge crew.
3. Depleting the MDC of the bow will knock out forward mega-laser, 8 of the heavy missile bays, and 4 of the laser turrets. The forward two Alpha launch bays will also be destroyed. Crew casualties will be heavy; (6D6)% of the crew will be killed instantly when the forward section is destroyed.
4. Depleting the MDC of the engineering section will essentially destroy the carrier. All power systems, the main engines and the auxiliary engines will be eliminated (see below). Crew losses will be heavy; (8D6)% of the crew will be instantly killed. In addition, all internal systems will shut down due to lack of power, including life support and internal gravity. Finally, there is a 50% chance that the reflex furnace will overload and explode, doing 4D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 5,000 ft (1,525 m) radius.
5. Destroying the Alpha launch bays will greatly impair the carrier's ability to rapidly deploy mecha. For every launch bay destroyed 24 Alphas will be eliminated, along with their pilots and support crews. If the main hangar bays are lost it will be even more disasterous. Under normal circumstances the Icarus can launch or recover 16 mecha or small ships per turn excluding the Alphas in their launch bays. For every 500 points of damage the flight deck takes reduce this number by 1. If the flight deck reaches 0 MDC then it is *destroyed*; no mecha can be launched or recovered, 40+(1D6x10)% of the flight crew will be killed, and any mecha that have already been launched will need to find another place to land (this includes the Alphas in the launch bays).
6. Depleting the MDC of the main engines will force the ship to rely on its auxiliary engines. Depleting the MDC of the main engines AND auxiliary engines will leave the ship adrift in space. If in an atmosphere, the ship will crash (destruction of the main engines will render the antigravity system useless due to loss of power).
7. The Pinpoint Barriers regenerate at a rate of 1,250 MD per second (2,500 MD per melee round). If destroyed, a barrier will completely regenerate within four seconds (2 melee rounds). See the Pinpoint Barrier System entry for details.

SPEEDS:

Speed (sublight): 0.18 speed of light (28,800 miles/46,350 km per second)
Speed (Auxiliary Drives): Mach 10
Space Fold:

Range unlimited (1 light year every 6 minutes). The Icarus' spacefold drive will transport all vessels within a three mile (4.5 km) radius with it when it executes a fold. Up to 100 smaller craft can be transported with the command carrier when it folds.

Planet bound:
Has vertical take off and landing (VTOL) capability via antigravity drives. Can reach speeds of up to Mach 2 in an upper planetary atmosphere, but not designed for extended flight or maneuvering. Can land underwater but cannot travel (does not float on an ocean surface).
Maximum Range: Unlimited (powered by a protoculture reactor with an estimated life span of 40 years)

STATISTICAL DATA:

Length: 3,042 ft (927 m)
Width: 495 ft (151 m)
Height: 788 ft (240 m)
Weight: 29,800,000 tons (standard)

Fold System:
Robotech Research Group (RRG) Mk. 3F fold system cluster
Sublight Drive:
REF Naval Engineering Class XVII macro nozzle cluster
Gravity Control System:
REF Naval Engineering Class XII internal gravity control system
Auxiliary Engine:
REF Naval Engineering Class XXII mass-conservation thrust system
Radar System:
RRG Type XX Alpha Hyperspace Sensor Cluster

WEAPON SYSTEMS:

1. **MAIN LASER CANNON (a.k.a. MEGA-LASER):** Like its predecessor, the Ikazuchi, the main weapon of the Icarus-class command carriers is a spinal mounted heavy laser/particle cannon combination commonly referred to as the "Mega-Laser". This weapon is built into the nose of the carrier, with no apparent appendage, nozzle or opening to give away its location. The mega-laser used by the Icarus is an improved version with greater range and more power the cannon used on the Ikazuchi carriers.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Spacecraft
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Orbital Bombardment
    - **RANGE:** 150,000 miles (240,000 km) in an atmosphere, 300,000 miles (480,000 km) in space
    - **DAMAGE:** 1D6x1000 M.D.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Once every other melee
    - **PAYLOAD:** Effectively Unlimited

2. **DUAL-BARREL HEAVY LASER TURRETS (18):** In addition to the mega-laser, Icarus carriers are armed with 18 heavy laser cannons that are based on Zentraedi technology. 10 cannons are located on the top of the ship and 8 are located on the bottom. Each turret can rotate 360 degrees and has a 180 degree arc of fire.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
   - **RANGE:** 100,000 miles (160,000 km) in an atmosphere, 200,000 miles (320,000 km) in space
   - **DAMAGE:** 1D6x100 M.D. per shot, 2D6x100 M.D. per dual blast
   - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire twice per melee round
   - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

3. **HEAVY MISSILE LAUNCHER BAYS (10):** To further augment their anti-warship firepower, Icarus carriers are equipped with torpedo-like missile tubes. The command cruisers have 10 tubes, 8 pointing forward and 2 pointing rearward. The launch bays contain long-range nuclear missiles and are intended for use in heavy combat only.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
   - **RANGE:** 2,000 miles (3,216 km)
   - **SPEED:** Mach 2+ (1,340 mph/2,140 kmph) in an atmosphere.
   - **DAMAGE:** 6D6x100 M.D.
   - **BLAST RADIUS:** 2,000 feet (610 m)
   - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each launcher tube holds one missile and must be reloaded after firing. Reloading a launcher tube takes 30 seconds (2 melee rounds). If loaded, all 10 tubes can fire at once for a volley of 10 nuclear missiles (!).
   - **PAYLOAD:** A typical carrier carries 80 missiles in storage that can be readied for firing in about 30 minutes. Additional missiles can be carried if deemed necessary, however.
   - **NOTE:** These missiles CANNOT be used by variable fighters. Each missile is approximately 12 ft (3.6 m) long, about twice the size of a VR-152 Battler II cyclone.

4. **RETRACTABLE LASER TURRETS (48):** During her redesign retractable laser turrets were added to the Icarus to provide better protection against attacks from Invid mecha. These lasers were placed at strategic positions along the hull and were primarily intended for anti-mecha defense, but can do moderate damage against any enemy spacecraft that get too close. When not in use the gun turrets are concealed within the hull underneath a sliding hatch. At most 24 lasers can be brought to bear on a single target.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha
   - **RANGE:** 30 miles (48.3 km) in an atmosphere, 60 miles (96.6 km) in space

- **DAMAGE:** 1D6x20 M.D. each. Several lasers can be directed to fire in volleys of 3 or more. A volley of 3 beams does 3D6x20 M.D., a volley of 6 beams does 6D6x20 M.D., and so on. A full volley of 24 beams aimed at a single target does 4D6x120 M.D. (!) if it hits.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once per melee, and can be combined in any volley combination of 3 or more lasers, up to 24 lasers. Volleys can be directed at different targets.
- **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited.
- **NOTE:** The lasers can be set on automatic during combat, during which time they have a +2 to strike due to their advanced tracking systems. The lasers tracking systems will target incoming missiles first and attacking mecha/aircraft second.

5. **RETRACTABLE MEDIUM MISSILE LAUNCHERS (12):** Along with the retractable laser turrets, medium-range missile turrets were added to the Icarus carriers to further augment their anti-mecha defenses. Each launcher contains 8 missile tubes allowing volleys of up to 8 missiles to be fired at a single target per launcher. Once depleted, the missile launchers are reloaded by an automated loading system that takes 15 seconds (one melee round) to reload all 8 missiles. Armor-piercing smart missiles are usually used to avoid chances of friendly fighters being shot down by the missiles.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Aircraft
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **MISSILE TYPES:** Any type of REF Medium Range Missile can be used. Smart missiles are commonly used to avoid hitting friendly aircraft.
    - **RANGE:** Varies, typically 60 miles (80.4 km).
    - **SPEED:** Varies, typically 1600mph (2571kmph) in an atmosphere.
    - **DAMAGE:** Varies, typically 2D4x10 M.D.
    - **BLAST RADIUS:** Varies, typically 15 feet.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, or 8 missiles per launcher.
    - **PAYLOAD:** Each launcher holds 8 missiles. Once the missiles are expended the launcher is reloaded within 1 round via an automated system. The reload system holds 48 missiles per launcher.

6. **DS-1 PINPOINT BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** Originally developed by Dr. Emil Lang onboard the SDF-1 during the First Robotech War, the Pinpoint Barrier System is a standard defense system on board most REF starships, including the Icarus carriers. The system generates four small disc-shaped force fields that can be positioned anywhere along the ship to deflect missiles, energy beams or projectiles. Each pinpoint barrier is about 200 ft (61 m) in length and can absorb up to 5,000 MD in damage, which then regenerates within 30 seconds (2 melee attacks). The barriers can also be layered on top of each other to generate a field which provides 20,000 MDC and can even deflect heavy particle beams (usually).

    The four barriers are controlled by operators in the command tower of the carrier. These operators are instructed to defend (1) the command tower, (2) main engines, (3) flight deck, and (4) weapons systems in that order. The operators primarily concentrate on defending the ship against larger spacecraft and leave defense against mecha attacking the carrier to the Veritechs and retractible weapon systems.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense (the pinpoint barrier system cannot be used as a weapon)

- **RANGE:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) from the surface of the vessel.
- **DAMAGE CAPACITY:** Can sustain up to 5,000 MD per round. Regenerates at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round.
- **RADIUS:** 200 ft (61 m)
- **DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT:** Can move from one end of the carrier to the other in less than a single round. Trained operators can attempt to block attacks up to 8 times per melee (counts as a parry) and are at +7 to block. Untrained characters can parry up to their number of hand-to-hand attacks with their normal parry bonuses only.
- **PAYLOAD:** Nearly inexhaustible. Will work as long as system is functional (see below) and engines are intact. If main engines are destroyed, the barrier will loose power and not function.
- **NOTE:** If all four barriers are grouped in a single spot they can deflect a heavy particle beam attack, such as the one generated by Zentraedi or Robotech Master warships. However, the beam will completely destroy all four barriers and put incredible strain on the pinpoint barrier system to the point where it may short out. After deflecting an energy beam, roll percentile dice on the table below to determine additional effects/damage.
    - **01-15:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **16-30:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **31-45:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair (yes, DAYS of work).
    - **46-60:** Completely destroyed! System can be rebuilt, but will require new parts and 2D6 DAYS of work to replace.
    - **61-75:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair.
    - **76-90:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **91-95:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **96-00:** It's a miracle! Trivial damage only, system will be operational again in only 4D6 melee rounds!

SYSTEMS OF NOTE:

- **ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION SYSTEM:** The Icarus carriers are equipped with an anti-gravity propulsion system used for planetary landings and liftoffs. The system is good for vertical ascent/descent only and can lift the ship at speeds of up to 1,320 feet (400 m) per minute. The system will function so long as the main engines can supply energy to it.
- **HYPERSPACE COMMUNICATIONS:** Icarus carriers are equipped with hyperspace communications relays which allows faster-than-light communication between the ships and other vessels or planetary bases. Hyperspace communications are still not instantaneous, however. Audio/video communication travels through hyperspace at a rate of about 5 seconds per light year, so messages communicated over vast distances can still take days, weeks, or months to arrive. The Icarus carriers are equipped with three separate hyperspace communications systems, allowing the carriers full communications capabilities even if two of the three systems are destroyed.
- **LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS:** The Icarus carriers have sufficient life support to provide breathable air and comfortable temperatures for 8,000 people for up to 15 years (air is recycled). In an emergency the life support system can support up to 12,000 people at one time, though living conditions onboard will get extremely cramped at that point. The cruiser also holds sufficient food and water to support 8,000 people for up to 6 months.
- **LONG-RANGE LASER/SATELLITE RELAY COMMUNICATIONS:** The impressive

communications array of the carrier can communicate with up to 1,000 craft simultaneously at ranges of up to 1,200 miles (1,920 km). This range can be boosted indefinitely by using satellites or other spacecraft to relay communications.

- **LONG-RANGE RADAR:** The radar array of the Icarus carriers can track and identify up to 1,000 craft simultaneously. The radar system has a 3,000 mile/4,800 km range.
- **SPACE FOLD SYSTEM:** Icarus carriers are equipped with a Robotech Research Group fold drive, capable of propelling the ship through hyperspace at speeds up to 3.28x10^10 mps (5.25x10^10 kmps), or 1 light year per 6 minutes. When executing a space fold the cruiser will transport any ships within a 3 mile (4.8 km) radius with it, allowing it to transport up to about 100 smaller ships with it, if necessary. The range of the fold drive is theoretically unlimited except by the life expectancy of the spacecraft.
- **SUBLIGHT ENGINES:** As a backup to the Fold System, the cruiser is equipped with sublight engines that can propel the ship at speeds up to 0.18 speed of light (28,800 miles/46,350 km per second) in space. Note that these engines are mainly intended for rapid movement inside a planetary system and are not suited for long voyages between star systems. In a planetary atmosphere the carrier is limited to speeds of Mach 1 at low altitudes or Mach 2 at high altitudes due to hull stress.
- **SUBSPACE MASS SENSORS:** The Icarus cruisers are equipped with subspace sensors which are based on the same principles as the hyperspace communications array. These sensors can essentially instantly detect mass readings and movement of objects up to 1 AU (93 million miles) distant from the carrier, and the readings are used both for early warning and for navigation when travelling at sublight speeds. Readings taken with the subspace sensors are not very detailed (-25% penalty when trying to identify a detected object) and cannot detect objects of less than 60,000 kg (this includes most veritechs and Invid mecha).

MECHA COMPLEMENT:

The landing bay can hold and support a grand total of 560 veritechs/destroids of any type, in addition to the 192 Alpha fighters in the 8 Alpha launch bays, as long as the mecha are smaller than 50 ft (15.2 m) and weigh less than 40 tons each. In addition, there are 5 special berths for larger mecha up to 100 ft (30.4 m) tall and 300 tons in weight (i.e. Mac II or III). Listed below is the mecha complement of the *RSS Icarus* during the Icarus Recon Mission. Other Icarus-class carriers will have similar complements, though changes may be made if required by the mission.

RSS Icarus Mecha Complement (circa 2044)

- 96 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters housed in 4 Alpha launch bays (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 96 VAF-8 Alpha Fighters housed in 4 Alpha launch bays (48 have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)

- 36 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 24 VAF-7A Shadow Alphas (*Sentinels* pg. 92)
- 48 VAF-8 Alpha Fighters (24 have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 40 VAF-8R Recon Alpha Fighters (all have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 12 VAF-9 Alpha Fighters
- 36 VBF-1 Beta Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 87)

- 12 VBF-1S Shadow Betas (*Sentinels* pg. 87)
- 48 VBF-2 Beta Fighters (24 have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 40 VBF-2R Recon Beta Fighters (all have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 12 VBF-3 Beta Fighters
- 4 VF-1V Vindicators

- 3000 Cyclones (assorted types, mostly Second Generation Cyclones)

- 60 Veritech Hover Tanks (*Sentinels* pg. 93)
- 24 Mk VII Excalibers (*Sentinels* pg. 61)
- 24 Mk III Gladiators (*Sentinels* pg. 63)
- 24 Mk XI Raidar X (*Sentinels* pg. 66)
- 24 Mk XIII Spartans (*Sentinels* pg. 68)
- 5 M.A.C. IIIs (*Sentinels* pg. 65)
- 44 TBP-Z1 Tactical Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 70)
- 4 OBP-Z2 Officer's Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 72)
- 4 CRP-Z3 Cyclops Theatre Scouts (*Sentinels* pg. 73)

- 24 AAT-40 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 24 AAT-30 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 10 ARRAV Rocket Launchers (*Sentinels* pg. 108)
- 4 MTA Titans (*Sentinels* pg. 114)
- 4 Horizont Transatmospheric Shuttle (two are modified to carry MTA Titans, *Sentinels* pg. 94)

In addition the Icarus carries 60 TCH-4 Tractor-Haulers, 120 ML-3 Forklifts, 12 AMR-10 Mecha Retrieval Transport Vehicles, 12 REF Personnel Shuttles and 8 REF Cargo Shuttles onboard.

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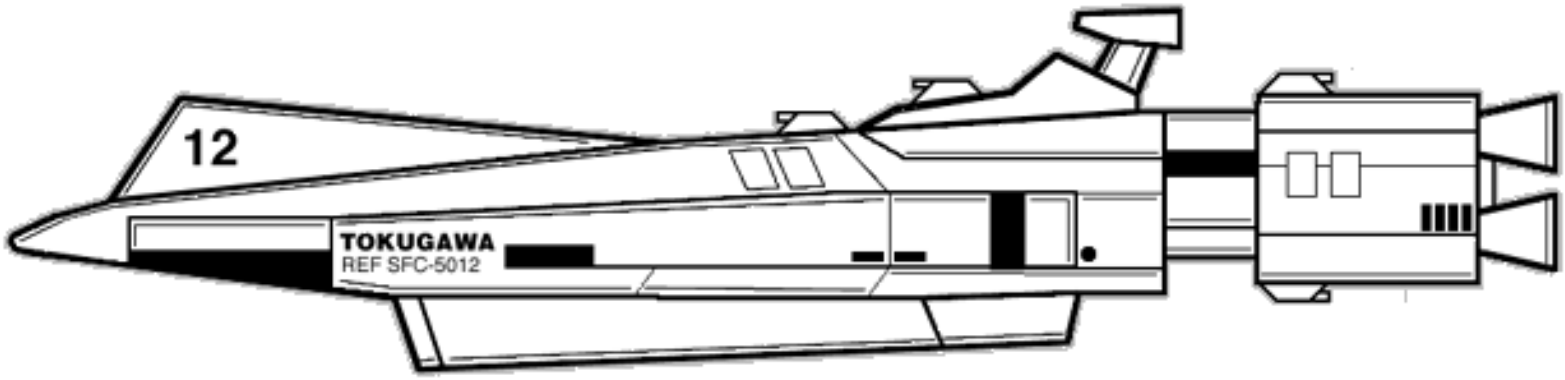
REF *TOKUGAWA*-CLASS CRUISER



BACKGROUND

The ***Tokugawa*-class Cruiser** is the oldest terran capital ship design still in service. Initially designed in 2015 following the end of the First Robotech War, the cruisers were intended to augment the RDF's minuscule fleet of captured Zentraedi warships and provide greater protection for the Sol system. A total of 8 Tokugawa cruisers had been constructed at the RDF Robotech Factory Satellite by the time of the *SDF-3 Pioneer*'s departure in 2022. 5 cruisers and a number of Zentraedi vessels were assigned to the Pioneer mission, while the other 3 were left behind in service to the Tactical Armored Space Corps of the Southern Cross. Due to their high cost of operation only two additional Tokugawa cruisers were constructed following the Pioneer mission's departure. Unfortunately all 5 Tokugawa cruisers that stayed behind were destroyed by the Robotech Masters in the Second Robotech War (2031-2032).

Meanwhile at Tirol the Tokugawa cruisers suffered from the same weaknesses that the *SDF-3 Pioneer* did. Anticipating combat with a large number of Zentraedi warships, the cruisers were woefully unprepared for the sheer number of Invid mecha they faced during the battle of Tirol. Two of the five ships were destroyed during the first battle of the Sentinels War (First Invid War), and a third was destroyed during an Invid counterattack on Tirol in 2023. The remaining two ships, the *Tokugawa* and the *Hannibal*, underwent an extensive refit at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards, and additional Tokugawa cruisers began construction in 2024.

Initially the Tokugawa-class cruisers were armed with 4 dual-barrel heavy laser turrets (2 forward, 2 rear), 12 concealed Zentraedi-style laser cannons in the front bow, and 4 heavy missile launcher tubes (2 forward, 2 rear). Following their conversions in 2024 the REF Tokugawas were upgraded to 6 heavy laser turrets (4 forward, 2 rear), 16 concealed forward laser cannons, and 8 heavy missile launcher tubes (6 forward, 2 rear).

In addition badly-needed anti-mecha weaponry was added in the form of 30 retractable laser cannons and 6 retractable missile turrets. Finally hyperspace communications and a fold drive system were added, making the vessel capable of travelling beyond a planetary system and commanding an interstellar fleet.

The Tokugawa cruisers served well during the First Invid War as command ships for REF fleets. In 2032 the cruiser *Hannibal* under the command of Major John Carpenter was dispatched to Earth to warn the United Earth Government about the Robotech Masters. Unfortunately by this time the Masters were already at war with the Armies of the Southern Cross. Alone and without support, the *Hannibal* engaged two Robotech Master motherships in Earth orbit and managed to destroy one by colliding with it after being mortally wounded in battle. Meanwhile back near Tirol the cruisers *Tokugawa*, *Rutland* and *Jutland* joined the haydonite cruiser *Ark Angel* and several other Sentinels vessels in the final assault on the Invid Regent at Optera. Unfortuantely that same year General T.R. Edwards attempted a coup against the REF command and siezed control of the Tokugawa cruisers *Saratoga* and *Ticonderoga*. The *Ticonderoga* was eventually recaptured by loyal REF troops, but the *Saratoga* was destroyed along with the *Tokugawa* when the two ships collided above Optera. More tragedy struck when the cruisers *Farragut* and *Challenger*, both assigned to Jonathan Wolff's **REF Venus Attack Group**, failed to emerge from hyperspace when the fleet folded to the Sol system. These two ships are still listed as missing in the REF fleet roster. During the Third Invid War several Tokugawa cruisers were assigned to the **REF Icarus Recon Mission**. Unfortunately all of these cruisers were destroyed by the Invid Space Hive network during recon missions and while attempting to get badly needed supplies to resistance fighters on Earth.

Production rates for the Tokugawa cruisers fell as newer command cruisers such as the *Ikazuchi* and *Icarus* classes were introduced. Production of Tokugawa cruisers finally ceased in 2054 with the commissioning of the *RSS Endeavor*. Although some Tokugawa cruisers have been scrapped, many are still in service with the RGF fleet. One of the most famous (or infamous) of these is the *RSS Griffon*, a Tokugawa cruiser which has been permanently assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces Intelligence (RGFI). The *Griffon* is painted all black and is rumored to have sensor and weapons capabilities greater than any other ship in the RGF fleet. Her exact specifications and missions are closely-guarded RGFI secrets, but most RGF personnel regard her presence as an extremely bad omen.

Tokugawa cruisers were first produced at the RDF Factory Satellite in orbit above Earth. After 2024 they were produced at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards near Tirol, and later at the Karbarran Space Works and the REF Factory Satellite. At their height Tokugawas were manufactured at a rate of 4 per year.

RPG STATS

Government: Tactical Armored Space Corps (Southern Cross), Robotech Expeditionary Force, later Sentinels Alliance
Ship Type: Super Dimensional (Space Fold) Cruiser
Class: *Tokugawa SFC-5000*

Manufacturer: Earth (RDF Factory Satellite), Tirol (Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard, REF Factory Satellite), Karbarra (Karbarran Space Works).

Crew: 2,155 total
Officers: 85
Main Crew: 840
Flight Crew: 500
Mecha Pilots: 380
Troops: 350

Notable Ships of Class:

SFC-5012 Tokugawa	launched 2015, assigned to REF Pioneer Mission in 2022, severly damaged in 1st Battle for Tirol same year, refit 2023, participated in final assault on Optera in 2032, destroyed in collision with cruiser *Saratoga* during T.R. Edwards' coup attempt same year
SFC-5015 Hannibal	launched 2016, assigned to REF Pioneer Mission in 2022, severly damaged in 1st Battle for Tirol same year, refit 2023, dispatched to Earth with warning about Robotech Masters in 2032, destroyed shortly after arrival by collision with Robtech Masters mothership
SFC-5024 Jutland	launched 2024, participated in final assault on Optera in 2032, assigned to REF Icarus Recon Mission in 2043, destroyed above Earth by Invid Space Hives in 2044
SFC-5025 Rutland	launched 2024, participated in final assault on Optera in 2032, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Group in 2045, assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces in 2048, retired from service in 2055, moored at RGF Naval Museum orbiting Tirol in 2060
SFC-5028 Saratoga	launched 2025, captured by forces loyal to T.R. Edwards in 2032, destroyed in collision with *Tokugawa* above Optera same year
SFC-5030 Ticonderoga	launched 2025, captured by forces loyal to T.R. Edwards in 2032, recaptured by REF forces same year, assigned to REF Icarus Recon Mission in 2043, destroyed above Earth by Invid Space Hives in 2044
SFC-5034 Farragut	launched 2027, assigned to REF Venus Attack Group in 2033, failed to materialize from hyperspace following fold to Sol system same year, listed as missing 2034
SFC-5037 Challenger	launched 2028, assigned to REF Venus Attack Group in 2033, failed to materialize from hyperspace following fold to Sol system same year, listed as missing 2034
SFC-5048 Griffon	launched 2032, assigned to REF Prometheus Attack Group in 2045, assigned to Robotech Guardian Forces in 2048, assigned special service to Robotech Guardian Forces Intelligence in 2070, still in service circa 2080

MDC BY LOCATION:

(1)	Main Body	15,000
(2)	Command Tower	2,000
	Bow (forward 1/4 of ship)	10,000
(3)	Engineering (rear 1/4 of ship)	8,000
(4)	Flight Deck (bottom)	5,000
(5)	Main Engines (8)	1,000 each
(5)	Auxiliary Engines (4)	750 each
	Guidance Thrusters (50)	200 each
	Laser Turrets (6)	150 each
	Forward Laser Cannons (16)	100 each
	Heavy Missile Launcher Tubes (8)	150 each
	Retractable Laser Turrets (30)	100 each
	Retractable Missile Launchers (6)	100 each
(6)	Pin Point Barriers (4)	5,000 each
	Small Airlocks/Access Hatches (40)	250 each
	Main Airlocks (8)	500 each
	Outer Hull (per 40ft area)	200
	Interior walls (per 20ft area)	20
	Main Hangar Door (1)	800
	Secondary Hangar Doors (4)	500 each

NOTES:

1. Depleting the MDC of the main body will eliminate the cruiser. All internal systems will shut down, including life support and internal gravity. In addition, there is a 30% chance that the power systems will overload and the destroyer will explode, doing 4D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 5,000 ft (1,525 m) radius. Regardless of whether it explodes or not, the ship itself will be an unsalvageable floating wreck.
2. Destroying the command tower will instantly kill anyone on the bridge, as well as knock out radar and primary communications. There are two auxiliary bridges in the main body of the ship that the surviving crew can take command from. However if the command tower is lost then the ship will be at -5 initiative and -3 to dodge due to loss of sensors.
3. Depleting the MDC of the engineering section will essentially destroy the cruiser. All power systems, the main engines and the auxiliary engines will be eliminated (see below). In addition, all internal systems will shut down due to lack of power, including life support and internal gravity. Finally, there is a 50% chance that the reflex furnace will overload and explode, doing 4D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 5,000 ft (1,525 m) radius.
4. Destroying the flight decks will greatly impair the cruiser's ability to deploy and recover mecha. Under normal circumstances the destroyer can launch or recover 10 mecha per turn. For every 500 points of damage the flight deck takes reduce this number by 1. If the flight deck reaches 0 MDC then it is *destroyed*; no mecha can be launched or recovered, 40+(1D6x10)% of the flight crew will be killed, and any mecha that have already been launched will need to find another place to land.
5. Depleting the MDC of the main engines will force the ship to rely on its auxiliary engines. Depleting

the MDC of the main engines AND auxiliary engines will leave the ship adrift in space. If in an atmosphere, the ship will crash (destruction of the main engines will render the antigravity system useless due to loss of power).

6. The Pinpoint Barriers regenerate at a rate of 1,250 MD per second (2,500 MD per melee round). If destroyed, a barrier will completely regenerate within four seconds (2 melee rounds). See the Pinpoint Barrier System entry for details.

SPEEDS:

Speed (sublight): 0.16 speed of light (25,600 miles/41,200 km per second)
Speed (Auxiliary Drives): Mach 10
Space Fold: Not equipped with space fold drives prior to 2023. After 2023 range unlimited (1 light year every 6 minutes).
Planet bound:
Has vertical take off and landing (VTOL) capability. Can reach speeds of up to Mach 6 in an upper planetary atmosphere, but not designed for extended flight or maneuvering. Cannot travel underwater (but will float on an ocean surface).
Maximum Range: Unlimited (powered by a protoculture reactor with an estimated life span of 30 years)

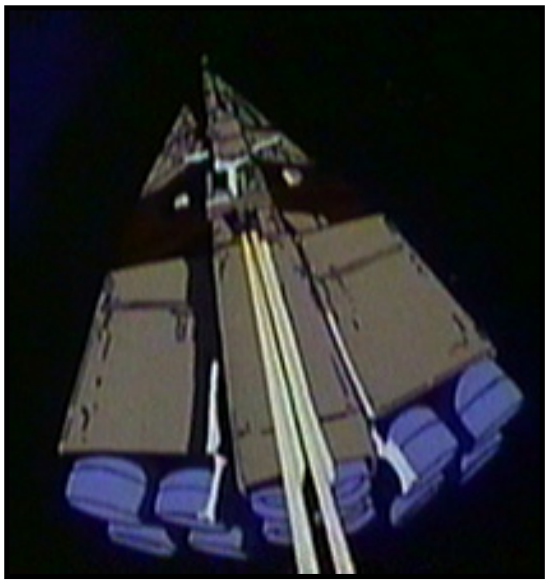
STATISTICAL DATA:

Length: 2475 ft (754 m)
Width: 950 ft (290 m)
Height: 790 ft (241 m)
Weight: 16,000,000 tons (standard)

Fold System:
Initially none
After 2023 equipped with Robotech Research Group (RRG) Mk. 2R fold system cluster
Sublight Drive:
Initially Workl-Quatafilla macro nozzle cluster (RRG-modified)
After 2023 equipped with REF Naval Engineering Class XI macro nozzle cluster
Gravity Control System:
Geteulmaqulla-Zollia internal gravity control system (RRG-modified)
Auxiliary Engine:
Initially Macross Engineering Mk. 48 nuclear thrust system
After 2023 equipped with REF Naval Engineering Class XV mass-conservation thrust system
Radar System:
Initially RRG Type VI Standard Sensor Cluster
After 2023 equipped with RRG Type XIV Hyperspace Sensor Cluster

WEAPON SYSTEMS:

1. **DUAL-BARREL HEAVY LASER TURRETS (4 initially, 6 after 2023):** The main weapons of the Tokugawa cruisers are zentraedi-style turreted heavy laser cannons. Originally the cruisers mounted four turrets (two near the center above the main body, two on the rear engineering section) but following the 2023 refit two additional turrets were added (one on either side of the command tower). Each turret can rotate 360 degrees and has a 180 degree arc of fire.



   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
   - **RANGE:** 100,000 miles (160,000 km) in an atmosphere, 200,000 miles (320,000 km) in space
   - **DAMAGE:** 1D6x100 M.D. per shot, 2D6x100 M.D. per dual blast
   - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire twice per melee round
   - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

2. **CONCEALED ZENTRAEDI-STYLE LASER CANNONS (12 initially, 16 after 2023):** As a backup to the main laser cannons and useful for heavy assaults, the Tokugawa cruisers are equipped with concealed lasers on the bow of the ship, similar to those used on Zentraedi cruisers. These lasers have a limited range of motion; they can be adjusted 30 degrees to the left, right, above or below the centerline of the ship. Initially 12 lasers were mounted on the bow of the Tokugawa, but after the 2023 refit this number was raised to 16.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
   - **RANGE:** 300 miles (483 km) in an atmosphere, 600 miles (966 km) in space
   - **DAMAGE:** 2D6x20 M.D. per blast
   - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once per round, and can be combined with other lasers to form a single volley (counts as one attack).
   - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

3. **HEAVY MISSILE LAUNCHERS (4 initially, 8 after 2023):** To further augment their anti-warship firepower, the Tokugawa cruisers are equipped with torpedo-like missile tubes. Initially the cruisers had two tubes pointing forward and two pointing rearward, but after the 2023 refit an additional 4 forward-pointing tubes were added. The launchers contain long-range nuclear missiles and are intended for use in heavy combat only.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
   - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
   - **RANGE:** 2,000 miles (3,216 km)
   - **SPEED:** Mach 2+ (1,340 mph/2,140 kmph) in an atmosphere.
   - **DAMAGE:** 6D6x100 M.D.
   - **BLAST RADIUS:** 2,000 feet (610 m)

- **RATE OF FIRE:** Each launcher tube holds one missile and must be reloaded after firing. Reloading a launcher tube takes 30 seconds (2 melee rounds). If loaded, all 8 tubes can fire at once for a volley of 6 nuclear missiles (!).
- **PAYLOAD:** A typical cruiser carries 48 missiles in storage that can be readied for firing in about 30 minutes. Additional missiles can be carried if deemed necessary, however.
- **NOTE:** These missiles CANNOT be used by variable fighters. Each missile is approximately 12 ft (3.6 m) long, about twice the size of a VR-152 Battler II cyclone.

4. **RETRACTABLE LASER TURRETS (30, not added until after 2023):** During the 2023 refit retractable laser turrets were added to the Tokugawa cruisers to provide better protection from Invid mecha attacks. These lasers were placed at strategic positions along the hull and were primarily intended for anti-mecha defense, but can do moderate damage against enemy spacecraft that get too close. When not in use gun turrets are concealed within the hull underneath a sliding hatch. At most 15 lasers can be brought to bear on a single target.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha
    - **RANGE:** 30 miles (48.3 km) in an atmosphere, 60 miles (96.6 km) in space
    - **DAMAGE:** 1D6x20 M.D. each. Several lasers can be directed to fire in volleys of 3 or more. A volley of 3 beams does 3D6x20 M.D., a volley of 6 beams does 6D6x20 M.D., and so on. A full volley of 10 beams aimed at a single target does 1D6x200 M.D. (!) if it hits.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once per melee, and can be combined in any volley combination of 3 or more lasers, up to 10 lasers. Volleys can be directed at different targets.
    - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited.
    - **NOTE:** The lasers can be set on automatic during combat, during which time they have a +2 to strike due to their advanced tracking systems. The lasers tracking systems will target incoming missiles first and attacking mecha/aircraft second.

5. **RETRACTABLE MEDIUM MISSILE LAUNCHERS (6, not added until after 2023):** Along with the retractable laser turrets medium-range missile turrets were added to the Tokugawa cruisers in 2023 to further augment their anti-mecha defenses. Each launcher contains 8 missile tubes allowing volleys of up to 8 missiles to be fired at a single target per launcher. Once depleted, the missile launchers are reloaded by an automated loading system that takes 15 seconds (one melee round) to reload all 8 missiles. Armor-piercing smart missiles are usually used to avoid chances of friendly fighters being shot down by the missiles.

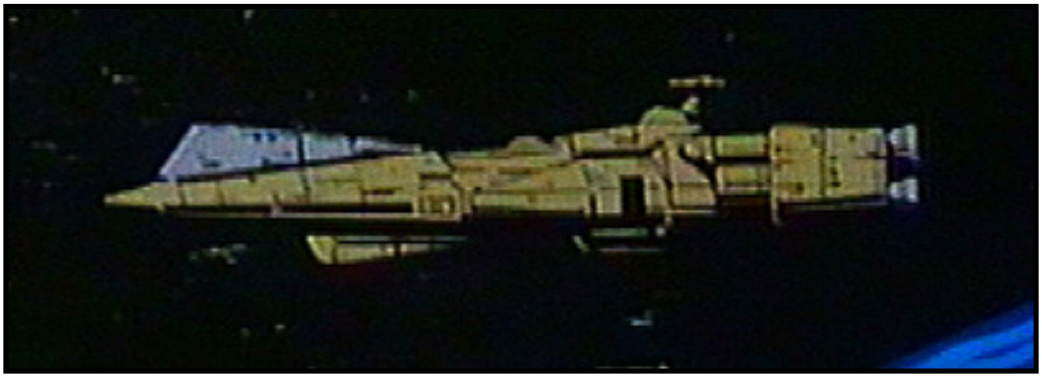
    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Aircraft
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **MISSILE TYPES:** Any type of REF Medium Range Missile can be used. Smart missiles are commonly used to avoid hitting friendly aircraft.
    - **RANGE:** Varies, typically 60 miles (80.4 km).
    - **SPEED:** Varies, typically 1600mph (2571kmph) in an atmosphere.
    - **DAMAGE:** Varies, typically 2D4x10 M.D.
    - **BLAST RADIUS:** Varies, typically 15 feet.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, or 8 missiles per launcher.

- **PAYLOAD:** Each launcher holds 8 missiles. Once the missiles are expended the launcher is reloaded within 1 round via an automated system. The reload system holds 48 missiles per launcher.

6. **DS-1 PINPOINT BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** Originally developed by Dr. Emil Lang onboard the SDF-1 during the First Robotech War, the Pinpoint Barrier System is a standard defense system on board most REF starships, including the Tokugawa cruisers. The system generates four small disc-shaped force fields that can be positioned anywhere along the ship to deflect missiles, energy beams or projectiles. Each pinpoint barrier is about 200 ft (61 m) in length and can absorb up to 5,000 MD in damage, which then regenerates within five seconds (3 melee attacks). The barriers can also be layered on top of each other to generate a field which provides 20,000 MDC and can even deflect heavy particle beams (usually).

   The four barriers are controlled by operators in the command tower of the carrier. These operators are instructed to defend (1) the command tower, (2) main engines, (3) flight deck, and (4) weapons systems in that order. The operators primarily concentrate on defending the ship against larger spacecraft and leave defense against mecha attacking the destroyer to the Veritechs and retractible weapon systems.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense (the pinpoint barrier system cannot be used as a weapon)
   - **RANGE:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) from the surface of the vessel.
   - **DAMAGE CAPACITY:** Can sustain up to 5,000 MD per round. Regenerates at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round.
   - **RADIUS:** 200 ft (61 m)
   - **DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT:** Can move from one end of the destroyer to the other in less than a single round. Trained operators can attempt to block attacks up to 8 times per melee (counts as a parry) and are at +7 to block. Untrained characters can parry up to their number of hand-to-hand attacks with their normal parry bonuses only.
   - **PAYLOAD:** Nearly inexhaustible. Will work as long as system is functional (see below) and engines are intact. If main engines are destroyed, the barrier will loose power and not function.
   - **NOTE:** If all four barriers are grouped in a single spot they can deflect a heavy particle beam attack, such as the one generated by Zentraedi or Robotech Master warships. However, the beam will completely destroy all four barriers and put incredible strain on the pinpoint barrier system to the point where it may short out. After deflecting an energy beam, roll percentile dice on the table below to determine additional effects/damage.
     - **01-15:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
     - **16-30:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
     - **31-45:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair (yes, DAYS of work).
     - **46-60:** Completely destroyed! System can be rebuilt, but will require new parts and 2D6 DAYS of work to replace.
     - **61-75:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair.
     - **76-90:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
     - **91-95:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
     - **96-00:** It's a miracle! Trivial damage only, system will be operational again in only 4D6 melee rounds!

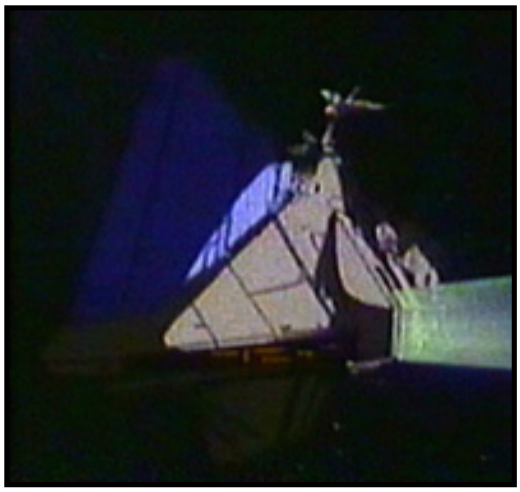


SYSTEMS OF NOTE:

- **ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION SYSTEM:** The Tokugawa cruisers are equipped with an anti-gravity propulsion system used for planetary landings and liftoffs. The system is good for vertical ascent/descent only and can lift the ship at speeds of up to 1,320 feet (400 m) per minute. The system will function so long as the main engines can supply energy to it.
- **HYPERSPACE COMMUNICATIONS:** The cruiser is equipped with a hyperspace communications relay which allows faster-than-light communication between the ships and other vessels or planetary bases. Hyperspace communications are still not instantaneous, however. Audio/video communication travels through hyperspace at a rate of about 5 seconds per light year, so messages communicated over vast distances can still take days, weeks, or months to arrive.
- **LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS:** The Tokugawa cruisers have sufficient life support to provide breathable air and comfortable temperatures for 2,500 people for up to 15 years (air is recycled). In an emergency the life support system can support up to 5,000 people at one time, though living conditions onboard will get extremely cramped at that point. The cruiser also holds sufficient food and water to support 2,500 people for up to 6 months.
- **LONG-RANGE LASER/SATELLITE RELAY COMMUNICATIONS:** The impressive communications array of the cruiser can communicate with up to 500 craft simultaneously at ranges of up to 900 miles (1,440 km). This range can be boosted indefinitely by using satellites or other spacecraft to relay communications.
- **LONG-RANGE RADAR:** The radar array of the Tokugawa cruisers can track and identify up to 500 craft simultaneously. The radar system has a 2,000 mile/3,200 km range.
- **SPACE FOLD SYSTEM:** Following 2023 the Tokugawa cruiser was equipped with a Robotech Research Group fold drive, capable of propelling the ship through hyperspace at speeds up to 3.28x10^10 mps (5.25x10^10 kmps), or 1 light year per 6 minutes. When executing a space fold the cruiser will transport any ships within a 2 mile (3.2 km) radius with it, allowing it to transport up to about 100 smaller ships with it, if necessary. The range of the fold drive is theoretically unlimited except by the life expectancy of the spacecraft.
- **SUBLIGHT ENGINES:** As a backup to the Fold System, the cruiser is equipped with sublight engines that can propel the ship at speeds up to 0.16 speed of light (25,600 miles/41,200 km per second) in space. Note that these engines are mainly intended for rapid movement inside a planetary system and are not suited for long voyages between star systems. In a planetary atmosphere the carrier is limited to speeds of Mach 6 at low altitudes or Mach 10 at high altitudes due to hull stress.
- **SUBSPACE MASS SENSORS:** The Tokugawa cruisers are equipped with subspace sensors which

are based on the same principles as the hyperspace communications array. These sensors can essentially instantly detect mass readings and movement of objects up to 1 AU (93 million miles) distant from the carrier, and the readings are used both for early warning and for navigation when travelling at sublight speeds. Readings taken with the subspace sensors are not very detailed (-25% penalty when trying to identify a detected object) and cannot detect objects of less than 60,000 kg (this includes most variable fighters).

MECHA COMPLEMENT:



The landing bay can hold and support a grand total of 350 veritechs/destroids of any type, as long as the mecha are smaller than 50 ft (15.2 m) and weigh less than 40 tons each. In addition, there are 3 special berths for larger mecha up to 100 ft (30.4 m) tall and 300 tons in weight (i.e. Mac II or III). Below are some typical mecha complements, though changes may be made if required by the mission.

Southern Cross Tokugawa cruiser (circa 2028)

- 92 Corsair III non-transformable fighters (*Southern Cross* pg. 80)
- 48 Logan Veritechs (*Southern Cross* pg. 57)
- 60 AJACS Veritech Attack Copters (*Southern Cross* pg. 59)
- 24 VAF-6 Alpha Veritechs (*Sentinels* pg. 83)
- 48 VF-11 Thunderbolt Veritechs

- 12 Veritech Hover Tanks (*Southern Cross* pg. 62)
- 48 Cosmic Unit Space Battloids (*Southern Cross* pg. 67)
- 6 GMP Multi-Purpose Battloids (*Southern Cross* pg. 64)
- 12 GMP Security Robots (*Southern Cross* pg. 76)

- 2 TASC Assault Shuttles (*Southern Cross* pg. 83)

REF Tokugawa cruiser (circa 2030)

- 144 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 72 VBF-1 Beta Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 87)
- 20 VF-1 Veritechs (*Robotech RPG* pg. 47)
- 6 VF-1V Vindicators

- 500 Cyclones (assorted types, *Sentinels* pg. 75)

- 12 Veritech Hover Tanks (*Sentinels* pg. 93)
- 24 Mk VII Excalibers (*Sentinels* pg. 61)
- 24 Mk III Gladiators (*Sentinels* pg. 63)
- 6 Mk XI Raidar X (*Sentinels* pg. 66)
- 6 Mk XIII Spartans (*Sentinels* pg. 68)
- 3 M.A.C. IIIs (*Sentinels* pg. 65)
- 33 TBP-Z1 Tactical Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 70)
- 3 OBP-Z2 Officer's Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 72)

- 12 AAT-40 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 12 AAT-30 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 4 ARRAV Rocket Launchers (*Sentinels* pg. 108)
- 1 MTA Titan (*Sentinels* pg. 114)
- 1 Horizont Transatmospheric Shuttle (modified to carry MTA Titan, *Sentinels* pg. 94)

REF Tokugawa cruiser (circa 2043)

- 48 VAF-6 Alpha Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 82)
- 80 VAF-8 Alpha Fighters (32 have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 6 VAF-8R Recon Alpha Fighters
- 6 VAF-9 Alpha Fighters
- 24 VBF-1 Beta Fighters (*Sentinels* pg. 87)
- 54 VBF-2 Beta Fighters (22 have SF-10 Cloaking Devices)
- 6 VBF-2R Beta Fighters
- 6 VBF-3 Beta Fighters
- 6 VF-1V Vindicators

- 500 Cyclones (assorted types, mostly Second Generation Cyclones)

- 24 Veritech Hover Tanks (*Sentinels* pg. 93)
- 18 Mk VII Excalibers (*Sentinels* pg. 61)
- 18 Mk III Gladiators (*Sentinels* pg. 63)
- 12 Mk XI Raidar X (*Sentinels* pg. 66)
- 6 Mk XIII Spartans (*Sentinels* pg. 68)
- 3 M.A.C. IIIs (*Sentinels* pg. 65)
- 33 TBP-Z1 Tactical Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 70)
- 3 OBP-Z2 Officer's Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 72)

- 12 AAT-40 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 12 AAT-30 Assault Transports (*Sentinels* pg. 107)
- 4 ARRAV Rocket Launchers (*Sentinels* pg. 108)
- 1 MTA Titan (*Sentinels* pg. 114)
- 1 Horizont Transatmospheric Shuttle (modified to carry MTA Titan, *Sentinels* pg. 94)

In all three examples a Tokugawa cruiser will also have 16 TCH-4 Tractor-Haulers, 30 ML-3 Forklifts, 6 AMR-10 Mecha Retrieval Transport Vehicles, 8 REF Personnel Shuttles and 4 REF Cargo Shuttles onboard.

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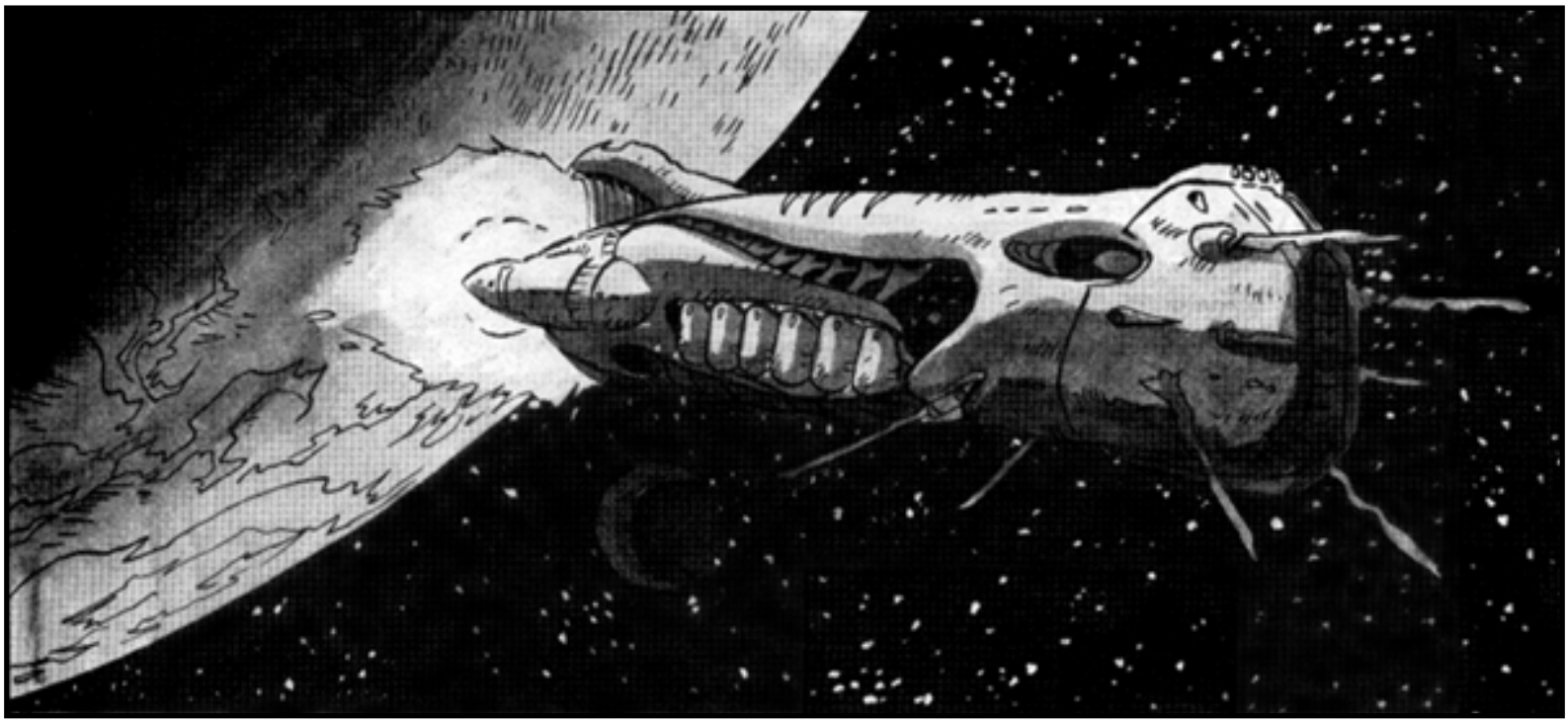
REF *WARRIOR*-CLASS DESTROYERS

Based on an original starship design by ***BILL SPANGLER, TIM ELDRED*** *and* ***FRED PERRY***
Published in ***Eternity Comics'*** ***Robotech Invid War*** *comic books.*
RPG Stats by ***DAVE DEITRICH*** *(deitrich@mcs.net)*



BACKGROUND

The ***Warrior*-class Destroyer** was designed and built by the Robotech Expeditionary Force (REF) in 2024, during the early part of the Sentinels War (First Invid War). Along with the *Exeter*-class Escorts, the Warriors were designed to defend REF bases as well as escort larger capital ships to protect against Invid strike forces. The destroyers were also designed for reconnaissance, and contain both powerful sensor systems and subspace transmitters/receivers for their size. The Warrior class has a definite Zentraedi look and feel to it, mostly due to the fact that a large number of its systems were taken directly from the Zentraedi *Salan* scout ship design. The use of Zentraedi technology greatly reduced the development time necessary for the destroyers, as well as lowering the cost of their manufacture since the Valivarre shipyards

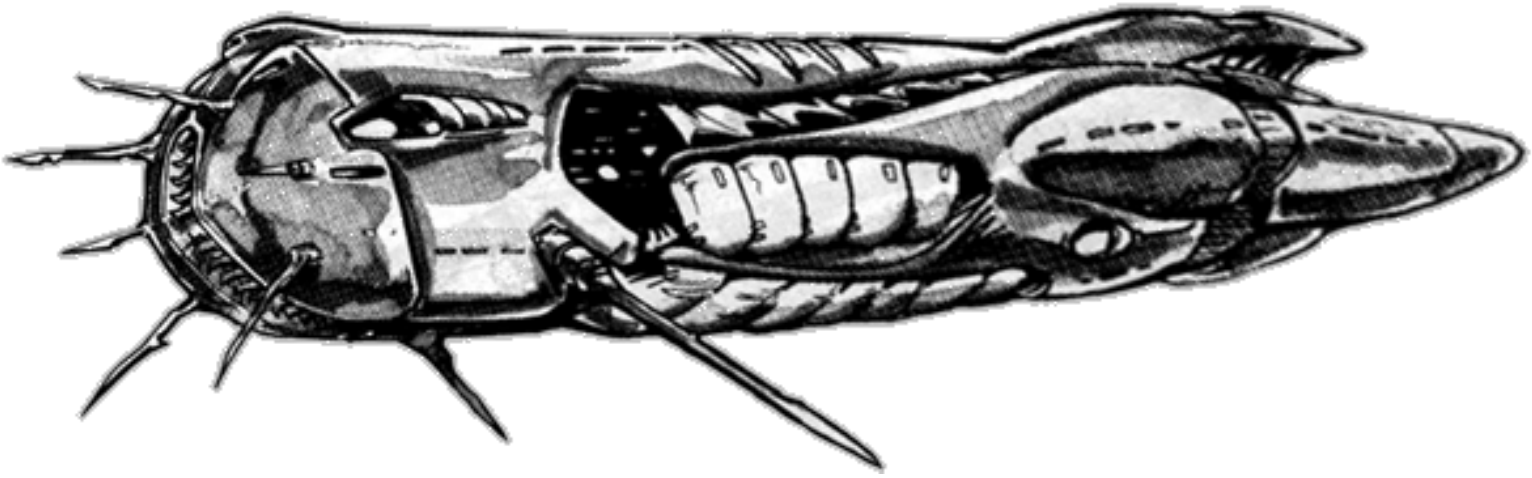
were already geared for manufacturing these systems and did not require extensive retooling.

The armament of the Warrior-class destroyer is impressive for its size. The main weaponry consists of two forward-mounted main laser cannons along with 8 concealed particle beam cannons. The destroyer also has six heavy missile launchers (4 forward, 2 reverse) capable of launching nuclear or reflex weaponry. As with all REF starships designed following the near-defeat at the battle of Tirol, the Warrior also has 20 retractable laser turrets and 4 retractable medium-range missile launchers for anti-mecha defense. In addition, the destroyer's modest landing bay can support up to 30 mecha of various types, along with 3 shuttles and other support craft. The Warrior also contains a pinpoint barrier system, as well as its own independent fold drive.

Although not as glamorous as other REF starships, the Warriors played an important part during the First Invid War providing valuable reconnaissance and defending REF bases against counterattacks as the Sentinels recaptured local group planets from the Regent's forces. During the final push to Optera near the end of the war many Warriors took part in border raids to disrupt Invid supply lines as well as diversionary skirmishes to keep Invid forces away from the main fleet. Many Warriors were destroyed during the final battles of the war, though their sacrifices led to the Sentinels' triumph and the death of the Invid Regent in 2032.

The Warrior-class destroyers were extremely popular with REF Zentraedi forces and even some important non-Zentraedi REF commanders. Following the end of the Sentinels War **Colonel Jonathan Wolff** took command of the ***RSS Wolfpack*** and made it the flagship of the REF Venus Attack Group, which was the first and only time a starship smaller than a cruiser has been made flagship of an entire REF fleet. However, the *Wolfpack* was hijacked by **Dana Sterling** and the 15th ATAC shortly after Wolff's arrival at Earth and returned to Tirol with refugees from the Second Robotech War. Dana Sterling was court-martialed for her actions and the *Wolfpack* was reassigned to the REF Mercury Defense Group to protect Tirol. In 2042 the *Wolfpack* was assigned to the Icarus Reconnaissance Mission and returned to the Sol system once again. Unfortunately the ship was destroyed shortly after arrival by the Invid Space Hive ring while trying to regain contact with REF Moon Base Copernicus.

The Warrior class served until 2057 when the class was retired in favor of newer RGF starship designs. Most of the destroyers that survived the Invid Wars were scrapped and recycled, although a few have been preserved. The *RSS Archer* is the most notable surviving example of this class, and is currently on display in the RGF Naval Museum orbiting Tirol. Warriors were originally manufactured at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards, though later they were also manufactured under contract at the Karbarran Space Works. At their height Warriors were manufactured at a rate of 15-20 per year.



RPG STATS

Government: Robotech Expeditionary Force, later Sentinels Alliance
Ship Type: Super Dimensional (Space Fold) Reconnaissance Destroyer
Class: *Warrior SFD-3000*
Manufacturer: Tirol (Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard), Karbarra (Karbarran Space Works).

Crew: 400 total
Officers: 25
Main Crew: 235
Flight Crew: 60
Mecha Pilots: 30
Troops: 50

Notable Ships of Class:

SFD-3064 Wolfpack launched 2028, made flagship of REF Venus Attack Group in 2033, hijacked by Dana Sterling same year, assigned to REF Icarus Reconnaissance Mission in 2042, destroyed by Invid Space Hive same year

SFD-3087 Archer launched 2030, survived all three Invid wars, retired in 2057, moored at RGF Naval Museum orbiting Tirol in 2061

MDC BY LOCATION:

(1)	Main Body	8,500
(2)	Forward Bridge	750
(3)	Flight Deck (bottom)	1,200
(4)	Main Engines (3)	2,000 each
(4)	Auxiliary Engines (2)	800 each
	Guidance Thrusters (24)	200 each

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    Main Lasers (2)                                  300 each
    Particle Beam Cannons (8)                         75 each
    Missile Launcher Tubes (6)                       150 each
    Retractable Laser Turrets (20)                   100 each
    Retractable Missile Launchers (8)                100 each
(5) Pin Point Barriers (4)                         5,000 each

(6) Forward Antennae (6)                              50 each
(6) Main Antennae (2)                                200 each
    Small Airlocks/Access Hatches (20)               250 each
    Main Airlocks (4)                                500 each
    Outer Hull (per 40ft area)                       200
    Interior walls (per 20ft area)                    20
```

NOTES:

1. Depleting the MDC of the main body will eliminate the destroyer. All internal systems will shut down, including life support and internal gravity. In addition, there is a 40% chance that the power systems will overload and the destroyer will explode, doing 1D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 2,000 ft (610 m) radius. Regardless of whether it explodes or not, the ship itself will be an unsalvageable floating wreck.
2. Destroying the forward bridge will instantly kill anyone on the command deck. However, there is an auxiliary bridge near the center of the ship that the surviving crew can take command from. If the main bridge is lost the ship will be operating at -2 initiative due to having to rely on backup systems.
3. Destroying the flight decks will greatly impair the destroyer's ability to deploy and recover mecha. Under normal circumstances the destroyer can launch or recover 4 mecha per turn. For every 300 points of damage the flight deck takes reduce this number by 1. If the flight deck reaches 0 MDC then it is *destroyed*; no mecha can be launched or recovered, 40+(1D6x10)% of the flight crew will be killed, and any mecha that have already been launched will need to find another place to land.
4. Depleting the MDC of the main engines will force the ship to rely on its secondary engines. Depleting the MDC of the main engines AND secondary engines will leave the ship adrift in space. If in an atmosphere, the ship will crash (destruction of the main engines will render the antigravity system useless due to loss of power).
5. The Pinpoint Barriers regenerate at a rate of 1,250 MD per second (2,500 MD per melee round). If destroyed, a barrier will completely regenerate within four seconds (2 melee rounds). See the Pinpoint Barrier System entry for details.
6. Destruction of the 6 forward antennae will knock out most of the destroyer's sensor systems. Main radar will be limited to only 20 miles (32 km), and subspace sensors will be offline. Destruction of the 2 main antennae will knock out hyperspace communications.

SPEEDS:

Speed (sublight): 0.20 speed of light (32,000 miles/51,500 km per second)

Speed (Auxiliary Drives): Mach 14
Space Fold: Range Unlimited (1 light year every 6 minutes).
Planet bound:

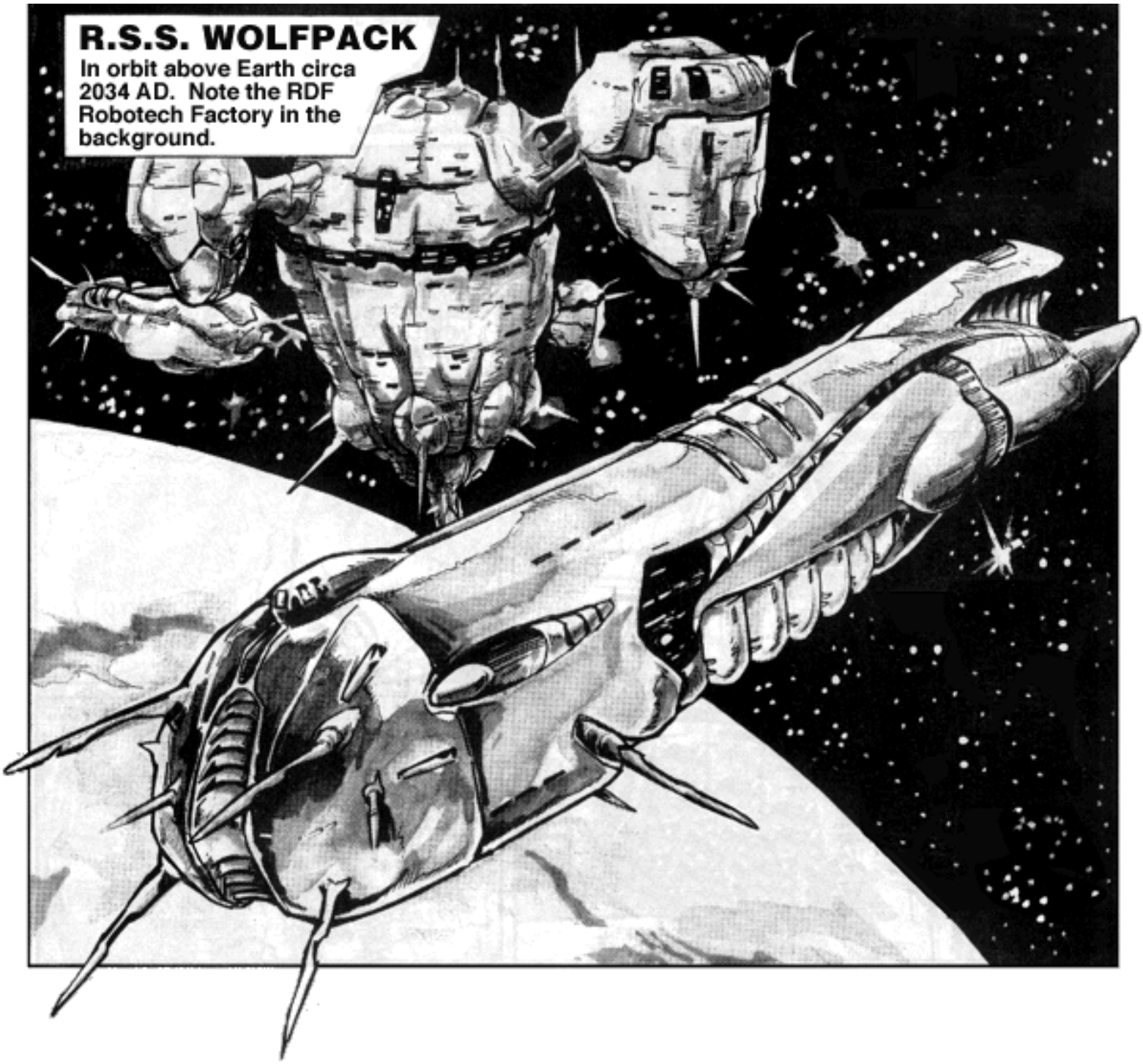
Has vertical take off and landing (VTOL) capability. Can reach speeds of up to Mach 8 in an upper planetary atmosphere, but not designed for extended flight or maneuvering. Can also travel underwater at up to 100mph (160 kmph) if absolutely necessary.

Maximum Range: Unlimited (powered by a protoculture reactor with an estimated life span of 20 years)

STATISTICAL DATA:

Length: 750 ft (250 m)
Width: 180 ft (55 m)
Height: 165 ft (50 m
Weight: 40,000 tons (standard)

Fold System: Robotech Research Group (RRG)-modified Shik-Telnekulla fold system cluster
Sublight Drive: Workl-Quatafilla macro nozzle cluster (RRG-modified)
Gravity Control System: Geteulmaqulla-Zollia internal gravity control system (RRG-modified)
Auxiliary Engine: REF Naval Engineering Class IX mass-conservation thrust system
Radar System: RRG Type XIV Hyperspace Sensor Cluster



WEAPON SYSTEMS:

1. **MAIN LASER CANNONS (2):** The main anti-starship weapons of the *Warrior*-class Destroyers are two zentraedi-style heavy laser cannons mounted below and to the rear on each side of the main bridge. These lasers are fixed forward and can only fire at targets directly in front of the destroyer. The lasers can be fired individually or at the same time; most commanders alternate between the two cannons to compensate for the lasers' recharge delay.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship

- **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
- **RANGE:** 500 miles (805 km) in an atmosphere, 1000 miles (1609 km) in space
- **DAMAGE:** 4D6x100 M.D. per blast
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once every other round
- **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

2. **PARTICLE BEAM CANNONS (8):** As a backup to the main laser cannons, The *Warrior* destroyers are equipped with 8 heavy particle beam cannons mounted in concealed hardpoints on the bow of the ship. These cannons have a limited range of motion; they can be adjusted 30 degrees to the left, right, above or below the centerline of the ship. The cannons are similar to the PBC-12 cannons used on the Mk VII Excalibur destroids, but have a longer range and greater power.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
    - **RANGE:** 100 miles (161 km) in an atmosphere, 200 miles (322 km) in space
    - **DAMAGE:** 5D10+50 M.D. per blast
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each PBC can fire once per round
    - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

3. **HEAVY MISSILE LAUNCHERS (6):** To further augment their anti-warship firepower, the *Warrior* destroyers are equipped with 6 torpedo-like missile tubes. Four of these tubes are aimed forward while two are mounted to the rear. The launchers contain long-range nuclear missiles and are intended for use heavy combat only.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **RANGE:** 2,000 miles (3,216 km)
    - **SPEED:** Mach 2+ (1,340 mph/2,140 kmph) in an atmosphere.
    - **DAMAGE:** 6D6x100 M.D.
    - **BLAST RADIUS:** 2,000 feet (610 m)
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each launcher tube holds one missile and must be reloaded after firing. Reloading a launcher tube takes 30 seconds (2 melee rounds). If loaded, all 6 tubes can fire at once for a volley of 6 nuclear missiles (!).
    - **PAYLOAD:** A typical destroyer carries 30 missiles in storage that can be readied for firing in about 30 minutes. Additional missiles can be carried if deemed necessary, however.
    - **NOTE:** These missiles CANNOT be used by variable fighters. Each missile is approximately 12 ft (3.6 m) long, about twice the size of a VR-152 Battler II cyclone.

4. **RETRACTABLE LASER TURRETS (20):** The destroyer has 20 retractable laser turrets mounted at various strategic places along the hull. These short-range lasers are intended primarily for anti-mecha defense, but can do moderate damage against enemy spacecraft that get too close. When not in use gun turrets are concealed within the hull underneath a sliding hatch. At most 10 lasers can be brought to bear on a single target.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense
- **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha
- **RANGE:** 30 miles (48.3 km) in an atmosphere, 60 miles (96.6 km) in space
- **DAMAGE:** 1D6x20 M.D. each. Several lasers can be directed to fire in volleys of 3 or more. A volley of 3 beams does 3D6x20 M.D., a volley of 6 beams does 6D6x20 M.D., and so on. A full volley of 10 beams aimed at a single target does 1D6x200 M.D. (!) if it hits.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once per melee, and can be combined in any volley combination of 3 or more lasers, up to 10 lasers. Volleys can be directed at different targets.
- **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited.
- **NOTE:** The lasers can be set on automatic during combat, during which time they have a +2 to strike due to their advanced tracking systems. The lasers tracking systems will target incoming missiles first and attacking mecha/aircraft second.

5. **RETRACTABLE MEDIUM MISSILE LAUNCHERS (4):** In addition to the heavy missile launchers, the *Warrior* destroyers are armed with four medium range missile launchers which are also intended for anti-mecha defense. Each launcher contains 10 missile tubes allowing volleys of up to 10 missiles to be fired at a single target per launcher. Once depleted, the missile launchers are reloaded by an automated loading system that takes 15 seconds (one melee round) to reload all 10 missiles. Armor-piercing smart missiles are usually used to avoid chances of friendly fighters being shot down by the missiles.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Aircraft
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **MISSILE TYPES:** Any type of REF Medium Range Missile can be used. Smart missiles are commonly used to avoid hitting friendly aircraft.
    - **RANGE:** Varies, typically 60 miles (80.4 km).
    - **SPEED:** Varies, typically 1600mph (2571kmph) in an atmosphere.
    - **DAMAGE:** Varies, typically 2D4x10 M.D.
    - **BLAST RADIUS:** Varies, typically 15 feet.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 missiles per launcher.
    - **PAYLOAD:** Each launcher holds 10 missiles. Once the missiles are expended the launcher is reloaded within 1 round via an automated system. The reload system holds 50 missiles per launcher.

6. **DS-1 PINPOINT BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** Originally developed by Dr. Emil Lang onboard the SDF-1 during the First Robotech War, the Pinpoint Barrier System is a standard defense system on board most REF starships, including the *Warrior* destroyers. The system generates four small disc-shaped force fields that can be positioned anywhere along the ship to deflect missiles, energy beams or projectiles. Each pinpoint barrier is about 200 ft (61 m) in length and can absorb up to 5,000 MD in damage, which then regenerates within five seconds (3 melee attacks). The barriers can also be layered on top of each other to generate a field which provides 20,000 MDC and can even deflect heavy particle beams (usually).

The four barriers are controlled by operators in the command tower of the carrier. These operators are instructed to defend (1) the forward bridge, (2) main engines, (3) main weapon systems, and (4) the flight deck, in that order. The operators primarily concentrate on defending the ship against larger spacecraft and leave defense against mecha attacking the destroyer to the Veritechs and retractible weapon systems.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense (the pinpoint barrier system cannot be used as a weapon)
- **RANGE:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) from the surface of the vessel.
- **DAMAGE CAPACITY:** Can sustain up to 5,000 MD per round. Regenerates at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round.
- **RADIUS:** 200 ft (61 m)
- **DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT:** Can move from one end of the destroyer to the other in less than a single round. Trained operators can attempt to block attacks up to 8 times per melee (counts as a parry) and are at +7 to block. Untrained characters can parry up to their number of hand-to-hand attacks with their normal parry bonuses only.
- **PAYLOAD:** Nearly inexhaustible. Will work as long as system is functional (see below) and engines are intact. If main engines are destroyed, the barrier will loose power and not function.
- **NOTE:** If all four barriers are grouped in a single spot they can deflect a heavy particle beam attack, such as the one generated by Zentraedi or Robotech Master warships. However, the beam will completely destroy all four barriers and put incredible strain on the pinpoint barrier system to the point where it may short out. After deflecting an energy beam, roll percentile dice on the table below to determine additional effects/damage.
    - **01-15:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **16-30:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **31-45:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair (yes, DAYS of work).
    - **46-60:** Completely destroyed! System can be rebuilt, but will require new parts and 2D6 DAYS of work to replace.
    - **61-75:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair.
    - **76-90:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
    - **91-95:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
    - **96-00:** It's a miracle! Trivial damage only, system will be operational again in only 4D6 melee rounds!

SYSTEMS OF NOTE:

- **ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION SYSTEM:** The Warrior destroyers are equipped with an anti-gravity propulsion system used for planetary landings and liftoffs. The system is good for vertical ascent/descent only and can lift the ship at speeds of up to 1,320 feet (400 m) per minute. The system will function so long as the main engines can supply energy to it.
- **HYPERSPACE COMMUNICATIONS:** The destroyer is equipped with a hyperspace communications relay which allows faster-than-light communication between the ships and other

vessels or planetary bases. Hyperspace communications are still not instantaneous, however. Audio/video communication travels through hyperspace at a rate of about 5 seconds per light year, so messages communicated over vast distances can still take days, weeks, or months to arrive.

- **LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS:** The Warrior destroyers have sufficient life support to provide breathable air and comfortable temperatures for 500 people for up to 15 years (air is recycled). In an emergency the life support system can support up to 800 people at one time, though living conditions onboard will get extremely cramped at that point. The carrier also holds sufficient food and water to support 400 people for up to 6 months.
- **LONG-RANGE LASER/SATELLITE RELAY COMMUNICATIONS:** The impressive communications array of the destroyer can communicate with up to 500 craft simultaneously at ranges of up to 900 miles (1,440 km). This range can be boosted indefinitely by using satellites or other spacecraft to relay communications.
- **LONG-RANGE RADAR:** The radar array of the Warrior destroyers can track and identify up to 1,000 craft simultaneously. The radar system has a 2,000 mile/3,200 km range.
- **SPACE FOLD SYSTEM:** For FTL propulsion, the destroyer is equipped with a modified version of a Zentraedi fold drive, capable of propelling the ship through hyperspace at speeds up to 3.28x10^10 mps (5.25x10^10 kmps), or 1 light year per 6 minutes. However, unlike larger capital ships the Warrior **CANNOT** transport other ships with it when it folds. The range of the fold drive is theoretically unlimited except by the life expectancy of the spacecraft.
- **SUBLIGHT ENGINES:** As a backup to the Fold System, the destroyer is equipped with sublight engines that can propel the ship at speeds up to 0.20 speed of light (32,000 miles/51,500 km per second) in space. Note that these engines are mainly intended for rapid movement inside a planetary system and are not suited for long voyages between star systems. In a planetary atmosphere the carrier is limited to speeds of Mach 3 at low altitudes or Mach 8 at high altitudes due to hull stress.
- **SUBSPACE MASS SENSORS:** The Warrior destroyers are equipped with subspace sensors which are based on the same principles as the hyperspace communications array. These sensors can essentially instantly detect mass readings and movement of objects up to 1 AU (93 million miles) distant from the carrier, and the readings are used both for early warning and for navigation when travelling at sublight speeds. Readings taken with the subspace sensors are not very detailed (-25% penalty when trying to identify a detected object) and cannot detect objects of less than 60,000 kg (this includes most variable fighters).

MECHA COMPLEMENT:

The landing bay can hold and support a grand total of 30 veritechs/destroids of any type, as long as the mecha are smaller than 50 ft (15.2 m) and weigh less than 40 tons each. The actual complement of mecha will vary; A Warrior destroyer assigned to escort or long-range reconnaissance will usually have 12 Alphas (VAF-6 or VAF-8), 12 Betas (VBF-1 or VBF-2), and 6 Destroids (Gladiator, Excalibur, or Raidar X) aboard, while a destroyer assigned to support an invasion may have 6 Alphas and 24 Destroids. Other combinations are possible. Also included are 50 Cyclones of various types (for use by the troops on board), 6 TCH-4 Tractor-Haulers, 12 ML-3 Forklifts, and 3 REF Personnel Shuttles.

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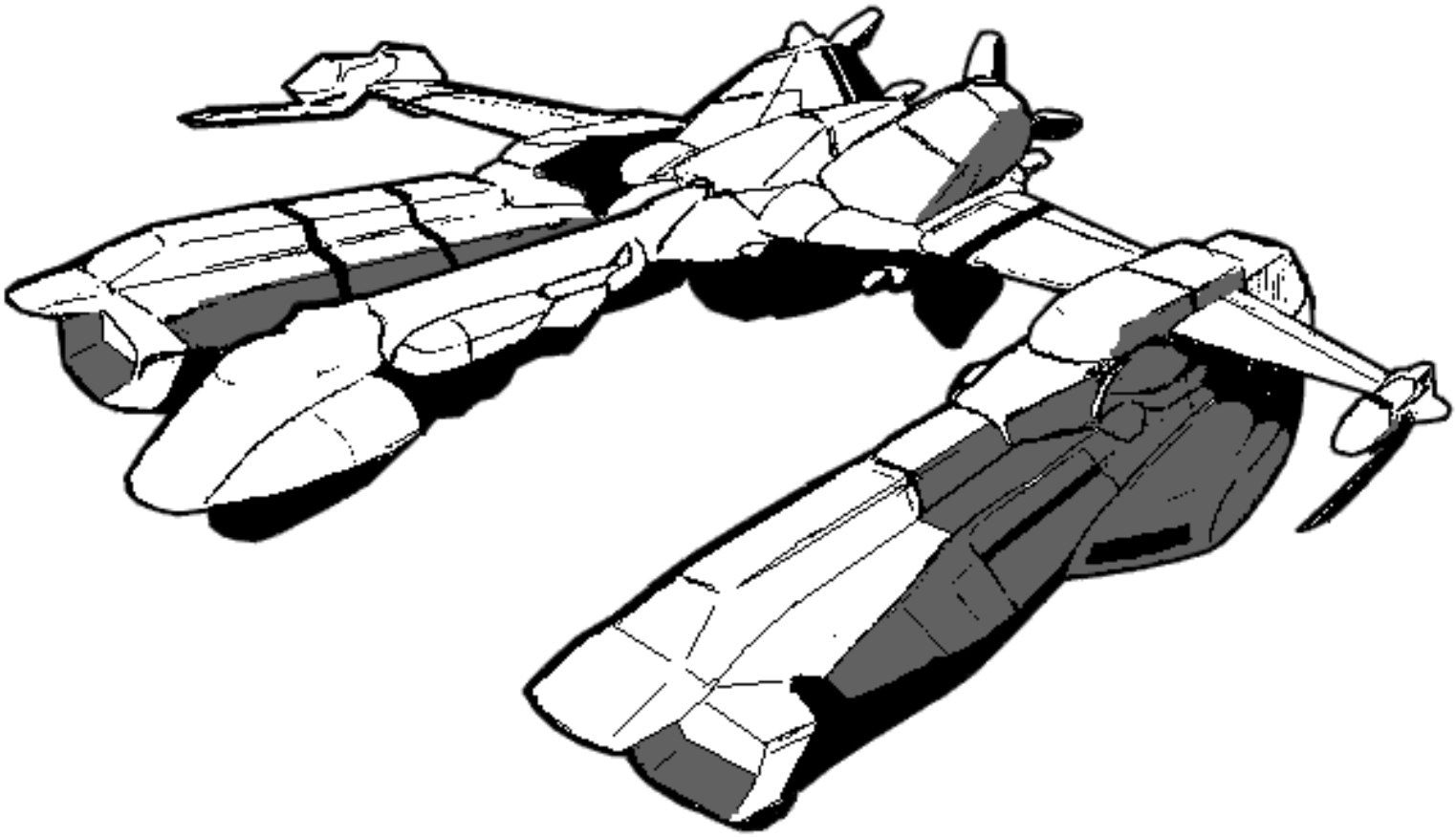
The following material is from **THE THIRD INVID WAR**, a fan supplement by **Dave Deitrich** and **Chris Meadows**. Please feel free to use, copy, and distribute it as you see fit. All we ask is that you give proper credit to us and do not claim that it is your own work. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

REF *EXETER*-CLASS ESCORTS

*Based on a starship design by **JOHN WALTRIP** and **JASON WALTRIP***
*Published in **Eternity Comics' Robotech II: The Sentinels** comic books.*
*Original Artwork by **PRESLEY H. CANNADY II** (cannady@magiccarpet.com)*
*RPG Stats by **DAVE DEITRICH** (deitrich@mcs.net)*



BACKGROUND

The ***Exeter*-class Escort** has perhaps the most intriguing background of any capital ship class in the REF fleet. Originally named the *Ark Angel*-class, the escorts were built shortly after the first REF engagement with the Invid over Tirol in 2022. During this battle enormous numbers of Invid mecha overwhelmed REF Veritech squadrons and did serious damage to the *SDF-3 Pioneer* and other REF capital ships before being forced to withdraw. This near-defeat pointed out a fundamental flaw in the REF's war strategy. Based on their experiences with the Zentraedi the REF had expected to encounter a large number of capital ships around Tirol and had built up the expeditionary force fleet accordingly. However, the forces of the Invid Regent were based on hit-and-run tactics using large numbers of smaller mecha such as Scouts and Troopers. Unprepared for assaults by large numbers of mecha, the REF fleet took heavy losses in the early battles of the Sentinels War due to inadequate anti-mecha defenses.

The Ark Angel-class escorts were designed to counteract this weakness. The ship is armed with 40 retractable laser turrets and 8 retractable missile turrets, double the anti-mecha defenses of larger capital ships such as the Warrior-class destroyers and the Tokugawa-class cruisers. In addition, the escorts can carry four wings of Veritechs in their enormous launching bays located on each wing. Designed by the same engineers who built the Horizont-class troop shuttles, the escorts have the same graceful "flying swan" body style that makes them look too delicate for warship duties. However, the ships are surprisingly durable and, more importantly, agile enough to surprise many mecha pilots. The vessels are even fold-capable, allowing them to keep up with large convoys and protect them from Invid attacks. The only glaring weakness of the class is that it lacks heavy weaponry for ship-to-ship combat. Aside from a single heavy laser, the escort must rely on its fighter wings to protect itself from enemy warships.

The *RSS Ark Angel*, the prototype ship for the design, was the first starship produced by the REF at the recently captured Tirolian shipyards. However, shortly after the warship's initial test flights were completed the Ark Angel was hijacked by Colonel Jonathan Wolff and a group of officers and crew loyal to Rick Hunter and the Sentinels, who were trapped on the dying planet Praxis. After Wolff rescued the Sentinels the freedom fighters commandeered the ship and used it to defeat the Invid on Gaurda and Haydon IV. Following the Sentinels victory at Haydon the grateful Haydonites gave the heroes the last surviving Haydonite cruiser, which Admiral Hunter ironically decided to also name *Ark Angel*. Both *Ark Angels* were used by the Sentinels throughout the rest of the Sentinels War. Unfortunately the escort *Ark Angel* was destroyed above Optera during the final battle of the war.

Eventually the charges against Jonathan Wolff and his associates for stealing the original *Ark Angel* were dropped. However, not wishing to glorify the hijacking of one of their ships the REF decided to change the name of the class to *Exeter*, which was the second escort produced at Tirol. The name *Ark Angel* was officially assigned to the Sentinels' haydonite cruiser when it became part of the REF fleet in 2033.

Exeter-class escorts served as an important part of the REF fleet throughout all three Invid wars. The class was eventually retired in 2052, although escorts continued to serve in the RGF fleet until the late 2070s. Several ships have been purchased by commercial interests and are now used as cargo vessels, a job in which they perform extremely well since they have both space fold and atmospheric re-entry capabilities. Exeters were produced at the Fantoma Orbiting Shipyards, Karbarran Space Works and Peryton IV Shipyards, sometimes reaching production rates as high as 25 per year.

RPG STATS

Government: Robotech Expeditionary Force, later Sentinels Alliance
Ship Type: Super Dimensional (Space Fold) Escort
Class: *Exeter SFE-2000* (originally *Ark Angel* Class)
Manufacturer: Tirol (Fantoma Orbiting Shipyard), Karbarra (Karbarran Space Works), Peryton (Peryton IV Shipyards).

Crew: 390 total
Officers: 20
Main Crew: 191
Flight Crew: 100
Mecha Pilots: 48 + 6 reserve
Troops: 25

Notable Ships of Class:

SDF-07 Ark Angel launched 2024, hijacked by Jonathan Wolff same year, served with Sentinels 2024-2032, destroyed over Optera in 2032

SFE-2002 Exeter launched 2025, assigned to **REF Venus Attack Group** in 2033, destroyed by Invid in 2035

MDC BY LOCATION:

(1)	Main Bridge	500
(2)	Forward Command Section	1,200
(2)	Neck Section	600
(3)	Main Body/Engineering Section	3,200
(4)	Flight Deck Nacelles (2)	3,500 each
	Wings (2)	900 each
(5)	Main Engines (3)	1,500 each
(5)	Auxiliary Engines (2)	800 each
	Guidance Thrusters (30)	200 each
	Main Laser (1, bottom)	300
	Retractable Laser Turrets (40)	100 each
	Retractable Missile Launchers (8)	100 each
(6)	Pin Point Barriers (4)	5,000 each
	Small Airlocks/Access Hatches (12)	250 each
	Main Airlocks (2)	500 each
	Outer Hull (per 40ft area)	200
	Interior walls (per 20ft area)	20
	Hangar Doors (4)	500 each

NOTES:

1. Destroying the forward bridge will instantly kill anyone on the command deck. However, there is an auxiliary bridge in the engineering section that the surviving crew can take command from. If the main bridge is lost the ship will be operating at -2 initiative due to having to rely on backup systems.
2. Depleting the MDC of the forward command section or neck section will seriously impair (practically destroy) the ship. (1D4x10)% of the crew will be killed, the main bridge will be lost (see above), the main laser will be destroyed, and 16 concealed lasers and 2 concealed missile launchers will be destroyed. The surviving crew can effectively command the ship from the engineering section, but will be at -5 initiative and -2 to dodge due to severe systems damage.
3. Depleting the MDC of the main body/engineering section will eliminate the escort. All internal systems will shut down, including life support and internal gravity. In addition, there is a 40% chance that the power systems will overload and the ship will explode, doing 1D6x1,000 M.D. to everything in a 1,500 ft (458 m) radius. Regardless of whether it explodes or not, the ship itself will be an unsalvageable floating wreck.
4. Destroying the flight deck nacelles will greatly impair the escort's ability to deploy and recover mecha. Under normal circumstances the destroyer can launch or recover 8 mecha per nacelle, per turn. For every 400 points of damage a flight deck takes reduce this number by 1. If the flight deck reaches 0 MDC then it is *destroyed*; no mecha can be launched or recovered, (1D6x10)% of the flight crew will be killed, and any mecha that have already been launched will need to find another place to land.
5. Depleting the MDC of the main engines will force the ship to rely on its secondary engines. Depleting the MDC of the main engines AND secondary engines will leave the ship adrift in space. If in an atmosphere, the ship will crash (destruction of the main engines will render the antigravity system useless due to loss of power). The wings do not provide sufficient lift for the escort to attempt a controlled landing.
6. The Pinpoint Barriers regenerate at a rate of 1,250 MD per second (2,500 MD per melee round). If destroyed, a barrier will completely regenerate within four seconds (2 melee rounds). See the Pinpoint Barrier System entry for details.

SPEEDS:

Speed (sublight): 0.24 speed of light (38,400 miles/61,800 km per second)
Speed (Auxiliary Drives): Mach 15
Space Fold: Range Unlimited (1 light year every 6 minutes).
Planet bound:

Has vertical take off and landing (VTOL) capability. Can reach speeds of up to Mach 5 in an upper planetary atmosphere, but not designed for extended flight or maneuvering. Can also travel underwater at up to 100 mph (160 kmph) if absolutely necessary.

Maximum Range: Unlimited (powered by a protoculture reactor with an estimated life span of 20 years)

STATISTICAL DATA:

Length: 700 ft (233 m)

Width: 518 ft (158 m)
Height: 210 ft (64 m)
Weight: 19,200 tons (standard)

Fold System: Robotech Research Group (RRG) Mk. 2G fold system cluster
Sublight Drive: REF Naval Engineering Class VII macro nozzle cluster
Gravity Control System: REF Naval Engineering Class IV internal gravity control system
Auxiliary Engine: REF Naval Engineering Class VIII mass-conservation thrust system
Radar System: RRG Type X Hyperspace Sensor Cluster

WEAPON SYSTEMS:

1. **MAIN LASER CANNON (1):** The only anti-starship weapon the Exeter-class escort carries is a single heavy laser cannon mounted below the command section of the ship. The laser is fixed forward and can only fire at targets directly in front of the ship.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Heavy Assault
    - **RANGE:** 500 miles (805 km) in an atmosphere, 1000 miles (1609 km) in space
    - **DAMAGE:** 4D6x100 M.D. per blast
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** The laser can fire once every other round
    - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited

2. **RETRACTABLE LASER TURRETS (40):** The escort's main anti-mecha weaponry consists of 40 retractable laser turrets mounted at various strategic places along the hull. These short-range are devastating against mecha and can do moderate damage against any enemy spacecraft that get too close. When not in use gun turrets are concealed within the hull underneath a sliding hatch. At most 20 lasers can be brought to bear on a single target.

    - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha
    - **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Defense
    - **RANGE:** 30 miles (48.3 km) in an atmosphere, 60 miles (96.6 km) in space
    - **DAMAGE:** 1D6x20 M.D. each. Several lasers can be directed to fire in volleys of 3 or more. A volley of 3 beams does 3D6x20 M.D., a volley of 6 beams does 6D6x20 M.D., and so on. A full volley of 20 beams aimed at a single target does 1D6x400 M.D. (!) if it hits.
    - **RATE OF FIRE:** Each laser can fire once per melee, and can be combined in any volley combination of 3 or more lasers, up to 10 lasers. Volleys can be directed at different targets.
    - **PAYLOAD:** Unlimited.
    - **NOTE:** The lasers can be set on automatic during combat, during which time they have a +3 to strike due to their advanced tracking systems. The lasers tracking systems will target incoming missiles first and attacking mecha/aircraft second.

3. **RETRACTABLE MEDIUM MISSILE LAUNCHERS (8):** In addition to the retractable lasers, the Exeter escorts carry eight medium range missile launchers which are also intended for anti-mecha

defense. Each launcher contains 10 missile tubes allowing volleys of up to 10 missiles to be fired at a single target per launcher. Once depleted, the missile launchers are reloaded by an automated loading system that takes 15 seconds (one melee round) to reload all 10 missiles. Armor-piercing smart missiles are usually used to avoid chances of friendly fighters being shot down by the missiles.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha
- **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Warship
- **MISSILE TYPES:** Any type of REF Medium Range Missile can be used. Smart missiles are commonly used to avoid hitting friendly aircraft.
- **RANGE:** Varies, typically 60 miles (80.4 km).
- **SPEED:** Varies, typically 1600mph (2571kmph) in an atmosphere.
- **DAMAGE:** Varies, typically 2D4x10 M.D.
- **BLAST RADIUS:** Varies, typically 15 feet.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 missiles per launcher.
- **PAYLOAD:** Each launcher holds 10 missiles. Once the missiles are expended the launcher is reloaded within 1 round via an automated system. The reload system holds 60 missiles per launcher.

4. **DS-1 PINPOINT BARRIER DEFENSE SYSTEM:** Originally developed by Dr. Emil Lang onboard the SDF-1 during the First Robotech War, the Pinpoint Barrier System is a standard defense system on board most REF starships, including the *Exeter* escorts. The system generates four small disc-shaped force fields that can be positioned anywhere along the ship to deflect missiles, energy beams or projectiles. Each pinpoint barrier is about 200 ft (61 m) in length and can absorb up to 5,000 MD in damage, which then regenerates within five seconds (3 melee attacks). The barriers can also be layered on top of each other to generate a field which provides 20,000 MDC and can even deflect heavy particle beams (usually).

   The four barriers are controlled by operators in the command tower of the carrier. These operators are instructed to defend (1) the command section, (2) main engines, (3) flight decks, and (4) engineering section, in that order. The operators primarily concentrate on defending the ship against larger spacecraft and leave defense against mecha attacking the destroyer to the Veritechs and retractable weapon systems.

   - **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Defense (the pinpoint barrier system cannot be used as a weapon)
   - **RANGE:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) from the surface of the vessel.
   - **DAMAGE CAPACITY:** Can sustain up to 5,000 MD per round. Regenerates at a rate of 2,500 MD per melee round.
   - **RADIUS:** 200 ft (61 m)
   - **DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT:** Can move from one end of the destroyer to the other in less than a single round. Trained operators can attempt to block attacks up to 8 times per melee (counts as a parry) and are at +7 to block. Untrained characters can parry up to their number of hand-to-hand attacks with their normal parry bonuses only.
   - **PAYLOAD:** Nearly inexhaustible. Will work as long as system is functional (see below) and engines are intact. If main engines are destroyed, the barrier will loose power and not function.
   - **NOTE:** If all four barriers are grouped in a single spot they can deflect a heavy particle beam

attack, such as the one generated by Zentraedi or Robotech Master warships. However, the beam will completely destroy all four barriers and put incredible strain on the pinpoint barrier system to the point where it may short out. After deflecting an energy beam, roll percentile dice on the table below to determine additional effects/damage.

- **01-15:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
- **16-30:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
- **31-45:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair (yes, DAYS of work).
- **46-60:** Completely destroyed! System can be rebuilt, but will require new parts and 2D6 DAYS of work to replace.
- **61-75:** Major damage, system will require 2D6x10 hours to repair.
- **76-90:** Minor damage, system will require 4D6 hours to repair.
- **91-95:** Lucked out, system will be operational in 1D6 hours.
- **96-00:** It's a miracle! Trivial damage only, system will be operational again in only 4D6 melee rounds!

SYSTEMS OF NOTE:

- **ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION SYSTEM:** The Exeter escorts are equipped with an anti-gravity propulsion system used for planetary landings and liftoffs. The system is good for vertical ascent/descent only and can lift the ship at speeds of up to 1,320 feet (400 m) per minute. The system will function so long as the main engines can supply energy to it.
- **HYPERSPACE COMMUNICATIONS:** The escort is equipped with a hyperspace communications relay which allows faster-than-light communication between the ships and other vessels or planetary bases. Hyperspace communications are still not instantaneous, however. Audio/video communication travels through hyperspace at a rate of about 5 seconds per light year, so messages communicated over vast distances can still take days, weeks, or months to arrive.
- **LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS:** The Exeter destroyers have sufficient life support to provide breathable air and comfortable temperatures for 500 people for up to 15 years (air is recycled). In an emergency the life support system can support up to 800 people at one time, though living conditions onboard will get extremely cramped at that point. The carrier also holds sufficient food and water to support 400 people for up to 6 months.
- **LONG-RANGE LASER/SATELLITE RELAY COMMUNICATIONS:** The communications array of the escort can communicate with up to 500 craft simultaneously at ranges of up to 600 miles (960 km). This range can be boosted indefinitely by using satellites or other spacecraft to relay communications.
- **LONG-RANGE RADAR:** The radar array of the Exeter can track and identify up to 500 craft simultaneously. The radar system has a 600 mile/960 km range.
- **SPACE FOLD SYSTEM:** For FTL propulsion the escort is equipped with a fold drive, capable of propelling the ship through hyperspace at speeds up to 3.28x10^10 mps (5.25x10^10 kmps), or 1 light year per 6 minutes. When executing a space fold the Exeter will transport any ships within a 1 mile (1.6 km) radius with it, allowing it to transport up to about a dozen smaller ships with it, if necessary. The range of the fold drive is theoretically unlimited except by the life expectancy of the spacecraft.
- **SUBLIGHT ENGINES:** As a backup to the Fold System, the escort is equipped with sublight engines that can propel the ship at speeds up to 0.24 speed of light (38,400 miles/61,800 km per second) in space. Note that these engines are mainly intended for rapid movement inside a planetary system and

are not suited for long voyages between star systems. In a planetary atmosphere the carrier is limited to speeds of Mach 2 at low altitudes or Mach 5 at high altitudes due to hull stress.

- **SUBSPACE MASS SENSORS:** The Exeter is equipped with subspace sensors which are based on the same principles as the hyperspace communications array. These sensors can essentially instantly detect mass readings and movement of objects up to 1 AU (93 million miles) distant from the ship, and the readings are used both for early warning and for navigation when travelling at sublight speeds. Readings taken with the subspace sensors are not very detailed (-25% penalty when trying to identify a detected object) and cannot detect objects of less than 60,000 kg (this includes most mecha).

MECHA COMPLEMENT:

Each landing bay nacelle can hold and support up to 24 veritechs/destroids of any type (48 total), as long as the mecha are smaller than 50 ft (15.2 m) and weigh less than 40 tons each. Destroids are rare on Exeter escorts since they are usually restricted to space duties, however the final mecha breakdown depends on the mission. A typical mecha complement for an Exeter will include:

- 24 Alpha Veritechs (VAF-6 or VAF-8)
- 12 Beta Veritechs (VBF-1 or VBF-2)
- 4 Logan Veritechs (*Southern Cross* pg. 57)
- 7 TBP-Z1 Tactical Battle Pods (*Sentinels* pg. 70)
- 1 OBP-Z2 Officer's Battle Pod (*Sentinels* pg. 72)

An Exeter will also have 25 Cyclones of various types (for use by the troops), 8 TCH-4 Tractor-Haulers, 14 ML-3 Forklifts, and 4 REF Personnel Shuttles onboard.

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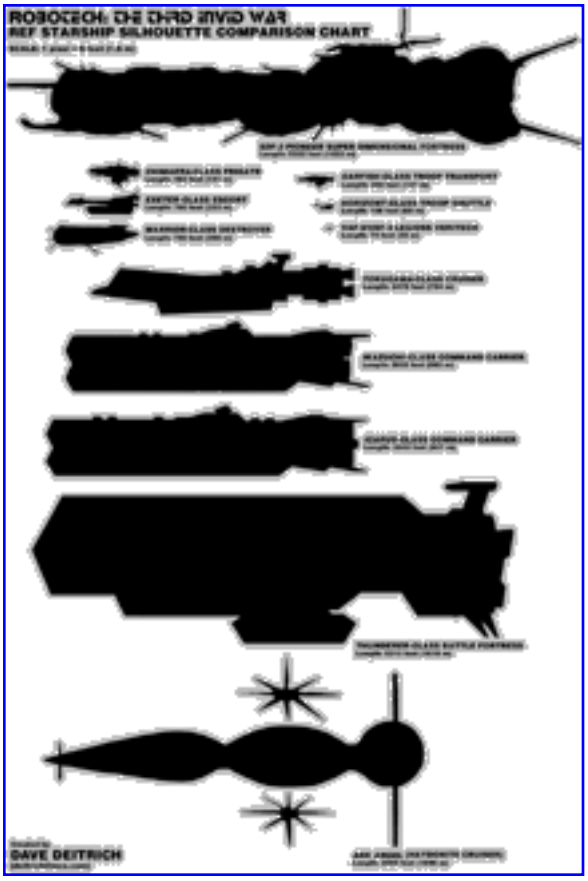
NEW STARSHIPS OF THE THIRD INVID WAR



Although Veritechs and Cyclones are widely considered to be the greatest technological marvels of the 21st century, no mecha can generate as much wonder or romanticism as the massive REF starships that were in service during the Invid Wars. The sheer size of the REF fleet is considered one of humanity's greatest achievements. In 2020 Earth's stellar fleet consisted solely of the ***SDF-3 Pioneer***, a few outdated ARMD platforms, and a handful of refurbished Zentraedi warships. During the Sentinels War/First Invid War (2022-2032) the REF managed to capture the ancient Tirolian shipyards built within Fantoma's outer asteroid belt. Although moderately damaged from the Invid invasion of Tirol, REF technicians were able to repair some of the massive factories and drydocks, and by 2024 the first new-generation REF starship, the *Exeter*-class escort ***Ark Angel***, was launched. By the time the Invid Regis invaded Earth for the first time in 2035 the REF starfleet consisted of over 500 warships, manned mostly by human, tirolian, and micronized zentraedi crews.

Following the end of the First Invid War and General T.R. Edwards' failed coup attempt in 2032, the surviving REF starships was reorganized into two separate fleets, initially named after planets in the Sol system to remind the REF soldiers of home. The first fleet, the **REF Mercury Defense Group**, was assigned to protect the planet Tirol, the Tirolian shipyards, and the main REF base of operations. The Mercury group remained in this role until the creation of the Robotech Guardian Forces in 2051. The second fleet was named the **REF Venus Attack Group**, and the famous war hero General Johnathan Wolff was assigned to command the fleet. Following a general refit to repair ship damage from the First Invid War the Venus group was sent to Earth to defend agains the Robotech Masters and the Invid in 2033 (the REF was unaware that the Robotech Masters had already been defeated by the Southern Cross armies in 2032).

Unfortunately the Venus group seemed to be ill-fated from the beginning. Two *Tokugawa*-class Cruisers and several escort ships failed to materialize from hyperspace when the fleet defolded in the Sol system. The loss of these ships has never been fully explained, although eventually flaws in the fold navigation systems were blamed for the loss. Then shortly after the Venus group's arrival Johnathan Wolff's flagship, the *RSS Wolfpack*, was hijacked by Dana Sterling and the 15th ATAC, who escaped and

returned to Tirol along with over 200 surviving clones from the Robotech Masters' mothership. Low morale and systems failures continue to plague the Venus group for the next two years while General Wolff made a vain attempt to re-unite the surviving Earth governments and the badly-mauled Armies of the Southern Cross in preparation for an invasion by the Invid. In 2035 the Venus group was taken by surprise and destroyed when the forces of the Invid Regis and her forces invaded Earth. According to survivors the Venus fleet was completely destroyed in less than 15 minutes of combat with the Invid.

Meanwhile back at Tirol the third REF fleet, the **REF Mars Attack Group**, was being completed at the Tirolian shipyards. The Mars group was the first fleet to use both starships constructed at the Tirolian shipyards and ships constructed under contract by the Karbarran Space Works. In addition, since most of the veteran REF soldiers had been lost with the REF Venus group the Mars group consisted mostly of fresh graduates from the newly-opened REF Academies on Tirol. Based on information gained from Dana Sterling and the 15th ATAC and the fact that all contact had been lost with the Venus fleet, the Mars attack group was dispatched to earth in 2036 with orders to help Wolff fortify Earth, or attack the Invid command center if the Venus group was already destroyed. Unfortunately despite their high morale and optomism the Mars group was severly outgunned by the Invid, and the fleet was destroyed in Earth orbit shortly after arriving in the Sol system. Only a few survivors made it to Earth, including the now-famous war hero Lt. Scott Bernard.

By now the REF high command was becoming increasingly concerned with the Invid Regis, almost to the point of panic. Even while the Mars fleet was being completed plans were under way to build the **REF Jupiter Attack Group**, the largest attack fleet ever constructed by the REF. The Jupiter group would be split into four different wings, commanded by the ***SDF-3 Pioneer***, the haydonite cruiser ***Ark Angel***, and the newly commissioned *Thunderer*-class battle fortresses ***SDF-4 Thunderer*** and ***SDF-5 Izumo***. The Jupiter Attack Group would contain almost all of the remaining REF fleet, including most of the ships of the Mercury defense group. Only a few ships would be left behind to defend Tirol during the fleet's absence. The Jupiter attack group was intended to be a final drive to destroy the Invid. The REF high command even made a highly-controversial decision to include the experimental Neutron-S missiles with the fleet, to be used to destroy the surface of the Earth if defeat was imminent. On July 24, 2038 the Jupiter Attack Group folded from Tirol to Earth.

However, fate once again turned against the REF. The *SDF-3 Pioneer* failed to emerge from hyperspace when the fleet defolded in the Sol system. Rather than delay the attack to wait for the SDF-3, General

Reinhardt took command of the fleet and reorganized it into two attack wings, led by the *Thunderer* and the *Izumo*. The *Ark Angel* would remain behind with a few ships and wait for the SDF-3 to appear. The *Izumo* led the first attack wave against Reflex Point, the Invid command center, but due to poor intelligence the REF fleet greatly underestimated the strength of the Invid forces. Despite new weapons such as the VAF-7 Shadow Fighters the first wing of the Jupiter attack group was crushed. Aboard the *Thunderer* General Reinhardt led the second wing against the Invid and prepared to use the Neutron-S missiles if necessary. However, on Earth a group of freedom fighters led by Scott Bernard managed to fight their way into Reflex Point and confronted the Invid Regis. Following some tense philosophical debate the Invid simualgents Ariel and Sera convinced the Regis to abandon Earth, and as Reinhardt launched the Neutron-S missiles the Regis and the Invid left the planet. The Regis' departure completely destroyed the Neutron-S missiles, the *Thunderer*, and the remains of the first and second attack wings. Only the *Ark Angel* and the reserve forces of the Jupiter attack group survived the final battle of the Second Invid War.

Following the end of the war Scott Bernard and Vince Grant took command of the *Ark Angel* and departed on a rescue mission to try and find the lost *SDF-3 Pioneer*, while the few remaining Jupiter group ships remained behind at Earth to help rebuild the planet. Back at Tirol, news of the Jupiter group's apparent victory was greeted with elation. However, the battle had been costly; the REF starfleet was in shambles, a mere shadow of its former self. Even though new ships could be built, too many experienced officers and crews had been lost. It would take years to rebuild the fleet to anywhere near its former size.

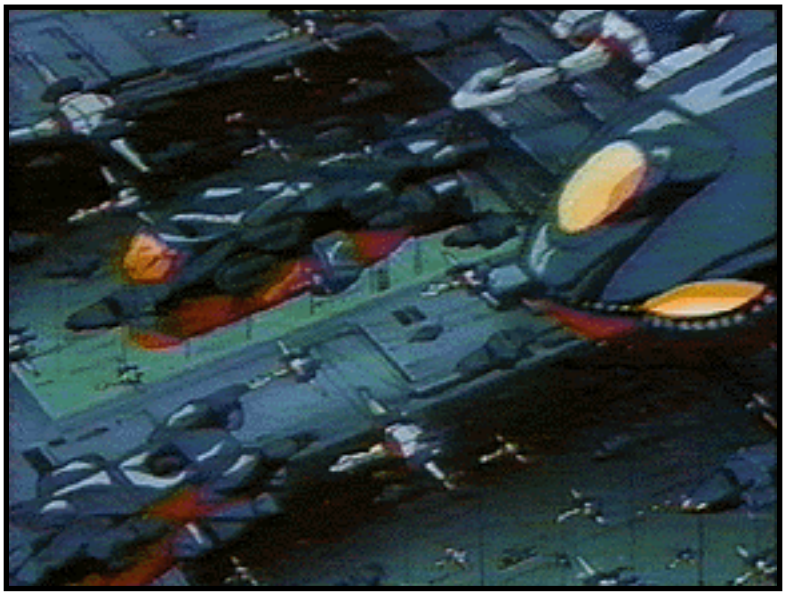
The REF would never get the time it needed. Less than a year after the Battle of Reflex Point the Invid, motivated by food shortages on their new home planet New Optera, again invaded Earth. The few surviving ships from the Jupiter group fought valiantly but were destroyed after a short battle. A brief distress call was sent to Tirol, but no useful information regarding the numbers or strengths of the invaders gained from the transmission. The REF high command was divided on what to do about this new threat. It would take years to build up a fleet that analysts felt would even have a chance of defeating the Invid. Finally, Colonels John Korcheck and Roger Harris received approval for a reconnaissance mission to Earth, to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the new Invid forces. The new fleet would be named the **REF Icarus Recon Group**, and Korcheck was given command of the ***SS Icarus***, the first *Icarus*-class command carrier which was specifically built for this mission. The Icarus Recon Group was launched from Tirol on January 1, 2044.

The Icarus recon mission arrived safely in the Sol system and for 9 months conducted hit-and-run and valuable recon missions against the Invid. Unfortunately by this time the Invid had finished construction of their Orbital Space Hive network, which prevented the capital ships of the recon mission from getting close enough to support ground forces. Eventually the Icarus mission was destroyed from within by an unwilling traitor. An REF Intelligence Agent rescued from an Invid hive had an Infiltrator inplanted in her brain, and the Stage 6 Invid leader named Varron was able to use the unwilling agent to lead the *Icarus* into a trap. Varron allowed a resistance group to rescue several important prisoners from a hive installation on Earth, and based on false information from the compromised intelligence agent Korcheck and Harris decided to attempt a rescue. The *Icarus* was ambushed during the rescue operation and its escort forces were destroyed. Only the Icarus itself managed to escape and make an emergency fold back to Tirol.

Despite the loss of all ships except the *Icarus*, the mission was considered a success and preparations were made to launch yet another assault against the Earth. This mission would be led by the brand new Thunderer-class Fortress ***RSS Prometheus***, and athough the fleet would not be as large as the Jupiter attack group the **REF Prometheus Attack Group** would be armed with the latest weapons and mecha Robotechnology had to offer. On July 4th, 2047 the Prometheus group folded to the Sol system an began a three-week siege against the Invid space hives. The battle was largely a stalemate, though most historians agree that had the siege continued the Prometheus mission would probably have lost. Fortunately the terran resistance launched Operation Emissary, a mission to covertly transport Invid sympathizers Sera and Marlene to New Optera to negotiate with the Regis herself. The plan was a success, and the Regis was so shocked by the atrocities the Stage 6 Invid had committed on Earth that she pulled out her forces from the Sol system. Deprived of their power base, the few Stage 6 Invid who remained behind were quickly defeated by the combined forces of the Prometheus mission, the terran resistance, and the Regis.

Following the end of the Third Invid War the majority of the Prometheus fleet returned to Tirol, where it became the backbone of the newly-constructed REF starfleet. In 2051 following the Local Group Galactic Conference the fleet was combined with other starfleets to form the Robotech Guardians Forces (RGF) Starfleet, the military arm of the Sentinels Alliance. Many of the surviving warships of the Prometheus mission are still in active service with the RGF fleet.

New and Updated REF Starships



- *Horizont*-Class Troop Shuttle (background update only)
- *Garfish*-Class Troop Transport (background update only)
- *Chimaera*-Class Cruiser (courtesy of Nathan Babcook)
- *Exeter*-Class Escort
- *Warrior*-Class Destroyer
- *Tokugawa*-Class Cruiser
- *Ikazuchi*-Class Command Carrier (background update only)
- *Icarus*-Class Command Carrier
- *Thunderer*-Class Battle Fortress
- *Pioneer*-Class Battle Fortress (background update only)
- *Ark Angel* (Haydonite Cruiser)

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VERITECH COMBAT BONUSES

When the Robotech Expeditionary Force (REF) redesigned the Veritech they standardized and improved the cockpit design of the new fighters. The 67 various controls in the old VF-1 Veritech cockpit have been combined into several pilot-configurable monitor displays and a HOTAS (hands-on throttle and stick) control system to reduce the difficulty in controlling the aircraft. This design paradigm continued when newer Alphas and Betas were developed, which greatly reduced the time necessary to train Veritech pilots to fly the new designs. As a result, pilots trained in one particular type of Alpha or Beta fighter can fly all Alphas/Betas with no appreciable difficulty.

In order to fly an Alpha or Beta the character must have the **Pilot REF Veritechs** skill. In addition if the pilot plans to engage in combat with his veritech then he must select a combat training skill based on which VF he plans to fly. There are four skills for REF Veritech combat training, **Alpha Fighter Combat Training**, **Alpha Fighter Combat BASIC Training**, **Beta Fighter Combat Training**, and **Beta Fighter Combat BASIC Training**. Because of the similarities in design and cockpit controls for all REF Veritechs, anyone with Alpha training can pilot the VAF-6, VAF-7, VAF-8, and VAF-9 series Alphas equally well, and likewise pilots with Beta training are qualified on VBF-1, VBF-2, and VBF-3 series Betas. There is no penalty for switching between designs. The only exception to this rule is the **VF-1V Vindicator**. The Vindicator was a technical design experiment based heavily on the VF-1 series veritechs, and as such the cockpit design for the Vindicator is more reminiscent of the VF-1 series cockpits than the new Alphas. In order to get full combat bonuses for the Vindicator pilots must have either **Vindicator Combat Training** or **VF-1 Veritech Combat** Training. Characters with Alpha or Beta Combat Training get only basic bonuses when flying the Vindicator.

In order to determine the bonuses a character gets from Alpha or Beta training, consult the tables below. The first lists general bonuses that a character earns from a specific training skill regardless of which Alpha/Beta model he is piloting. Then look at the second table to get a list of the specific bonuses associated with the model of Veritech the character is piloting. All skills and bonuses for Alphas and

Betas are exclusive; a character can have Alpha Combat *or* Alpha Basic training, but not both skills to try and combine bonuses. A character can have both Alpha and Beta combat training if he plans to be flying both types of veritechs.

Remember, these bonuses are in addition to the pilot's own hand to hand training and attribute bonuses, but apply ONLY when piloting a veritech. These mecha combat bonuses do not apply to the pilot's physical abilities when outside the mecha.

NOTE: Changing modes between fighter, guardian, and battloid counts as one attack/action for a melee round.

GENERAL BONUSES FROM ALPHA FIGHTER *BASIC* TRAINING This category applies to all characters who were not officially trained by the Robotech Expeditionary Force (REF) in Alpha Figher combat. • One (1) hand to hand attack per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level seven (7). • One additional hand to hand attack at level twelve (12). • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram (counts as two attacks), kick attack, leap kick (counts as two attacks).	**GENERAL BONUSES FROM BETA FIGHTER *BASIC* TRAINING** This category applies to all characters who were not officially trained by the Robotech Expeditionary Force (REF) in Beta Figher combat. • One (1) hand to hand attack per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level seven (7). • One additional hand to hand attack at level thirteen (13). • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram (counts as two attacks), kick attack, leap kick (counts as two attacks).
GENERAL BONUSES FROM ALPHA FIGHTER COMBAT TRAINING This category applies to REF Veritech Pilots and other military personnel who were officially trained by the Expeditionary Force in Alpha Fighter combat. • Three (3) hand to hand attacks per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level six (6). • One additional hand to hand attack at level	**GENERAL BONUSES FROM BETA FIGHTER COMBAT TRAINING** This category applies to REF Veritech Pilots and other military personnel who were officially trained by the Expeditionary Force in Beta Fighter combat. • Two (2) hand to hand attacks per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level seven (7). • One additional hand to hand attack at level

eleven (11). • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram (counts as two attacks), kick attack, leap kick (counts as two attacks).	thirteen (13). • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram (counts as two attacks), kick attack, leap kick (counts as two attacks).

Model	Basic Bonuses	Combat Bonuses
VAF-6 ALPHA FIGHTER	+1 to strike +1 to parry +1 to dodge in battloid/guardian +3 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +3 to roll with punch
VAF-7 SHADOW FIGHTER	+2 to strike +1 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+3 to strike +2 to parry +5 to dodge in battloid/guardian +7 to dodge in fighter mode +3 to roll with punch +3 to initiative
VAF-8 SHADOW FIGHTER	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+3 to strike +3 to parry +6 to dodge in battloid/guardian +8 to dodge in fighter mode +4 to roll with punch +3 to initiative
VAF-9 HEAVY ASSAULT SHADOW FIGHTER	+3 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+4 to strike +4 to parry +6 to dodge in battloid/guardian +8 to dodge in fighter mode +4 to roll with punch +3 to initiative

Model	Basic Bonuses	Combat Bonuses
VBF-1 BETA FIGHTER	+1 to strike +2 to parry +1 to dodge in battloid/guardian +3 to dodge in fighter mode +1 to roll with punch	+1 to strike +3 to parry +2 to dodge in battloid/guardian +4 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch

VBF-1S SHADOW BETA	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +1 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+2 to strike +3 to parry +4 to dodge in battloid/guardian +6 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch +3 to initiative
VBF-2 SHADOW BETA	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +1 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+3 to strike +3 to parry +5 to dodge in battloid/guardian +7 to dodge in fighter mode +3 to roll with punch +3 to initiative
VBF-3 HEAVY ASSAULT SHADOW BETA	+3 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge in battloid/guardian +5 to dodge in fighter mode +2 to roll with punch +3 to initiative	+4 to strike +3 to parry +5 to dodge in battloid/guardian +7 to dodge in fighter mode +3 to roll with punch +3 to initiative

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THE VBF-3 BETA FIGHTER

> ***WARNING: EXTREMELY POWERFUL!*** *This mecha is a very powerful Veritech fighter and should be handled with care by GMs. Liberal application of this design may be unbalancing to game play!*

BACKGROUND

The **VBF-3 Close Combat Heavy Assault Beta Fighter** was an experimental mecha combat superiority fighter designed to be a complimentary design for the VAF-9 Heavy Assault Alpha Fighter produced during the early days of the **Third Invid War**. Both mecha designs were intended to serve as the spearhead for the Prometheus Mission liberation force being sent to Earth to liberate the world from the Invid forces. Designed to combat new invid mecha (but built with very little information on the capabilities of the invid mecha it was intended to face) the VAF-9 and VBF-3 both incorporated the most advanced mecha combat systems available to the **Project Shadowchaser** R&D engineers at the time.

Like its VAF-9 companion, the VBF-3 was built around the new FF-4000X Experimental Fusion/Protoculture Variable Turbines, dual-source protoculture engines that could supply tremendous thrust and maneuvering power both inside and outside of an atmosphere. In addition the Beta contains two new XTR-90 rocket boosters for quickly achieving orbital velocity while attached to a VAF-9 Alpha. The VBF-3 is significantly larger than the VBF-2 and VBF-1 Betas due to the size requirements of the two immense engine systems. However, the larger airframe and stronger superstructure allowed the designers to mount heavier weapons on the new fighter as well. The missile launchers in the shoulders were expanded to include an extra 10 missiles (60 total) in each

unit, while the medium-range missiles were moved from the overhead rack to the legs of the mecha and expanded in capacity to a total of 20 MRMs. Like previous Betas the VBF-3 also has two long range missiles mounted on either side of the cockpit.

Non-missile weapon systems were augmented as well. Thanks to new revisions in the GU-XX firing chamber design it was possible to mount a compressed version of the popular autocannon in each arm, giving the fighter tremendous punch at short to medium range. As backup for the GU-XXs, a modified version of the EU-16 Energy Cannon was mounted in the chest of the mecha, immediately below the pilot's compartment. These weapons could be fired in any mode, though in guardian and fighter modes they were limited to front (EU-16) and rear (GU-XX) arcs only. Eliminating the overhead MRM rack allowed designers to include a feature that had never before been mounted on a Beta veritech; a head. In addition to the advanced targeting sensors mounted in the head, two TWR-30 pulse lasers identical to the ones used by the VAF-9 Veritech were added for anti-missile and anti-personnel defense. Finally, the VBF-3 was armed with a heavy gun pod somewhat similar to those used by smaller Alpha fighters. As the new Beta was designed to augment the VAF-9 in close-range intense combat, designers felt that the veritech could benefit from a gun pod for mecha-to-mecha dogfights. The gun pod chosen for the VBF-3 was the immense EU-18, an experimental energy cannon so massive that it could not even be carried by smaller aircraft.

The design of the VBF-3 seemed to be plagued with mishaps. The initial prototype went out of control and crashed during its first test flight, killing the test pilot. Review of the wreckage traced the problem to a flaw in the flight computer's software that coordinated thrust between the two main engines. No sooner had this problem been corrected than 4 of the 5 remaining remaining prototypes were requisitioned by the REF for service in the Icarus fleet. Several engineers were asked to accompany the VBF-3s and help to service them aboard the U.S.S. Icarus. The engineers escaped in a VBF-3 to earth when the Icarus fleet was destroyed, but were captured by frags and later rescued by freedom fighters in one of the more dramatic human victories of the Third Invid War.

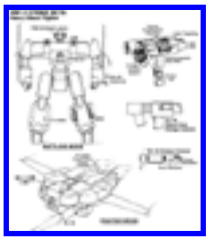
> **NOTE:** Due to their scarcity, encountering a VBF-3 Beta on Earth during the Third Invid War should be a VERY rare occurrance. Although all 3 VBF-3s made it to earth from the ill-fated Icarus Recon Mission, their fate is left up to the GM. Players should be required to go on a LONG adventure and face MANY dangers before they can get their hands on a VBF-3.

Meanwhile, back on Tirol work continued on perfecting the design using the last available prototype. Eventually enough VBF-3s were produced to supply the Prometheus Assault Group with several full squadrons of VAF-9/VBF-3 Legios fighters. These elite squadrons took point in the final battles of the Third Invid War and became legends in the realm of Veritech combat. However, due to the immense cost of the VBF-3 the design was never truly mass-produced. Following the end of the war only enough were built to replace those lost and to equip a handful of elite REF units. In 2059, *Vanguard Aerospace* and *Tirolian Weapons Research* tried to modernize the design as a companion to their **VAF-9 Mark II** Veritech, resulting in the devlopment of the **VBF-4 Beta**. The VBF-4 became the standard Beta fighter of the ***Robotech Guardian Forces (RGF)*** for a few years, but was itself replaced during the RGF

reorganization of 2065. Only two VBF-3s from the Third Invid War are known to have survived. One is in the Robotech War Memorial Museum in New York on Earth, while the other is on Tirol in the Robotech Guardian Forces Museum.

Like the VBF-2, the color scheme for the VBF-3 is based on where the unit is stationed, i.e. space Veritechs are usually painted flat black, desert Veritechs are painted with a light tan camouflage, etc. The Veritech was only produced in one model (the VBF-9C) and was streamlined in colors that matched the VAF-9 Alpha it was assigned to (blue for VAF-9C's, red for VAF-9J's, and green for VAF-9S's).

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some schematics from the REF VBF-3 Beta Fighter development report, document REF-A1-4432-1937, *TOP SECRET!*

RPG STATS

Vehicle Type: Heavy Assault Stealth Veritech Fighter

Models: VBF-3C (Standard Model)
Although initially planned, no other variants were ever produced.

Crew: Pilot, Gunner (optional), Communication/Sensory Equipment Operator (optional). **Note:** the VBF-3 does NOT have a bomb bay and therefore cannot carry extra passengers.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

(1)	Sensor Head	75
	Head Lasers (2)	30 each
	Hands (2)	75 each
	Shoulders/Chest Missile Bays (2)	220 each
(2)	Forearm Shields/GU-XX Guns (2)	450 each
	Upper Arms (2)	120 each
	Upper Legs (2)	150 each
	Lower Legs/Missile Bays (2)	210 each
	Wings (2)	120 each
	Main Thrusters (2, in Legs)	175 each
	Secondary Thrusters (2, in Torso)	100 each
(3)	Main Body	500
	Reinforced Pilot's Compartment	220

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(4) EU-16 Gun Pod (built into chest)       75
    EU-18 Gun Pod                         150
```

1. Destruction of the sensor head will greatly reduce the pilot's sensory and targeting equipment, though backup systems prevent total sensory blindness. Long-range radar is reduced to 2 mile range. Radio and Laser communication systems are lost, but an auxiliary system provides voice-only radio with a 100 mile range. Head Spotlights, Thermo-Imager, Night vision Optics, Audio Pickup, and Head Lasers are lost. Laser targeting is also destroyed; -1 to strike.
2. The forearm shields can be used to shield the main body or body parts from damage. The character can try to block any incoming attack, even missiles, by blocking with one or both arms (missiles require both arms). Roll a parry, and if successful, only the arm shields take damage. NOTE: Destroying the forearm shields will destroy the wing connection joints and damage the wing(s), making transformation to jet or guardian modes impossible! The forearm-mounted GU-XX gun pods are also lost.
3. Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will completely shut the mecha down.
4. The EU-16 Gun Pod is build into and protected by the main body. Because it is such a difficult target, attackers are -4 to strike it.

NOTE: The VBF-3 Beta incorporates the Southern Cross' laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

SPECIFICATIONS

Jet Mode with Jet Thrusters:	Up to Mach 2.0 (1340 mph/2140.8 kmph), with a ceiling of 60 miles (96 km).
Jet Mode with Rocket Thrusters:	Mach 8.5 (5800 mph/9114.5 kmph), making the mecha transatmospheric (able to blast into outer space under its own power).
Jet Mode Cruising Speed:	Mach 1.0 (670 mph/1072 kmph)
Guardian Mode:	Hover stationary to about Mach 1.0 (670 mph/1072 kmph), with a maximum altitude of 30,000 ft (9150 m), or about 4 miles.
Battloid Mode Flying:	Hover stationary to about 500 mph/800 kmph, with a maximum altitude of 10,000 ft (3048 m).
Battloid Mode Running:	80 mph (128 kmph)
Battloid Mode Leaping:	80 ft (24.4 m) up or across without using jet boosters, 300 ft (91.5 m) with jet boosters.

Height: 42 ft (12.6 m) in battloid mode
33.6 ft (10.1 m) in guardian mode
24 ft (7.2 m) in jet mode

Width: 36.4 ft (10.9 m) at shoulders in battloid mode
83.2 ft (25 m) jet and guardian modes with wings fully swept

Length: 28.8 ft (8.6 m) in battloid mode
38.4 ft (11.5 m) in jet and guardian modes

Weight: 18.5 tons without missiles, 26.8 tons fully loaded.

Cargo: Storage space behind cockpit can hold about 300 lbs (136.2 kg) or one additional passenger. If the Cyclone is removed from its storage compartment, the compartment can hold an additional 500 lbs (226.8 kg).

Main Engine: Two FF-4000X fusion/protoculture turbine in the lower torso, plus two XTR-90 rocket boosters, one in each leg.

Secondary Engines: 3 FF-3800 nuclear fusion rocket engines.

Range: 24 protoculture cells will give the mecha an active combat life of about two years. The mecha can operate on half as many cells (12) for 12 months, but maximum speed is reduced by half and the mecha is at -1 to strike. As a last resort, the mecha can operate solely on fusion power, but maximum speed is reduced by 75%, the head lasers cease to function, the mecha is at -2 to strike and -2 to dodge, and the Beta loses it's transatmospheric capability (the main thrusters can not work on fusion power alone).

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAD MOUNTED TWR-30 PULSE LASERS (2)**: Two Tirolian-designed pulse lasers are mounted in the head of the Veritech. They can fire individually or in tandem, and are aimed by moving the mecha's head.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Anti-personnel, Anti-aircraft
    - **Mega-Damage**: 4D6 M.D. per individual blast or 8D6 M.D. per dual blast.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Range**: 4000ft (1200m)

2. **MM-60S SUPER MULTI-MISSILE SYSTEM:** The VBF-3 Beta has two MM-60S systems built into each chest/shoulder area in Battloid and accessible on the right and left of the cockpit in Jet or Guardian mode. The retractible systems raise their missile launchers from protective storage bays to fire volleys of short-range missiles. The two MM-60 systems can fire independently or simultaneously. The automatic reload system enables the pilot to fire his entire payload of 120 missiles in one melee (this is possible by firing both MM-60 systems simultaneously, launching

20 missiles (10 each) each melee attack up to six times. NOTE: The MM-60S can be launched in all modes.

- **Primary Purpose:** Assault
- **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Aircraft
- **Missile Type:** Standard RDF/REF short-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor piercing, or plasma. Different types are rarely mixed, so all 40 missiles per launcher would be the same. Of course, missiles can be mixed if desired.
- **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
- **Rate of Fire:** One at a time, or in volleys of two, four, six, eight, or ten (or twenty, if both launchers are fired at the same time). One volley counts as one attack. the number of attacks per melee is equal to the pilot's combined hand to hand attacks per melee (usually 4 or 5).
- **Range:** Varies with missile type; 1 to 5 miles.
- **Payload:** 50 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 100.
- **NOTE:** The war-torn world makes the availability of missiles an extremely rare event. Players should be careful not to expend all their character's missiles too soon, because it may be a long time before more are found.

3. **MEDIUM-RANGE LEG MISSILES:** Each lower leg has a medium-range missile launcher built into it. These missiles can be fired in any mode (missiles exit the bottom of the mecha in jet mode).

- **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
- **Missile Type:** Standard REF medium-range missiles, usually armor-piercing or plasma.
- **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
- **Rate of Fire:** One at a time, or in volleys of two, four, six, eight, or ten (all).
- **Range:** Varies with missile type; 40 to 80 miles.
- **Payload:** Ten in each leg, for a total of 20.

4. **TWO LONG RANGE MISSILES:** These can be seen in the mid-chest area of the Beta in Battloid, or on either side of the cockpit in Jet and Guardian modes. These can be launched only from Jet or Guardian mode.

- **Primary Purpose:** Heavy Assault
- **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Spacecraft
- **Missile Type:** Standard RDF/REF long-range missiles, usually proton, reflex heavy, and reflex multi-warhead.
- **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
- **Rate of Fire:** One at a time.
- **Payload:** Two
- **NOTE:** Surprisingly, the long-range missiles are about as rare as the short-range missiles because there are few mecha that use them. All reflex and proton missiles are extremely

rare.

5. **GU-XX 35mm ARM-MOUNTED GUN PODS:** Each arm shield has an auto-feed GU-XX built into it. This weapon is exactly like the GU-XX handgun used by the old VAF-6 Alpha Fighters, but has a greater ammunition payload. Reloading the Beta's GU-XXs requires tools, a mechanic, and 3D4x2 minutes.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
    - **Mega-Damage:** 4D6 M.D. per short burst, 1D4x10 M.D. per medium burst and 2D4x10 M.D. for a full melee burst.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Short and medium bursts count as one attack, with the number of attacks equal to the pilot's combined hand to hand melee attacks (usually 4 or 5). Both guns can be fired simultaneously at the same target, in which case both bursts count as one attack. A full melee attack takes the place of all other attacks (both guns can still be concentrated on one target).
    - **Payload:** 80 short bursts, or 40 medium bursts (equal to 2 short bursts), or 20 full melee bursts (equal to 4 short bursts) PER ARM. Total of 160 short bursts, or 80 medium bursts, or 40 full melee bursts.
    - **Range:** 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **Note:** Can be fired in any mode, but in Guardian and Jet modes firing arcs are limited to the rear of the mecha.

6. **EU-16 ENERGY GUN POD:** A rapid-fire energy rifle similar to the old EU-11 gun pod is built into the body of the Beta. Firing arc is limited to the front of the mecha.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
    - **Mega-Damage:** 1D6x10 M.D. per blast (bursts are NOT possible).
    - **Rate of Fire:** Equal to the pilot's combined number of hand-to-hand attacks per melee.
    - **Payload:** Unlimited.
    - **Range:** 6000 ft (1800 m)

7. **EU-18 ENERGY GUN POD:** This enormous and very powerful energy weapon is standard issue for VBF-3C Beta fighters. Designed for extra-heavy combat, this gun pod is so big that only the VBF-3s can effectively hold and use it (no other mecha can use it). Two EU-18 gun pods can be carried and used by the Beta, but in almost all cases only one is issued per fighter. The EU-18 is mounted on the undercarriage of the Beta in Jet and Guardian modes. It can be fired in any mode, either from it's mounted position or hand-held by the mecha.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault
    - **Mega-Damage:** 1D6x10+40 M.D. per blast (bursts are NOT possible).
    - **Rate of Fire:** Equal to the pilot's combined number of hand-to-hand attacks per melee.
    - **Payload:** 6 per energy clip.

- **Range:** 3000 ft (900 m)
- **Note:** Two EU-18 energy clips can be stored in the legs (one in each leg). It requires one full melee (15 seconds) to reload a clip. Only the biggest REF ships and bases can recharge an EU-18 energy clip.

8. **HAND TO HAND COMBAT:** The VBF-3 Beta can engage in hand-to-hand combat if necessary (in fact, it is designed for it). The Beta's powerful hands and oversized servos can do fearsome damage if it gets hold of enemy mecha.

    - Punch does 3D6 M.D. in Battloid
    - Kick does 3D6 M.D. in Guardian/Battloid
    - Body Flip/Throw does 2D6 M.D.
    - Body Block/Tackle does 2D6 M.D.
    - Stomp does 2D4 M.D.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- **SF-10 SHADOW CLOAKING DEVICE:** All VBF-3 Beta Fighters are equipped with the SF-10 Shadow Cloaking Device. The stats for this device are the same as those for the VAF-9 Alpha Fighter.
- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** Invented during the construction of Southern Cross mecha, this coating scrambles laser tracking and reduces laser damage by half (lasers ONLY).
- **RADAR:** 40 mile range. Can identify and track up to 60 targets simultaneously.
- **BACKUP RADAR:** 10 mile (16 km) range. Can identify and track up to 20 targets simultaneously.
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Wide band and directional radio and video telecast capabilities. Range is 600 miles (945 km) or can be boosted indefinitely via satellite relay.
- **LASER COMMUNICATIONS:** Long-range, directional communication system. Effective range: 100,000 miles (157,500 km).
- **COMBAT COMPUTER:** Calculates, stores, and transmits data onto the cockpit computer screen, heads-up display (H.U.D.), or the pilot's helmet display. Patches in with the VAF-9's targeting computer when the two are docked.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Assists in the tracking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VBF-3's high strike bonus.
- **LASER TARGETING SYSTEM:** 100 mile (160 km) range. Assists in the striking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VBF-3's high strike bonus.
- **MOTION DETECTOR AND COLLISION WARNING SYSTEM:** 500 ft (152.5 m) range. Sounds an alarm and red light warns pilot of impending collision and/or immediate target.
- **TELESCOPIC OPTICAL ENHANCEMENT:** 4000 ft (1218 m) range, up to 64x magnification. 20 ft (6.1 m) field of vision.
- **THERMO-IMAGER:** 4000 ft (1218 m) range. A special optical heat sensory unit that allows the

infrared radiation of warm objects to be converted into a visible image. It also enables the pilot to see in darkness, shadows and through smoke.

- **NIGHTVISION OPTICS:** 4000 ft (1812 m) range. An image intensifier that is passive, meaning it emits no light of its own, but relies on ambient light which is electronically amplified to give a visible picture. Nightvision can not work in absolute darkness (but infrared and thermo-imagers can).
- **EXTERNAL AUDIO PICKUP:** 300 ft (91.5 m) range. A sound amplification listening system that can pick up a whisper 300 ft away.
- **HEAD SPOTLIGHTS:** 600 ft. (182 m) range.
- **EJECTOR SEAT:** In case of an emergency, all three crewmembers can be instantly ejected.
- **CE-1 CYCLONE EJECTOR SYSTEM:** Also in case of an emergency, all three VR-135 Forager Cyclones will also be ejected from the doomed mecha. This system is activated automatically when the pilot pulls the activation lever for his ejection seat. The cyclones will deploy parachutes once outside of the mecha and then land within 1D6x1000 feet of the pilot and crew. This system was installed to allow pilots to retrieve their cyclones even after their veritechs had been destroyed.
- **SELF-DESTRUCT:** A last ditch effort to prevent the capture of a Veritech unit (usually preceded by the pilot's ejection from the Veritech) is self-destruction. Explosive damage is fairly contained. A VBF-3 Beta without missiles (or few) does 4D6 x 10 M.D., but a Veritech with all or most of its missiles (35 or more) will do 3D6 x 100 M.D. to a 50 ft (15.2 m) radius.
- **SMOKE SCREEN SYSTEM:** The VBF-3 Beta can emit a thick cloud of smoke from its rear to create immediate cover. The smoke screen system can discharge a maximum of 4 bursts before needing replacement (smoke missiles can be converted to function in the system). Each burst will cover a 60 ft area (19.8 m).
- **HEAT AND RADIATION SHIELDS:** Special shielding prevents the penetration of life-threatening heat and radiation.
- **INDEPENDANT OXYGEN AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM:** Built-in tanks provide one (1) week of continuous oxygen. With the special recycling systems, this may be extended to four (4) weeks.
- **SURVIVAL GEAR:** The VBF-3 includes three VR-135 Forager Cyclones, six weeks' compact emergency rations, an emergency signal beacon, three first-aid kits, and a life raft. There is space for an energy rifle to be attached to each ejector seat, and the crew of course carry side-arms.

SPECIAL RULES FOR GUNNERS

NOTE: For the purposes of this section, the "gunner" is anybody who has weapon systems skill and is in the gunner's station of the Beta, whether he is the Beta Gunner, Comm Officer, or just somebody along for the ride.

The gunner receives as many attacks per melee as if he had equivalent-level Beta Basic Combat (or Expert Combat, if he has Expert Combat). He can control all the weapons in the Alpha (if the Beta is connected and the Alpha pilot allows) and Beta, or just choose certain weapons (as many as he thinks he can handle) before combat begins. When the gunner is controlling a weapon, nobody else can use it until

he releases control, even if the gunner never fires it!

Weapons to be controlled by the gunner must be declared before combat begins. It takes one full melee for the gunner to change to different weapons, and during that time he can fire no weapons, and none of the weapons he has been firing, or is about to assume control of, may be fired by anybody else until they're completely programmed in.

The gunner can control only weapons fire, not hand-to-hand combat. The gunner may control the gun pod of the Alpha when it is mounted on the plane. When the Alpha is holding it in its hand, however, he may NOT control it.

When the gunner is firing a weapon, he receives an additional +1 to hit. These bonuses do NOT apply to missiles (so missiles will probably not be among the weapons the gunner chooses to operate) but DO apply to mini-missiles.

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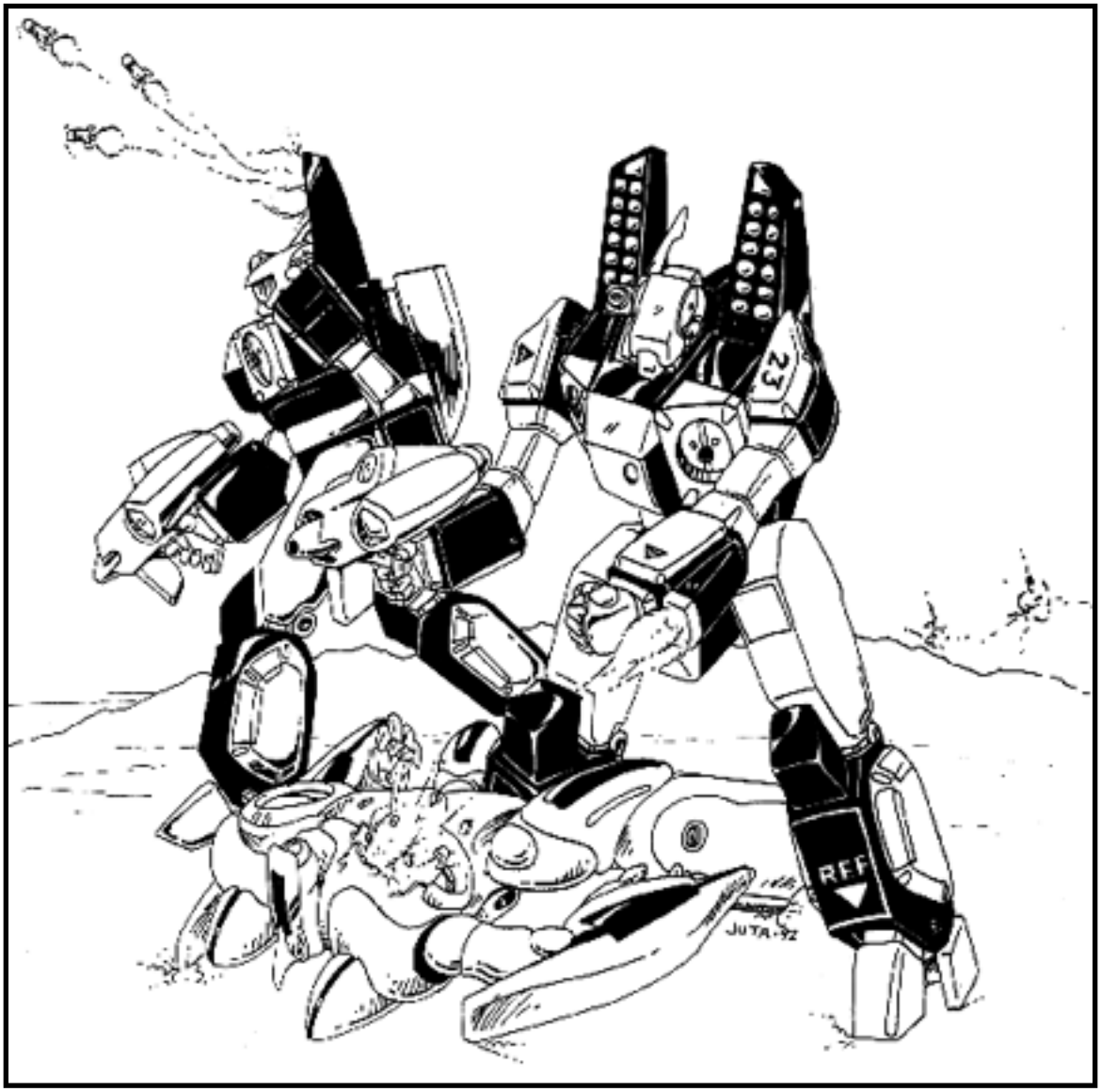
The following material is from **THE THIRD INVID WAR**, a fan supplement by **Dave Deitrich** and **Chris Meadows**. Please feel free to use, copy, and distribute it as you see fit. All we ask is that you give proper credit to us and do not claim that it is your own work. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

VAF-9 HEAVY ASSAULT VERITECH SHADOW FIGHTER

WARNING: EXTREMELY POWERFUL! *This mecha is a very powerful Veritech fighter and should be handled with care by GMs. Liberal application of this design may be unbalancing to game play!*



BACKGROUND

The **VAF-9 Heavy Assault Alpha Fighter** was an experimental air/space superiority fighter designed and produced during the early days of the **Third Invid War**. Intended to be the spearhead of an assault to retake the Earth from the second invasion force of Invid, the VAF-9 was definitely the most advanced mecha of the war and probably one of the most advanced Veritechs of the 21st century. The VAF-9 incorporated all of the cutting-edge technology available to the REF R&D scientists assigned to **Project Shadowchaser**. The mecha was designed around the new FF-4000X Experimental Fusion/Protoculture Variable Turbines, which could supply tremendous thrust and maneuvering power both inside and outside of an atmosphere. The mecha was made slightly larger to incorporate several new weapon systems, including the new MM-74 SRM missile system and the TWR-30 head-mounted Pulse Lasers. Another revolutionary system used with the VAF-9 was the Falcon MRM Missile System; the Falcon system stored missiles inside the wings instead of on hardpoints, allowing the mecha to convert into battloid mode and, if necessary, use the missiles while in that mode. To top off the new mecha's armaments, a pair of GR-12 shoulder mounted missile systems (formerly used on the VAF-7A) were added, as well as a pair of caseless 32mm depleted uranium autocannons mounted on the arms of the mecha. For a hand weapon, the VAF-9 was equipped with the EU-XX Destabilizer Cannon, the latest version of the famous EU-12 and EU-13 Destabilizers used during the Second Invid War.

In terms of development, the VAF-9 Alpha was very much like the VAF-7A Alpha. Both were revolutionary technical experiments that were pressed into service by the REF to help reclaim the Earth. The disadvantage of the design was its immense cost, however. The cost of a single VAF-9 was equal to an entire SQUADRON of VAF-8 Alphas. In addition, the mecha was a nightmare for support crews to maintain due to an immense number of special parts that were always in short supply. But despite the costs, a squadron of 12 VAF-9 Alphas and 12 VBF-3 Betas (the counterpart to the VAF-9), were included with the Icarus Recon Mission, and although records from the aftermath of that mission are spotty it appears that all of them made it to Earth and into resistance hands. Several squadrons of VAF-9 were included with the Prometheus Assault Group, and were very effective during the final battles of the Third Invid War, even though superior firepower from the Invid Orbiting Hives prevented the Prometheus Group from ever gaining the upper hand.

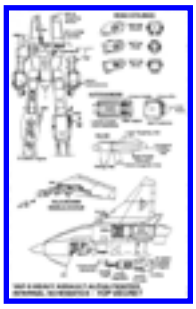
> **NOTE:** Due to their scarcity, encountering a VAF-9 Alpha on Earth during the Third Invid War should be a VERY rare occurrance. Only 11 VAF-9s made it to earth from the ill-fated Icarus Recon Mission, and of those 11 three have been confirmed destroyed by the Invid. The fate of the remaining 8 is left up to the GM, but players should be required to go on a LONG adventure and face MANY dangers before they can get their hands on a VAF-9.

The VAF-9 was never mass-produced. After the end of the Third Invid War, a number of squadrons were built to replace destroyed mecha, but distribution of the fighters were never widespread. In 2058, *Vanguard Aerospace* and *Tirolian Weapons Research* jointly produced the **VAF-9 Mark II**, a cheaper version of the VAF-9 incorporating updated technology. The VAF-9 Mk. II replaced the VAF-8 as the

standard ***Robotech Guardian Forces (RGF)*** fighter for a few years, but was itself replaced during the RGF reorganization of 2065. After that the original VAF-9s mostly disappeared, with only a few surviving examples (minus weapons and armor) in the hands of museums or private collectors.

The VAF-9 Heavy Assault Alpha Fighter vaguely resembles its distant cousin, the VAF-6 Alpha Fighter, but is somewhat larger and much more streamlined and as a more pronounced delta-wing design. Like the VAF-8, the color scheme for the VAF-9 is based on where the unit is stationed, i.e. space Veritechs are usually painted flat black, desert Veritechs are painted with a light tan camouflage, etc. The Veritech is always streamlined with a color to indicate it's model type. VAF-9C's are streamlined in blue, VAF-9J's in red, and VAF- 9S's in green. Each model also has a unique head style, but unlike the original VF-1 Veritech all three models have the exact same armament.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some schematics from the REF VAF-9 Alpha Fighter development report, document REF-A1-4432-1744, *TOP SECRET!*

RPG STATS

Vehicle Type: Heavy Assault Stealth Veritech Fighter

Models: VAF-9C (Standard Model)
VAF-9J (Low-Ranking Officer Model)
VAF-9S (Squadron Leader Model)

Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

(1)	Sensor Head	75
	Head Lasers (2)	30 each
	Hands (2)	60 each
	Forearms/Machine guns/Missiles (2)	350 each
	Shoulders/Missile Pods (2)	150 each
	Upper Legs (2)	150 each
	Lower Legs/Thrusters/Missile Pods (2)	250 each
	Wings/Missile Sheaths (2)	180 each

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    Wing Hardpoints (4)                          10 each
    Tail (2)                                     75 each
(2) Main Body                                   460
    Reinforced Pilot's Compartment              220
    EU-XX Gun Pod                               120
```

1. Destruction of the sensor head will greatly reduce the pilot's sensory and targeting equipment, though backup systems prevent total sensory blindness. Long-range radar is reduced to 2 mile range. Radio and Laser communication systems are lost, but an auxiliary system provides voice-only radio with a 100 mile range. Head Spotlights, Thermo-Imager, Night vision Optics, Audio Pickup, and Head Lasers are lost. Laser targeting is also destroyed; -1 to strike.
2. Destruction of the main body will shut the unit down completely.

NOTE: The VAF-9 Series Veritech incorporates the Southern Cross' laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

SPECIFICATIONS

Jet Mode:	Mach 4.0 (2676 mph/4281.6 kmph).
Jet Cruising Speed:	Mach 1.2 (804 mph/1286.4 kmph).
Guardian Mode:	Hover stationary to Mach 1.5 (1005 mph/1608 kmph).
Battloid Mode, Flying:	Hover stationary to about Mach 1 (670 mph/1072 kmph).
Battloid Mode, Running:	180 mph (290 kmph)
Battloid Mode, Leaping:	100 ft (30.5 m) up or across without using jet boosters, 350 ft (106.8 m) with jet boosters.

Height: 34.5 ft (10.5 m) in battloid mode.
22.2 ft (6.8 m) in guardian mode.
16.5 ft (5.0 m) in jet mode.

Width: 15 ft (4.6 m) at shoulders in battloid mode.
34.5 ft (10.5 m), jet and guardian modes with wings fully swept.

Length: 36 ft (11 m), in jet and guardian modes.

Weight: 14.2 tons without missiles, 20.6 tons fully loaded.

Cargo: Space behind pilot's seat for pilot's belongings; can hold about 100 lbs (45.4 kg). If Cyclone is removed from its storage compartment, the compartment can hold an additional 500 lbs (226.8 kg).

Main Engine: FF-4000 fusion/protoculture turbine in each leg.

Range: 24 protoculture cells will give the mecha an active combat life of about two years. The mecha can operate on half as many cells (12) for 12 months, but maximum speed is reduced by half and the mecha is at -1 to strike. As a last resort, the mecha can operate solely on fusion power, but maximum speed is reduced by 75%, the head lasers cease to function, and the mecha is at -2 to strike and -2 to dodge.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **HEAD MOUNTED TWR-30 PULSE LASERS (2)**: Two Tirolian-designed pulse lasers are mounted in the head of the Veritech. They can fire individually or in tandem, and are aimed by moving the mecha's head.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Anti-personnel, Anti-aircraft
    - **Mega-Damage**: 4D6 M.D. per individual blast or 8D6 M.D. per dual blast.
    - **Payload**: Unlimited
    - **Range**: 4000ft (1200m)

2. **MM-74 MULTI-MISSILE SYSTEM**: Like their predecessors, the VAF-9 Assault Alphas are bristling with short range missiles, 74 in all. 12 missiles are located in each forearm (6 on each side), 12 are located in each Shoulder, and 13 are located in each leg.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Standard REF short-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor-piercing, or plasma.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, or all. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 1 to 5 miles.
    - **Payload**: A maximum capacity of 74 short-range missiles. Mini, medium and long range missiles can not be used.

3. **GR-12 SHOULDER LAUNCHER SYSTEM**: This additional pair of missile launchers, once exclusive to the old VAF-7A Shadow Alphas, are now standard equipment for VAF-9 Veritechs. These systems add an extra 24 short-range missiles to its armaments.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense
    - **Missile Type**: Standard REF short-range missiles, usually armor-piercing or plasma.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, six, or twelve (all).
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 1 to 5 miles.
    - **Payload**: Twelve in each unit, for a total of 24.

4. **ARM MOUNTED 32mm-caseless AUTOCANNONS (4)**: These weapons were added to give the Alpha Fighter an additional attack for use in close-range combat. Each forearm has two concealed autocannons that fire in tandem.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Close-range Assault/Defense
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Antipersonnel
    - **Mega-Damage**: 2D6 M.D. for short burst, 4D6 M.D. for long burst, or 2D4x10 M.D. for one full melee of continuous fire (each burst is considered to be one attack, regardless of length).
    - **Payload**: 480 rounds in each arm (short burst uses 6 rounds, long burst 12 rounds, and full burst 24 rounds)
    - **Range**: 2000 ft (609 m)

5. **FALCON WING-SHEATH MISSILE SYSTEM**: Three heavily-shielded medium-range missile launchers are built into each wing. The launchers are flush with each wing, which reduces drag and protects the missile from attack until launched. Each missile launcher can hold one missile, but the missile is fully shielded and does not need to be launched before the Veritech can convert to battloid mode.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Missile Type**: Standard REF medium-range missiles, usually multi-warhead or plasma.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, or six (all).
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 50 to 80 miles.
    - **Payload**: One per unit, for a total of 6.

6. **WING HARDPOINTS**: The VAF-9 has four hardpoints (2 per wing) which can be used to mount missiles and other ordinance for heavy assaults and bombardments. Each hardpoint can mount 1 long range missile, 3 medium range missiles, or one pod of mini-missiles. Due to the design of the wings, the missiles or pods must be dropped prior to transformation into battloid mode.

    NOTE: VAF-9s found in the field will typically NOT be equipped with missiles on their hardpoints, as these missiles are usually used up within the first few minutes of combat.

    - **LONG RANGE MISSILES**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Spacecraft
        - **Missile Type**: Standard REF long-range missiles, usually proton, reflex heavy and reflex multi-warhead.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.

        - **Rate of Fire**: One, two, three, or four.
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 500 to 1800 miles.
        - **Payload**: One per hardpoint; up to four maximum.
    - **MEDIUM RANGE MISSILES**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Mecha
        - **Missile Type**: Standard REF medium-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor piercing, or multi-warhead.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
        - **Rate of Fire**: One, two, three, four, eight, or twelve (all).
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 50 to 80 miles.
        - **Payload**: Three per hardpoint; up to 12 maximum.
    - **MINI-MISSILE PODS**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Personnel
        - **Type**: Any except plasma. Armor-Piercing is standard issue.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with mini-missile type; usually about one mile.
        - **Rate of Fire**: Volleys of two, four, or eight
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type
        - **Payload**: 15 per launcher; up to 60 maximum.

7. **EU-XX DESTABILIZER GUN POD**. The powerful Destabilizer that was the standard weapon for the Shadow Fighters and Vindicators has been redesigned and streamlined. Two EU-XX gun pods can be carried and used by the VAF-9 Alpha fighter, though usually only one is issued per fighter. The EU-XX can be mounted on the top or the undercarriage of the fighter. It can be fired in any mode, either from it's mounted position or hand-held by the mecha.

   Against Invid or Zentraedi force fields, each blast will create a 6D6 foot hole in the field, which will last for 4D6 minutes. Against exterior hive entrances, the Destabilizer will disrupt the field completely for 4D6+20 minutes. Note that the EU-XX does not need to be shoulder-mounted to fire destabilizing bursts.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Force field disruption.
    - **Mega-Damage**: 2D4x10 per blast (bursts are NOT possible).
    - **Rate of Fire**: Equal to the pilot's combined hand to hand melee attacks (usually 4 or 5).
    - **Payload**: 40 blasts
    - **Range**: 4000 ft (1200 m)
    - **NOTE**: Four EU-XX energy clips can be stored in the legs (two in each leg). It requires one full melee (15 seconds) to reload a clip. Only the biggest REF ships and bases can recharge EU-XX energy clips.

8. **OPTIONAL USE OF THE GU-11, EU-5, EU-11, E-20, GU-XX, OR EU-12 GUN PODS**.

These are obviously not standard issue, but can be used if needed and available. See the various mecha for weapon statistics.

9. **OPTIONAL HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. Punch does 1D6 M.D., Body Block does 1D6 M.D., Kick does 1D6 M.D., Leap Kick does 2D6 M.D., Stomp does 1D4 M.D., but is limited to targets no more than 12 feet tall. Body Flip and Body Block does 1D6 M.D.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR VAF-9 ALPHA FIGHTERS

- **SF-10 SHADOW CLOAKING DEVICE**: Like the VAF-8, the VAF-9 Alpha Fighter is designed to use the SF-10 Cloaking Device, the new standard cloaking device for the REF. A much improved version of the original SF-7 cloaking device, this version incorporates changes that makes the device smaller and more affordable to manufacture. The device still operates like older versions; rendering the mecha invisible to all electronic forms of detection, including radar, Invid Protoculture sensors, and microwaves. Only light- based detection systems, such as optical and laser tracking will detect the mecha.

  The SF-10 is the first cloaking device to feature THREE modes of operation instead of only two: ON, in which the device operates normally; OFF, in which the device is shut off and the mecha is detectable by all forms of electronic detection; and SAFETY, in which the device emits a "4th dimensional blip," which is detectable by other REF mecha's collision warning systems. The SAFETY mode is used for close formations where mecha proximity could potentially cause disastrous collisions.

  The SF-10 is slightly more reliable than its predecessor. Once the main body MDC of the fighter has been reduced to 200 M.D. or less, there is a cumulative 10% chance of the SF-10 failing for every 20 points of damage beyond that. For example,there is a 10% chance of the device failing when the main body MDC is between 200-180, 20% when the MDC is between 160-180, 30% when the MDC is between 140-160, etc. Once a cloaking device fails it CANNOT be repaired; it must be replaced by another working SF-10, either from a salvaged fighter or a parts depot.

  BONUSES: (ON and SAFETY modes) The Veritech always gets first attack in the first round of combat. After that, the mecha has a +3 on all initiative rolls. Also provides an additional +2 to dodge, and +1 to strike.

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING**: A Southern Cross invention, this coating scrambles laser tracking and reduces laser damage by half (lasers ONLY).

- **RADAR**: The VAF-9 is equipped with a dual radar system. The first system is a *long range radar* that has a range of over 100 miles (160 km) and can track up to 30 targets simultaneously within

that range. The problem with the system, however, is that the powerful long distance radar waves tend to give away the position of the craft; attackers using radar-guided weaponry have a +2 to hit the VAF-9 while the system is on.

The second radar is a *combat radar* that has a range of 15 miles (24 km) and can identify and track up to 150 targets simultaneously. This radar uses frequency hopping and a number of other techniques to prevent its emissions from giving away the position of the VAF-9.

NOTE: In general, Invid do **NOT** use radar-tracking weapons.

- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS**: Wide band and directional radio and video telecast capabilities. Range is 750 miles (1180 km) or can be boosted indefinitely via satellite relay.

- **LASER COMMUNICATIONS**: Long-range, directional communication system. Effective range: 100,000 miles (157,500 km).

- **COMBAT COMPUTER**: Calculates, stores, and transmits data onto the cockpit computer screen or heads-up display (H.U.D.) of the pilot's helmet. Patches in with targeting computer.

- **TARGETING COMPUTER**: Assists in the tracking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VAF-9's high strike bonus.

- **LASER TARGETING SYSTEM**: 100 mile (160 km) range. Assists in the striking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VAF-9's high strike bonus.

- **MOTION DETECTOR AND COLLISION WARNING SYSTEM**: 500 ft (152.5 m) range. Sounds an alarm and red light warns pilot of impending collision and/or immediate target.

- **TELESCOPIC OPTICAL ENHANCEMENT**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. 20 ft (6.1 m) field of vision.

- **HEAD SPOTLIGHTS**: 600 ft (182 m) range, normal light.

- **INFRARED SPOTLIGHT**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. The infrared spotlight sits in the front of the sensor head. It emits an infrared light beam that is invisible to the normal eye. However, an enemy with infrared optics can easily see the beam of light and track it to the Veritech. Smoke impairs vision/beam.

- **THERMO-IMAGER**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. A special optical heat sensory unit that allows the infrared radiation of warm objects to be converted into a visible image. It also enables the pilot to see in darkness, shadows and through smoke.

- **NIGHT VISION OPTICS**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. An image intensifier that is passive, meaning it emits no light of its own, but relies on ambient light which is electronically amplified to give a visible picture. Night vision can not work in absolute darkness (but infrared can).

- **EXTERNAL AUDIO PICKUP**: 300 ft (91.5 m) range. A sound amplification listening system that can pick up a whisper 300 ft away.

- **EXTERNAL VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM**: 600 ft (183 m) range. A video camera system with telescopic capabilities (8x magnification) is built into the head. The video images can be relayed to a cockpit monitor and stored on removable video disks. Maximum disk capacity is 24 hours. Disks can be erased and reused.

- **EJECTOR SEAT**: In case of an emergency, the pilot can be instantly ejected. In battloid mode, the pilot is ejected out of the mecha's back.

- **CE-1 CYCLONE EJECTOR SYSTEM**: Also in case of an emergency, the VR-135 Forager Cyclone will also be ejected from the doomed mecha. This system is activated automatically when the pilot pulls the activation lever for his ejection seat. The cyclone will deploy parachutes once outside of the mecha and then land within 1D6x1000 feet of the pilot. This system was installed to allow pilots to retrieve their cyclones even after their veritechs had been destroyed.

- **SELF-DESTRUCT**: A last ditch effort to prevent the capture of a Veritech unit (usually preceded by the pilot's ejection from the Veritech) is self- destruction. Explosive damage is fairly contained. A VAF-9 Alpha without missiles (or few) does 2D6 x 10 M.D., but a Veritech with all or most of its missiles (35 or more) will do 2D6 x 100 M.D. to a 50 ft (15.2 m) radius.

- **SMOKE SCREEN SYSTEM**: The VAF-9 Assault Alpha can emit a thick cloud of smoke from its rear to create immediate cover. The smoke screen system can discharge a maximum of 4 bursts before needing replacement (smoke missiles can be converted to function in the system). Each burst will cover a 60 ft area (19.8 m).

- **HEAT AND RADIATION SHIELDS**: Special shielding prevents the penetration of life-threatening heat and radiation.

- **INDEPENDENT OXYGEN AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM**: Built-in tanks provide 48 hours of continuous oxygen. A special recycling system can keep the air breathable for a maximum of one week.

- **SURVIVAL GEAR**: The VAF-9 includes a VR-135 Forager Cyclone, four weeks' compact emergency rations, an emergency signal beacon, three first-aid kits, and a life raft. There is space for an energy rifle to be attached to each ejector seat, and the pilot can of course carry a side-arm.

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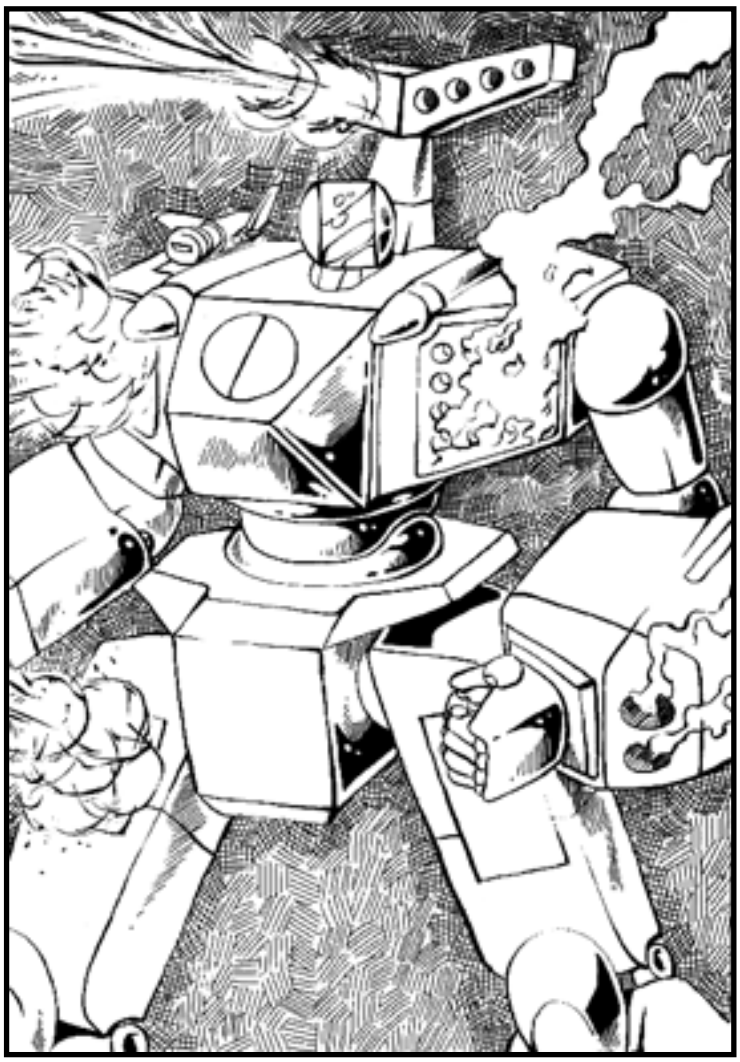
THE VBF-2 BETA FIGHTER

BACKGROUND



The VBF-2 Beta Fighter was developed to be the new standard heavy Veritech fighter for the REF during the Third Invid War. The design was perfected and put into production shortly after the REF Jupiter Mission left for Earth in 2039, the fighter missed the close of the Second Invid War but was already in mass production by the time the Icarus Recon Mission left Tirol in 2044. The VBF-2 was designed to complement the VAF-8 Transatmospheric Strike Alpha and as such included many of the same technological systems that the VAF-8 did, including the new FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture Variable Turbine Engines and the SF-10 Cloaking Device. Unfortunately also like the VAF-8, the SF-10 proved harder to manufacture in mass quantities than the planes themselves, and thus only about 30% of VBF-2 fighters were actually equipped with cloaking devices.

The VBF-2 was also the first REF Beta fighter produced in two distinct models with vastly different intended purposes. The VBF-2A was the standard version of the Beta fighter, primarily designed as a heavy weapons platform and support craft for the smaller but more agile VAF-8 Alpha. The other model was the VBF-2T Beta Troop Transport/Ground Support model. This version of the Beta was designed by REF engineers after reviewing the performance of the VBF-1 Betas in the First and Second Invid Wars. The engineers found that although not designed for it, the older Beta had commonly been used to ferry small groups of troops to and from hot LZs (landing zones) deep inside enemy territory. The Beta was faster and more heavily armed than the DTTS-12 Horizont transports that were designed for LZ missions, and thus had a greater chance of success and survival. Observing this, the engineers decided to build a

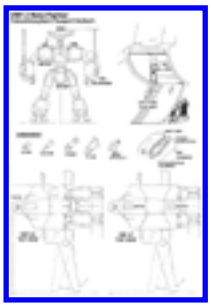
specific model of the Beta for troop transport and support duties. The resulting VBF-2T had an enlarged cargo bay capable of holding up to 12 cyclone riders in full armor, as well as multiple hatches for quick loading and unloading. The armament of the 2T was also modified to provide better ground support at the cost of some air-to-air combat capabilities. Because of the size and placement of the cargo bay on the VBF-2T, the beta was capable of only two modes of operation; fighter and guardian modes.

Like the VBF-1, the VBF-2's primary mission is to provide heavy support for the VAF-8 Alphas. The VBF-2 can link with any model of VAF-8 and provide increased weapons and greater thrust for the craft. The control systems for the VAF-8 and VBF-2 were also designed to work together better, and when linked it is possible for the Alpha pilot to control all aspects of the Beta fighter or vice versa. More typically however the pilots would split the workload, with the Alpha pilot concentrating on piloting and maneuvering and the Beta gunners operating the combined craft's powerful weapon systems. Both the VBF-2A and 2T can link to any model of VAF-8.

The VBF-2 served as the major heavy fighter for the REF (and later the Robotech Guardian Forces) from 2040 until 2058. The design was phased out and replaced with the VBF-4 Beta series during the late 2050s, but still remains a common sight on RGF bases and outposts due to the great numbers that were manufactured during its 18-year lifespan.

The VBF-2 greatly resembles the previous Beta, save for its size. The Beta does not have different model types to differentiate between the ranks of the people piloting it. Instead, the highlights, trim, and identification numbers are painted in different colors corresponding to rank; standard soldiers are colored light blue; low-ranking officers are colored red, and squadron leaders/XOs are trimmed in green. Shadow-equipped Betas (approximately 20% of all VBF-2 units) are painted black and are trimmed in the colors listed above, while VBF-2T Transports are usually painted in a flat grey and highlighted as above. All other VBF-2 Betas are colored in a camouflage scheme based on where they are stationed, i.e. space Veritechs are often painted flat black, desert Veritechs are painted with a light tan camouflage, etc. Some of the shadow-equipped models are painted black with red canopies, perhaps out of nostalgia or a whimsical sense of humor on the part of the factory technicians.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF VBF-2 Beta Fighter maintenance guide, document REF-5482-344-8477.

RPG STATS

Vehicle Type: Transformable Battloid, VBF series Veritech Fighter

Models: **VBF-2A** (Standard Model)
VBF-2T (Transport/Ground Support Model)

Crew:
VBF-2A: Pilot, Gunner (optional), Communication/Sensory Equipment Operator (optional), 4 to 6 passengers if necessary.
VBF-2T: Pilot, Gunner (optional), Communication/Sensory Equipment Operator (optional), 12 Cyclone Riders w/Cyclones.

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

(1)	Sensor Head	80
	Hands (2)	80 each
	Shoulder/Chest Retractable Missile Bays (2)	200 each
(2)	Forearm Shields (2)	350 each
	Upper Arms (2)	100 each
	Top Missile Racks (2, side-by-side)	80 each
	Upper Leg Missile Bays (2)	150 each
	Lower Legs/Feet (2)	200 each
	Wings (2)	150 each
	Bomb Bay (VBF-2A only)	250
	Passenger Bay (VBF-2T only)	300
	Front Access Ramp (VBF-2T only)	100
	Rear Jet Thrusters (2, side-by-side)	100 each
	Rocket Thrusters (3)	200 each
(3)	Main Body	450
	Reinforced Pilots' Compartment	250
	GU-25 Gun Pod (built into chest)	80

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the sensor head will knock out long-range communications (reduce to 60 miles/96 km range), long-range radar (reduce to 10 miles) and laser targeting (-1 to strike)
2. On the VBF-2A Beta, the forearm shields can be used to shield the main body or body parts from damage. The character can try to block incoming attacks of any kind, punches, blasts, and even missiles, by blocking with one or both arms (missiles require both arms). Roll a parry. If successful, only the arm shields take damage. NOTE: Depleting the arm shields to below their M.D.C. will destroy the wing connection joints and damage the wing(s), making transformation into jet or guardian modes IMPOSSIBLE! Likewise, the loss of an arm is the loss of a wing and connection unit, making transformation impossible. **Note:** The VBF-2T can NOT use the forearm shields to block attacks.
3. Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will completely shut the mecha down.

NOTE: The VBF-2 Series Veritech incorporates the Southern Cross' laser resistant ceramic armor, so

laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

SPECIFICATIONS

Jet Mode with Jet Thrusters:	Mach 2.1 (1407 mph/2264 kmph) maximum. Altitude Ceiling is 60 miles.
Jet Mode with Rocket Thrusters:	Mach 8.7 (5829 mph/9379 kmph), making the Beta transatmospheric (able to blast into outer space under its own power).
Jet Mode Cruising Speed:	Mach 1 (670 mph/1078 kmph)
Guardian Mode:	Hover Stationary to Mach 1 (670 mph/1078 kmph)
Battloid Mode Flying:	Hover stationary to about 400 mph 644 kmph, with a maximum altitude of 12,000 feet.
Battloid Mode Running:	85 mph/137 kmph
Battloid Mode Leaping:	100 feet (30.5 m) up or across without booster assistance. 350 feet (106.75 m) with jet booster assistance.

Height: 40 ft. Battloid mode
24 ft. Jet mode
34 ft. Guardian mode

Width: 32 ft. Battloid mode
72 ft. Jet and Guardian modes

Length: 30 ft. Battloid mode
38 ft. Jet and Guardian modes

Weight:
VBF-2A: 19 tons without missiles, 24 tons fully loaded (including missiles and bombs).
VBF-2T: 21 tons unloaded, 33 tons maximum load.

Cargo:
VBF-2A: Bomb Bay that can hold up to 20 bombs (approx. 10 ft. by 6 ft. by 6 ft.); Three Cyclones may be removed from storage compartment which may then be used to hold cargo.
VBF-2T: Cargo/Troop Compartment can carry up to 12 tons of weight, 12 Cyclone Riders in full combat armor, or 20 people in cramped conditions without armor.

Main Engine: Two FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture turbines
Secondary Engines: 3 FF-3800 nuclear fusion rocket engines.

Range: 24 Protoculture cells will give the mecha an active combat life of about two years. The mecha can operate on half as many cells (12) for 12 months, but maximum speed is reduced by half and the mecha is at -1 to strike. As a last resort, the mecha can operate solely on fusion power, but maximum speed is reduced by 75%, the head lasers cease to function, and the mecha is at -2 to strike and -2 to dodge.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **MM-50S SUPER MULTI-MISSILE SYSTEM:** The Beta has two MM-50 systems built into each chest/shoulder area in Battloid and accessible on the right and left of the cockpit in Jet or Guardian mode. The retractible systems raise their missile launchers from protective storage bays to fire volleys of short-range missiles. The two MM-50 systems can fire independently or simultaneously. The automatic reload system enables the pilot to fire his entire payload of 100 missiles in one melee (this is possible by firing both MM-50 systems simultaneously, launching 20 missiles (10 each) each melee attack up to five times. NOTE: The MM-50S can be launched in all modes.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Aircraft
    - **Missile Type:** Standard RDF/REF short-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor piercing, or plasma. Different types are rarely mixed, so all 40 missiles per launcher would be the same. Of course, missiles can be mixed if desired.
    - **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire:** One at a time, or in volleys of two, four, six, eight, or ten (or twenty, if both launchers are fired at the same time). One volley counts as one attack. the number of attacks per melee is equal to the pilot's combined hand to hand attacks per melee (usually 4 or 5).
    - **Payload:** 50 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 100.
    - **NOTE:** The war-torn world makes the availability of missiles an extremely rare event. Players should be careful not to expend all their character's missiles too soon, because it may be a long time before more are found.

2. **GR-20P LEG MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHERS (VBF-2A ONLY):** Each leg has a mini-missile launcher built into the thigh. These missiles can be launched only in Battloid mode.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Personnel
    - **Missile Type:** Any mini-missile except Plasma. Armor-Piercing is standard-issue.
    - **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16, or 20 (all) per launcher; both launchers may be fired simultaneously.
    - **Payload:** 20 mini-missiles per launcher for a total of 40.

3. **MEDIUM-RANGE, TOP MOUNTED MISSILES (VBF-2A ONLY):** These are the missile racks seen on top of the Beta in Battloid mode and recessed into the rear of the Beta in Jet or Guardian modes. The missiles can be launched while in any configuration.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type:** Standard RDF/REF medium-range missiles, usually high-explosive, plasma, or armor piercing. Of course, any medium range missiles can be used.
    - **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire:** One at a time or in volleys of two, three, or four.
    - **Payload:** Four missiles per each launcher (2), for a total of eight.
    - **NOTE:** Medium-range missiles are more scarce than short-range.

4. **TWO LONG RANGE MISSILES:** These can be seen in the mid-chest area of the Beta in Battloid, or on either side of the cockpit in Jet and Guardian modes. These can be launched only from Jet or Guardian mode.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Heavy Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Spacecraft
    - **Missile Type:** Standard RDF/REF long-range missiles, usually proton, reflex heavy, and reflex multi-warhead.
    - **Mega-Damage:** Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire:** One at a time.
    - **Payload:** Two
    - **NOTE:** Surprisingly, the long-range missiles are about as rare as the short-range missiles because there are few mecha that use them. All reflex and proton missiles are extremely rare.

5. **BOMB BAY (VBF-2A ONLY):** The bay can hold 20 bombs, or up to 12 passengers, being slightly larger than that of its predecessor. However, it is often used for deploying relay buoys instead. Relay buoys act as miniature satellites, relaying radio signals through space. These signals may be telemetry, radio, or picture relays. The radio range for these buoys is 400 miles, and their M.D.C. is 30.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Ground Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Satellite Deployment
    - **Missile Type:** Bombs are equal to short or medium range missiles. Usually fragmentation or high-explosive.
    - **Mega-Damage:** Varies with the type of bomb.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10.
    - **Payload:** The bomb bay can hold up to 20 bombs.
    - **NOTE:** These are bombs, not guided missiles. As such, they have the following penalties: -

4 to strike a stationary ground target, -6 to strike a moving target(s), and -10 to hit a small moving target like an Invid Scout or vehicles. Bombs are usually used against large stationary targets.

6. **BETA GU-25 25mm QUAD-BARREL INTERNAL GUN POD:** This weapon is exactly like the GU-25 handgun used by the VAF-8 Alpha Fighters. The difference is that it is built into the body of the beta and has an automatic feed and a greater ammunition payload. To reload the Beta GU-25 requires tools, a mechanic, and 4D4 minutes. The person must crawl into the gun bay and undo the ammo compartment and reload. To modify the ammo from a conventional GU-25 gun pod requires an additional 1D4 hours per clip.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
    - **Range:** 4000 feet
    - **Mega-Damage:** Does 3D6 MD short burst, 6D6 medium burst, 1D6x10 full melee burst.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Short or medium bursts count as one attack. The pilot can fire as many bursts as his combined hand to hand attacks per melee. A full melee burst takes the place of all other attacks.
    - **Payload:** 160 short bursts, or 80 medium bursts, or 40 full melee bursts.

7. **ARM-MOUNTED ION BLASTERS:** Each arm has four ion blasters mounted on the ends. These weapons may be fired in any mode, but in fighter and guardian modes are limited to firing directly in front of the mecha only. **Note:** Since the VBF-2T does not have a battloid mode, the Ion Blasters can only fire forward on these mecha.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
    - **Range:** 4000 feet
    - **Mega-Damage:** Each blaster does 2D6. Two barrels fired at once do 4D6. Three do 6D6. All four do 1D6x10. Both arms may be fired at once (counts as one melee attack). 1, 2, 3, and 4 barrels all count as one melee attack.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Blasts only; equal to the hand-to-hand attacks of the person firing them.
    - **Payload:** Unlimited

8. **RAPID-FIRE LASER TURRETS (2, VBF-2T ONLY):** In order to assist the VBF-2T Transport Beta in recovering or deploying personnel and to give cover to ground troops during transfer operations, the VBF-2T has two rapid-fire laser turrets mounted on the underside of the mecha. These turrets can rotate 360 degrees and can elevate up and down in a 90-degree arc. They can shoot in any direction BELOW the VBF-2T. These lasers are usually controlled by the Gunner.

    - **Primary Purpose:** Ground Support
    - **Secondary Purpose:** Defense
    - **Range:** 2000 ft (609 m)
    - **Mega-Damage:**
        - Single "aimed" shot (1 laser; +3 to strike): 1D6 M.D.

        - Dual "aimed" shot (both lasers; +3 to strike): 2D6 M.D.
        - Short burst, both lasers (+1 to strike): 1D4x10 M.D.
        - Long burst, both lasers, one target (counts as two attacks, no strike bonus): 2D4x10 M.D.
        - Burst shooting wild/spraying (-1 to strike, can be short or long burst): 2D6 M.D. to everything it hits.
        - See aimed, burst, and shooting wild rules in the modern weapon proficiency section.
    - **Rate of Fire:** Equal to pilot's (or gunner's) combined hand to hand attacks. Single and dual "aimed" shots and short bursts count as one attack. Long bursts count as two attacks, and shooting wild takes ALL melee attacks in a melee round.
    - **Payload:** Unlimited.

9. **HAND TO HAND COMBAT:** The VBF-2 Beta can engage in hand-to-hand combat if absolutely necessary. The VBF-2T is limited to kick and stomp attacks only, however. The Beta's hands are so constructed that it cannot hold a GU or EU gun pod of any kind. It has to rely on its built-in weapons and speed in a fight.

    - Punch does 1D6 M.D. in Battloid
    - Kick does 1D6 M.D. in Guardian/Battloid
    - Body Flip/Throw does 1D6 M.D.
    - Body Block/Tackle does 1D6 M.D.
    - Stomp does 1D4 M.D.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- **SF-10 SHADOW CLOAKING DEVICE:** About 20% of VBF-2 Beta Fighters are equipped with the SF-10 Shadow Cloaking Device. The stats for this device are the same as those for the VAF-8 Alpha Fighter.
- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** Invented during the construction of Southern Cross mecha, this coating scrambles laser tracking and reduces laser damage by half (lasers ONLY).
- **RADAR:** 40 mile range. Can identify and track up to 60 targets simultaneously.
- **BACKUP RADAR:** 10 mile (16 km) range. Can identify and track up to 20 targets simultaneously.
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Wide band and directional radio and video telecast capabilities. Range is 600 miles (945 km) or can be boosted indefinitely via satellite relay.
- **LASER COMMUNICATIONS:** Long-range, directional communication system. Effective range: 100,000 miles (157,500 km).
- **COMBAT COMPUTER:** Calculates, stores, and transmits data onto the cockpit computer screen, heads-up display (H.U.D.), or the pilot's helmet display. Patches in with targeting computer and VAF-8R reconaissance correlation computer.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Assists in the tracking of enemy targets and is partly responsible

for the VBF-2's high strike bonus.

- **LASER TARGETING SYSTEM:** 100 mile (160 km) range. Assists in the striking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VBF-2's high strike bonus.
- **MOTION DETECTOR AND COLLISION WARNING SYSTEM:** 500 ft (152.5 m) range. Sounds an alarm and red light warns pilot of impending collision and/or immediate target.
- **TELESCOPIC OPTICAL ENHANCEMENT:** 4000 ft (1218 m) range, up to 64x magnification. 20 ft (6.1 m) field of vision.
- **THERMO-IMAGER:** 4000 ft (1218 m) range. A special optical heat sensory unit that allows the infrared radiation of warm objects to be converted into a visible image. It also enables the pilot to see in darkness, shadows and through smoke.
- **NIGHTVISION OPTICS:** 4000 ft (1812 m) range. An image intensifier that is passive, meaning it emits no light of its own, but relies on ambient light which is electronically amplified to give a visible picture. Nightvision can not work in absolute darkness (but infrared and thermo-imagers can).
- **EXTERNAL AUDIO PICKUP:** 300 ft (91.5 m) range. A sound amplification listening system that can pick up a whisper 300 ft away.
- **HEAD SPOTLIGHTS:** 600 ft. (182 m) range.
- **EJECTOR SEAT:** In case of an emergency, all three crewmembers can be instantly ejected. No ejection seats are provided for passengers in the cargo bay, unfortunately.
- **CE-1 CYCLONE EJECTOR SYSTEM:** Also in case of an emergency, all three VR-135 Forager Cyclones will also be ejected from the doomed mecha. This system is activated automatically when the pilot pulls the activation lever for his ejection seat. The cyclones will deploy parachutes once outside of the mecha and then land within 1D6x1000 feet of the pilot and crew. This system was installed to allow pilots to retrieve their cyclones even after their veritechs had been destroyed.
- **SELF-DESTRUCT:** A last ditch effort to prevent the capture of a Veritech unit (usually preceded by the pilot's ejection from the Veritech) is self-destruction. Explosive damage is fairly contained. A VBF-2 Beta without missiles (or few) does 3D6 x 10 M.D., but a Veritech with all or most of its missiles (35 or more) will do 3D6 x 100 M.D. to a 50 ft (15.2 m) radius.
- **SMOKE SCREEN SYSTEM:** The VBF-2 Beta can emit a thick cloud of smoke from its rear to create immediate cover. The smoke screen system can discharge a maximum of 4 bursts before needing replacement (smoke missiles can be converted to function in the system). Each burst will cover a 60 ft area (19.8 m).
- **HEAT AND RADIATION SHIELDS:** Special shielding prevents the penetration of life-threatening heat and radiation.
- **INDEPENDANT OXYGEN AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM:** Built-in tanks provide one (1) week of continuous oxygen. With the special recycling systems, this may be extended to four (4) weeks.
- **SURVIVAL GEAR:** The VBF-2 includes three VR-135 Forager Cyclones, six weeks' compact emergency rations, an emergency signal beacon, three first-aid kits, and a life raft. There is space for an energy rifle to be attached to each ejector seat, and the crew of course carry side-arms.

SPECIAL RULES FOR GUNNERS

NOTE: For the purposes of this section, the "gunner" is anybody who has weapon systems skill and is in the gunner's station of the Beta, whether he is the Beta Gunner, Comm Officer, or just somebody along for the ride.

The gunner receives as many attacks per melee as if he had equivalent-level Beta Basic Combat (or Expert Combat, if he has Expert Combat). He can control all the weapons in the Alpha (if the Beta is connected and the Alpha pilot allows) and Beta, or just choose certain weapons (as many as he thinks he can handle) before combat begins. When the gunner is controlling a weapon, nobody else can use it until he releases control, even if the gunner never fires it!

Weapons to be controlled by the gunner must be declared before combat begins. It takes one full melee for the gunner to change to different weapons, and during that time he can fire no weapons, and none of the weapons he has been firing, or is about to assume control of, may be fired by anybody else until they're completely programmed in.

The gunner can control only weapons fire, not hand-to-hand combat. The gunner may control the gun pod of the Alpha when it is mounted on the plane. When the Alpha is holding it in its hand, however, he may NOT control it.

When the gunner is firing a weapon, he receives an additional +1 to hit. He also receives the +2 bonus to strike if the Beta is connected to a VAF-8R Alpha with a REO operating the sensory equipment, or the +1 bonus if one such plane is operating nearby. These bonuses do NOT apply to missiles (so missiles will probably not be among the weapons the gunner chooses to operate) but DO apply to mini-missiles.

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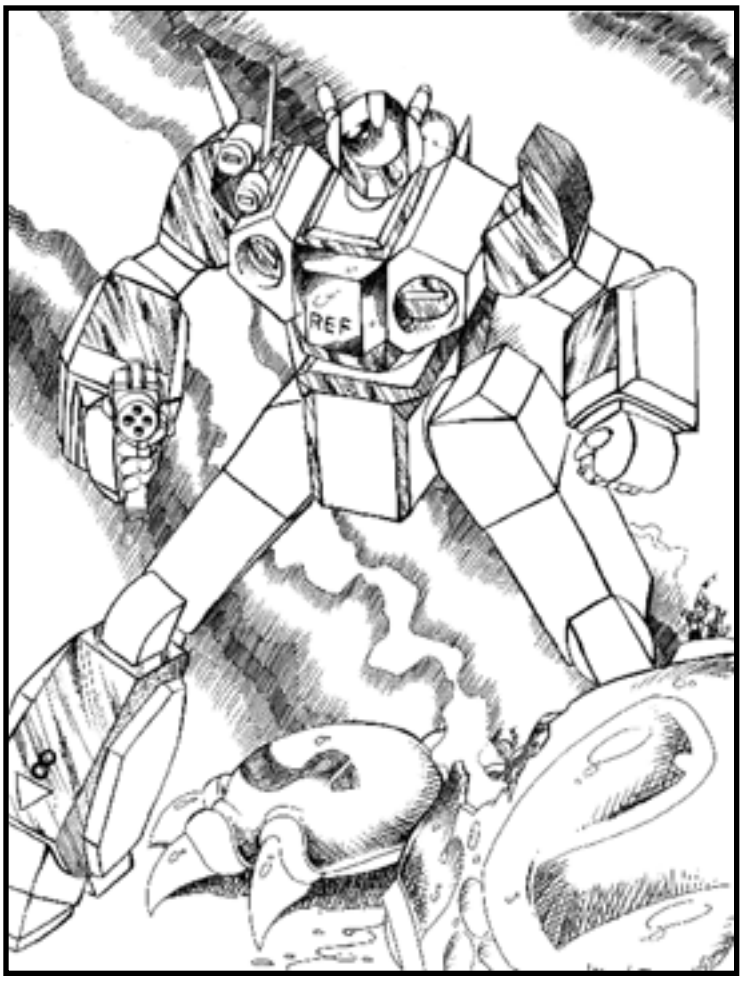
The following material is from **THE THIRD INVID WAR**, a fan supplement by **Dave Deitrich** and **Chris Meadows**. Please feel free to use, copy, and distribute it as you see fit. All we ask is that you give proper credit to us and do not claim that it is your own work. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

This mecha was based on an original mecha design by ***Aaron Meadows*** , Chris' younger brother.

THE VAF-8 ALPHA FIGHTER

BACKGROUND



The **VAF-8 Transatmospheric Alpha Fighters** were the standard Veritech fighters of the REF during the **Third Invid War**. Designed on Tirol by the engineers of **Project Shadowchaser**, the VAF-8 was the first original mecha designed from the ground up around the new cloaking technology developed to counter the Invid protoculture tracking technology. The original SF-7 Cloaking Device had been outfitted on a small group of mecha, mostly VAF-6 Alphas and a few Mk III Gladiator Destroids. These new mecha (the *VAF-7A Alphas* and *Mk IV Gladiators*) were mainly technical experiments and were not really intended for mass production or use in combat. However, the push to equip the REF Jupiter mission with the latest technology necessitated these mecha being included with the mission's warships, and most of the prototype units were destroyed during the final battles of the Second Invid War.

During the lull following the Jupiter Mission's departure from Tirol, the VAF-8 Alpha and VBF-2 Beta Fighters were perfected and put into production. The VAF-8 was intended to be the next main fighter for the REF, and as such was designed with mass-production in mind. The main design of the fighter centered around two brand new systems in the REF arsenal, the SF-10 Shadow Cloaking Device and the FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture Variable Turbine Engines. The SF-10 was a more advanced version of the shadow cloak intended to be more reliable and cheaper to produce, although cloaking device production still remained the bottleneck of the VAF-8

production line. The FF-3000 was a new high-efficiency engine designed for use on transatmospheric fighters. The engine contained a variable thrust system that could use either air intakes (like a ramjet) or internal fuel supplies (like a rocket) to produce thrust. This made the mecha transatmospheric; the Alphas could be launched from an orbiting starship, engage in orbital combat, enter a planet's atmosphere to engage ground targets, and then escape the planet's atmosphere to return to the starship after the mission is complete. This engine fit in well with REF analyst predictions that most future mecha fighting would be fought in terms of orbital-to-ground engagements. Other improvements to the VAF-8 included an increased SRM load, wing hardpoints for variable missile loads, and the new GU-25 multipurpose gun pod.

After the Jupiter mission failed to report back from Earth, the threat of continued warfare with the Invid began to resurface. Mass production of the VAF-8 began in 2039, as the REF rebuilt and prepared for another possible conflict. Initially there were 3 different models of the VAF-8; the VAF-8A, VAF-8J, and VAF-8S. Although nearly identical in capabilities, the VAF-8A was intended for use by standard pilots, the VAF-8J by low-ranking officers, and the VAF-8S by squadron leaders. During the planning for the Icarus Recon Mission in 2042, Colonels John Korcheck and Roger Harris requested a special version of the VAF-8 for reconnaissance and electronic warfare. The REF R&D department developed the VAF-8R Recon Alpha Fighter to fulfill that request. The VAF-8R was slightly different from previous versions of the VAF-8, mostly because of the advanced sensor systems equipped on the Alpha. In addition, the VAF-8R was equipped with a copilot's station directly behind the pilot's station. This copilot was not actually intended to help fly the plane, but instead served to collect and correlate the massive amounts of data from the mecha's sensors. These copilots, called Recon Equipment Operators (REOs), were mostly intelligence officers who would analyze data and communicate it back to the command ship while the pilot and his escorts engaged the enemy and protected the VAF-8R.

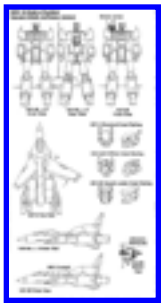
Hundreds of VAF-8s were produced for the REF Icarus and Prometheus missions. Due to the rush for production, many VAF-8s were sent into service without the SF-10 cloaking device, which could simply not be produced fast enough to keep up with demand. Roughly 60% of the fighters used by Icarus and Prometheus were not equipped with SF-10 cloaking devices. Despite this flaw, the VAF-8s served well during the Third Invid War. Even with the blockade created by the Invid Orbiting Hives, many VAF-8 Alphas made it to Earth to bolster the resistance forces there. However, attrition prevented the numbers on Earth from ever becoming too high, as the Invid blockade made spares and replacement parts hard to come by on occupied Earth.

The VAF-8 served as the major fighter of the REF (and later the Robotech Guardian Forces) from 2040 up until 2058, when it was replaced by the VAF-9 Mark II. Even after production ceased, the VAF-8 remained a common fighter inthe RGF arsenal for decades, commonly seen throughout Sentinels Alliance territory until almost the end of the 21st century.

The VAF-8 series Veritechs have the sleek, angular lines of the VAF-6 Alpha series, but are equipped with swing wings (as in the VF-1 series fighter) and redesigned leg/engine units. The head of the mecha is located ventrally in fighter and Guardian modes, and each wing contains a single hardpoint for variable

missile loads, both similar to the older VF-1 Veritechs. The VAF-8 series marks the return of the REF to distinctive head styles to indicate rank. Though the head-mounted lasers are exactly the same for each model, the head shapes are different and recognizable for each version of the Alpha. In addition, each fighter has highlight colors and identification numbers painted in different colors by model. The VAF-8A is color is blue; the VAF-8J is red; VAF-8S is green. The rest of the mecha's color scheme is usually based on where the unit is stationed; i.e. space Veritechs are often painted flat black, desert Veritechs are painted with a light tan camouflage, etc. Some of the shadow-equipped models are painted black with red canopies, perhaps out of nostalgia or a whimsical sense of humor on the part of the factory technicians. The VAF-8R has a slightly elongated and raised nose compartment to accommodate the additional REO crew member, and a shoulder-mounted sensor unit that contains many of the advanced sensor systems for the Recon Alpha. VAF-8Rs are usually highlighted in white to distinguish them from 8As, 8Js, and 8Ss. The VAF-8R uses the same head design as the VAF-8J Alpha.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF VAF-8 Alpha Fighter maintenance guide, document REF-5482-344-4387.

RPG STATS

Vehicle Type: Transatomspheric Stealth Veritech Fighter

Models: VAF-8A (Standard Model)
VAF-8J (Low-Ranking Officer Model)
VAF-8R (Reconnaissance Model)
VAF-8S (Squadron Leader Model)

Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

(1)	Head	75
	Head Lasers (2)	30
(2)	Shoulder Sensor Unit (8R only)	55
(3)	Main Body	400
	Shoulders/Missile Pods (2)	100 each
	Forearms/Missile Pods (2)	100 each

Hands (2)	60	each
Upper Legs (2)	120	each
Lower Legs/Thrusters (2)	120	each
Wings (2)	100	each
Tail Fins (2)	60	each
Reinforced Pilot's Compartment	200	
Reinforced REO's Compartment (8R only)	150	
Wing Weapon Pods (2)	50	each
GU-25 Gun Pod	100	

1. Destroying the head will destroy all optical enhancements and cause penalties of -2 to strike, parry, and dodge. Main communications is also destroyed for the fighter, though a backup radio system provides the veritech with short-range radio communications. Radar is stored in another area of the plane and is unaffected.
2. Depleting the MDC of the sensor unit on the VAF-8R will destroy many of the Recon Veritech's advanced sensor systems. The XR-A Doppler Radar, Sonar, and Nightvision Optics are all lost.
3. Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut the mecha down completely, rendering it useless. Be sure to note the special rules regarding failure of the SF-10 cloaking device, listed in the Equipment section.

SPECIFICATIONS

Jet Mode: Mach 3.7 (2479 mph/3989 kmph) maximum.

Jet Cruising: About Mach 1.5 (1005 mph/1617 kmph)

Guardian Mode: Hover stationary to Mach 1.5 (1005 mph/1617 kmph)

Battloid Mode, Flying: Hover Stationary to about 400 mph (644 kmph).

Battloid Mode, Running: 180 mph (290 kmph)

Battloid Mode, Leaping: 100 ft (30.5 m) up or across without booster assistance. 350 ft (106.8 m) with booster jets' assistance.

Height: 34 ft (10.2 m) in Battloid mode
21 ft (6.3 m) in Guardian mode
15 ft (4.5 m) in Jet mode

Width: 13 ft (3.9 m) in Battloid mode
23 ft (6.9 m) in Jet and Guardian modes (14 ft/4.2 m with wings in swept position)

Length: 39 ft (11.7 m) in Jet mode
32 ft (9.6 m) in Guardian mode

Weight: VAF-8A, J, S: 11.6 tons without missiles, 17.2 tons fully loaded.
VAF-8R: 13.0 tons without missiles, 18.6 tons fully loaded.

Cargo: VAF-8A, J, S: 8 cubic foot compartment behind cockpit for personal items. VAF-8R: 3 cubic foot compartment behind REO's compartment. Cyclone spaces can also be used for spare storage and can hold up to 500 lbs.

Main Engine: FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture turbine in each leg

Range: 16 Protoculture cells will give the mecha an active combat life of about two years. The mecha can operate on half as many cells (8) for 12 months, but maximum speed is reduced by half and the mecha is at -1 to strike. As a last resort, the mecha can operate solely on fusion power, but maximum speed is reduced by 75%, the head lasers cease to function, and the mecha is at -2 to strike and -2 to dodge.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **MM-70B MULTI-MISSILE SYSTEM**: Similar to the MM-60 missile launcher system used in the VAF-6 and VAF-7 Alpha Fighters, the MM-70B retains the same electronic systems but can include an additional 10 SRMs due to the increased size of the VAF-8. A total of 70 short range missiles are included; Shoulders: 8 each, Forearms: 12 each (6 on both sides of the arm), Lower Legs: 15 each (3 launchers on each leg).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft
    - **Missile Type**: Standard RDF short-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor piercing, or plasma. A typical combat mix of missiles is 35 armor piercing, 25 high explosive or plasma, 8 fragmentation, 2 smoke.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type; typically 2D4x10 M.D.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty or all. The number of volleys a character can fire per melee is equal to his/her attacks. Remember, a volley, regardless of the number of missiles, counts as one attack.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 1 to 5 miles.
    - **Payload**: A maximum capacity of 70 short-range missiles. Mini, medium and long range missiles can not be used.

2. **HEAD MOUNTED TWR-25 PULSE LASERS (2)**: 2 tirolian-built lasers are mounted on the head of the VAF-8 and can be used in any mode; fighter, guardian, or battloid (similar to the old VF-1 Veritech). In combat the lasers are limited to the number of attacks the pilot has, but they can also be used in a continuous beam, making them useful for cutting or demolitions.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense Weapon
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Tool for Cutting
    - **Mega-Damage**: 4D6, or 2D6 if only one is fired. The lasers can also be fired in a long continuous blast that lasts the entire round and does 2D6x10 M.D. However, this mode is

unsuitable for combat purposes and imposes a -2 to strike rolls to attack moving targets.
    - **Range**: 4000 ft
    - **Payload**: Unlimited

3. **WING HARDPOINTS**: The VAF-8 has two hardpoints (1 per wing) which can be used to mount missiles and other ordinance for heavy assaults and bombardments. Each hardpoint can mount 1 long range missile, 3 medium range missiles, or one pod of mini-missiles. These missiles do NOT have to be dropped prior to transformation into battloid mode; however, the missiles cannot be fired in battloid mode because they are covered by the tail fins of the mecha.

   NOTE: VAF-8s found in the field will typically NOT be equipped with missiles on their hardpoints, as these missiles are usually used up within the first few minutes of combat.

    - **LONG RANGE MISSILES**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Spacecraft
        - **Missile Type**: Standard REF long-range missiles, usually proton, reflex heavy and reflex multi-warhead.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
        - **Rate of Fire**: One or two.
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 500 to 1800 miles.
        - **Payload**: One per hardpoint; two maximum.
    - **MEDIUM RANGE MISSILES**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Heavy Assault
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Mecha
        - **Missile Type**: Standard REF medium-range missiles, usually high explosive, armor piercing, or multi-warhead.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
        - **Rate of Fire**: One, two, three, four, or six (all).
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 50 to 80 miles.
        - **Payload**: Three per hardpoint; up to 6 maximum.
    - **MINI-MISSILE PODS**
        - **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense
        - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Personnel
        - **Missile Type**: Any except plasma. Armor-Piercing is standard issue.
        - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with mini-missile type; usually about one mile.
        - **Rate of Fire**: Volleys of two, four, or eight
        - **Range**: Varies with missile type
        - **Payload**: 15 per launcher; up to 30 maximum.

4. **STEALTH RECON PODS (2, typically used by the VAF-8R)**: The VAF-8R Recon Veritech is usually equipped with two special electronic warfare suites instead of missiles on the wing hardpoints. Called Stealth Recon Pods (SRPs), these pods are actually remote-controlled robot

vehicles used for data gathering and reconnaissance, spy satellites, or beacons. The SRPs are powered by miniaturized fusion reactors and contain NO protoculture systems, making them undetectable by Invid protoculture sensors. The SRPs contain an internal antigravity engine that allows them to maneuver at will after being launched, or even return to the VAF-8R after completion of a mission. The SRPs must be controlled by a human operator (usually the REO) at all times, as they do not possess any form of artificial intelligence guidance. Like the missiles, the SRPs do not need to be ejected before the Recon Alpha converts into battloid mode.

- **Primary Purpose**: Intelligence-Gathering
- **Pod M.D.C.**: 15
- **Range**: Essentially indefinite (uses nuclear energy source). Data transmission systems have a 400 mile range, which can be extended using satellite or other transmission systems. Speed: 200 mph max; cruising speed while gathering intelligence is usually only 50-100 mph (any faster blurs the images)
- **Bonuses**: +2 to dodge
- **Payload**:
  - Optical Sensor Packet including telescopic (4x), infrared, and
  - Radar Sensor Unit. Range: 40 miles. May track up to 30 targets simultaneously.
  - Motion Detector/Collision Warning System. Close Range: 200 feet. Helps the SRP operator avoid collisions and plot locations of pieces of debris too small to be picked up by radar.
  - Laser Targeting System. Range: 100 miles. Aids in pinpointing enemy targets precisely so long-range missiles may be fired from the Beta or other planes to take them out.
  - Telemetry Computer: Analyzes and organizes sensor output for transmission back to the Alpha (or whatever site is analyzing the data). Transmissions are scrambled and broadcast on low-band frequencies to avoid enemy detection/decryption.
  - Radio Communications: Used primarily for relaying sensor readings back to the Alpha, but may be reprogrammed for use as a satellite relay system. Range: 400 miles.

5. **GU-25 25mm QUAD-BARREL HAND CANNON**: The VAF-8 Alphas are armed with a new miniaturized gun pod, resembling a giant Ingram MAC-10 for mecha. The new pod is less bulky, less unwieldy, and can hold more ammunition than the GU-XX. Two may be mounted and used, but one is standard-issue.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault/Defense
- **Range**: 4000 feet (1200 m)
- **Mega-Damage**: Does 3D6 MD short burst, 6D6 medium burst, 1D6x10 full melee burst.
- **Rate of Fire**: Short or medium bursts count as one attack. The pilot can fire as many bursts as his combined hand to hand attacks per melee. A full melee burst takes the place of all other attacks.
- **Payload**: Can fire 48 short bursts, 24 medium bursts (equal to 2 short bursts), or 12 full

melee bursts (equal to 4 short bursts).
    - **NOTE**: Four GU-25 ammo clips can be stored in the legs (two clips in each). Reloading requires two melee actions.

6. **OPTIONAL USE OF ANY OTHER GUN POD**. Although almost always assigned a GU-25, the VAF-8 series can use any mecha gun pod (past or present) if needed and available.

7. **OPTIONAL HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**. Punch does 1D6 M.D., Body Block does 1D6 M.D., Kick does 1D6 M.D., Leap Kick does 2D6 M.D., Stomp does 1D4 M.D., but is limited to targets no more than 12 feet tall. Body Flip and Body Block does 1D6 M.D.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- **SF-10 SHADOW CLOAKING DEVICE**: VAF-8 series Alpha Fighters are designed to use the SF-10 Cloaking Device, the new standard cloaking device for the REF. A much improved version of the original SF-7 cloaking device, this version incorporates changes that makes the device smaller and more affordable to manufacture. The device still operates like older versions; rendering the mecha invisible to all electronic forms of detection, including radar, Invid Protoculture sensors, and microwaves. Only light- based detection systems, such as optical and laser tracking will detect the mecha.

  The SF-10 is the first cloaking device to feature THREE modes of operation instead of only two: ON, in which the device operates normally; OFF, in which the device is shut off and the mecha is detectable by all forms of electronic detection; and SAFETY, in which the device emits a "4th dimensional blip," which is detectable by other REF mecha's collision warning systems. The SAFETY mode is used for close formations where mecha proximity could potentially cause disastrous collisions.

  The SF-10 is slightly more reliable than its predecessor. Once the main body MDC of the fighter has been reduced to 200 M.D. or less, there is a cumulative 10% chance of the SF-10 failing for every 20 points of damage beyond that. For example,there is a 10% chance of the device failing when the main body MDC is between 180-200, 20% when the MDC is between 160-180, 30% when the MDC is between 140-160, etc. Once a cloaking device fails it CANNOT be repaired; it must be replaced by another working SF-10, either from a salvaged fighter or a parts depot.

  BONUSES: (ON and SAFETY modes) The Veritech always gets first attack in the first round of combat. After that, the mecha has a +3 on all initiative rolls. Also provides an additional +2 to dodge, and +1 to strike.

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING**: A Southern Cross invention, this coating scrambles laser tracking and reduces laser damage by half (lasers ONLY).

- **RADAR**: The VAF-8 is equipped with a dual radar system. The first system is a *long range radar* that has a range of over 100 miles (160 km) and can track up to 25 targets simultaneously within that range. The problem with the system, however, is that the powerful long distance radar waves tend to give away the position of the craft; attackers using radar-guided weaponry have a +2 to hit the VAF-8 while the system is on.

  The second radar is a *combat radar* that has a range of 10 miles (16 km) and can identify and track up to 100 targets simultaneously. This radar uses frequency hopping and a number of other techniques to prevent its emissions from giving away the position of the VAF-8.

  NOTE: In general, Invid do **NOT** use radar-tracking weapons.

- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS**: Wide band and directional radio and video telecast capabilities. Range is 600 miles (945 km) or can be boosted indefinitely via satellite relay.

- **LASER COMMUNICATIONS**: Long-range, directional communication system. Effective range: 100,000 miles (157,500 km).

- **COMBAT COMPUTER**: Calculates, stores, and transmits data onto the cockpit computer screen or heads-up display (H.U.D.) of the pilot's helmet. Patches in with targeting computer.

- **TARGETING COMPUTER**: Assists in the tracking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VAF-8's high strike bonus.

- **LASER TARGETING SYSTEM**: 100 mile (160 km) range. Assists in the striking of enemy targets and is partly responsible for the VAF-8's high strike bonus.

- **MOTION DETECTOR AND COLLISION WARNING SYSTEM**: 500 ft (152.5 m) range. Sounds an alarm and red light warns pilot of impending collision and/or immediate target.

- **TELESCOPIC OPTICAL ENHANCEMENT**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. 20 ft (6.1 m) field of vision.

- **HEAD SPOTLIGHTS**: 600 ft (182 m) range, normal light.

- **INFRARED SPOTLIGHT**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. The infrared spotlight sits in the front of the sensor head. It emits an infrared light beam that is invisible to the normal eye. However, an enemy with infrared optics can easily see the beam of light and track it to the Veritech. Smoke impairs vision/beam.

- **THERMO-IMAGER**: 2000 ft (609 m) range. A special optical heat sensory unit that allows the infrared radiation of warm objects to be converted into a visible image. It also enables the pilot to

see in darkness, shadows and through smoke.

- **EXTERNAL AUDIO PICKUP**: 300 ft (91.5 m) range. A sound amplification listening system that can pick up a whisper 300 ft away.

- **EXTERNAL VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM**: 600 ft (183 m) range. A video camera system with telescopic capabilities (8x magnification) is built into the head. The video images can be relayed to a cockpit monitor and stored on removable video disks. Maximum disk capacity is 24 hours. Disks can be erased and reused.

- **EJECTOR SEAT**: In case of an emergency, the pilot can be instantly ejected. In battloid mode, the pilot is ejected out of the mecha's back.

- **CE-1 CYCLONE EJECTOR SYSTEM**: Also in case of an emergency, the VR-135 Forager Cyclone will also be ejected from the doomed mecha. This system is activated automatically when the pilot pulls the ejection lever. The cyclone will deploy parachutes once outside of the mecha and then land within 1D6x1000 feet of the pilot. This system was installed to allow pilots to retrieve their cyclones even after their veritechs had been destroyed.

- **SELF-DESTRUCT**: A last ditch effort to prevent the capture of a Veritech unit (usually preceded by the pilot's ejection from the Veritech) is self-destruction. Explosive damage is fairly contained. A VAF-8 Alpha without missiles (or few) does 2D6 x 10 M.D., but a Veritech with all or most of its missiles (35 or more) will do 2D6 x 100 M.D. to a 50 ft (15.2 m) radius.

- **SMOKE SCREEN SYSTEM**: The VAF-8 Assault Alpha can emit a thick cloud of smoke from its rear to create immediate cover. The smoke screen system can discharge a maximum of 4 bursts before needing replacement (smoke missiles can be converted to function in the system). Each burst will cover a 60 ft area (19.8 m).

- **HEAT AND RADIATION SHIELDS**: Special shielding prevents the penetration of life-threatening heat and radiation.

- **INDEPENDENT OXYGEN AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM**: Built-in tanks provide 48 hours of continuous oxygen. A special recycling system can keep the air breathable for a maximum of one week.

- **SURVIVAL GEAR**: The VAF-8 includes a VR-135 Forager Cyclone, four weeks' compact emergency rations, an emergency signal beacon, three first-aid kits, and a life raft. There is space for an energy rifle to be attached to each ejector seat, and the pilot can of course carry a side-arm.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT FOR VAF-8R RECON VERITECHS

Because of their primary duty as the main intelligence gathering mecha for the Icarus forces, the VAF-8R Alphas were equipped with additional sensor systems not found on standard VAF-8 Veritechs. Most of these systems are included in the external sensor unit on the shoulder of the mecha, and loss of this unit will seriously reduce the VAF-8R's reconnaissance capabilities.

- **XR-A EXTERNAL DOPPLER TRACKING RADAR**: 300 mile (480 km) range, and can identify and track up to 140 targets simultaneously. However, the powerful waves of this radar create a tremendous radar image on enemy screens, giving enemies with radar tracking capabilities a +4 (!) to hit the Veritech.

- **SONAR**: 20 mile (32 km) range underwater. Can identify and track up to 30 targets simultaneously.

- **RECONNAISSANCE CORRELATION COMPUTER**: Operated by the Recon Equipment Operator (REO), this high-tech computer system analyzes reconnaissance data and projects it on the REO's screens. This system is also tied in with the Combat and Targeting computers of the mecha; the REO decides what data should receive the pilot's attention.

- **NIGHT VISION OPTICS**: 4000 ft (1812 m) range. An image intensifier that is passive, meaning it emits no light of its own, but relies on ambient light which is electronically amplified to give a visible picture. Night vision can not work in absolute darkness (but infrared and thermo-imagers can).

- **TELESCOPIC IMAGE SENSORS**: Can magnify a visual image up to 1,000 times.

- **"BLACK-BOX" TELEMETRY RECORD SYSTEM**: A special reusable laserdisc recording system records all visuals and data collected by the REO from the Alpha's sensor systems for later analysis. Each disc can contain up to 36 hours worth of complete telemetry, including visuals, audio, and sensor readings from all instruments. The recorder is specially shielded to survive a crash (M.D.C. 100) and can be recovered later in the event that the VAF-8R is shot down.

- **SEISMIC SENSOR SYSTEM**: When on the ground, sensors in the VAF-8's legs are used in concert with the laser targeting system to read the passage of vehicles or major troop movement, as well as natural and unnatural seismic activity, within a range of 20 miles (greater in case of large vibrations). The reconnaissance correlation computer can read out, with a 70% probability, the approximate types and numbers of troops/vehicles, or the Richter Scale ranking of the seismic disturbance and distance to its epicenter. This system was often used to detect the location of Invid Genesis Pits during the war.

- **EJECTOR SEAT**: Both the pilot and the REO are equipped with ejection seats in case of emergency. These seats may eject in either fighter or battloid mode.

- **SURVIVAL GEAR**: The VAF-8R includes one Cyclone cycle (the REO must walk), four weeks' compact emergency rations, an emergency signal beacon, three first-aid kits, and a life raft. There is space for an energy rifle to be attached to each ejector seat, and the pilot and REO can of course each carry a side-arm with them.

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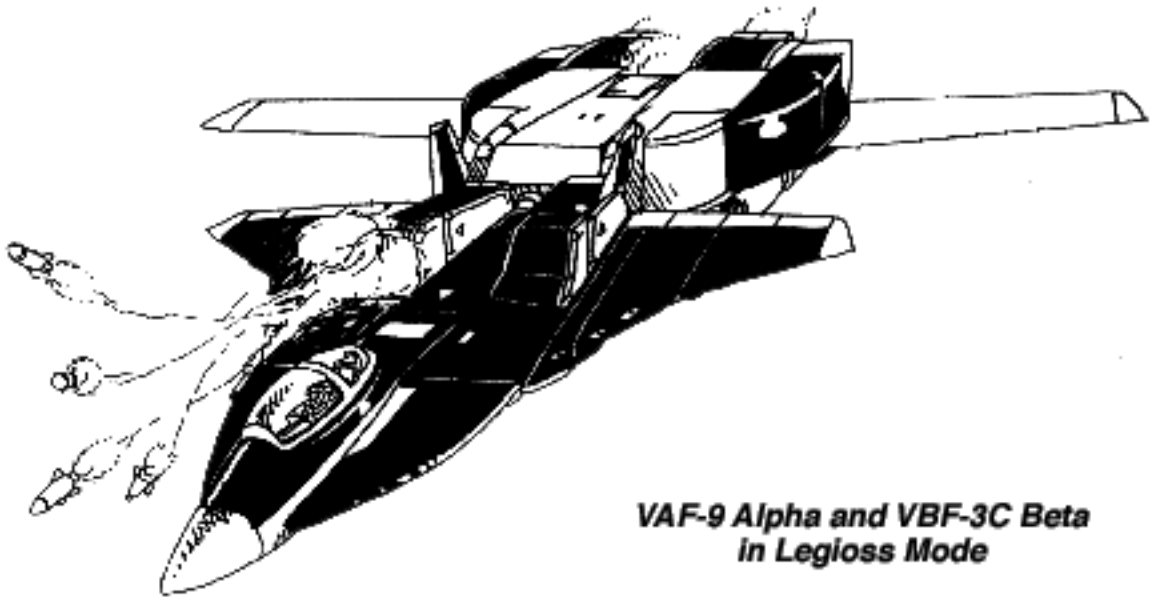
THE VERITECHS OF THE THIRD INVID WAR



VAF-9 Alpha and VBF-3C Beta in Legioss Mode

Veritechs have always been the representative mecha of terran Robotech forces. The transformable nature of the Veritech makes it ideal for a wide variety of missions, from air combat to air-to-ground fire support to hand-to-hand mecha combat. Veritechs have always held a special place in the hearts of REF designers, so it should come as no surprise that VFs were among the first mecha to be updated as new technology became available during the Second and Third Invid Wars.

In 2033, shortly after the end of the First Invid War, REF Command approved funding and personnel requests for **Project Shadowchaser**, a plan to design a new series of Veritechs to replace the aging VAF-6 Alpha and VBF-1 Beta fighters in the REF military. The Veritech designs would be centered around the new Shadow Cloaking technology being developed on Tirol to shield protoculture emissions from Invid sensors. The first mecha designs to be produced by Project Shadowchaser were the **VAF-7A Shadow Fighter**, the **VBF-1S Shadow Beta** and the **VF-1V Shadow Vindicator**, all three of which were unveiled in 2037. These original Shadow Fighters were conceived as technical experiments intended to test the benefits and limitations of the new Shadow Cloaking Device in conjunction with the then-standard VAF-6 Alpha and VBF-1 Beta designs. Despite the fact that the new fighters were not perfected and had barely even been tested, the new Shadow Fighters were rushed into production during the mad push of 2038 to build mecha for the upcoming Jupiter Assault Mission against the Invid Regis. All operational VAF-7A and VBF-1S Veritechs were included in the Jupiter Mission, and most were either lost with the SDF-3 or destroyed during the First Battle of Reflex Point.

Fortunately the loss of most of the original prototypes did not bring about the end of Project

Shadowchaser. Back on Tirol the project engineers continued to develop the Shadow Fighter concept, this time designing a whole new fighter chassis around the cloaking device. They decided to stick with the Alpha/Beta concept of the the older VAF Veritechs, where multiple mecha could combine to form a more powerful war machine and augment each other's abilities when necessary. Since REF military analysts felt that the majority of future combat with the Invid would take place in a planetary atmosphere, the designers borrowed some of the older body styling of the VF-1 series Veritechs for their new fighter, including a variable wing design and a more streamlined, less angular body shape. The primary result was an aerodynamic fighter design that could achieve significantly higher speeds than the older VAF-6 and VAF-7 Alpha Fighters in an atmosphere. The designers continued to improve on the new mecha's performance by including the newly-designed FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture turbines, which were capable of delivering considerably more thrust than older veritech engines. New armaments such as head lasers, a more compact SRM missile system, wing hardpoints for variable missile loads, and the new GU-25 gun pod were also included. The resulting mecha was named the **VAF-8 Transatmospheric Veritech Alpha Fighter**, and would become the standard Veritech fighter of the REF for many years to come.

Although most of the technology and parts of the VAF-8 were traditional enough to be mass-produced quickly, the shadow cloaking device still remained the major bottleneck of the production process. The cloaking technology was so complex and expensive that cloaking devices simply could not be manufactured quickly in an assembly line factory setup. In order to maximize the number of mecha included in the Prometheus Assault Mission, some of the VAF-8 Veritechs produced were sent out without being equipped with shadow cloaking devices. The non-shadow VAF-8s were of course much cheaper to build and could be produced in far larger numbers, but efforts would still be made to produce as many Shadow VAF-8s as feasibly possible. Even without the shadow device, however, the VAF-8 remained a formidable fighter and a powerful new weapon for the REF. Roughly 60% of the fighters used by the Icarus and Prometheus missions were not equipped with a SF-10 Cloaking Device.

When the Icarus Recon Mission to Earth was approved, Colonels John Korcheck and Roger Harris requested a special version of the VAF-8 for their mission. They wanted a two-man version of the VAF-8 that could serve as both a reconnaissance fighter and a command-and-control mecha. Project Shadowchaser responded with a variation of the VAF-8 designed with the recon and scouting in mind, the **VAF-8R Reconnaissance Alpha**. The VAF-8R had an extended body with a second cockpit behind that of the pilot, designated the recon equipment operator (REO) position. The recon alpha was equipped with an advanced suite of sensors, including exotic systems like sonar and seismic sensors. To help protect the planes and their valuable data, all Recon Alphas were equipped with shadow cloaking devices to protect them from Invid attack. The price for a single VAF-8R was impressive; equal to approximately 4 standard VAF-8 Alphas. Still, the mecha was ideal for Korcheck's and Harris' purposes. Only a limited run of VAF-8R Recon Alphas were produced, and almost all were

dispatched with the Icarus Recon Mission on the *S.S. Icarus*.

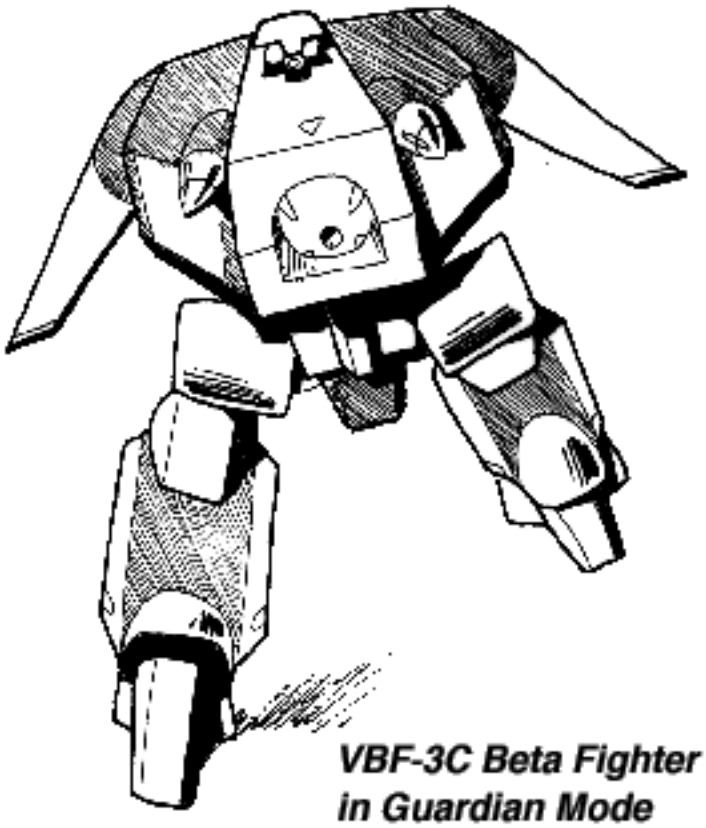
Shadowchaser engineers also developed a new Beta Fighter to go along with the VAF-8 Alphas. The **VBF-2 Beta Fighter** was a much-improved version of the classic VBF-1 that had served well in the First Invid War. The new mecha was larger than it's predecessor and had a greater capacity in its cargo bays for bombs, missiles, or passengers. The thruster system was redesigned to include two FF-3000 Fusion/Protoculture Turbines and three FF-2800 Rocket Thrusters, providing much more thrust than the original VBF-1. The missile capacity for the VBF-2 was also increased to include 40 Mini-missiles, 100 SRMs, 8 MRMs, and 2 LRMs. As a final modification, four ion cannons and an internal GU-25 were included to give the Beta extra weapons to fall back on in situations where the craft could not rely on its missiles. Unlike earlier Betas, all weapons on the VBF-2 could fire in all modes, providing the new Beta with greater flexibility in firepower.

Project Shadowchaser also designed a second variation of the VBF-2 Beta to expand on a concept that was heavily used during the First and Second Invid Wars. Although the original VBF-1s were designed only for a crew of three, commanders often sacrificed the bombs in the bomb bay in order to provide extra space in the Beta for carrying passengers. Using this method the Beta could carry up to 6 troopers in cyclone armor, which could then be inserted or evacuated deep behind enemy lines. Impressed by this technique, the engineers developed the VBF-2T Transport Beta, a Beta Fighter specifically designed to transport troops quickly from place to place and also able to provide support and cover fire with necessary. Several sacrifices had to be made for the expanded cargo space, however. The VBF-2T contained 40% less weaponry than the 2A, and was limited to two modes of operation (Guardian and Fighter Transport modes). Despite this the VBF-2T proved an incredible success, and was instrumental to the insertion of scout forces on Earth during the Icarus Recon Mission.

While the VAF-8 Alpha and the VBF-2 Beta represented a significant improvement over older Veritechs, the engineers felt that they had been cheated and had not reached the full capabilities of the technology available to them at the time. Many corners had to be cut and capabilities sacrificed in order to make the VAF-8s and VBF-2s cost effective enough to be produced in the numbers the REF command wanted. The opportunity to correct this came in 2041 when the REF High Command approved additional funds to develop an Air/Space superiority fighter that could stand up to anything the Invid could conceivably throw at it, and form the core of the new offensive to retake Earth. Shadowchaser designers drooled at the opportunity. They took their inspiration for the new fighter from the old VF-1V Vindicator prototypes, and designed a new Alpha that was not quite as large as the Vindicator, but still larger than the VAF-7A and VAF-8 Alphas. The extra room would be needed to accommodate the tremendous power this new fighter needed to possess. The new fighter was designed around the new FF-4000X Experimental Fusion/Protoculture Turbines, which would supply tremendous thrust for maneuvering both inside and outside an atmosphere. The new MM-74 mini-missile system was included as the mecha's main armament, as well as a pair of TWR-30 Pulse Lasers on the head for close range combat and GR-12 SRM launchers for backup. The new Falcon MRM Missile System was also included with the veritech; the Falcon system was revolutionary in that it stored the missiles inside the wings instead of on hardpoints, protecting them from attack and allowing the mecha to convert to battloid mode while still retaining the missiles. A pair of caseless 32mm depleted uranium autocannons were included on each arm to provide

another close-range punch in combat. Finally, the older EU-12 was redesigned and developed into the EU-XX Destabilizer Cannon. The resulting mecha was a quantum leap in veritech design, and was named the **VAF-9 Heavy Assault Veritech Alpha Fighter**.

As with the VAF-8, a new version of the Veritech Beta Fighter (designated the **VBF-3 Beta Fighter**) was also designed to augment the VAF-9 Alpha. The new beta design was also built around the FF-4000X Fusion/Protoculture Turbine engines and the SF-10 Cloaking Device. However unlike the VBF-2 only one version of the VBF-3 was initially produced (the VBF-3C Combat version) as it was felt that a transport version of the VBF-3 would not be useful or cost effective when combined with the combat-oriented VAF-9. The **VBF-3C** was designed for close to medium range combat and was armed with 120 SRMs, 20 MRMs, and 2 LRMs as its main missile armament. The VBF-3 also included an internal EU-16 Energy Cannon that could fire in all modes as well as internal GU-XX 35mm autocannons built into each arm to provide a multi-range punch in mecha to mecha combat. Finally, a new ultra-heavyweight energy gun pod designated the EU-18 gun pod was developed for hand-held use by the VBF-3C. To top the 3C's armament off, a pair of pulse lasers were added to the head of the mecha.



The Generals planning the Prometheus Mission had high praise for the VAF-9 Alphas and VBF-3 Betas, but the tremendous firepower of the mecha came at a tremendous price. The cost of a single VAF-9/VBF-3C combo was almost as much as an entire squadron of VAF-8/VBF-2 Legioss. Still, several squadrons of VAF-9s and VBF-3s were produced for the Prometheus Mission and Icarus Mission. 12 VAF-9s and 4 VBF-3Cs (prototypes) were included with the Icarus Recon Mission on board the *U.S.S. Icarus*. The rest were held back to be included in the main Prometheus Attack Force that would assault the Invid Space Defenses and the new Reflex Point.

New REF Veritech Designs

- The VAF-8 Alpha Fighter
- The VBF-2 Beta Fighter

- The VAF-9 Alpha Fighter
- The VBF-3 Beta Fighter

- Combat Bonuses for New Veritech Fighters
- Optional Veritech Hand Weapons

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EXTRA EQUIPMENT FOR CYCLONES

During the Cyclone Redesign Project of 2039 REF engineers and REF Intelligence took a close look at the capabilities of the Cyclones versus the missions they were being assigned to. Although the Cyclone was a marvelous mecha for reconnaissance, hit-and-run, infiltration, and extraction missions, it tended to be underpowered and underequipped for front-line confrontations with enemy main battle mecha. Often times 40-70% of a cyclone squadron would be destroyed while accomplishing mission objectives, simply because their armament and equipment was not sufficient to the tasks they were faced with. To combat this, the REF designed several different auxiliary units for use with Cyclones to augment their capabilities. The most common of these units are listed below.

CONTENTS:

- CA-101 Cyclone Re-entry Shield
- CA-102 Cyclone Heavy Weapon System: Particle Beam Cannon
- CA-103 Cyclone Heavy Weapon System: Tri-Barrel Laser
- CA-104 Cyclone Heavy Weapon System: Disruptor Cannon
- CA-105 Cyclone High-density Battery Pack
- CA-106 Cyclone Medical Sidecar

CA-101 CYCLONE RE-ENTRY SHIELD

The CA-101 was conceived and developed for the **Icarus Mission** by REF Intelligence, who wanted a quick and quiet way to land cyclone-clad agents on Earth to spy on Invid fortifications and troop movements. The result of their research was an external device that could allow a cyclone pilot to deploy high in the atmosphere (or even in orbit) and reach the ground without burning up in reentry. The CA-101 initially looks like a large box with thrusters that attaches to the back of any model cyclone like a backpack. In use, the cyclone rider is deployed at high altitudes and uses the cyclone's thrusters to begin descent towards the Earth. Then the pilot turns around so his back is facing the ground, and activates the CA-101. The pack immediately deploys a series of canvas balloons that form an umbrella-shaped disk on the back of the cyclone. This umbrella is made of heat resistant materials and shields the cyclone pilot, his mecha, and his equipment from damage during reentry. The thrusters on the CA-101 are used to slow

the cyclone's descent. Once the cyclone is low enough in the atmosphere, the CA-101 automatically jettisons the balloons and deploys a parachute to safely land the cyclone on the ground. The CA-101 contains chemical fuel and high-power batteries to power both its onboard computer and the cyclone's life support systems, so the entire procedure can be done while the cyclone's protoculture engine is turned off, making the cyclone essentially invisible to Invid scanners.

The CA-101 was a tremendous success, and was used extensively during the Third Invid War once the REF discovered that it was virtually impossible to penetrate the Invid space defenses with their starships. During the war Beta fighters would be loaded with Cyclone troopers and then fly close enough to the Earth to deploy the troopers, and then rocket away from earth before the Invid Space Troopers could catch them. Thousands of cyclone riders managed to land on Earth this way during the war. The CA-101 can be used by any cyclone, old or new, without penalty.

> **NOTE:** The CA-101 can be used only in battloid mode! Should the cyclone switch to motorcycle mode then the CA-101 will automatically pop off the back of the mecha.

Model Type: CA-101 Cyclone Re-Entry Shield
Class: Disposable Re-Entry Shield
Crew: One fully-clad Cyclone Rider

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

Main Unit	25
Thruster	10
Heat Balloon	2
Parachute	1

NOTE: Destroying any part of the CA-101 will render the entire unit useless.

CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEMS

CA-102 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (PARTICLE CANNON)
CA-103 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (TRI-BARREL LASER)
CA-104 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (DISRUPTOR CANNON)

As the mobile infantry forces for the REF, Cyclone riders were often ordered on rapid strike missions to help take out enemy fortifications and defenses in advance of heavier forces (such as Veritechs and Destroids). The cyclone's incredible mobility made it ideal for these types of missions, but the light armament of the mecha sometimes hindered the success of the mission. To combat this, REF engineers

came up with a series of external heavy weapon modules for use by cyclone forces during the Cyclone Redesign Project of 2039. In motorcycle mode these heavy weapons would be mounted on sidecars that could travel fairly quickly along with the cyclone, and in battloid mode the weapon would convert to an over-the-shoulder unit that increased the offensive capabilities of the cyclone.

All HWS units have their own internal power supplies so as not to cause any unnecessary drain on the cyclone's own engine system. There are three different HWS units; a particle cannon similar to the one used by the Excalibur Destroid, a tri-barrel rapid-fire laser cannon similar to the one used by the Raidar X, and a disruptor cannon similar to the one used by Shadow Fighters. Unfortunately due to size considerations, the HWS units use an unshielded protoculture power system that can be easily detected by Invid sensors when active. Furthermore, because of their size and placement, the ground and flight speeds of a cyclone were decreased by 15% while the HWS was attached. The units can be instantly detached from the cyclone mecha after they have served their purpose. Often one HWS of each type was assigned to a cyclone infantry platoon (12 Cyclone riders) and the three cyclone riders who used them became the heavy weapons squad of the platoon.

CA-102 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (PARTICLE CANNON)

Model Type: CA-102 Cyclone Heavy Weapons System (Particle Cannon)
Class: External Cyclone Heavy Weapon System
Crew: None

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

```
Main Body   50
Wheel (1)   5
```

Note: Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body destroys the unit.

- **Primary Purpose:** Heavy Assault
- **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
- **Mega-Damage:** 3D4x10 M.D. per blast.
- **Rate of Fire:** Can only fire once every 60 seconds (4 melee rounds).
- **Range:** 2 miles.
- **Payload:** Effectively unlimited.
- **Power Requirements:** 4 Protoculture Cells. **NOTE:** Protoculture emissions can be detected by Invid sensors!

CA-103 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (TRI-BARREL LASER)

Model Type: CA-103 Cyclone Heavy Weapons System (Tri-Barrel Laser)
Class: External Cyclone Heavy Weapon System
Crew: None

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

```
Main Body    50
Wheel (1)    5
```

Note: Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body destroys the unit.

- **Primary Purpose:** Anti-Aircraft
- **Secondary Purpose:** Assault
- **Mega-Damage:** 2D4 M.D. for a single shot, 4D4 M.D. for dual shots, 1D4x10 M.D. for triple shots.
- **Rate of Fire:** Equal to the pilot's total number of attacks per melee. The unit can fire one, two, or three shots at a time. Simultaneous firing counts as a volley regardless of how many cannons are shooting, and counts as one melee attack.
- **Attack Bonus:** The CA-103 has a built-in radar and advanced tracking system that provides a +2 bonus to strike any aircraft.
- **Range:** 1 mile.
- **Payload:** Effectively unlimited.
- **Power Requirements:** 2 Protoculture Cells. **NOTE:** Protoculture emissions can be detected by Invid sensors!

CA-104 CYCLONE HEAVY WEAPONS SYSTEM (DISRUPTOR CANNON)

The CA-104 is technologically the most advanced of the Cyclone HWS systems, and is also the most costly to produce and maintain. Because of these factors very few CA-104 systems made it to Earth with the forces of the Icarus Mission, and thus the HWS is VERY rare among resistance fighters. Only the largest and most organized of resistance groups (or the luckiest) even have a chance of ever seeing one of these units.

Model Type: CA-104 Cyclone Heavy Weapons System (Destabilizer Cannon)
Class: External Cyclone Heavy Weapon System
Crew: None

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

```
Main Body    50
```

```
Wheel (1)    5
```

Note: Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body destroys the unit.

- **Primary Purpose:** Assault
- **Mega-Damage:** 1D4x10 M.D. per blast.
- **Rate of Fire:** Can only fire once every 60 seconds (4 melee rounds).
- **Special Bonus:** When used against Invid Hive Shields, the Destabilizer will create a 10+2D6 ft hole in the force field, allowing troops to enter.
- **Range:** 4000 ft (1200 m).
- **Payload:** Effectively unlimited.
- **Power Requirements:** 4 Protoculture Cells. **NOTE:** Protoculture emissions can be detected by Invid sensors!

CA-105 CYCLONE HIGH-DENSITY BATTERY PACK

Another invention of REF Intelligence, the CA-105 is an external battery pack that allows a cyclone to operate at full capabilities without using the protoculture engine for a short period of time. This allows intelligence agents to operate inside invid hives without fear of being spotted by their protoculture emissions. The CA-105 is a high-density heavy metal battery that can store and supply a tremendous amount of electricity, enough to power a cyclone for up to 1 hours by itself. When used in conjunction with a cyclone's fusion engine, it allows the mecha to operate at full capabilities for 2 hours without using its protoculture engine.

The only disadvantage of the CA-105 is that the chemicals and metals used in the battery are highly corrosive and explosive, and tend to explode if the casing is breached. The unit can supply enough energy to run a cyclone for 1 hour by itself, or 2 hours with help from the FF-600 fusion reactor. Once depleted it takes 36 hours to completely recharge the battery, which can only be done using a cyclone fusion reactor or equivalent power source. The cyclone can NOT be used while it is recharging the battery. The CA-105 is the same size as a cyclone saddlebag and can be stored in place of either saddlebag on the back of the mecha. Two CA-105 battery packs can be used on one cyclone to double the duration, at the price of sacrificing both saddlebags. ONLY second generation cyclones can use the CA-105 for stealth purposes, though anyone can tap the battery as a source of energy.

Note: It is possible to significantly extend the life of the battery by switching between fusion/battery power and fusion power only when full power is not needed. Using this technique the battery can typically supply power for normal cyclone operation for up to 4 hours (8 hours with two batteries) provided prolonged combat is avoided. Switching between fusion only and fusion/battery power (or activating the cyclone's protoculture generator) takes one melee action.

Model Type: CA-105 Cyclone Battery
Class: Auxilary Energy Supply
Size: 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep
M.D.C.: 30

Note: Destruction of the CA-105 will result in an explosion that does 1D6x10 M.D. to all objects in a 10 foot radius. The cyclone the CA-105 is attached to is automatically considered destroyed (engine system is wrecked), though the pilot will usually be protected by the Cyclone's armor.

CA-106 "HOS-BOX" CYCLONE MEDICAL SIDECAR

The CA-106 was designed to provide good facilities for medical field work, in cases where the victim cannot be moved, or even reached by normal ambulances. When used in conjunction with the **VR-117 Firefly Rescue Cyclone**, the CA-106 can provide superb emergency field care to victims in even the worst of conditions. The Medical Sidecar contains diagnostic, surgical, and medical equipment, all of it microminiaturized and packed compactly in place so that no space is wasted. Because of its amazing facilities (equal to those of a fair clinic--save vs. coma/death at 1-56%), it has been nicknamed the "Hospital in a Box," or more simply, the "Hos-Box."

The Hos-Box sidecar is air-tight, shock resistant, and has mega-damage armor. When the Cyclone it is attached to converts to power armor mode, the sidecar's single wheel retracts and a handle pops out of the top, so the armored Cyclone Rider may carry the sidecar with him. Though commonly issued only to the VR-117 Firefly Cyclone, the Hos-Box is compatible with any model of Cyclone, old or new, and with almost any motorcycle.

Model Type: CA-106 Cyclone Medical Sidecar
Class: Medical Accessory Kit
Crew: A qualified doctor/Cyclone rider

M.D.C. BY LOCATION

Main Body	50
Wheel (1)	5
Handle	5

Note: Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body destroys the sidecar. There is a 75% chance that whatever it was carrying is ruined (takes 2D6 M.D.). Items that aren't ruined will be scattered over a 40-foot area by the blast.

Height: 3 feet, 6 inches
Width: 4 feet
Length: 5 feet, 4 inches
Weight: 50 lbs. empty, 250 lbs packed with medical equipment

Cargo: If the medical supplies are removed, the Hos-Box can carry approximately 16 cubic feet of material (4x2x2 foot storage compartment) and up to 400 lbs. It is not uncommon to see a Hos-Box doing duty in the wastelands as a cargo carrier.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT
Medical Supplies, including:

- Anaesthesiological equipment
- Diagnostic and monitoring equipment, including EKGs, portable ultra-sound scanner, etc.
- Fluorescent examining light, magnifying lenses, etc.
- Medical supplies (more common drugs including pain-killers, stimulants, adrenalin, other types of medicines)
- Sterilization equipment (anti-bacteriological sprays, etc.)
- Surgical gowns and accoutrements
- Surgical scalpels, forceps, etc.
- Other miscellaneous medical equipment that makes it equivalent to a clinic (fair facilities)--save vs. coma/death at 1-56%.

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Most of the weapons in this section were based on weapons used in ***Robotech: The Untold Story*** (A.K.A. *Megazone 23 Part 1*). Special thanks to **PETER WALKER** for pictures and background info.

CYCLONE HAND WEAPONS

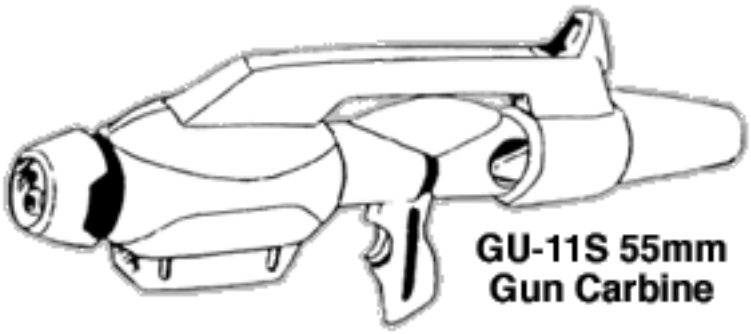
A big strength of the cyclone mecha is that because it is a battlesuit and not a full-sized mecha, it can use a variety of different hand weapons in addition to its normal armaments. Cyclone pilots can either use infantry hand weapons such as the Gallant H-90 or Wolverine Assault Rifle, or can use larger anti-mecha weapons with the help of the Cyclone's hydraulics and targeting systems. The weapons below for the most part fit into the latter category. They were actually designed for the ***Garland series cyclones*** used by the Southern Cross just before and during the *Second Robotech War*. Although somewhat rare after almost 12 years of warfare, they can still be found from time to time and are a valuable addition to cyclone infantry squads and terran resistance fighters.

> **NOTE:** These weapons can easily be integrated into your Southern Cross or Invid Invasion campaigns even if you are not playing a full *Third Invid War* campaign. They should be generally available on Earth any time after the late 2020s / early 2030s, shortly before the arrival of the Robotech Masters. Stats for the ***Southern Cross Garland Cyclones*** are available by clicking **HERE**.

CONTENTS:

- GU-11S 55mm Gun Pod
- GU-18 23mm Gun Pod
- GU-19 35mm Gun Pod
- N-1 Net Launcher
- GU-21 45mm Recoilless Rifle w/N-2 Net Launcher

GU-11S 55mm GUN POD



This weapon is a variant of the original GU-11 Gun Pod used by the old VF-1 Veritechs of the Robotech Defense Force (RDF). Smaller, with a shorter barrel and smaller ammo supply, the weapon was designed to be used by the smaller-scale battloids and garlands of the Southern Cross. The weapon can be used by Cyclone riders, but looks a little out of scale for them; more like a three-barrel bazooka than a carbine. Although popular because of it's strong punch, the weapon is becoming increasingly rare due to lack of 55mm ammo.

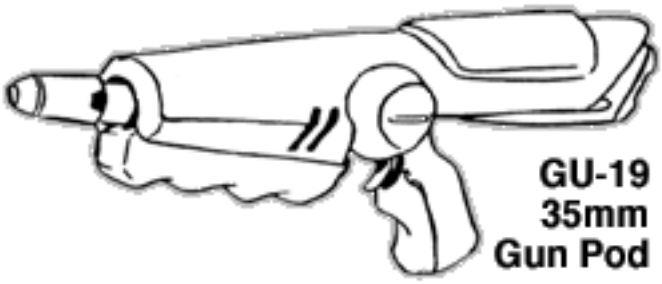
- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Assault
- **MEGA-DAMAGE:** 3D6 for a short burst, 6D6 for a long burst, or 1D6x10 for a full melee burst.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Short or medium bursts count as one attack. The pilot may fire as many bursts as his combined HTH attacks per melee. A full melee burst takes the place of all attacks.
- **RANGE:** 4000 ft (1200 m)
- **PAYLOAD:** 160 rounds per clip, equal to 16 short bursts, 8 long bursts, or 4 full-melee bursts.

GU-18 23mm GUN POD

A small handheld gun pod designed to be used by the series 5 Garlands of the Southern Cross. This handheld weapon is a fairly popular replacement for the EP-40 Pulse Beam Gun because of its non-reliance on protoculture energy supplies. The gun itself is difficult to find due to its limited production, but ammo can frequently be found in the ruins of old SC bases and equipment caches.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Assault
- **MEGA-DAMAGE:** 1D4x10 M.D.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Semi-automatic; equal to the pilot's combined HTH attacks.
- **RANGE:** 2000 ft (600 m)
- **PAYLOAD:** 12 rounds per magazine. Magazine clips fit in the back of the gun. Inserting a spare clip requires 2 melee actions (1 to remove the clip, and 1 to replace it).

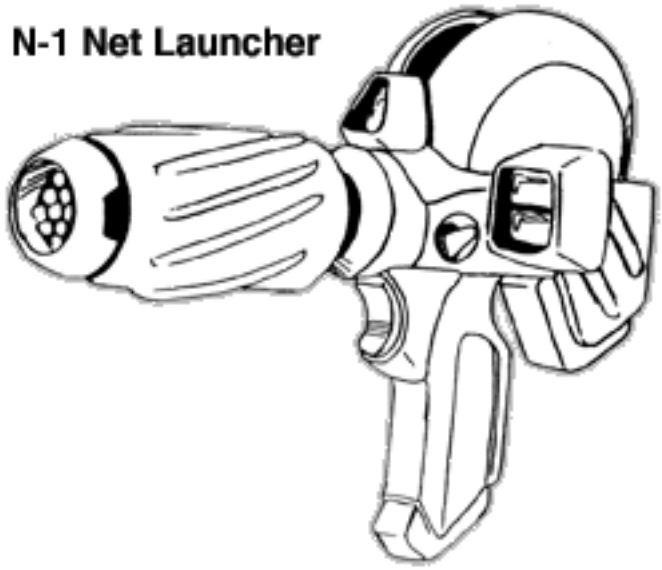
GU-19 35mm GUN POD



A non-protoculture, conventional ammunition version of the EP-37 Beam Cannon for the Cyclone mecha. This weapon is EXTREMELY popular with resistance fighters, as it uses the same ammunition that the GU-XX Gun Pod (used on Alpha and Beta fighters) uses, allowing the Veritechs and Cyclones to share ammo when necessary. The weapon can be used by humans without Cyclones, but is heavy and akward, and imposes a penalty of -3 to strike.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Assault
- **MEGA-DAMAGE:** 2D6 per short burst, 4D6 per long burst, or 1D6x10 per full melee burst.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Short or medium bursts count as one attack. The pilot may fire as many bursts as his combined HTH attacks per melee. A full melee burst takes the place of all attacks.
- **RANGE:** 4000 ft (1200 m)
- **PAYLOAD:** Can fire 12 short bursts, 6 long bursts, or 3 full melee bursts per clip. Note that although the bullets used by the GU-19 and GU-XX are the same, the clips themselves are different. Therefore bullets must be unloaded from one clip and loaded into another if the two mecha are going to share ammo.

N-1 NET LAUNCHER

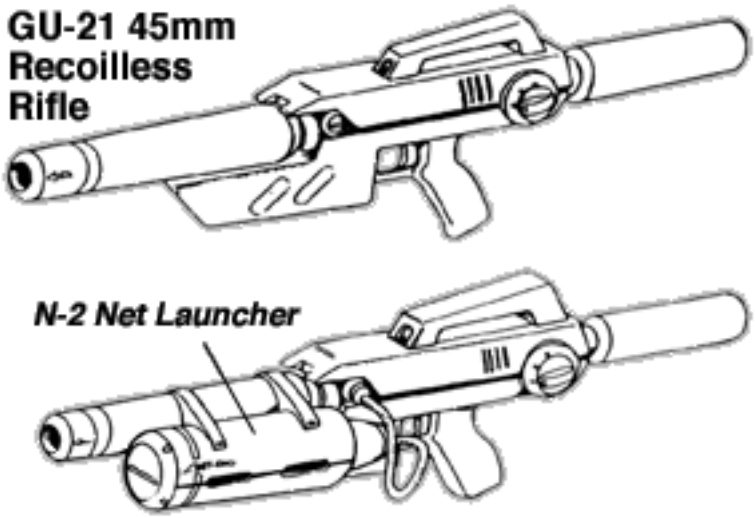


A unique weapon developed for the *Global Military Police (GMP)* during the years before the Second Robotech War, this weapon fires a woven cable net about 10 feet in diameter. The net is very strong, and breaking it requires the victim to do at least 20 MDC points of damage (total) to the net; each strand is only 1 MDC each, but many strands must be broken before the victim can be freed. It will take 4D6 melees for a person to untangle himself or herself from the net.

The N-1 Net Gun was originally designed to help GMP agents capture fugitives and suspects without a great risk of harming them (or their hostages). Due to this fact, this weapon is seldom used by terran resistance, as they seldom desire to actually capture an Invid. Instead, it is more commonly used by *Frags* and other Invid sympathizers to capture resistance fighters and slaves for the Invid.

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Capture
- **MEGA-DAMAGE:** None; see above.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Single shot weapon.
- **RANGE:** 100 feet
- **PAYLOAD:** One shot per net canister. Replacing a canister with a spare takes 2 melee actions (1 to detach the old canister, and 1 to put a new one on). Reloading a canister after it has been used requires 2D6x10 minutes.

GU-21 45mm RECOILLESS RIFLE (with optional N-2 NET LAUNCHER)



A rather powerful and dangerous weapon developed for the Garland cyclones shortly before the arrival of the Robotech Masters. This weapon is fairly rare and well sought after for it's destructive potential. The GU-21 fires 45mm fin- stabilized grenades, and can use several different types of grenades. The weapon uses a unique ammo clip that can carry up to 3 different types of ammo, and can switch between those ammo types by flipping a switch on the back of the rifle. The GU-21 ca use High Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT), Fragmentation (FRAG), Smoke or Gas grenades. The GU-21 can also be equipped with an external N-2 net launcher, which launches a net similar to the N-1 net gun.

GU-21 Recoilless Rifle:

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Assault
- **SECONDARY PURPOSE:** Anti-Mecha, Crowd Control
- **MEGA-DAMAGE: HEAT:** 2D4x10 M.D., FRAG: 1D6x10 M.D., Smoke or Gas: No Damage. The smoke grenades will block sight and infrared sensors, and the gas grenades may be loaded with drugs such as tear gas or sleeping gas.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Single Shots only. Number of shots per round is equal to pilot's combined HTH attacks.
- **RANGE:** 3000 ft (900 m)
- **PAYLOAD:** Each clip contains up to 30 grenades, and the 30 grenades carried can be subdivided into groups of 10 of different types. Switching types of grenades (by changing the switch at the end of the gun) takes 1 melee action.

N-2 Net Launcher:

- **PRIMARY PURPOSE:** Capture
- **MEGA-DAMAGE:** None; see N-1 Net Launcher description.
- **RATE OF FIRE:** Single shot weapon.
- **RANGE:** 100 feet
- **PAYLOAD:** One shot per net canister. Replacing a canister with a spare takes 3 melee actions (1 to detach the old canister, 1 to put a new one on, and 1 to hook it up to the GU-21's firing systems). Reloading a canister after it has been used requires 2D6x10 minutes.

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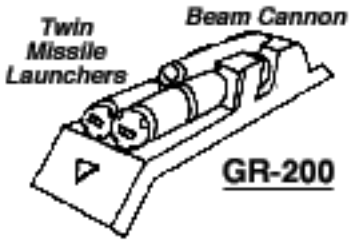
CYCLONE WEAPON MODULES

One of the key features of the cyclone design is the modular weapon systems it can use. The arm shields of all cyclone models can be customized with a variety of different weapon packages, allowing the mecha to be equipped with an array of weapons that match the requirements of its mission. The first generation cyclones had only three different weapon modules, the *GR-97 Plasma Missile Launcher*, the *EP-37 Beam Cannon*, and the *RL-6 Portable Rocket Launcher*. The second generation cyclones were designed so that they could use all of the above modules, PLUS a whole new series of modular weapons being designed by REF engineers. The below list represents the weapon modules most commonly found on Earth during the Third Invid War. Newer modules are constantly in development, however, helping to increase the versatility and efficitiveness of the Cyclone mecha.

CONTENTS:

- GR-200 Missile Launcher/Beam Cannon
- GR-215 Beam Cannons
- GR-220 Beam Cannon/4.45mm SMG
- Close Assault Defense System Mk. II
- Close Assault Defense System Mk. Ib
- GR-117 Rescue Hook

GR-200 FOREARM MISSILE LAUNCHER/BEAM CANNON



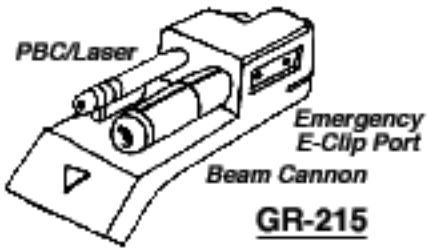
Designed especially for the VR-152 Battler II, this popular cyclone weapon unit is based on the old GR-97 Missile Launcher design used on the VR-052 Battler. The new unit mounts two one-shot plasma missile launchers, combined with a modified beam cannon derived from the older EP-37 design. The plasma missiles give the cyclone a heavy punch, and the beam cannons provide an energy weapon to fall back on when the missiles are gone. The GR-200 is the commonly requested and issued unit for cyclone units expecting heavy combat.

The beam cannon draws power directly from the cyclone's fusion reactor, giving the weapon unlimited

ammo so long as the reactor is functioning. The disadvantage to this is that there is no backup supply, and the beam cannon becomes useless hardware when the GR-200 is detached (though some resistance fighters have been known to "hot- wire" the weapon into another power supply). The missile launchers are of course one-shot weapons.

- **Primary Purpose:** Assault
- **Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
- **Missile Type:** REF Plasma Mini-missile ONLY.
- **Mega-Damage: Missiles:** 1D6x10 M.D. **Beam Cannon:** 1D4x10 M.D. per blast.
- **Rate of Fire: Missiles:** One or two at a time. **Beam Cannon:** Aimed, burst, or wild.
- **Range: Missiles:** 1 mile. **Beam Cannon:** 4000 ft (1200 m)
- **Payload:** 1 missile per launcher, for a total of 2 missiles per unit. The beam cannon draws power directly from the on-board fusion reactor, so it is effectively unlimited as long as it remains attached to the cyclone. The cannon is useless if detached.

GR-215 BEAM CANNONS



The GR-215 is an energy-only weapon package for cyclones. Two different weapons are mounted on the unit; a beam cannon, for a high damage at short range, and a small particle cannon, which packs less punch but has a much greater range and accuracy. The particle cannon uses a guiding laser for maintaining beam coherence, which in a pinch can be used at lower power settings for utilitarian purposes such as wielding and cutting.

The GR-215 was originally designed for use with the VR-135 Forager survival cyclone. The cyclone designers felt that reliance on missiles would be too big a hinderance in a guerilla combat situation such as the Invid Wars, and so designed the GR-215 to provide a dynamic range of energy-weapons that did not require ammo. In addition, the 215 is the only weapon package designed to take power directly from an external energy clip, in case the cyclone's reactor is malfunctioning or otherwise unable to supply power. Finally, as a direct result of the survival philosophy behind the Forager, the GR- 215s were designed to be extremely simple to maintain and repair int the field *(+20% to repair and modification rolls)*. Instructions for disassembling and reassembling the GR-215 are actually printed on the weapon itself.

VR-135 Forager cyclones come automatically equipped with a pair of GR- 215s, but the popularity of the unit has led it to be commonly used on other cyclone designs as well. It is often used in conjunction with another weapon system, such as the GR-200 or a CADS system, in order to provide greater variety in weapon selection.

- **Primary Purpose:** Defense

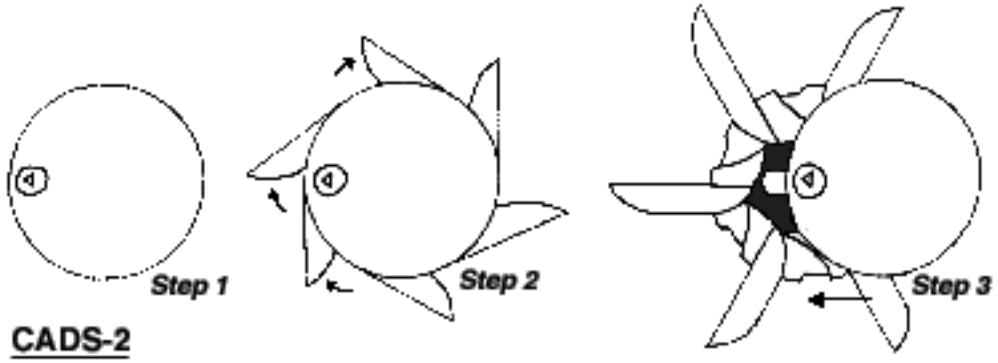
- **Secondary Purpose:** Survival
- **Mega-Damage: Beam Cannon:** 4D6 M.D. per blast. **Particle Beam:** 2D6 M.D. per shot. **Utility Laser:** 2D6 S.D. per round. Bursts are NOT possible with this weapon.
- **Rate of Fire:** Equal to the pilot's combined number of attacks.
- **Range: Beam Cannon:** 2000 ft (600 m) **Particle Beam:** 6000 ft (1800 m) **Laser:** 200 ft (60 m)
- **Payload:** The GR-215 draws power directly from the on-board fusion reactor, so it is effectively unlimited as long as it remains attached to the cyclone. The weapon has an emergency E-clip port that will give it 40 particle beam shots or 20 beam cannon blasts per clip if necessary.

GR-220 BEAM CANNON/4.45mm SMG

The GR-220 was designed in response to the need for a weapon unit that combined the high destructive power of a beam cannon with a more discreet conventional weapon. Such a mix is useful in both guard and law enforcement duty, where the conventional weaponry can be used as a deterrent, and the beam weapon used against heavier opponents. The GR-220 uses a light beam cannon combined with a 4.45 mm submachine gun, all concealed by a cover plate so as to not overly indicate the power of the unit. The 220 is commonly issued to VR-122 Protector cyclones or VR-120 Ferrets on guard duty.

- **Primary Purpose:** Security/Law Enforcement
- **Secondary Purpose:** Defense
- **Mega-Damage: Beam Cannon:** 3D6 M.D. per blast. **SMG:** 4D6 S.D. (the 4.45 mm rounds do NOT do M.D.)
- **Rate of Fire:** Aimed, Burst, or Wild.
- **Range: Beam Cannon:** 3000 ft (900 m). **SMG:** 1000 ft (300 m).
- **Payload:** The beam cannon draws power directly from the on-board fusion reactor, so it is effectively unlimited as long as it remains attached to the cyclone. The cannon is useless if detached. The SMG has 60 rounds per clip, and extra clips are usually stored in the carrying bags of the Cyclone.

CLOSE ASSAULT AND DEFENSE SYSTEM MK. II (CADS-2)

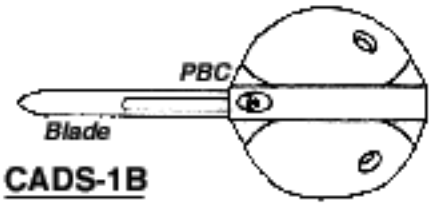


Also called "CADS- Super," this advanced version of the original CADS system is standard issue for the VR-141 Super Saber. Instead of sword blades, the disk- shaped hub units conceal whirling buzz-saw blades that can cut through solid steel girders in seconds. This attachment has great possibilities in the field of sabotage and demolitions as well as that of espionage. Like its predecessor, it is mostly silent, except for a low hum and the sound of the blades whirring. Unfortunately when cutting through metal, the CADS-2 will tend to make a great deal of noise, spoiling any chance of surprise.

Like its predecessor, the CADS-2 also contains an energy shield that can be used to shield the mecha from harm if necessary. The CADS-2 is large and awkward, and cannot be used as a weapon if detached from the Cyclone mecha. The unit draws power directly from the cyclone's onboard fusion reactor.

- **Primary Purpose:** Hand to Hand Combat
- **Secondary Purpose:** Clandestine operations
- **Range:** Within Reach
- **Mega-Damage: Slash:** 4D6 M.D. **Punch:** 6D6 M.D. **Power Punch:** 1D6x10 M.D.
- **Number of Attacks Per Melee:** Equal to combined hand-to-hand attacks. M.D.C. Special: 50 when retracted, but a renewing force field provides the blades and forearms with unlimited M.D.C. when extended (this only protects the saber blades and forearms).
- **Special Bonus:** Adds +3 to parry in hand to hand combat and even enables the character to attempt to parry/block energy blasts at a +1, but with ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER BONUSES APPLICABLE.
- **NOTE:** The CADS-2 is designed specifically for the VR-141 Super Saber, but can be used with other cyclones if necessary and available. Getting permission to use the unit is another matter, however.

CLOSE ASSAULT AND DEFENSE SYSTEM MK. 1B (CADS-1B)



Basically an updated version of the original CADS-1, designed as an alternative for the CADS-2. The CADS-1B resembles and has all the functionality of the CADS-1, but is smaller and has a particle cannon mated to it for distance attacks.

- **Primary Purpose:** Assault/Defense
- **Secondary Purpose:** Clandestine operations
- **Range: Blades:** Within Reach. **Particle Cannon:** 6000 ft (1800 m)
- **Mega-Damage: Slash:** 2D6 M.D. **Punch:** 4D6 M.D. **Power Punch:** 6D6 M.D. **Particle Cannon:** 4D6 M.D.
- **Rate of Fire (Particle Cannon):** Single shot; equal to pilot's number of attacks.
- **Number of Attacks Per Melee:** Equal to combined hand-to-hand attacks.
- **M.D.C. Special:** 50 when retracted, but a renewing force field provides the blades and forearms with unlimited M.D.C. when extended (this only protects the saber blades and forearms).
- **Special Bonus:** Adds +2 to parry in hand to hand combat and even enables the character to attempt to parry/block energy blasts at a +1, but with ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER BONUSES APPLICABLE.
- **NOTE:** The CADS-1B is designed specifically for the VR-041 Saber or VR- 141 Super Saber, but can be used with other cyclones if necessary and available. Getting permission to use the unit is another matter, however.

GR-117 RESCUE HOOK

The GR-117 is a rather unique weapon system originally designed for the VR-117 Firefly rescue cyclone. The primary "weapon" of the GR-117 is a grappling hook launcher with an extremely strong cable and hook. The grappling hook can be used in a variety of purposes, such as a makeshift crane, cable for pulling, or even for securing loose and crumbling fixtures. It can be used for it's original purpose of scaling buildings and walls as well, of course. In addition to the grappling hook, a welding laser is mounted on the module to allow the user to cut through bulkheads and rubble. The GR-117 unit is NOT designed with combat purposes in mind.

- **Primary Purpose:** Rescue
- **Secondary Purpose:** Demolition
- **Mega-Damage: Grappling Hook:** 5D6 S.D. (not designed to be used as a weapon) **Welding Laser:** 1D6 S.D., 3D6 S.D., 6D6 S.D., 1D6x10 S.D., 1D6 M.D., or 3D6 M.D. per round (the laser has multiple settings for different materials).
- **Rate of Fire:** Equal to pilot's number of attacks.
- **Range: Grappling Hook:** 500 ft (150 m) of high-strength wire; 10 M.D.C. per 50 feet.
- **Payload:** The welding laser draws power directly from the on-board fusion reactor, so it is effectively unlimited as long as it remains attached to the cyclone. The laser is useless if detatched.

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CYCLONE COMBAT BONUSES

With the introduction of the second generation of cyclone designs there are now many different designs to choose from, all with slightly different abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Likewise, the bonuses from cyclone combat training will be slightly different for each model. There are still only two skills for cyclone training, **Cyclone Combat Training** and **Cyclone Combat BASIC Training**. Due to the similar design of all cyclones and the basic nature of the control systems for all models anyone with one of these skills can pilot ALL types of cyclones with no penalty.

In order to determine the bonuses a character gets from cyclone training, consult the two tables below. The first lists general bonuses that a character earns from a specific training skill regardless of which cyclone model he is piloting. Then look at the second table to get a list of the specific bonuses associated with the model of cyclone the character is piloting. All skills and bonuses are exclusive; a character can have Cyclone Combat *or* Cyclone Basic training, but not both skills to try and combine bonuses.

Remember, these bonuses are in addition to the pilot's own hand to hand training and attribute bonuses, but apply ONLY when piloting a cyclone. These mecha combat bonuses do not apply to the pilot's physical abilities when outside the mecha.

NOTE: Changing modes from motorcycle to battloid or vice versa counts as one attack/action for a melee round.

GENERAL BONUSES FROM CYCLONE *BASIC* TRAINING	GENERAL BONUSES FROM CYCLONE COMBAT TRAINING
This category applies to all characters who were not officially trained by the RDF, Southern Cross, or Expeditionary Force in mecha combat. • One hand to hand attack per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level six. • One additional hand to hand attack at level eleven. • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram, kick attack, leap attack (counts as two attacks), leap dodge (automatic dodge, just like a parry, with no loss of attacks per melee).	This category applies to REF Cyclone Pilots and other military personnel who were officially trained by the RDF, Southern Cross, or Expeditionary Force in mecha combat. • Two hand to hand attacks per melee (plus those of the pilot). • One additional hand to hand attack at level five. • One additional hand to hand attack at level ten. • Critical strike same as pilot's hand to hand. • Maneuvers: Body flip/throw, body block/tackle/ram, kick attack, leap attack (counts as two attacks), leap dodge (automatic dodge, just like a parry, with no loss of attacks per melee).

Model	Basic Bonuses	Combat Bonuses
VR-052 BATTLER CYCLONE	+1 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+1 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch
VR-041 SABER CYCLONE	+1 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+1 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch
VR-038-LT LIGHT COMBAT CYCLONE	+1 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+1 to strike +3 to parry +4 to dodge +4 to leap dodge +4 to roll with punch +1 to initiative

VR-152 BATTLER II CYCLONE	+2 to strike +1 to parry +1 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +2 to parry +2 to dodge +2 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch
VR-141 SUPER SABER CYCLONE	+2 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch +1 to initiative
VR-135 FORAGER CYCLONE	+2 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch.
VR-120 FERRET CYCLONE	+2 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +3 to parry +4 to dodge +4 to leap dodge +4 to roll with punch +1 to initiative
VR-122 PROTECTOR CYCLONE	+2 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+2 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch
VR-117 FIREFLY CYCLONE	+1 to strike +1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch	+1 to strike +2 to parry +3 to dodge +3 to leap dodge +3 to roll with punch
VR-112 SAMSON CYCLONE	+1 to dodge +1 to roll with punch	+1 to parry +2 to dodge +1 to leap dodge +2 to roll with punch

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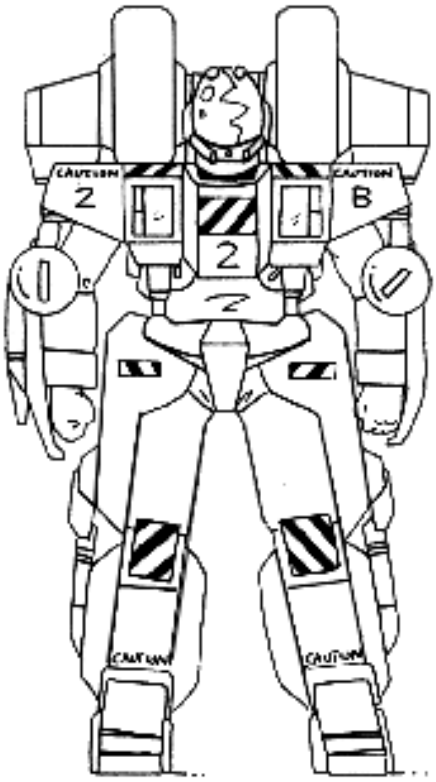
THE VR-112 SAMSON

BACKGROUND



The VR-112 Samson was the first cyclone designed with a non-combat role in mind. During the Cyclone Redesign Project of 2039, the REF engineering team reasoned that a small man-sized mecha such as the cyclone could have many logistics and utilitarian uses aside from combat, such as moving supplies, arming veritechs and destroids with heavy ordinance, and helping in combat engineering tasks such as building bridges or planting explosives. They therefore designed the Samson to be a "light" engineering vehicle for use by REF support forces and combat engineers. VR-112 cyclones are most commonly found in REF starships or REF bases helping with the general maintenance and repair of other mecha. They are also sometimes used in the field by REF Combat Engineers to help perform their tasks.

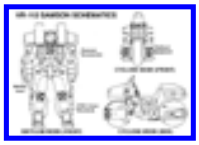
The VR-112 Samson is the most massive cyclone designed to date, mostly due to the extensive hydraulic systems that give the battlesuit its great strength. While the Samson is immensely strong and well armored (due to its bulk), it is also the slowest of all cyclones. In cyclone mode, the VR-112 is very angular, and so large that it resembles a piece of machinery more than it does a motorcycle. In battloid mode the massive exoskeleton arms have led to the model being nicknamed "Ahnold" by several different construction platoons. The VR-112 is painted gray with yellow warning markings, and is often battered and scraped. Since the VR-112 rarely goes into combat, most pilots wear the older CVR-3 body armor.

Following the end of the Third Invid War most of the design team that worked on the VR-112 retired from the REF and started their own construction mecha company, ironically named *Samson Industries* and based on Tirol. Although the company specializes in cheaper powered suits and non-transformable mecha, they have produced two successor cyclones to the VR-112 Samson (the **VR-119/SCE-02 Samson II** and the **SCE-06 Hercules**), both of which are sold commercially to the RGF and civilian construction companies. The original VR-112 Samson is still very common on Earth, as it was imported in great number during the Era of Rebuilding (2048-2055).

> **NOTE:** By 2037 the REF Command had repealed the old RDF rules forbidding mecha engineers from receiving mecha pilot training. It is now standard practice for all REF Bio-Maintenance Engineers and Combat Engineers to receive pilot training on Cyclones with emphasis on the VR-

112 Samson. Mecha combat skill is still limited to BASIC level, however; one cannot learn to be an ace pilot and crack mechanic in the academy at the same time.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-5532-129-1896.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-112 Samson
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Engineering Vehicle
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	25
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	50
	Storage Box (2)	4 each		Leg Shields (2)	150
	Thrusters (rear)	25		Head	50
(1)	Main Body	350	(1)	Main Body	350

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4C (Heavy Combat Armor)	90
(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

Notes:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival). The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

   Military versions of the VR-112 Samson *are* compatible with CVR-4C Heavy Combat Armor.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 55 mph (88 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 30 ft (9 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 10 ft (3 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 30 mph (48 kmph)
Flying: 100 mph (160 kmph)
Leaping: 30 ft (9 m)
Thruster Leap: 50 ft (15 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.6 ft (2.3 m)
Motorcycle: 3.8 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 4.0 ft (1.2 m)
Motorcycle: 2.5 ft (0.8 m)

Length:

Battloid: 4.0 ft (1.2 m)
Motorcycle: 6.0 ft (1.8 m)

Weight:450 lbs (203 kg)

Cargo:

The VR-112 has a variety of holding pouches and connectors in addition to detachable saddlebags that are used for holding construction materials and equipment. The saddlebags are 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. A passenger can also ride seated behind the driver, provided large objects such as girders or panels are not being carried. The enormously strong VR-112 can hold up to 1500 lbs (675 kg) of material when properly secured. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 100 lbs (44 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky...

Main Engine: FF-650 Fusion/Protoculture Engines (2)

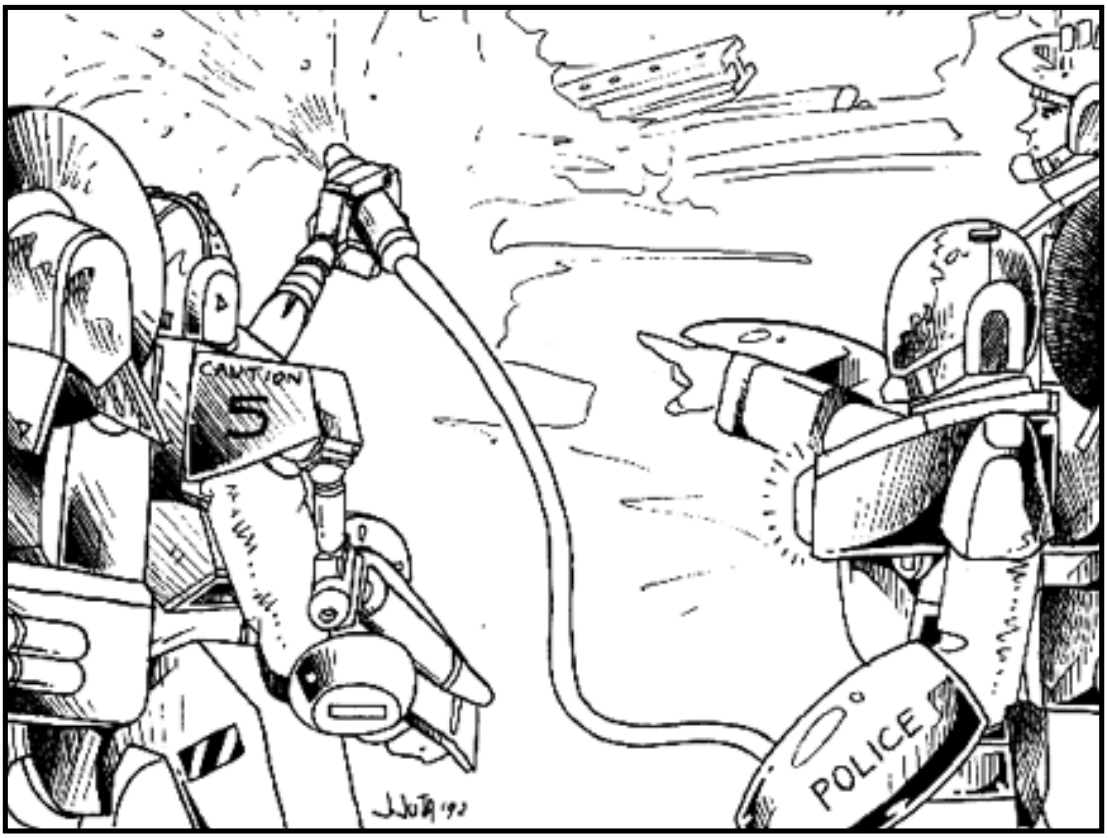
Range:

4 protoculture cells will power the VR-112 for approximately 12 months before needing

refueling. The backup system can operate on 2 protoculture cells for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 200 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engines runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engines are released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

Standard VR-112 Samson cyclones are painted gray with yellow stripes and trim, similar to modern construction equipment. However, Samsons assigned to combat units are usually colored based on where they are stationed; desert Samsons are usually painted in a tan camouflage, arctic Samsons are painted a flat white, etc. But since the Samsons assigned to the Icarus Mission were not intended for combat duty, most of them retained their gray and yellow color schemes. Unlike the military Cyclones, Samsons are not streamlined in colors corresponding to the ranks of their pilots.



VR-112 Samson *(left) and* ***VR-122 Protector*** *(right)*
fighting a fire aboard the REF starship ***ICARUS****.*

WEAPON SYSTEMS

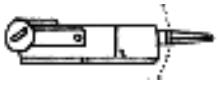
1. **WELDING LASER**. The VR-112 comes standardly equipped with a welding laser on the right arm shield. While not intended to be used as a weapon, it can do damage on higher settings. *This welding laser is built into the right arm shield and cannot be exchanged for another arm weapon!*

- **Primary Purpose**: Construction
- **Mega-Damage Settings**: 1D4, 1D6, and 2D4 M.D. (Maximum Setting)
- **S.D.C. Damage Settings**: 1D6, 3D6, 6D6, 1D6x10 S.D.C.
- **Rate of Fire**: Standard.
- **Range**: 5 ft (1.5 m).
- **Payload**: The welding laser draws power directly from the on-board fusion reactors, so it is effectively unlimited as long as it remains attached to the cyclone. The laser is useless if detached.

2. **SPECIAL ADDITIONS**. The left arm shield of the VR-112 Samson can be equipped with a variety of tools for special jobs, such as salvage, demolition, sandblasting, etc. These tools are designed specifically for the VR-112 Samson and cannot be used with other cyclone designs. Some of the tools (and this is by no means a complete list) include:

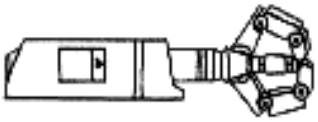
    1. Extension Arm with Robotic Fingers for delicate work in hard-to-reach places. (Strength of arm: 3 M.D.C.)

    2. Grappling hook with 200 ft of high-tension wire. (Strength of Wire: 1 M.D.C. per 10 feet)

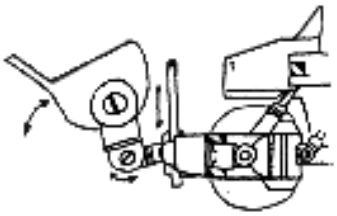
    

    3. High-power Air Gun that can be attached to containers. Can be used to shoot water, sand, paint, etc. (Damage: 2D6, 4D6, or 1D6x10 S.D.C.)

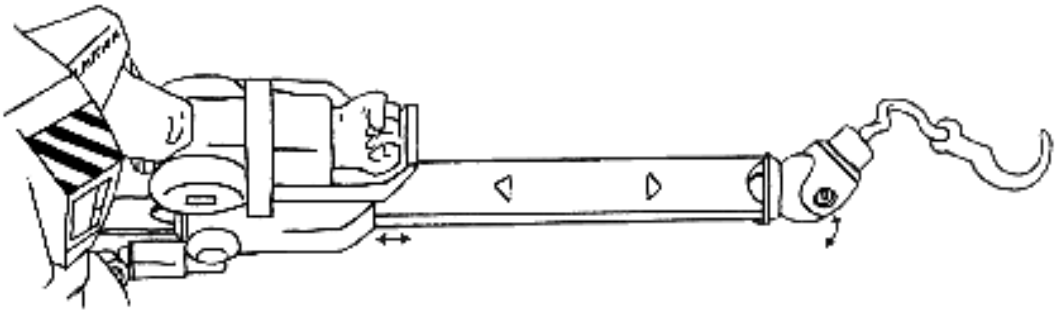
    4. Powerful Hydraulic Claw for securely carrying heavy objects. Can easily hold up to 2000 pounds of pressure (...which is actually more than the cyclone itself can handle). Does 2D6 M.D. CONTINUOUSLY to anything it grabs!

    5. Mechanical scoop/cargo lifter. Can only be used in motorcycle mode.

    6. Extendable crane with 300 feet of cable. Motor can lift up to 1000 lbs (450 kg), but the Samson's hydraulic arm must be braced if lifting more than 500 lbs (225 kg). Cable strength is 2 M.D.C. per 10 feet.



Gamemasters, feel free to come up with your own additions!

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. The left arm shield can also accept any other GR-series weapon pod, both from the newer combat cyclone models and the older ones. Combat pods are usually mounted only when the mecha is operating in battlefields or other "hot" zones. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules. The VR-112 is not equipped with a combat computer, so any bonuses for certain weapon systems **do NOT apply** when being used on the Samson.

4. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 2D6 M.D. Kick does 2D6 M.D. (The VR-112 Samson has an equivalent strength of PS 150!) Leap Kick does 3D6 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 2D6 M.D.

5. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR THE VR-112 SAMSON (MILITARY VERSION)

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **SHORT-RANGE RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Range: 1 mile. Can identify and track up to 10 different targets. (This system was added as an afterthought. Remember, the Samson was not intended for direct combat.)
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors to 10 mile (16 km) range.
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.
- **HARD POINTS:** The Samson Cyclone has several places for the attachment of heavy construction equipment and loads of material.
- **ADAPTABILITY:** The VR-112 can be modified to operate in other environments such as underwater or in space. These modifications usually consist of an extra oxygen supply (24 hours) and special jets for maneuvering in different environments, and are available for special assignments. (These modifications are generally not available on Earth during the Third Invid War.)
- **NOTE:** the VR-112 Samson is NOT equipped with a Targeting Computer!

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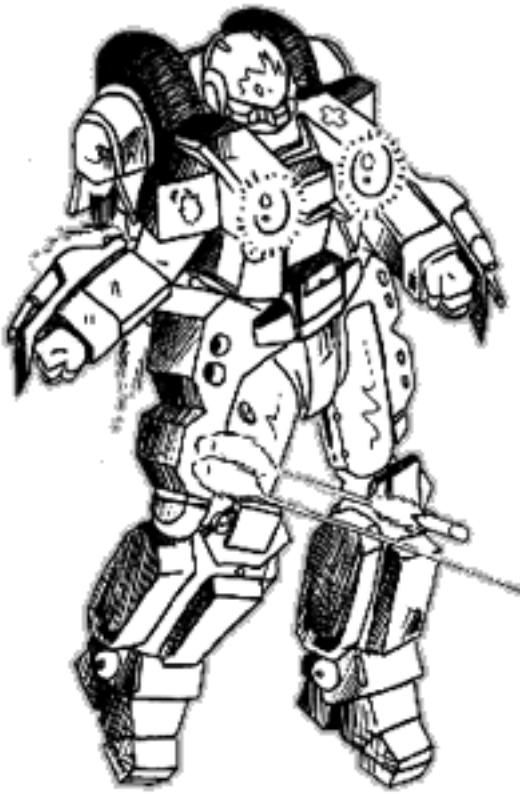
THE VR-117 FIREFLY

BACKGROUND

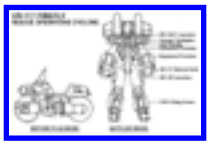


The VR-117 Firefly Rescue Cyclone is another non-combat specialty cyclone used as a support vehicle for the REF military. Designed during the Cyclone Redesign Project of 2039, the Firefly is a "light" cyclone intended for use in medical and rescue missions. Based loosely on the VR-120 Ferret combat cyclone, the VR-117 is designed to be light and agile while retaining the strength and protection that makes it ideal for rescue missions and damage control. The Firefly is commonly found on REF starships and bases assigned to maintenace and damage control teams, and are commonly issued to **REF Combat Paramedics** for use in the field.

The VR-117 Firefly is somewhat similar to the VR-120 Ferret but is slightly heavier and has heavier shielding. In battloid mode the differences are even greater, with the Firefly having heavy plates, search lights, and various containers mounted on the chest and torso areas. The super-hard materials used in the construction of the VR-117 make it nearly impervious to damage from fire and debris, and special chemical coatings on the armor plates provide protection even from high-level radiation and nuclear fires. The Firefly has performed admirably under the worst conditions both in space and on land, and has become a valuable addition to both military and civilian rescue services. The only downside to the cyclone is the high cost of the special heat shielding the mecha uses.

Like the VR-112 Samson, the design for VR-117 Firefly became commercial property when the design team that worked on the new generation Cyclones retired from the REF after the Third Invid War. The design has changed little over the years since 2039, and is currently produced by several mecha construction companies under liscense from *Samson Industries* based on Tirol. The VR-117 is now extremely common both on Earth and on Tirol, as most fire-fighting departments own at least one of the rescue mecha.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-5532-147-5478.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-117 Firefly
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Rescue Vehicle
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	50
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	50
	Storage Box (2)	2 each		Leg Shields (2)	125
	Thrusters (rear)	50		Head	50
(1)	Main Body	225	(1)	Main Body	225

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

CVR-4C Heavy Armor is incompatible with the VR-117 Firefly.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 210 mph (336 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 40 ft (12 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 20 ft (6 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 60 mph (96 kmph)
Flying: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Leaping: 20 ft (6 m)
Thruster Leap: 100 ft (30 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.0 ft (2.1 m)
Motorcycle: 3.6 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.4 ft (1.0 m)
Motorcycle: 1.6 ft (0.5 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.1 ft (0.9 m)
Motorcycle: 5.0 ft (1.5 m)

Weight:200 lbs (90 kg)

The VR-117 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. The VR-117 can hold 200 lbs (84 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 25 lbs (11 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky.

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling. The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying

will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

The standard color scheme for the VR-117 Firefly is red, orange, and yellow, which makes them easy to spot in disaster areas where there is lots of rubble and smoke. Since this color scheme does not work particularly well in combat situations, VR-117 cyclones in the field are usually painted in a camouflage pattern based on where they are stationed. Desert Cyclones are usually painted in a tan camouflage, Arctic Cyclones are painted a flat white, etc. The Firefly is then streamlined in light blue and orange, and is marked with crosses and other medical symbols in an attempt to make it clear to observers that the VR-117 is a non-combatant medical vehicle (of course the Invid rarely take notice of this fact, unfortunately).

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103LT MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. Like the VR-120 Ferret, the VR-117 Firefly is equipped with a smaller version of the classic GR-103 shoulder missile launchers. The payload for the GR-103LTs are 3 missiles per launcher, giving a total of 6 mini-missiles in the shoulders. Like the standard GR-103s, the 103LTs have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha.

   VR-117 Fireflies stationed on REF Starships and Bases (as well as civilian cyclones) are usually issued flame-retardant missiles for use fighting fires. VR-117s in the field are issued armor-piercing missiles as an anti- mecha defense, however.

   - **Primary Purpose**: Fire Suppression
   - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Mecha
   - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-117 Firefly in the field.
   - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
   - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, or six. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
   - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
   - **Payload**: 3 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 6.

2. **GR-187 HIP MISSILE LAUNCHERS** (2). A new addition to modern cyclones, the VR-117 Firefly comes automatically equipped with a pair of GR-187s. These weapons are mounted on the

hip/upper leg shields in battloid mode and in the lower back of the cyclone in motorcycle mode. It appears as four small tubes built directly into the armored plate. The missiles can only fire in battloid mode.

Like the GR-103LTs, the GR-187s are usually loaded with flame-retardant missiles when the VR-117 is stationed on a spaceship or base. In the field however the GR-187s are usually loaded with smoke or tear gas missiles for use in concealment and for identifying an LZ (landing zone).

- **Primary Purpose**: Fire Suppression
- **Secondary Purpose**: Miscellaneous
- **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Smoke/Tear Gas are standard-issue for the VR-117 Firefly in the field.
- **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
- **Rate of Fire**: One or two at a time.
- **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
- **Payload**: 4 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 8.

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-117 Firefly are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

   Typical VR-117s are assigned two GR-117 RESCUE HOOK units if stationed on a base or spaceship, or one GR-117 unit and one GR-220 BEAM CANNON/SMG unit if in the field. Different weapons may be substituted if approved by a commanding officer. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

4. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D6 M.D. (The VR-117 Firefly has an equivalent strength of PS 50) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

5. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Can identify and track up to 40 different targets. **Range:** 10 miles.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems

(Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).

- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors. **Range:** 10 mile (16 km).
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.
- **TINTED HELMET VISOR**

SPECIAL SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR VR-117 FIREFLY CYCLONES

- **HEAVY HEAT SHIELDING:** The Firefly's armor is chemically treated and can resist heat up to 500 degrees centigrade. Normal fires do no damage, and plasma and nuclear fires do only 1/3 damage. This armor is VERY expensive, and is only standard issue on the VR-117.
- **EXTENDED OXYGEN SUPPLY:** Extra supplies of breathable air in the armor can allow the pilot to survive up to 48 hours in a vacuum, or can be supplied to others through several tubes in the back of the mecha. There is also a reservoir of pure oxygen available for treating victims of smoke inhalation.
- **HEAT-SHIELD BLANKETS:** The Cyclone is equipped with two man- sized blankets of a remarkable material that is non-combustible and resists heat up to 200 degrees centigrade. These blankets can be used to protect victims while extracting them from the fire.
- **SEARCHLIGHTS:** The Firefly contains two powerful searchlights mounted on the front of the cyclone in motorcycle mode and on the chest in battloid mode. These lights can illuminate up to 600 ft (180 m) away and can penetrate light smoke and dust. Very useful for finding victims in dark places or rubble.
- **RESCUE EQUIPMENT:** The carrying bags of the Cyclone are always filled with a variety of rescue equipment, such as extra rope, an MDC crowbar, flashlights, etc.

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Last Updated: *Saturday, July 25, 1998*

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THE VR-122 PROTECTOR

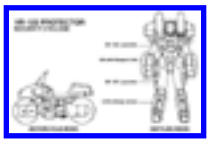
BACKGROUND

The VR-122 Protector security cyclone is yet a third support cyclone, this time designed at the request of the REF Military Police. The MP wanted a stronger version of the VR-120 Ferret that could stand up to larger mecha and tougher opponents, yet still be cheaply produced in mass numbers. This mecha would be ideal for helping to maintain order on REF bases and starships, as well as to help occupy enemy population centers and maintain law and order under martial law situations. The cyclone had to be larger and slightly more imposing than the VR-120, so as to help the police establish a psychological advantage over would-be rebels and troublemakers. The VR-122 Protector was thus designed to fill this role. While not intended to go head-to-head with heavy combat mecha, the Protector is ideal for quick-strike attacks and can keep a larger opponent occupied until heavier forces can arrive . The Protector also functions admirably in urban and intra-spaceship combat, using its mobility to maximum advantage in the labyrinth of corridors and city streets. A sizeable number of VR-122s were included in the Icarus mission and were intended to help establish a stable base of operations on Earth during the Third Invid War, but events of the war never permitted such a base to be established. Furthermore, the transport ship containing the bulk of the Protectors was destroyed early during the Third Invid War by Invid Space Troopers. Consequently, few Protectors saw action on Earth during the war, though those few who made it performed well in guerrilla warfare against the Invid.

The VR-122 Protector resembles the VR-041 Saber with its curved nose and streamlined profile. The cyclone is not equipped with the CADS systems, however, instead mounting the new GR-220 Beam Cannon/SMG weapon units. The VR-122 is almost always painted dark blue and grey, and has varius military police identification stenciled over it in light grey along with flashing red and blue emergency lights on the front. Protector pilots wear CVR-4 body armor painted dark blue with "Military Police" stenciled across the back and "MP" on the shoulders.

When the REF cyclone design team left the military to form *Samson Industries* after the end of the Third Invid War, they were initially barred from producing VR-122 Protectors by the REF due to concerns over sensitive military technology used in its design. After a long court battle Samson Industries was eventually given permission to market the design to civilian law enforcement agencies under the designation **SCE-04 Watchman** in 2050. The REF also kept control of the design as well, and RGF Intelligence and RGF Security later used the design as a basis for their **VR-224 Guardsman** cyclone in 2056. Both the VR-122 Protector and the SCE-04 Watchman are quite common on Earth and are standard issue for most police forces in major cities.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-5532-147-7565.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-122 Protector
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Security Vehicle
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	50
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	75
	Storage Box (2)	2 each		Leg Shields (2)	125
	Thrusters (rear)	50		Head	70
(1)	Main Body	275	(1)	Main Body	275

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.

2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

CVR-4C Heavy Armor is incompatible with the VR-122 Protector.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 210 mph (336 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 40 ft (12 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 20 ft (6 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 60 mph (96 kmph)
Flying: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Leaping: 20 ft (6 m)
Thruster Leap: 100 ft (30 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.0 ft (2.1 m)
Motorcycle: 3.6 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.5 ft (1.0 m)
Motorcycle: 1.6 ft (0.5 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.1 ft (0.9 m)
Motorcycle: 5.2 ft (1.6 m)

Weight: 250 lbs (113 kg)

The VR-122 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. The VR-122 can hold 250 lbs (105 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 25 lbs (11 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky.

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling. The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

The standard color scheme for the VR-122 Protector is dark blue and grey, with light grey trim and stenciling. Since Protectors are rarely stationed outside of a city, base, or spaceship, these colors are rarely varied according to terrain. Occasionally a VR-122 that is assigned to field duty will be repainted in a camouflage patteren matching where they are stationed (Desert Cyclones are usually painted in a tan camouflage, Arctic Cyclones are painted a flat white, etc.).

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103 MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. Like standard military cyclones, the VR-122 uses the GR-103 missile system as its main weapon. The launchers have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha. Both launchers hold 6 mini-missiles. The Protector is usually equippped with an even mix of high explosive and tear gas missiles.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-vehicle
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. High explosive and tear gas are standard-issue for the VR-122 Protector
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, six, or all. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 6 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 12.

2. **GR-187 HIP MISSILE LAUNCHERS** (2). A new addition to modern cyclones, the VR-122 Protector comes automatically equipped with a pair of GR-187 missile launchers. These weapons are mounted on the hip/upper leg shields in battloid mode and in the lower back of the cyclone in motorcycle mode. It appears as four small tubes built directly into the armored plate. The missiles can only fire in battloid mode. On VR-122s the launchers are usually loaded with armor-piercing missiles for anti-mecha defense.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-122 Protector.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One or two at a time.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 4 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 8.

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-122 Protector are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

    Typical VR-122s are assigned two GR-220 BEAM CANNON/SMG units, which were designed with the Protector in mind. Different weapons may be substituted if approved by a commanding officer, however. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

4. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D6 M.D. (The VR-122 Protector has an equivalent strength of PS 50) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

5. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System. A Gallant 1000 AND a Putnam Stun-Gun are standard issue for VR-122 pilots.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Can identify and track up to 40 different targets. **Range:** 10 miles.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems

(Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).

- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors. **Range:** 10 mile (16 km).
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.

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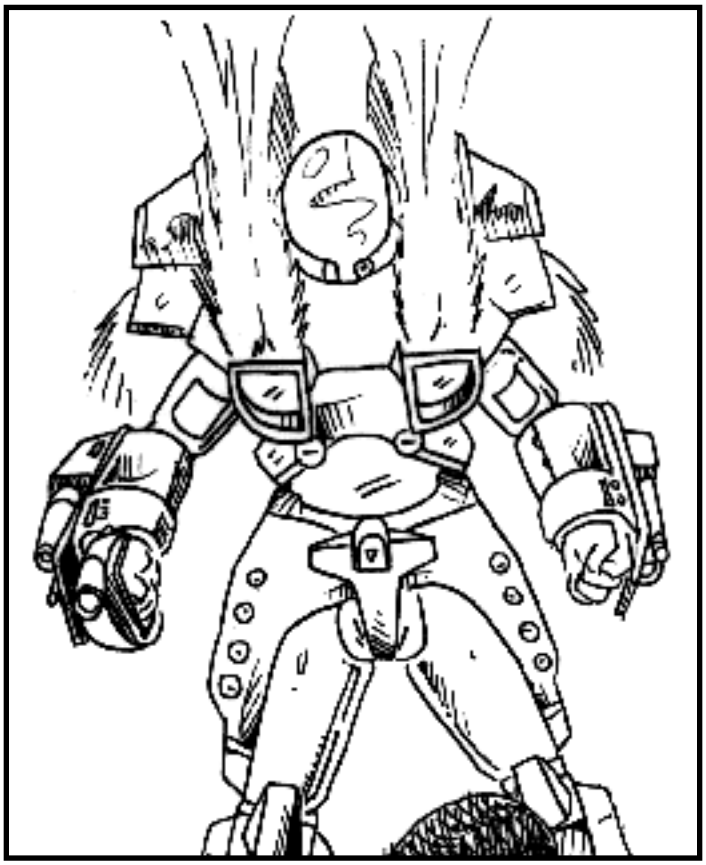
THE VR-120 FERRET

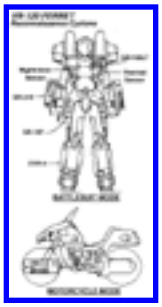
BACKGROUND



The VR-120 Ferret is a new cyclone variant that places an emphasis on speed and agility, rather than strength and firepower like the VR-152 or VR-141. Smaller, lighter, and less armored than its cousins, the Ferret is capable of an amazing 240 mph (384 kmph) on open roads in motorcycle mode, and a 215 mph (344 kmph) air speed when flying in battloid. This speed combined with the phenonemal agility possed by all cyclones makes the Ferret ideal for reconnaissance and scouting missions. The speed does come at a price, though; as mentioned above, the armor on the Ferret is reduced and some armaments have been cut (compared to other newer Cyclone designs) to reduce the overall weight of the cyclone. Usually Ferret pilots do not engage in direct combat with enemy forces. Instead they use speed and agility to avoid detection and relay information to their command, which can then call in appropriate forces to deal with the threat.

The VR-120 Ferret is the smallest of the new cyclones, closely resembling the old VR-038-LT at first glance. The nose is larger, however, and weapon systems are mounted on the front wheel hub. The Ferret is popular with scouts and nomads among the resistance on Earth, who value its ability for speed and stealth. Ferret Pilots usually wear the standard CVR-4 body armor.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-8834-149-1775.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-120 Ferret
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Reconnaissance Mecha
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	50
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	50
	Storage Box (2)	2 each		Leg Shields (2)	100
	Thrusters (rear)	50		Head	70
(1)	Main Body	180	(1)	Main Body	180

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

CVR-4C Heavy Armor is incompatible with the VR-120 Ferret.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 240 mph (384 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 100 mph (160 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 60 ft (18 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 40 ft (12 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 75 mph (120 kmph)
Flying: 215 mph (344 kmph)
Leaping: 30 ft (9 m)
Thruster Leap: 120 ft (36 m)

Height:

Battloid: 6.8 ft (2.0 m)
Motorcycle: 3.4 ft (1.0 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.2 ft (0.9 m)
Motorcycle: 1.4 ft (0.4 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.0 ft (0.9 m)
Motorcycle: 4.8 ft (1.4 m)

Weight:100 lbs (45 kg)

Special Bonuses:

The VR-120 Ferret has a **+1 bonus** to *initiative, parry, dodge, and roll*, due to its greater speed and agility (from lower weight) than normal Cyclones. This bonus is in addition to any other bonuses the pilot may possess based on skill or training.

Cargo:

The VR-120 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. The VR-152 can hold 200 lbs (84 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 25 lbs (11 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster

packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky.

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling. The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

Following the new painting scheme for most REF mecha, the VR-120 cyclones are colored based on where they are stationed. Desert Cyclones are usually painted in a tan camouflage, Arctic Cyclones are painted a flat white, etc. This is especially important in the case of the Ferret, as its missions typically call for the mecha to remain concealed and spy on enemy forces at close range. Each cyclone is streamlined in a color corresponding to the position of the pilot. Enlisted Pilots have their cyclones streamlined in Blue, Aces and low-ranking Officers in Red, and Platoon Leaders in Green.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103LT MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. Although based on the older VR-038-LT Cyclone, the VR-120 Ferret was equipped with GR-103 shoulder missile launchers like its newer bretheren to give it more punch. However, due to the need to keep the Ferret's weight low, the payload for the GR-103s had to be halved to 3 missiles per launcher, giving a total of 6 mini-missiles instead of the normal payload of 12 for VR-1XX cyclones. Like the standard GR-103s, the 103LTs have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha. Armor-piercing missiles are typically issued to Ferrets.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-120 Ferret.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, or six. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.

- **Payload**: 3 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 6.

2. **GR-187 HIP MISSILE LAUNCHERS** (2). A new addition to modern cyclones, the VR-120 Ferret comes automatically equipped with a pair of GR-187s. These weapons are mounted on the hip/upper leg shields in battloid mode and in the lower back of the cyclone in motorcycle mode. It appears as four small tubes built directly into the armored plate. The missiles can only fire in battloid mode.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-120 Ferret.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One or two at a time.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 4 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 8.

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-120 Ferret are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

    Typical VR-120s are assigned two GR-215 BEAM/LASER CANNON units, or two GR-220 BEAM CANNON/SMG units, though different weapons may be assigned if necessary or desired. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

4. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D4 M.D. (The VR-120 Ferret has an equivalent strength of PS 35) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

5. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Can identify and track up to 40 different targets. **Range:** 10 miles.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems (Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).

- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors to **Range:** 10 mile (16 km).
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.

SPECIAL SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR VR-120 FERRET CYCLONES

- **THERMAL IMAGER:** A special optical heat sensor that converts infrared radiation given off by warm objects into a false-color image for the pilot. It enables the pilot to see in darkness and through smoke, as well as providing a +30% bonus for detecting traps or ambushes. **Range:** 200 ft (60 m).
- **NIGHTVISION CAMERA:** A low-light amplification camera that allows the pilot of the VR-120 to see clearly in normal darkness. The camera will NOT work in pitch-blackness and can be blinded by bright lights such as flares or weapon discharges. **Range:** 400 ft (120 m).
- **FIBER-OPTIC COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM:** The VR-120 is equipped with a communcations system that can transmit audio and video signals to a command base via fiber-optic cable laid along the ground. The advantage of this system is that it allows clear communications even in heavy static or jamming situations, and that the communication signal is virtually undetectable by enemy sensors. The disadvantage is that the fiber-optic cable must remain intact for the system to work. **Range:** equal to the length of the cable; up to 2 miles.

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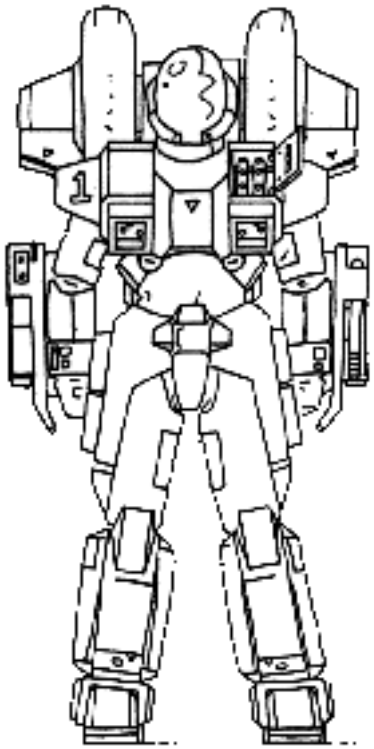
THE VR-135 FORAGER

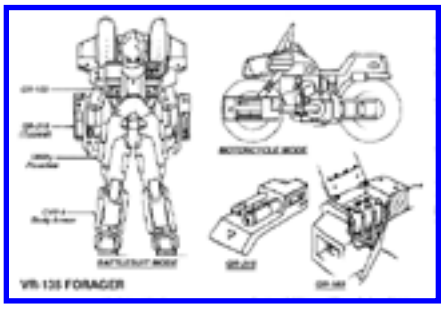
BACKGROUND



The VR-135 Forager was designed specifically as a survival mecha for crashed mecha pilots. It is one of the most durable and maintenance-free mecha ever designed, requiring little in the way of ammo or supplies. The internal systems of the Cyclone are also extremely simple in design, with instructions often stenciled right on the parts themselves. Skilled bio-maintenance engineers have actually disassembled and reassembled VR-135s in mere minutes. Many Foragers made it to Earth via the Icarus Recon Mission, and some clever bio-maintenance engineers started adapting VR-135s to their own purposes, producing several "home-brew" designs. Some of the stories of what the Foragers could be modified to do border on the unbelievable to this day. All REF mecha are now equipped with at least one VR-135 for the pilot in the event of a crash landing.

The VR-135 Forager is boxy in appearance, like the VR-152, but is smaller and less bulky. The cyclone has a very "utilitarian" look to it, being designed expressly for the survival of the pilot and little else. Despite its smaller appearance, the VR-135 is perhaps the most durable of all the new cyclones. Forager Pilots usually have the standard CVR-4 body armor, since it is the standard armor of mecha pilots.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-8812-334-1201.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-135 Forager
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Survival Mecha
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

Motorcycle Mode		Battlesuit Mode	
Headlight	5	Tires (2, rear)	5
Front Tire	5	Thrusters (rear)	60
Rear Tire	5	Forearm Shields (2)	50
Storage Box (2)	2 each	Leg Shields (2)	100
Thrusters (rear)	60	Head	70
(1) Main Body	300	(1) Main Body	300

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

CVR-4C Heavy Armor is incompatible with the VR-135 Forager.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 210 mph (336 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 40 ft (12 m) horizontal

Turbo Boost Up: 20 ft (6 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 60 mph (96 kmph)
Flying: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Leaping: 20 ft (6 m)
Thruster Leap: 100 ft (30 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.0 ft (2.1 m)
Motorcycle: 3.6 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.4 ft (1.0 m)
Motorcycle: 1.6 ft (0.5 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.1 ft (0.9 m)
Motorcycle: 5.0 ft (1.5 m)

Weight:200 lbs (90 kg)

Cargo:

The VR-135 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. In addition, the VR-135 has four concealed pouches on the sides of the mecha, in the thigh armor plates (where the GR-187 is located on other Cyclones). These pouches are each 6 inches long by 4 inches wide by 2 inches deep, and are usually used to hold items like medical kits, tools, or extra ammo clips. A passenger can also ride seated behind the driver. The VR-135 can hold 250 lbs (110 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 50 lbs (22 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky. The thigh pouches are a physical part of the cyclone and do not disconnect. They are fully protected by the cyclone's thigh armor.

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling.

The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

Normally REF mecha are painted in camouflage schemes that match the location where they are stationed. However, due to the nature of the Forager's purpose it is hard to predict exactly where the cyclone will be used. Most Foragers are painted in a dull tan/brown color scheme (similar to desert mecha), but some mecha pilots take it on themselves to customize their syrvival cyclones to their tastes. As usual, each cyclone is streamlined in a color corresponding to the position of the pilot. Enlisted Pilots have their cyclones streamlined in Blue, Aces and low-ranking Officers in Red, and Platoon Leaders in Green.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103 MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. The main weapon of older cyclones has remained mostly unchanged in the newer models. The launchers have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha. Both launchers hold 6 mini-missiles (usually armor-piercing).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. High-explosive are standard-issue for the VR-135 Battler II.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, six, or all. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 6 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 12.

2. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-135 Forager are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

Typical VR-135s are assigned two GR-215 MISSILE LAUNCHER/BEAM CANNON units, though different weapons may be assigned if necessary or desired. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

3. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D4 M.D. (The VR-135 Forager has an equivalent strength of PS 50) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

4. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

5. Any other cyclone weapon pod can be substituted for the GR-215, both from the newer cyclone models and the older ones.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Range: 10 miles. Can identify and track up to 40 different targets.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems (Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors to 10 mile (16 km) range.
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.

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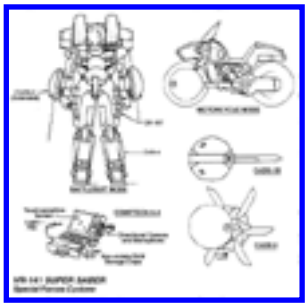
THE VR-141 SUPER SABER

BACKGROUND

The VR-141 Super Saber was designed by REF engineers at the request from REF Intelligence for a special cyclone unit for espionage and sabotage operations. Especially designed for intelligence gathering, the new cyclone includes advanced sensor systems and a powerful computer for data analysis. For weaponry, the engineers decided to stick with a modified version of the CADS-1 close assault system that was so successful on the old VR-041 Saber cyclones. The new CADS-2 system had multiple spinning blades that act as both a shield and a buzzsaw in combat. One REF General pointed out that the lack of energy weapons could become a serious liability in the field, so the designers grudgingly came up with the CADS-1B, a smaller version of the original CADS-1 mated to a laser. Both designs were well-received by the REF Intelligence community.

The VR-141 Super Saber closely resembles its predecessor, the VR-041 Saber Cyclone, with the same smooth lines and curved nose, and the distinctive round CADS units on the front wheel hub. A closer look will reveal that the new VR-141 is slightly larger and better equipped than its predecessor, though. Super Saber Pilots usually wear the standard CVR-4 body armor.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-8812-334-1200.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-141 Super Saber
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Special Forces Unit
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	60
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	75
	Storage Box (2)	2 each		Leg Shields (2)	125
	Thrusters (rear)	60		Head	70
(1)	Main Body	300	(1)	Main Body	300

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2) CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor) 70

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

CVR-4C Heavy Armor is incompatible with the VR-141 Super Saber.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 210 mph (336 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 40 ft (12 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 20 ft (6 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 60 mph (96 kmph)
Flying: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Leaping: 20 ft (6 m)
Thruster Leap: 100 ft (30 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.0 ft (2.1 m)
Motorcycle: 3.6 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.6 ft (1.1 m)
Motorcycle: 1.8 ft (0.5 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.2 ft (1.0 m)
Motorcycle: 5.2 ft (1.6 m)

Weight:200 lbs (90 kg)

Cargo:

The VR-141 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. A passenger can also ride seated behind the driver. The VR-141 can hold 300 lbs (140 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 50 lbs (22 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky...

Note that usually one of the saddlebags is replaced with a Comptech A-4 Portable Computer. (see below)

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling. The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

Following the new painting scheme for most REF mecha, the new military cyclones are colored based on where they are stationed. Desert Cyclones are usually painted in a tan camouflage, Arctic Cyclones are painted a flat white, etc. Most of the Super Sabers assigned to the Icarus Mission were painted dark blue and battleship grey in color, though they are often repainted by resistance groups to match their terrain or tastes. Each cyclone is streamlined in a color corresponding to the position of the pilot. Enlisted Pilots have their cyclones streamlined in Blue, Aces and low-ranking Officers in Red, and Platoon Leaders in Green.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103 MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. The main weapon of older cyclones has remained mostly unchanged in the newer models. The launchers have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha. Both launchers hold 6 mini-missiles (usually armor-piercing).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-141 Super Saber.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, six, or all. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 6 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 12.

2. **GR-187 HIP MISSILE LAUNCHERS** (2). A new addition to modern cyclones, the VR-141 Super Saber comes automatically equipped with a pair of GR-187s. These weapons are mounted on the hip/upper leg shields in battloid mode and in the lower back of the cyclone in motorcycle

mode. It appears as four small tubes built directly into the armored plate. The missiles can only fire in battloid mode.

- **Primary Purpose**: Assault
- **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
- **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. High explosive are standard-issue for the VR-141 Super Saber.
- **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
- **Rate of Fire**: One or two at a time.
- **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
- **Payload**: 4 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 8.

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-141 Super Saber are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

   Typical VR-141s are assigned either two CADS-2 Melee Units units, two CADS-1B Melee Weapon/Laser units, or one CADS-2 and one CADS-1B. Of course, different weapons may be assigned if necessary or desired. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

4. **COMPTECH A-4 PORTABLE COMPUTER**. Usually one of the carrying bags on the VR-141 will be replaced with this extremely powerful portable computer. Ideal for espionage, this computer can double as an audio/video recorder and may be programmed with a variety of counterintelligence programs. The optical storage drive in the computer can record up to 6 hours of video and audio signal, 24 hours of audio-only signal, or 200 Gigabytes worth of computer information.

   GAME EFFECTS: In addition to its recording capabilities, the Computer provides the character with a skills pool of +30%, which can be split up any way desired; +30% for one skill, +15% for two skills, +10% for three skills, etc. Changing the computer's configuration requires a skilled Computer Programmer or Hacker, and 1D6+1 hours of uninterrupted work.

5. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D4 M.D. (The VR-152 Battler II has an equivalent strength of PS 50) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

6. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT FOR VR-141 SUPER SABER CYCLONES
(In addition to normal equipment for all military cyclones)

- **TELESCOPIC OPTICAL ENHANCEMENT:** Range: 2000 ft (600 m). Field of Vision: 20 ft (6 m).
- **THERMO-IMAGER:** Range: 1000 ft (300 m). Special optical sensor that allows the infrared radiation of warm objects to be converted into a visible image. Enables rider to see in darkness, shadows, and through smoke.
- **NIGHT VISION OPTICS:** Range: 1000 ft (300 m). An image intensifier that is passive, meaning that it relies on ambient light and produces no light of its own. Night vision can NOT work in absolute darkness.
- **EXTERNAL AUDIO/VIDEO PICKUP:** Anything the rider sees and hears can be recorded by the onboard computer for future review.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Range: 10 miles. Can identify and track up to 40 different targets.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems (Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors to 10 mile (16 km) range.
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.

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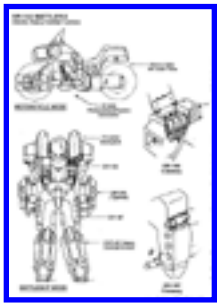
THE VR-152 BATTLER II

BACKGROUND

The VR-152 Battler II was the first new cyclone design produced after the Second Invid War. Designed to be the new "Grunt" of the REF, this design sacrificed some of the Cyclone's fabled mobility for vast increases in armor and weaponry. The Battler II is now the standard front-line fighting mecha for the REF, and is usually used either as support forces for Destroid and Hovertank units or independent heavy infantry platoons. The Battler II is designed for the close assault ground combat that made up most of the land battles of the First Invid War.

The VR-152 Battler II cyclone is the largest and bulkiest of all cyclones, with the exception of the VR-112 Samson. The cyclone itself is very boxy and angular, resembling the older VR-052 Battler cyclone. Battler II Pilots usually wear the heavier CVR-4C heavy combat armor instead of the standard CVR-4 armor, in anticipation of heavy hand-to-hand combat with enemy mecha.

SCHEMATICS



Click on the icon to the left to view some pictures from the REF Cyclone maintenance guide, document REF-8812-334-1199.

RPG STATS

Model: VR-152 Battler II
Class: 2nd Generation M.O.S.P.E.A.D.A. Infantry Unit
Crew: One

M.D.C. BY LOCATION:

	Motorcycle Mode			Battlesuit Mode	
	Headlight	5		Tires (2, rear)	5
	Front Tire	5		Thrusters (rear)	75
	Rear Tire	5		Forearm Shields (2)	120
	Storage Box (2)	2 each		Leg Shields (2)	150
	Thrusters (rear)	75		Head	90
(1)	Main Body	350	(1)	Main Body	350

M.D.C. OF BODY ARMOR:

(2)	CVR-4C (Heavy Combat Armor)	90
(2)	CVR-4 (Standard Military Armor)	70
(2)	CVR-3 (Standard Military Armor, Support Personnel)	50

NOTES:

1. Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the mecha down completely.
2. Depleting the M.D.C. of the body armor will destroy it and very likely kill the wearer (10% chance of survival).

The Second Generation Cyclones are equipped with laser resistant ceramic armor, so laser weapons do only HALF damage. This does NOT include any other energy attacks such as particle beams or ion blasts, nor does it help against explosives.

SPECIFICATIONS

Motorcycle Mode:

Maximum Speed: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Cruising Speed: 80 mph (128 kmph)
Turbo Boost Fwd: 30 ft (9 m) horizontal
Turbo Boost Up: 15 ft (4.5 m) vertical

Battloid Mode:

Running: 40 mph (64 kmph)
Flying: 180 mph (288 kmph)
Leaping: 20 ft (6 m)
Thruster Leap: 80 ft (24 m)

Height:

Battloid: 7.6 ft (2.3 m)
Motorcycle: 3.7 ft (1.1 m)

Width:

Battloid: 3.7 ft (1.1 m)
Motorcycle: 2.0 ft (0.6 m)

Length:

Battloid: 3.7 ft (1.1 m)
Motorcycle: 6.0 ft (1.8 m)

Weight: 250 lbs (113 kg)

Cargo:

The VR-152 has detachable cargo boxes that are connected to the rear of the bike like saddlebags. The size of each container is 18 inches tall by 20 inches wide by 18 inches deep. A passenger can also ride seated behind the driver. The VR-152 can hold 300 lbs (140 kg) in addition to the rider. Reduce maximum speed by 20% for every additional 50 lbs (22 kg) over the limit and add -1 to dodge.

Unlike its predecessors, the storage boxes of the new cyclones do NOT drop off when they convert to battloid mode. Instead, the boxes are shifted to the lower back, just below the thruster packs and covering the butt of the pilot. The passenger, however, isn't so lucky...

Main Engine: FF-600 Fusion/Protoculture Engine

Range:

2 protoculture cells will power the cyclone for approximately 12 months before needing refueling. The backup system can operate on 1 protoculture cell for 6 months at no penalty. Constant flying will drain the protoculture cells twice as quickly for all models. As a final backup, the cyclone can run on fusion power alone for up to 400 miles on a full tank of fuel, but maximum speed is reduced 15% and constant flying is impossible. The fusion engine runs off hydrogen, so any hydrogen-rich liquid (like water or ammonia) can be used for fuel. Extra gas from the fusion engine is released through an exhaust port.

Color Scheme:

Following the new painting scheme for most REF mecha, the new military cyclones are colored based on where they are stationed. Desert Cyclones are usually painted in a tan camouflage, Arctic Cyclones are painted a flat white, etc. Most of the Battler IIs assigned to the Icarus Mission were painted an olive green and grey in color, though they are often repainted by resistance groups to match their terrain or tastes. Each cyclone is streamlined in a color corresponding to the position of the pilot. Enlisted Pilots have their cyclones streamlined in Blue, Aces and low-ranking Officers in Red, and Platoon Leaders in Green.

WEAPON SYSTEMS

1. **GR-103 MINI-MISSILE LAUNCHER (2)**. The main weapon of older cyclones has remained mostly unchanged in the newer models. The launchers have been updated with newer technology which makes them more resilient to damage and easier to repair (+20% to repair rolls). In motorcycle mode, the two missile launchers are side by side in the nose of the cycle. In battloid mode, the missile launchers are divided, with one on each shoulder of the mecha. Both launchers hold 6 mini-missiles (usually armor-piercing).

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-152 Battler II.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One at a time or in volleys of two, four, six, or all. Remember, a volley counts as one melee attack regardless of the number of missiles.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 6 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 12.

2. **GR-187 HIP MISSILE LAUNCHERS** (2). A new addition to modern cyclones, the VR-152 Battler II comes automatically equipped with a pair of GR-187s. These weapons are mounted on the hip/upper leg shields in battloid mode and in the lower back of the cyclone in motorcycle mode. It appears as four small tubes built directly into the armored plate. The missiles can only fire in battloid mode.

    - **Primary Purpose**: Assault
    - **Secondary Purpose**: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Mecha
    - **Missile Type**: Any type of REF Mini-missile EXCEPT Plasma. Armor-piercing are standard-issue for the VR-152 Battler II.
    - **Mega-Damage**: Varies with missile type.
    - **Rate of Fire**: One or two at a time.
    - **Range**: Varies with missile type; 20 ft to 1 mile.
    - **Payload**: 4 missiles per each launcher, for a total capacity of 8.

3. **MODULAR WEAPON SYSTEMS**. As with all REF Cyclones, the arm shields of the VR-152 Battler II are designed to interface with one of the GR-series weapon modules. One weapon module can be mounted on each forearm shield, and it is not necessary to mount the same modules on each shield. The Cyclone's onboard computer system will automatically recognize which weapon module is installed and adjust the HUD displays on the pilot's helmet accordingly. Any GR-series weapon module can be used.

   Typical VR-152s are assigned two GR-200 MISSILE LAUNCHER/BEAM CANNON units, though different weapons may be assigned if necessary or desired. Click HERE for a complete listing of cyclone weapon modules.

4. **Hand-to-Hand Combat**. Punch does 1D4 M.D. Kick does 1D4 M.D. (The VR-152 Battler II has an equivalent strength of PS 50) Leap Kick does 2D4 M.D. Body Flip or Body Block does 1D4 M.D.

5. Any type of hand-held weapon can be fired by the pilot while in cyclone armor, including the new Gallant 1000 Multi-Weapon System.

6. Any other cyclone weapon pod can be substituted for the GR-200, both from the newer cyclone models and the older ones.

STANDARD SENSORS AND EQUIPMENT FOR ALL MILITARY CYCLONES

- **LASER-RESISTANT CERAMIC COATING:** 1/2 damage from laser attacks.
- **ENHANCED RADAR WITH HEADS-UP DISPLAY:** Range: 10 miles. Can identify and track up to 40 different targets.
- **TARGETING COMPUTER:** Uses helmet display instead of retractable sensor of older models. Provides the pilot with +3 to strike with missiles and +2 to strike with other weapon systems (Beam Cannons, Lasers, etc.). **Range:** 4000 ft (609 m).
- **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS:** Boosts standard radio in CVR-series armors to 10 mile (16 km) range.
- **MISCELLANEOUS INDICATORS:** Altitude, Speed, Power status, Time, Date, Direction, etc. All controlled by on-board computer.

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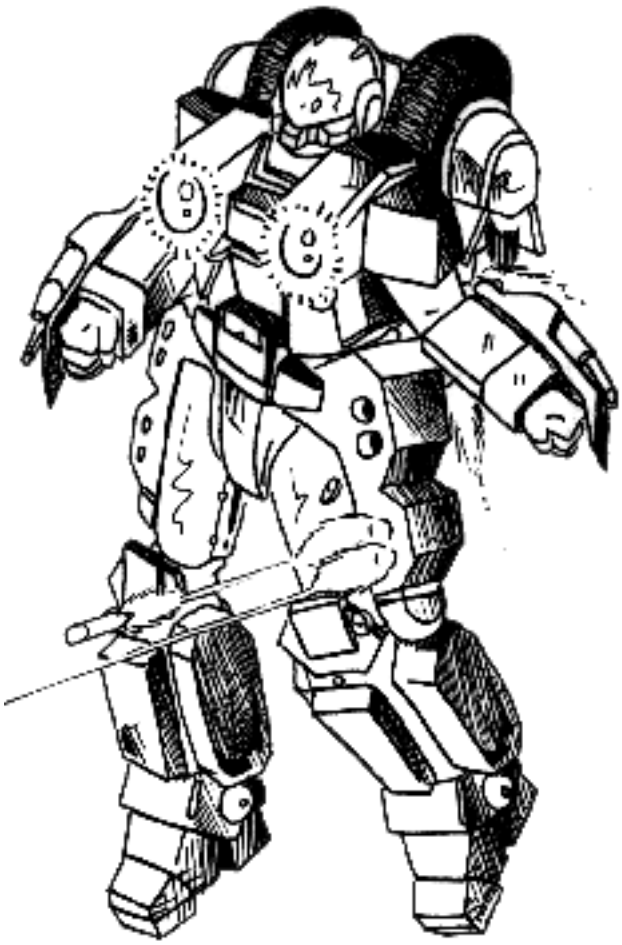
THE CYCLONES OF THE THIRD INVID WAR

The **Cyclone Veritech Ride Armor** was probably the most revolutionary mecha ever constructed during the 21st century. This small motorcycle/powered armor suit gave pilots the strength of a larger Veritech or Destroid with the maneuverability neither could match. They were quickly put into mass production after their initial development, and soon became the most numerous mecha in the REF arsenal. With their ability to run on either Gasoline or Protoculture, they were ideal Invid fighters and served as the REF's front-line strike force for most of the campaign to recapture Earth from the Invid Regis. It was therefore not surprising that the Cyclones were among the first mecha to be updated and improved in the interim between the Second and Third Invid Wars.

The second generation of Cyclones were designed to take advantage of new technology discovered during the Sentinels campaigns. For example, the new CVR-4 body armor that replaced the older CVR-3 near the end of the Second Invid War was constructed of molecular-aligned crystalline alloys, a "trick" taught to REF Metallurgists by the Spherians. These suits of armor were stronger and lighter than anything previously known to terran engineers. Another off-world technology included in the new cyclones was the powerful new micronized fusion/protoculture reactors. These reactors were based on Tirolian designs that could use water or any other hydrogen-rich liquid as fuel instead of gasoline. On the other hand, terran engineers still made their share of contributions to the new Cyclones. REF weapon engineers created a new series of modular weapon systems that could be used interchangeably with both the newer cyclones and the older models. By 2040 the initial bugs were worked out of the prototypes, and mass production of the new cyclones began in earnest. When the **Icarus Reconnaissance Fleet** left for Earth in 2044 it carried with it thousands of new Cyclones, ready to engage the Invid for the first time.



While developing the new combat cyclones, the REF design team also came up with some new ideas for the mecha. They realized that a man-sized mecha as powerful as the cyclone had hundreds of applications besides combat, and that the basic cyclone design could also serve as an excellent utility vehicle for the REF military. This led to the development of several types of cyclone support vehicles to

help keep the REF running smoothly. The first utility cyclone was the **VR-112 Samson,** a high-strength low-agility model that was intended to help move supplies and munitions as well as assist combat engineers in the field. A second model, the **VR-117 Firefly**, was developed for rescue operations, and a third model, the **VR-122 Protector**, was developed for security, civil defense, and urban pacification. Other utility cyclone designs, such as underwater and space construction powersuits, are currently under development by Terran and Tirolian mecha construction companies.

The development of the second generation of cyclone designs did not replace the older VR-0XX cyclones overnight. On the contrary, so many first-gen cyclones were produced between 2032 and 2039 that it will probably be decades before they disappear from common use (if ever). Even though the Icarus mission managed to ship hundreds of second-gen cyclones to Earth during the Third Invid War, older first generation designs were still far more common among resistance fighters than the newer models throughout the war.

Any characters who know how to pilot the older cyclones will be able to pilot the second generation cyclones without any difficulty. The main control systems for all cyclones are nearly identical; all an old cyclone rider needs to do is accustom himself to the sensor layouts and control changes of the new cyclones, such as the heads-up targeting display instead of a retractable targeting sensor for missiles. There is only one **Cyclone Combat** and one **Cyclone Combat Basic** skill; anyone trained on the first-generation Cyclones gets full bonuses when piloting the second-generation Cyclones provided he has Cyclone Combat skill. Consult the **Cyclone Combat Bonuses** tables for listings on what bonuses characters get for each model. Optionally GMs may wish to require players to practice on second generation cyclones for 24 hours before they get full benefits when piloting the new cyclones.

The availability of the new cyclones to the characters will initially be restricted by OCC. Only the **REF Cyclone Rider OCC** can have his choice of cyclone. Veritech and Destroid Pilots will be assigned ONE **VR-135 Forager**, and Military Specialists will be assigned a **VR-141 Super Saber**. REF Combat Engineers may be assigned a **VR-135 Forager** or **VR-112 Samson** depending on the situation. All other occupations will be assigned either the **VR-120 Ferret** or a **VR-135 Forager**. Other cyclones can be issued only by base commanders, and the circumstances for this are rare. Of course, in the chaos of the **Third Invid War** characters are free to pilot whatever working Cyclone they can find...

The REF Second Generation Cyclones

- VR-152 Battler II Infantry Cyclone
- VR-141 Super Saber Special Ops Cyclone
- VR-135 Forager Survival Cyclone
- VR-120 Ferret Recon Cyclone

- VR-122 Protector Security Cyclone
- VR-117 Firefly Rescue Cyclone
- VR-112 Samson Engineering/Support Cyclone

- Combat Bonuses for New Cyclones
- Cyclone Weapon Modules
- Cyclone Hand Weapons
- Extra Equipment for Cyclones

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THE THIRD INVID WAR
NEW CHARACTER CLASSES

CONTENTS:

- Renegade Invid OCC
- Ganger OCC
- REF Combat Paramedic OCC
- REF Military Police OCC
- REF Combat Engineer OCC
- Civilian Construction Engineer OCC

RENEGADE INVID

"Look, mentally I'm older than Lincoln, emotionally I'm six years old, physically I look like I'm in my twenties, my hormones are going top speed, and I'm something evolved from a slug evolved into something evolved from an ape. And YOU got the nerve to say YOU'RE confused?!?"
Kayagh, Renegade Stage 5 Invid

Traditionally members of the Invid race have had a strong hive-mentality. To the Invid, there was no "self", only an overwhelming devotion to the Regis and the Invid collective. This all changed however when the Regis began creating Invid in human form with human brain patterns. For the first time in the history of the race, individual Invid began to think for themselves. While this resulted in much more unpredictable and deadly fighters, it also caused a problem that the Regis had not anticipated; humanoid Invid began to feel emotions such as love, hate, anger, and fear; emotions they had no idea how to deal with. And as a result, again for the first time in Invid history, some Invid actually began to question the plans of the Regis!

Many stage 5 invid possess a certain amount of rebelliousness, but only a very few actually go so far as to disobey the Regis' directives and work against the Invid occupation forces. Often these renegade Invid work by themselves, since there is still much distrust and hatred between them and the humans, but every once in a while both humans and invid will overcome their prejudices and work together against the stage 6 invid overlords.

NOTE: Renegade invid with the resistance are very rare, and likewise encounters with renegades should be extremely rare. If the GM consents to letting a player play a renegade invid, then certainly no more than one invid per party should be allowed!

GENDER:
60% female, 40% male.

ALIGNMENT:
Any, though if a stage 5 invid is working with the resistance then *principled, scrupulous, unprincipled, or aberrant*. Any others are not likely to have enough patience to join a resistance group, or even to go renegade in the first place.

HEIGHT:
5 feet plus 3D6 inches.

WEIGHT:

130 lbs plus 2D4x10 lbs.

PHYSICAL S.D.C.:

6D6

ATTRIBUTES:

I.Q. 3D6 **M.E.** 3D6 **M.A.** 2D6 **P.S.** 3D6

P.P. 4D6 **P.E.** 3D6 **P.B.** 4D6 **Spd.** 3D6

As usual, any attribute of 16 or higher gets to roll an additional 1D6 for that attribute.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

- Can automatically sense the presence of other invid within a one mile (1.6 km) area.
- Can communicate telepathically with other invid; range: one mile (1.6 km).
- Can attempt to fool other invid into believing that the character is still loyal to the invid cause. Fooled invid will not attack the character and **MAY** follow the character's instructions if they do not conflict with the invid's previous instructions. The fooled invid will automatically see through the ruse if the character tries to help his human allies or tries to interfere with Invid operations. Roll percentile dice on the table below to see if the invid is fooled.

    - **Stage 1 Invid:** 1-35% chance of being fooled.
    - **Stage 2 Invid:** 1-30% chance of being fooled.
    - **Stage 3 Invid:** 1-25% chance of being fooled.
    - **Stage 4 Invid:** 1-20% chance of being fooled.
    - **Invid Brains:** 1-15% chance of being fooled.
    - **Stage 5 Invid:** 1-5% chance of being fooled.
    - **Stage 6 Invid:** No chance; will automatically sense a ruse.
    - **The Regis:** No chance; will automatically sense a ruse.

R.C.C. SKILLS:

- Pilot Invid Battloids (65% + 5% per level of experience)
- Mecha Combat: Invid Battloids (Bonuses identical to Mecha Combat: Alpha Fighter)
- Navigation: land, air, water (+15%)
- Navigation: space (+10%)
- Detect Ambush (+5%)
- Detect Concealment (+5%)
- Hand to Hand: Expert - 1
- W.P. Energy Pistol
- W.P. Energy Rifle
- Trivia: Protoculture (30% + 5% per level of experience) - 2
- Trivia: Invid Race (60% + 5% per level of experience) - 2

1. May be upgraded to Martial Arts at the cost of one "other" skill.
2. These skills represent an invid's basic knowledge about protoculture and the invid race in general. Characters should use these skills when attempting to answer a question that "any Invid should know," such as invid tactics and hive designs. GMs may overrule these skills if their effects might be too damaging to the plot of the adventure.

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 10 other skills. Plus two at third level, two at sixth level, and one at tenth level. All new skills start at level one proficiency. Note that some skills must be taught by humans before any invid can gain the skill; it is highly unlikely that a stage 5 invid who has just gone rogue will know computer programming. Players and GMs should use common sense when determining what skills a renegade invid has.

- **Communications:** Any
- **Domestic:** Any
- **Electrical:** None
- **Espionage:** Any (+10%)
- **Mechanical:** None
- **Medical:** First Aid Only
- **Physical:** Any (+5% where applicable)
- **Pilot:** Any, but any aircraft, spacecraft, or mecha skills count as TWO skill selections each. Maximum allowable mecha combat level is **Mecha Combat BASIC**. All pilot skills MUST be taught by humans; they cannot be taken as initial skills.
- **Pilot Related:** Any (+5%)
- **Rogue Skills:** Any (+5%)
- **Science:** Any, but any skill besides Basic or Advanced Math counts as TWO skill selections.
- **Technical:** Any
- **Weapon Proficiencies:** Any
- **Wilderness:** Any, but must be taught by humans; they cannot be taken as initial skills.

SPECIAL RULE:

Inexperienced invid (or human) characters may elect to NOT fill all of their skill slots, and then claim them at a later time to represent skills learned during their adventures when their background can justify learning such skills. Skills can only be claimed when a character gets enough experience to advance a level. For example, a new renegade invid PC fills 5 skill slots, leaving 5 blank. When the character gains enough experience to advance to level 2, he chooses to take **Pilot Cyclone** and **Mecha Combat BASIC: Cyclone** as skills, using up 4 skill slots (see below). He justifies this by saying that the veritech pilot he has been traveling with has taught him how to use "earther mecha". The player still has 1 skill slot available for when he reaches level 3 or later. This rule may also be used for human children or other inexperienced characters (i.e. "Annie"). Delayed skills start at level 1 proficiency when claimed.

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-1,950
2. 1,951-3,900
3. 3,901-8,800
4. 8,801-17,600
5. 17,601-25,600
6. 25,601-35,600
7. 35,601-50,600
8. 50,601-70,600
9. 70,601-95,600
10. 95,601-125,600
11. 125,601-175,600
12. 175,601-225,600
13. 225,601-275,600
14. 275,601-325,600
15. 325,601-375,600

SAVINGS:

(1D4-1) x 10 *(Yes, 0 initial credits is possible)*

STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

One fully-functional suit of Invid Body Armor and one Invid Type II Energy Pistol with two extra protoculture cells. 1D4 weeks of reserve food and water rations. The GM may choose whether or not to let the character have a captured invid battloid, or he may let the player roll on the table below:

Renegade Invid Starting Mecha
(Roll Percentile Dice)

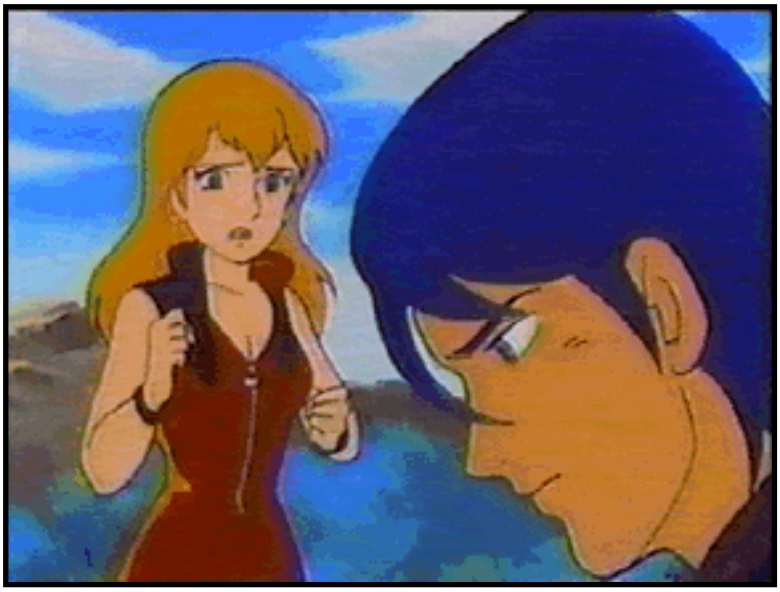
01-10
: *Invid Assault Battloid*

11-55
: *Invid Royal Command Battloid* (See Invid Invasion page 84)

56-00
: No Mecha or Mecha destroyed during escape

NOTE: Finding spare parts for Invid Battloids will be **VERY** hard (almost next to impossible). Bio-Maintenance Engineers trying to repair Invid mecha have an automatic -20% to their rolls, and must work with the Invid **AT ALL TIMES** during the repair process.

GANGER O.C.C.



The Invid Wars have been very hard on the general civilian population of Earth. The democratic governments of the past have collapsed, and along with them almost all civil services such as police, hospitals, schools, etc. Many people have given in to despair, and spend their days huddled in shelters or under rubble praying that everything will go away. Others have adapted and learned to live in the harsh new world, becoming stronger and more resiliant (and more brutal) in order to survive in a land where "might makes right". Many of these survivors have banded together into gangs, working together for mutual protection. Some gangs are actually benevolent, ruling the cities they inhabit with a fair (if cold) hand. But by far the majority of them are cruel and criminal, raping and pillaging towns for their own pleasure and survival. The lowest have even thrown in with the Invid, and now work as pawns of their overlords. These Invid sympathizer gangs (called **FRAGS**) are particularly dangerous, as they actively hunt down dissidents and resistance fighters for their Invid masters.

Sometimes gangers will become disillusioned with their fellow gang members and seek to escape. Leaving a gang is not hard; all one needs to do is sneak out of their city and into the wastelands that surround them. Often these ex-gangers will hook up with resistance fighters or rebels and work together for something better. Although usually young, poor, and uneducated, these warriors bring with them survival skills that are invaluable to a party travelling in the destroyed cities and urban wastelands of Earth.

ATTRIBUTE REQUIREMENTS:

Gangers who are still alive are generally fast, clever, and agile, but there are no real requirements.

O.C.C. SKILLS:

- Streetwise (+20%)
- Pilot: Motorcycle (+15%)
- Prowl (+10%)
- W.P. Knife
- W.P. Revolver
- Hand to Hand: Basic (may be upgraded to Expert at the cost of one "extra" skill, and Martial Arts at two "extra" skills)

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 15 other skills, plus 2 at level three, 2 at level six, and 1 at level ten. All new skills start at level 1 proficiency.

- **Communication:** Radio: Basic only.
- **Domestic:** Any (+5%).
- **Electrical:** Basic Electronics only.
- **Espionage/Military:** Any (+5%).
- **Mechanical:** Automotive Mechanics, Baic Mechanics, and Locksmith only.
- **Medical:** First Aid only.
- **Physical:** Any (+5% where applicable).
- **Pilot:** Any (+5%, mecha-related skills count as 2 skill selections).
- **Pilot Related:** Navigation (Air, Land, Water) only.
- **Rogue:** Any (+15%).
- **Science:** Mathematics: Basic only.
- **Technical:** Demolitions only (counts as 2 skill selections).
- **Weapon Proficiencies:** Any.
- **Wilderness Skill:** Any (+5%).

SPECIAL RULE:

Young gangers may elect to NOT fill all of their skill slots, and then claim them at a later time to represent skills learned during their adventures when their background can justify learning such skills. Skills can only be claimed when a character gets enough experience to advance a level. For example, a new Ganger fills 10 skill slots, leaving 5 blank. When the character gains enough experience to advance to level 2, he chooses to take Pilot Cyclone and Mecha Combat BASIC: Cyclone as skills, using up 4 skill slots. He justifies this by saying that the veritech pilot he has been traveling with has taught him how to use Cyclones. The player still has 1 skill slot available for when he reaches level 3 or later. This rule is primarily intended for human children or other inexperienced characters (i.e. "Annie"). Delayed skills start at level 1 proficiency when claimed.

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-1,875
2. 1,876-3,750
3. 3,751-7,250
4. 7,251-14,100
5. 14,101-21,200
6. 21,201-31,200
7. 31,201-41,200
8. 41,201-51,200
9. 51,201-71,200
10. 71,201-101,500

11. 101,501-136,500
12. 136,501-186,500
13. 186,501-236,500
14. 236,501-286,500
15. 286,501-326,500

SAVINGS:

(1D6-1) x 10 (yes, 0 initial credits is possible)

STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

An automobile, jeep, dune buggy, or motorcycle. One knife, one pistol, and one rifle weapon (may be MDC weapons). 1D6 spare clips for each weapon. 30% chance that the character will own a suit of REF or Southern Cross armor (70% chance if a frag). See the entry on **FRAGS** for possible weapon and armor selections.

REF COMBAT PARAMEDIC O.C.C.

The REF Combat Paramedic is a highly-trained medical specialist who is a vital part of the REF Military. While not as experienced or as knowledgable as a true Medical Doctor, the paramedic is trained in all forms of emergency medicine and is familiar with triage medical practices and addressing critical life-threatening wounds. More importantly, the Combat Paramedic is experienced in military tactics and can defend himself/herself in the field as well as keep pace with other military units. In terms of medicine, the paramedic is qualified to perform everything up through simple surgery and common medical procedures (appendectomies, shrapnel removal, delivering babies, etc.) but is not experienced in more advanced areas such as combatting viruses or brain surgery. The main focus of the Combat Paramedic's training is to keep a wounded soldier alive and stable until he can be evacuated to a field hospital.

The Combat Paramedic is typically a resourceful individual who thinks fast and can make due with limited resources. He/she will typically try to avoid combat and bloodshed (it goes against his/her hippocratic oath) but also realizes that sometimes it is necessary to use lethal force to defend one's self and loved ones. The paramedic is trained in combat tactics, however, and can hold his/her own in a fight. Combat Paramedics are highly sought after among resistance groups on Earth during the Third Invid War. They provide invaluable services in a world where combat is common, swift and deadly and trained medical staff are virtually nonexistant.

REF Combat Paramedics recieve Cyclone Basic training as part of their REF training, and are usually issued a **VR-117 Firefly** when going into the field. They typically are not permitted training in other mecha such as Veritechs and Destroids.

ATTRIBUTE REQUIREMENTS: IQ 10 or higher.

O.C.C. SKILLS:

- Paramedic (+25%)
- Field Surgery (+15%)
- Radio: Basic
- Wilderness Survival (+5%)
- Pilot Truck: Small (Ambulance) (+10%)
- Pilot Motorcycle (+10%)
- Pilot Cyclone (+10%)
- Mecha Combat Basic: Cyclone
- Hand to Hand: Expert (may be upgrade to Martial Arts at the cost of one "extra" skill)
- W.P. Automatic Pistol

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 12 other skills, plus two additional skills at level 3, two at level 6, two at level 9, and two at level 12. All new skills start at level 1 proficiency.

- **Communication:** Any
- **Domestic:** Any
- **Electrical:** Basic Electronics only.
- **Espionage:** Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Land Navigation, and Tracking only.
- **Mechanical:** Basic Mechanics only.
- **Medical:** Any, but Pathology counts as two skills and Medical Doctor counts as three (!) skills. (+10%)
- **Physical:** Any
- **Pilot:** Any except Mecha piloting skills. (+5%)
- **Pilot Related:** Any
- **Rogue:** Any
- **Science:** Any (+5%)
- **Technical:** Any, except Demolitions and Demolitions Disposal.
- **Weapon Proficiencies:** Any, except Cyclone Weapon Systems.
- **Wilderness:** Any (+5%)

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-2,000

2. 2,001-4,000
3. 4,001-8,200
4. 8,201-16,400
5. 16,401-24,500
6. 24,501-34,600
7. 34,601-49,700
8. 49,701-69,800
9. 69,801-94,900
10. 94,901-129,000
11. 129,001-179,100
12. 179,101-229,200
13. 229,201-279,300
14. 279,301-329,400
15. 329,401-389,500

SAVINGS:

3D6 x 100

MONTHLY WAGES:

3,000 for a new recruit (levels 1-3); 3500 for 4th level and higher; paramedics above 7th level usually become field doctors and earn 7,000 or more per month.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

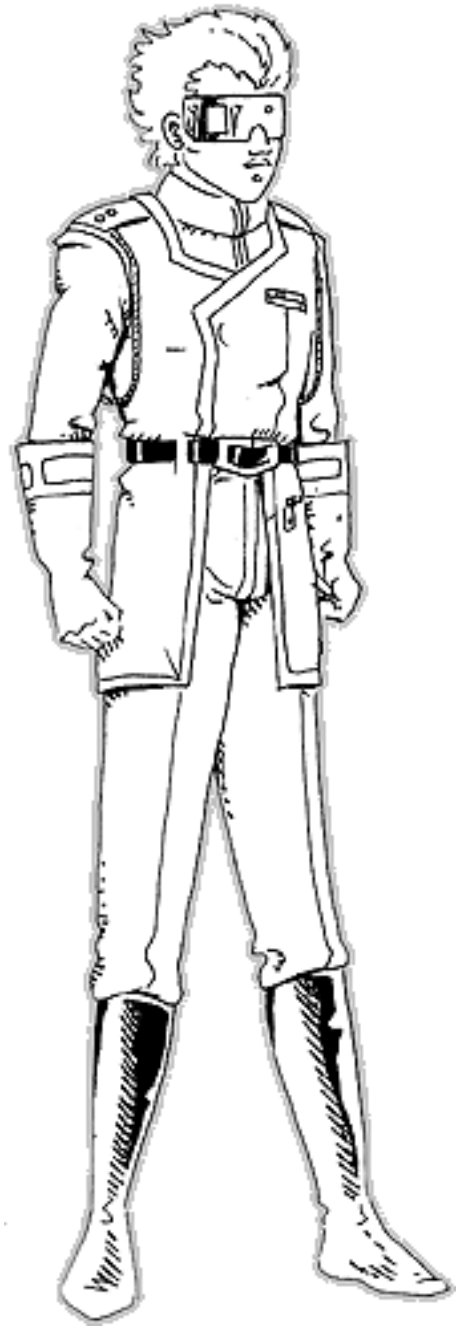
- Sidearm (usually M-37 "Weasel" Auto-Pistol)
- Medical Kit (includes first-aid kit, bandages, antiseptics, healing/disinfectant salves, aspirin, painkiller, antibiotics, hypodermic gun, electronic thermometer, stethoscope, tounge depressors, pen flashlight)
- Surgical Kit (includes scalpels, clamps, sutures, needles, etc)
- Standard REF Survival Kit
- Uniform
- Reusable Surgical Gown and Gloves
- CVR-4 armor
- Cyclone (Typically VR-117 Firefly, sometimes VR-135 Forager)
- Portable field computer
- Wrist-radio (short-range--eight miles)
- Emergency Beacon (20 mile range)
- Four weeks' rations
- Flashlight
- Four signal flares

SPECIAL CLEARANCE UPON ASSIGNMENT:

Additional medical equipment, including the CA-106 "Hos-box" for use with VR-117 Cyclone.

REF MILITARY POLICE O.C.C.

Originally created by Yoroiden (Yoroiden@aol.com)



The REF Military Police (REF MP) is the expeditionary force's version of the Southern Cross Global Military Police. Like the GMP, the REF MP is an elite intelligence and law enforcement division that maintains order within REF forces and ensures that robotechnology is never compromised or abused. REF MP agents are stationed on all ships and bases in the expeditionary force. Although they share the same facilities and use the same mecha as the regular troops, they have their own reporting structure and are answerable only to their MP superiors and the REF high command.

REF Military Police officers are heavily trained in forensic arts such as tracking, investigation, and interrogation. They are also extensively drilled in hand-to-hand and modern firearm combat skills so that they can hold their own in combat when necessary. They are given basic familiarity training in most REF mecha but are specifically trained to use REF Cyclones and Southern Cross Garlands. REF MP officers are also experienced in crowd control measures, and are even skilled in emergency medical skills to care for injured persons until paramedics can arrive.

Like their counterparts in the GMP, REF Military Police are given top security clearance, access to special items and mecha, and the freedom to act under their own discretion during an investigation. Because of this preferential treatment most of the standard REF soldiers consider the REF MP to be snobbish and arrogant. However, the majority of REF MP officers are loyal, dependable and trustworthy soldiers who strongly believe in the principles of the REF.

ATTRIBUTE REQUIREMENTS: A high IQ and PS (>10) are preferred, but not required.

O.C.C. SKILLS:

- Radio: Basic (+20%)
- Surveillance Systems (+30%)
- Intelligence (+15%)
- Interrogation (+10%)
- Tracking (+20%)

- Criminal Sciences and Forensics (+15%)
- First Aid (+5%)
- Field Surgery (+30%)
- Pilot Motorcycle (+20%)
- Pilot Mecha: Cyclone & Garland (all) (+20%)
- Weapon Systems (+15%)
- Find Contraband, Weapons, & Cybernetics (Invid experimets): 40% + 4% per level of experience
- Streetwise (+20%)
- W.P. Gallant
- W.P. Heavy
- Hand to Hand: Martial Arts - 1

1. Martial Arts can be changed to Aikido, but with GM's permission, and the ability to find the skill (Rifts World Book 8: Japan)

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 12 other skills, plus three at level 3, two at levels 6, two at level 9, and one at level 12. All new skills start at level 1 proficiency.

- **Communications:** Any (+10%)
- **Domestic:** Any
- **Electrical:** Basic only
- **Espionage:** Disquise, Escape, and Sniper only (+5%)
- **Mechanical:** Automotive, Locksmith, and Veritech Mechanics (only applicable to cyclones)
- **Medical:** Paramedic (counts as 2 skills) or Medical Doctor (counts as 3 skills)
- **Military:** Demolitons Disposal only (+10%)
- **Physical:** Any, except acrobatics
- **Pilot:** Any (+10%) except mecha combat is basic
- **Pilot Related:** Any (+5%)
- **Rogue:** Any
- **Science:** Any (+5%)
- **Technical:** Any, except Operate Heavy Power Tools
- **Weapon Proficiencies:** Any
- **Wilderness:** Any (+5%)

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-1,925
2. 1,926-3,850
3. 3,851-7,450
4. 7,451-14,900
5. 14,901-21,000
6. 21,001-31,000

7. 31,001-41,600
8. 41,601-53,000
9. 53,001-73,000
10. 73,001-103,500
11. 103,501-139,000
12. 139,001-189,000
13. 189,001-239,000
14. 239,001-289,000
15. 289,001-339,000

SAVINGS:

4D6X100

MONTHLY WAGES:

Monthly Wages: 3,000 for levels 1-5, 4000 levels 6+

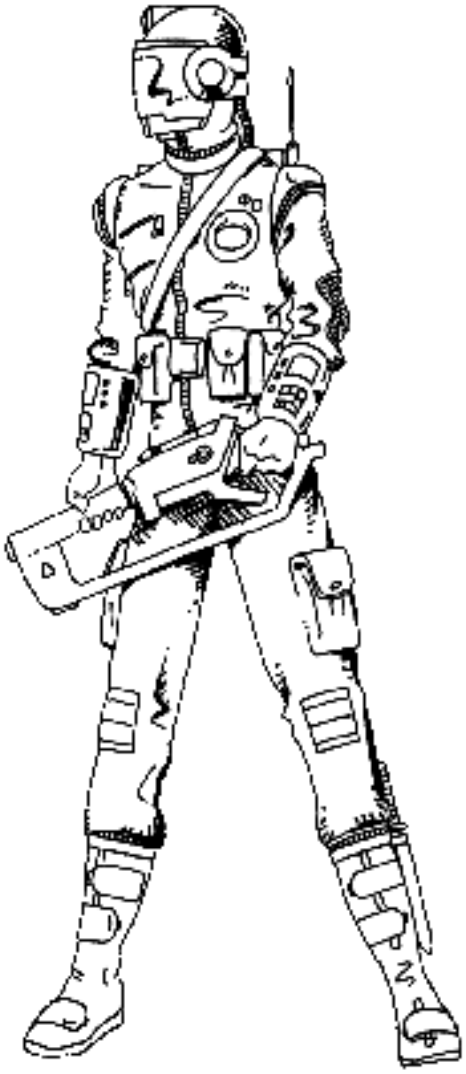
STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

- Gallant 1000 w/ Rifle attachment and flash suppressor
- M-37 Weasel
- First-aid kit w/ emergency equipment (pain killer, turniquettes, etc.)
- Standard REF survival kit
- Dress and Combat uniforms
- CVR-4 Body Armor
- VR-122 Protector Cyclone (Former Southern Cross members may have a Garland 6 or 7)
- Portable Field Computer
- Wrist Radio (20 mi)
- Emergency Beacon
- 4 Weeks Rations
- Flashlight
- Handcuffs
- Night Stick (1D6 SDC Damage)
- 10 Tracer Bugs (See Robotech RPG pg. 80)
- 10 Signal Flares

SPECIAL CLEARANCE UPON ASSIGNMENT:

Heavy Weapons, Rifles, Mecha, vehicles, aircraft, personnel, etc.

REF COMBAT ENGINEER O.C.C.



(For TIW/Sentinels, but adaptable to Macross and Southern Cross)

Ever since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, construction engineers have been a vital part of the armed forces, building (or blowing up) bridges, bases, and other structures to aid in the accomplishment of a military objective. Army Engineers also act as "sappers," using special equipment to clear areas of land mines and booby-traps. In peacetime, combat engineers perform civilian works, such as building dams (such as Bagnall Dam in Missouri) and work to avert disasters such as earthquakes and flooding.

The services of a combat engineer are a much-needed commodity during the Invid occupation of Earth. Many buildings and fortifications are half-ruined, and only skilled construction workers can repair them. The Resistance can always use the services of a military engineer to help defeat fortifications made by the Invid, and pay on individual jobs can often be astounding.

ATTRIBUTE REQUIREMENTS: IQ 9, PE 12 or higher.

O.C.C. SKILLS:

- Basic and Advanced Mathematics (+10%)
- Construction Engineering (+20%)
- Design Engineering (+20%)
- Demolitions (+20%)
- Surveying (+20%)
- Operate Heavy Power Tools (+15%)
- Pilot Cyclone (+10%)
- Mecha Combat: Cyclone
- Hand to Hand: Basic (may be upgraded to Expert at the cost of one "extra" skill, and Martial Arts at two "extra" skills)

ADAPTATIONS:

For Macross, remove Cyclone Piloting/Combat and replace with two additional "other" skills.

Ignore the skills and categories that Macross didn't have, and the only mecha combat allowed under Pilot Skills is Destroid Combat. Veritech piloting and combat is NOT allowed.

For Southern Cross, replace Cyclone Piloting/Combat with Battloid Piloting/Combat. Again, the only mecha that can be piloted are Battloids. No Veritechs.

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 14 other skills, but at least four must come from Electronic and/or Mechanical, and two from Technical. Plus two additional skills at Level 3, two at Level 6, two at Level 9, and two at Level 12. All new skills start at Level 1 proficiency.

- **Communication:** Any
- **Domestic:** Any
- **Electrical:** Any (+5%), including Electrical Engineer.
- **Espionage:** Wilderness Survival and Detect Concealment only.
- **Mechanical:** Any (+10%), including Mechanical Engineer.
- **Medical:** First Aid or Paramedic (counts as 2 skills) only.
- **Physical:** Any
- **Pilot:** Alpha, Beta, Hovertank, or VF series only (+5%). Mecha Combat is limited to basic.
- **Pilot Related:** Any (+10%).
- **Rogue:** Any (+5% to Safe-Cracking).
- **Science:** Any (+5%).
- **Technical:** Any (+10%).
- **Weapon Proficiencies:** Any, except Cyclone Weapon Systems.
- **Wilderness:** Any

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-2,120
2. 2,121-4,240
3. 4,241-8,480
4. 8,481-16,960
5. 16,961-24,960
6. 24,961-34,960
7. 34,961-49,960
8. 49,961-69,960
9. 69,961-94,960
10. 94,961-129,960
11. 129,961-179,960
12. 179,961-229,960
13. 229,961-279,960
14. 279,961-329,960
15. 329,961-389,961

SAVINGS:

4D6 x 100 *(Combat Engineers are among the most highly-paid of the REF specialists)*

MONTHLY WAGES:

3,000 for a new recruit (levels 1-5); 3800 for 6th level and higher; officers receive 5,000 to 6,000 credits per month or more.

STANDARD SENTINELS/TIW EQUIPMENT:

- Energy pistol (often Gallant or SAL-9)
- S.D.C. sidearm (usually Wolff Auto Pistol or Browning GP-35)
- Portable welding unit
- Uniform
- CVR-4 armor
- Cyclone Cycle (usually one of the light models, or the VR-112 Samson for special missions)
- Portable field computer (with CAD program if design engineer)
- Wrist-radio (short-range--eight miles)
- Tool kit
- Four weeks' rations
- Flashlight
- Three signal flares

STANDARD INVID INVASION EQUIPMENT:

- Energy pistol (often Gallant or SAL-9)
- S.D.C. sidearm (usually Wolff Auto Pistol or Browning GP-35)
- Portable welding unit
- Uniform
- CVR-3 armor
- Tool kit
- Four weeks' rations
- Flashlight
- Three signal flares
- Land Vehicle (may or may not be a Cyclone; GM's decision).

ADAPTATIONS:

For Macross, remove the Cyclone and CVR-3 armor and energy weapon. Add an S.D.C. submachine gun or rifle. For Southern Cross, remove the Cyclone and replace the CVR-3 armor with the standard body armor of whatever army the engineer is attached to (usually Civil Defense Squad or the Global Military Police).

SPECIAL CLEARANCE UPON ASSIGNMENT:

Additional equipment, surveying tools, explosives, mecha, access to construction shops and subordinate construction workers.

CIVILIAN CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER

(For TIW/Sentinels, but adaptable to Macross and Southern Cross)

The civilian engineer could be called the equivalent of the combat engineer but employed in the private sector. These individuals are often placed in command of groups of laborers working on construction projects. Starting out, these engineers are sub-contractors to one or more levels of higher-level construction engineers, who are in turn subcontractors to contracting companies. As they gain more experience, the engineers advance upward, getting more men (and subcontractors) under their command. Eventually, they may become the heads of their own contracting organizations, passing on contracts to subordinate (lower-level) engineers.

In any Robotech era, construction engineers will usually never lack for a job. But in the Macross and Invid wars era in particular, when reconstruction was commencing at a startling rate, construction engineers are particularly sought-after, with even the lowest-level engineer receiving astounding salaries (up to ten times the base) from groups such as E.B.S.I.S. and RDF.

ATTRIBUTE REQUIREMENTS: IQ 9, PE 12 or higher.

O.C.C. SKILLS:

- Pilot Automobile (+5%)
- Cook (+5%)
- Computer Operation (+5%)
- Basic Mathematics (+5%)
- Advanced Mathematics (+5%)
- Construction Engineer (+15%; Professional)
- Operate Construction Equipment (+15%; Professional)
- Operate Heavy Power Tools (+15%; Professional)

NOTE: May choose three alternate professional construction (or even other category) skills of choice; however for a professional Construction Engineer, the above three are the most likely choices.

OTHER SKILLS:

Select 16 other skills. Plus two at third level, two at sixth level, and one at tenth level. All new skills start at level one proficiency. All new skills start at level one proficiency. "Other Skill" Categories are the same as the Nonmilitary Personnel OCC, with an additional bonus of +10% to any construction-related skills.

EXPERIENCE LEVELS:

1. 0,000-2,120
2. 2,121-4,240
3. 4,241-8,480
4. 8,481-16,960
5. 16,961-24,960
6. 24,961-34,960
7. 34,961-49,960
8. 49,961-69,960
9. 69,961-94,960
10. 94,961-129,960
11. 129,961-179,960
12. 179,961-229,960
13. 229,961-279,960
14. 279,961-329,960
15. 329,961-389,961

SAVINGS:

4D6 x 100

MONTHLY WAGES (from contracting agency):

3,200 for a recent trade school graduate (levels 1-5); 4,200 for 6th level and higher; experienced contractors receive 5,500 to 6,500 credits per month or more. Self-employed contractors may receive ten to hundreds of thousands of credits per job, depending on the quality of the workmanship, the size and complexity of the project, and the number of men under him. It is possible to receive multi-MILLION-credit contracts, but not likely in terms of gameplay; the character would have to be AT LEAST tenth level for his or her contracting agency to be well-known enough to get that kind of deals.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

- Headset radio (short range - 5 miles)
- Toolbox filled with common construction tools (hammer, screwdrivers, etc.)
- Work coveralls
- Hard-hat helmet
- S.D.C. sidearm (optional) for personal off-duty use and self defense.

If working for the resistance or the military, also has a set of CVR-3 body armor and a VR-112 Samson or VR-038-LT Cyclone (Sentinels or Invid Invasion only). May also have a small apartment paid for by the company.

DAVE DEITRICH
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Last Updated: *Saturday, July 25, 1998*

The following material is from **THE THIRD INVID WAR**, a fan supplement by **Dave Deitrich** and **Chris Meadows**. Please feel free to use, copy, and distribute it as you see fit. All we ask is that you give proper credit to us and do not claim that it is your own work. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

THE THIRD INVID WAR
NEW CHARACTER SKILLS

The following is a list of new skills for the Palladium RPG system that are being introduces with TIW. All new skills listed below can be included under one of the older skill categories used in the Robotech and Sentinels role-playing games (as well as any other Palladium RPG). The skill category is listed in *italics* immediately after the skill name. No conversion of characters is necessary before they can learn any of the skills below; any character that can learn skills from the appropriate category can learn these new skills. Any O.C.C. bonuses applicable are also valid for these skills.

CONTENTS:

- Basic Construction
- Basic Drafting
- Construction Demolitions
- Construction Engineering
- Design Engineering
- Field Surgery
- Operate Construction Equipment
- Operate Heavy Power Tools
- Plumbing
- Surveying

NOTE: New skills may be added to this list at a later date.

- **BASIC CONSTRUCTION *(Technical)*** - The practiced skill of repairing structures (including bridges, houses, skyscrapers, the Statue of Liberty, etc.) or building them, under competent supervision (this would be the skill belonging to most of today's construction workers--non-college-trained, blue collar laborers). This includes the ability to read simple blueprints and the ability to operate simple construction equipment (such as small welders, solderers, power drills, etc.). People who have this proficiency understand how buildings are constructed. This can be

useful in the case of rescuers trying to dig people out from under a collapsed building (i.e. figure out how to shift it so the whole thing won't collapse on the people). **BASE SKILL:** 50% + 5% per level of experience.

- **BASIC DRAFTING *(Technical)*** - Includes reading and drawing simple blueprints, as well as making fairly good-quality drawings (Basic Mathematics required). **BASE SKILL:** 50% + 5% per level.

- **CONSTRUCTION DEMOLITIONS *(Technical)*** - This is the same as the Technical Demolitions skill; however only civilian (construction) applications are taught. When working under military conditions, or with a military application of the skill, subtract 30%. NOTE: An exception to this is the Military Construction Engineer, who specializes in this kind of work. **BASE SKILL:** 60% + 5% per level of experience.

- **CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING *(Mechanical)*** - The expert skill of repairing or building structures and/or supervising Basic Construction workers in building structures (also includes the ability to read complex blueprints and a working knowledge of Demolitions as pertains to construction; Basic and Advanced Mathematics required). **BASE SKILL:** 40% + 5% per level of experience.

- **DESIGN ENGINEERING *(Mechanical)*** - The expert skill of understanding blueprints and graphic design (also includes knowledge of how to use CAD (Computer-Aided Design) programs). The Design Engineer can create complex blueprints and designs, and also make professional-quality perspective drawings. In addition to designing structures, Design Engineers may also design weapons, vehicles, mecha, or other devices, depending on what their other specialties (other skills) are (Basic and Advanced Mathematics required). **BASE SKILL:** 40% + 5% per level of experience.

- **FIELD SURGERY *(Medical)* (Original skill by Pat Nowak)** - This skill reflects training in emergency life-saving surgical procedures that can be performed in the field to keep critically wounded patients alive. Given the proper tools, the surgeon character can perform amputations, suture torn arteries, check internal bleeding, cauterize wounds, give blood transfusions, etc. (The character can also try to improvise the supplies he/she needs, but in this case receives a -10% penalty to the skill roll.) Field expedient surgery is a dangerous proposition that too often results in the death of the patient. Because of the risk involved, field surgery is attempted only when it is the only chance the wounded person has for survival. If the operation is successful, the patient lives and can be evacuated to a base or hospital, but a failed roll results in the immediate death of the patient. **BASE SKILL:** 16% + 4% per level of experience.

  Optional Guidelines for Fatal Injury Treatment: In the violent world of the Third Invid War, unarmored humans are at an extreme disadvantage. Once a person's mecha and body armor are destroyed, a single M.D. blast will usually obliterate him/her. These guidelines are provided to

give characters a chance, however slight, to survive a blast that would normally evaporate the character. If the GM agrees, the character can survive a mega-damage intensity wound if a trained medic makes a successful *field surgery* skill roll.

Unless the attacker made a called shot or rolled an unmodified 19 or higher, the character has the chance to live. The basic idea is that the M.D. blast was partially absorbed by nearby cover or merely sheared off a limb (GMs, use your imagination). Within 1D4 melee rounds after the character's being hit, a medic character must attend to his/her injuries. If the medic makes a successful skill roll, the character is incapacitated but survives the attack, though just barely (reduce S.D.C. to zero and hit points are at 1D6 above zero). A failed roll means the injured character was beyond saving and dies an instant later.

Note that even if the surgery is successful and the victim survives, he/she is by no means out of danger. The person will be in shock, crippled, and will most likely require additional extensive surgery and a long recovery period before s/he is able to adventure again, both of which are nearly impossible to find in the post-holocaust world of TIW. Just keeping the character alive and transporting him/her to adequate medical help may be an entire adventure in itself. Even afterwards, the character may have lasting side-effects such as insanity or pemanenet physical crippling/disfigurement (GM's option).

*(This skill originally appeared in **Rifts World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign**)*

- **OPERATE CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT *(Pilot)*** - The ability to drive bulldozers, backhoes, forklifts, cranes, et cetera. Could be considered a Piloting skill. **BASE SKILL:** 60% + 5% per level of experience.

- **OPERATE HEAVY POWER TOOLS *(Technical)*** - Knowledge of exactly how to use heavy equipment such as jackhammers, riveters, welders, pneumatic drills, cutting torches, et cetera. May also be considered a "weapon proficiency," as it gives a +3 to strike the target with these construction implements. **BASE SKILL:** 55% + 5% per level of experience.

- **PLUMBING *(Technical)*** - The practice of fixing leaky pipes or hydraulics. May be used to work on mecha hydraulic systems at -30%. **BASE SKILL:** 50% + 5% per level of experience.

- **SURVEYING *(Technical)*** - The ability to use surveying equipment to take accurate sightings and measurements of land, for use in architectural designs or mapmaking. Basic and Advanced Mathematics are prerequisites. Adds a +10% bonus to Navigation, and a +5% bonus to Optic Systems. **BASE SKILL:** 40% + 5% per level.

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THE THIRD INVID WAR
A Chronology of Important Dates

WARNING!
CLASSIFIED MATERIAL!

The following information is for the Game Master's eyes only! You will ruin much of your enjoyment of TIW as a player if you continue to read this page. If you plan on playing TIW as a PC, STOP READING NOW!

2022

- The ***SDF-3 Pioneer*** Battle Fortress and its escorts arrive at Tirol.
- Tirol is currently under siege by the Invid Regent. Invid forces engage the *Pioneer*.
- **SENTINELS WAR** (later called the **FIRST INVID WAR**) **BEGINS**

2031

- Robotech Masters arrive at Earth.
- Armies of the Southern Cross engage Robotech Masters.
- **SECOND ROBOTECH WAR BEGINS**

2032

- Robotech Masters are defeated above the remains of the SDF-1.
- **SECOND ROBOTECH WAR ENDS**
- United Nations world government collapses completely.
- Armies of the Southern Cross officially disband.

- Invid Regent is killed by REF/Sentinels forces on Optera.

- **FIRST INVID WAR ENDS**
- Invid Regis gathers remaining Invid forces and retreats to unknown system.

2033

- **REF Venus Attack Group**, led by Colonel Johnathon Wolff, arrives at Earth with warning about Invid.
- Dana Sterling and remains of the 15th ATAC hijack Johnathon Wolff's flagship, the Warrior-class destroyer ***RSS WolfPack***, and return to Tirol along with 200 clone survivors from the Robotech Master's main mothership.

2035

- Invid Regis and her forces arrive in the Sol system.
- First wave of Invid attack Earth. 90% of Earth's surviving military forces (including the remains of the *Venus Attack Group*) are destroyed.
- **THIRD ROBOTECH WAR** (later called the **SECOND INVID WAR**) **BEGINS**
- Earth is occupied by the Invid Regis and her forces.

2036

- *REF Mars Attack Group* arrives at Earth. The fleet is destroyed in orbit by Invid forces.
- Lieutenant Scott Bernard is one of the few survivors that make it to Earth.

2038

- **BATTLE OF REFLEX POINT**. The **REF Jupiter Attack Group** (95% of remaining REF fleet) arrives in the Sol system.
- Invid Regis abandons Earth, but approximately 98% of Jupiter Attack Group is destroyed.
- **SECOND INVID WAR ENDS**
- *SDF-3 Pioneer* is lost in space. Lt. Cmdr. Scott Bernard and Commander Vince Grant lead a rescue mission in the Haydonite cruiser *Ark Angel*, the only surviving Jupiter Group command ship.

- Invid Regis and remains of the Invid race settle on a remote world on the very edge of the galaxy. Planet is named **New Optera**.
- First crops of the Invid Flower of Life do not do well on New Optera.
- Invid scientists estimate that the race will starve in 6-9 months unless a temporary food supply can be found.
- Regis begins to consider re-occupation of Earth.

2039

- Regis creates the Stage 6 Invid as leaders for the Earth Occupation Forces.
- Invid forces return and reoccupy Earth.
- Remains of Jupiter Attack Group attempt to defend against the Invid but are destroyed.
- **THIRD INVID WAR BEGINS**

2040

- Stage 6 Invid slowly become corrupted by their power.
- Friction between Stage 5 and Stage 6 Invid starts to increase.
- Rook, Rand, Lancer, and other heroes of the Second Invid War form ***Rook's Knights***, a large resistance group operating primarily in western North America. Rook and Lancer are elected co-leaders of the group.

2041

- Stage 6 Invid develop the **"Fortress Earth"** plan to blockade the planet with a series of powerful orbiting hives.
- Construction of the Invid Space Hive ring begins.

2042

- Events in "**Return of the Masters**" take place.

- Back at Tirol, Colonels John Korcheck and Roger Harris receive approval for an Earth reconnaisance mission. Preparations for **REF Icarus Recon Group** begin.
- Anton Kosmas betrays *Rook's Knights* and leads the group into an ambush. Kosmas detonates a nuclear device killing most of the Knights, although Rook, Lancer and the others heroes survive.
- The surviving members of *Rook's Knights* break up and go their separate ways.

2043

- Events in "**Lancer's Rockers**" take place.
- Invid complete Space Hives. New Invid mecha designs begin to appear on Earth.

2044

- **Icarus Recon Group** launched for Earth.
- Tenative plans for **REF Prometheus Attack Group** begin. Final approval is witheld pending

results of Icarus mission.

- Icarus fleet arrives in Solar System near Jupiter. Attempts to contact **REF Jupiter Base Io** and **REF Moon Base Aluce II** are unsuccessful. Recon patrols reveal that Jupiter Base Io has been completely destroyed by an unknown force. Icarus begins to move towards Earth.
- Advance squad of ships are sent ahead of Icarus fleet to recon Earth and attempt to contact Moon Base Aluce II. Ships are destroyed upon entering Earthspace by Invid Space Hives. Only one ship escapes to warn the Icarus fleet.
- Icarus forces begins hit-and-run attacks against Invid space defenses in the hopes of getting small groups of mecha to Earth to contact resistance groups.

- **THE LaGRANGE MASSACRE**. Icarus forces are ambushed by large Invid force during retrieval of Earth personel. Col. Harris splits the survivors into two groups. Harris leads the majority of Icarus' remaining ships and mecha against the Invid, while Col. Korcheck retreats to Tirol in the heavily-damaged flagship *RSS Icarus*.
- *Icarus* returns to Tirol with data collected by the Icarus mission.
- Final approval is given to **Prometheus Attack Group**.

2045

- **THE DARK YEARS** begin. Invid forces begin mass enslavements of civilians and mass extermination missions against Earth Resistance forces. Resistance forces begin to take heavy casualties. Morale begins to falter among terran forces.

- The *Ark Angel* returns to Tirol after having unsuccessfully searched for the *SDF-3 Pioneer* for over 7 years. The *Pioneer* and its crew are listed as missing and presumed dead. The *Ark Angel* and its crew are assigned to the Prometheus Mission.

2046

- **OPERATION STARFALL** succeeds; first major victory against Invid since 2044. A small group of resistance fighters manage to infiltrate an Invid Space Hive and sabotage the power core. The Space Hive falls out of orbit and burns up in the atmosphere, creating a spectacular fireball that inspires terran forces around the world.

- Col. Roger Harris killed by Stage 6 Invid while defending civilians.

2047

- Concentrated attacks by Invid forces bring terran resistance to the edge of collapse.
- Stage 5 Invid Sera and Marlene propose **OPERATION EMISSARY**. The two women will

infiltrate an Invid cargo ship and travel to New Optera to confront the Regis. Resistance leaders reluctantly agree. Lancer, Rand, Rook, Lunk, and Annie accompany them on their mission.

- **REF Prometheus Attack Group** is completed and launched towards Earth. Arrival of the Prometheus Group inspires terran resistance groups. Reinforcements and New Mecha begin to arrive on Earth. However, REF starships still cannot penetrate the Invid space defenses. As battles continue, Prometheus group begins to weaken due to lack of supplies.

- Marlene and Sera arrive at New Optera and contact the Regis. The Regis is incensed at the brutality of the Stage 6 Invid, and travels to Earth herself to end the war.
- Regis assumes command of most Invid forces on Earth and orders them to attack the Stage 6 Invid in their Space Hives. The Stage 6 Invid resist with their own forces of Inorganics and loyal/controlled Invid, but are eventually defeated by combined attacks from the Regis and the Prometheus fleet.
- Space Hive defense ring is destroyed.

- Regis orders all Invid in Earthspace to return to New Optera. All Stage 5 Invid are offered the choice of staying behind or returning to New Optera.
- Stage 6 Invid are stripped of their powers and banished from the Invid race. A few stay on Earth and attempt to discreetly build their own empires.

- Regis leaves Earthspace forever.
- **THIRD INVID WAR ENDS**

2048

- Prometheus Fleet returns to Tirol.
- The *Ark Angel* and most of its crew stays behind with a representative group from the REF in an attempt to foster a new world government on Earth.

- **LOCAL GROUP GALACTIC CONFERENCE** is held on Haydon IV. Tirol (now home to REF as well as Tirolians), Fantoma (home to remaining Zentraedi) Karbarra, New Praxis, Garuda, Spheris, Haydon IV, and Peryton form the **Sentinels Alliance**.
- Remains of REF fleet and other surviving space forces are combined into the **ROBOTECH GUARDIAN FORCES (RGF)**, the military arm of the Sentinels Alliance.

- Back on Earth, negotiations to form a new world government fail.
- New countries form overnight and begin to stake territorial claims.
- Ex-EBSIS forces seize South America to form the **South American Coalation (SAC)**.
- REF survivors (Non-RGF related) and North American resistance fighters form the **United States of North America (USNA)**.
- Other pocket republics continue to form around the world. SAC and USNA quickly become

Earth's major superpowers due to their large supplies of mecha.

- **ERA OF REBUILDING** begins.

2051

- **7-DAY WAR** begins on Earth, between the SAC and USNA. The *Ark Angel*, led by Scott Bernard, steps in to end the war when SAC attempts to use nuclear weapons on USNA targets.
- **PANAMA TREATY** signed, establishing the rebuilt Panama Canal as the official boundary between the SAC and USNA. In addition, Earth leaders agree for the planet to become protectorate of Sentinels Alliance. The protectorate agreement is not popular with many terrans.
- Anti-Sentinels terrorist groups appear on Earth.

2080

- **ROBOTECH: GUARDIANS** begins.

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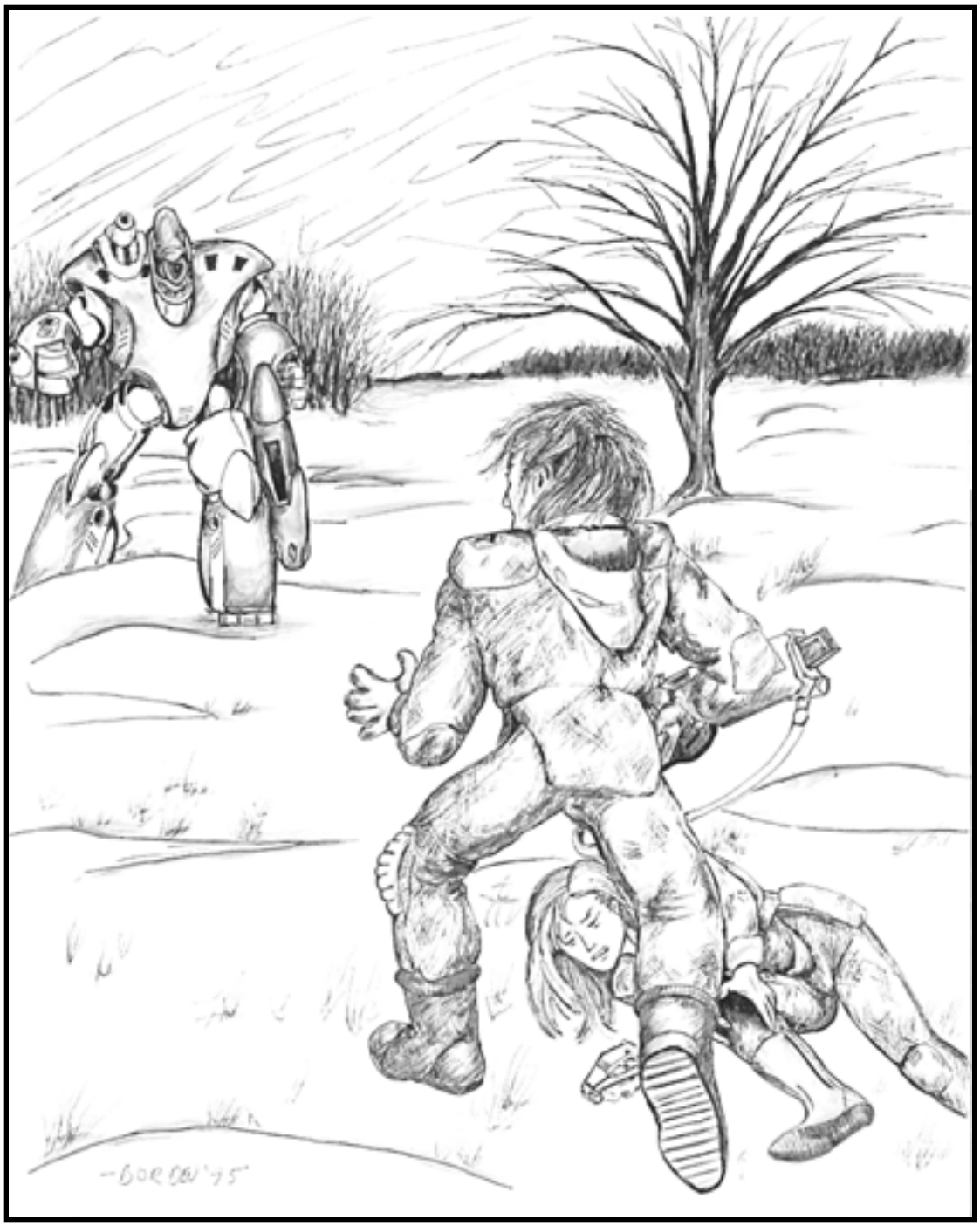


THE THIRD INVID WAR

Player's Introduction
"Welcome to the End of the World"

It is a wet, rainy February evening as you and your fellow resistance fighters huddle together for warmth around a small fire located in some godforsaken part of North America. The year is 2045, for anyone

who's still keeping count, and the planet Earth is about to begin it's 10th year of occupation by the Invid. The cold, dark evening reflects your mood as you sit and slowly drink your dirty rainwater, and inevitably your mind starts to review the events of the last decade as you wonder how the war could have possibly gotten this bad...

Things weren't always so hopeless. In fact, back in 2038 it looked like humanity had triumphed against impossible odds and had kicked the Invid Regis off Earth forever. You and a couple of your friends were actually there in the famous **Battle of Reflex Point**, fighting alongside the troops of the REF Jupiter Fleet, attempting to penetrate Reflex Point, the central Invid hive itself. The "final" battle was particularly fierce, and many of your friends lost their lives that day. But then at the height of the conflict, when it looked like the tide of battle would turn against humanity yet again, a miracle occurred. A fiery phoenix, brighter than the sun, burst out of Reflex Point and flew into the night sky. The image of the bird was so brilliant that it lit up the entire hemisphere, and all over the world people claimed they could feel a shudder run through them as the apparition left the Earth. And when the phoenix had vanished, so had the Invid. All those scouts, troopers, pincers, and battloids were simply gone. The only remaining evidence that the Invid had even occupied Earth at all were some abandoned and empty hives that were rapidly crumbling into dust. Of course, almost the entire Jupiter Attack Group had been wiped out as well, but it looked like humanity had won. After three brutal years, Earth was finally free. Or so it seemed.

Rumors flew as to what exactly had happened that day. Some people said that Lt. Scott Bernard and his freedom fighters had actually managed to get into the Regis' central chambers somehow, and actually *convinced* the Invid Queen to leave Earth peacefully. Others said that a crack team of REF Commandos flying modified VAF-7A Shadow Fighters had penetrated the hive and killed the Regis, and that the phoenix image was actually an aftereffect of her death. You didn't give the matter much thought, however, and gladly took part in the victory celebration that went on for almost a week. After things calmed down you said good-bye to your companions, mounted your Cyclone, and returned to the village that you considered home. You were given a hero's welcome upon your arrival.

After that life seemed to return to normal. You worked together with the men and women of your village to rebuild and repair the damage from the war, and slowly the wounds and scars of many battles began to fade. You routinely took trips to other villages in your area to trade goods, and heard many success stories during your travels about how the world was finally getting back on its feet. The surviving ships and troops from the REF Jupiter Fleet were helping to repair cities and re-establish global communications, and there were rumors of a conference scheduled for next year in New York City to try and form a new world government. You didn't much care about that, however; you were perfectly happy with your little corner of paradise.

But fate wasn't that kind. One sunny summer morning several months later, the daily news reports broadcast by the orbiting REF starships to villages all over the world suddenly stopped without warning. In addition, the land-line communications that had been established with major cities miles away went dead for no apparent reason. You and your fellow townspeople could find no explanation, when one person's random channel searching in the lower bands finally turned up a signal. And the words that

came out of the small radio speaker that day instantly chilled your soul...

"...it was found on the margins of a farm in the area. We observed it for an hour or so, before it was done with whatever it was doing and took off. When we inspected the area where it'd been, we found Flowers of Life had somehow sprouted there. They were about a couple weeks old."

"You mean you saw an Invid Shock Trooper in the area?"

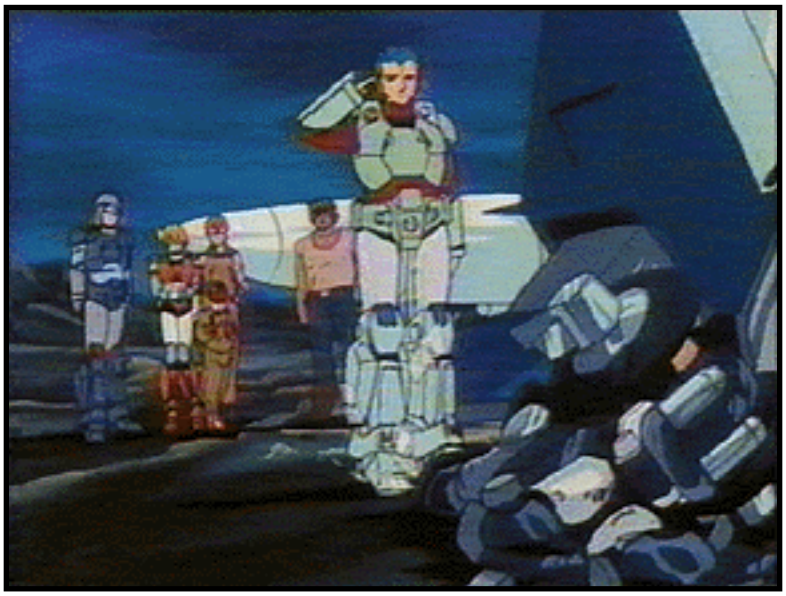
"Affirmative. God help us..."

Several minutes later a blood-curdling scream from outside the building shook you out of your state of shock. Running out of the town hall, you immediately realized what was causing the townspeople to run away in terror; flights of Invid Scouts and Troopers flew in formation overhead, seemingly oblivious to the town below them. Fortunately your Cyclone was stored elsewhere and not generating protoculture energy, or you would have probably been killed that day. Several other towns in the area tried to attack the invid, and were wiped out in minutes. Without warning, the Invid had returned and reclaimed what they had left. You felt like the last few months had been a happy, escapist dream, and you were once again waking up to the cold reality of war.

Eventually word worked its way to you through the village that the Resistance was reforming to combat the new Invid invasion, and that a group was gathering in a remote area a hundred miles away. You decided to leave your town and rejoin the Resistance, as you felt your continued presence put your friends and relatives in danger. So you put on your CVR-3 body armor, slapped your last few protoculture cells into your Cyclone, and went back into the war. You quickly found a Resistance group to join, and were surprised at how quickly the skills and tactics of guerrilla warfare came back to you. Despite the initial shock and despair the Invid's return had caused, morale was very high at first. There seemed to be less Invid mecha around and fewer hives, and those Invid you encountered followed the same dumb tactics they had in the past, allowing you and your friends to outguess your enemy and pull off several impressive raids, ambushes and counterattacks. Things were going well, but you couldn't shake the feeling in the back of your head that somehow this was TOO easy, and that something more sinister was in the air. Still, you kept your thoughts to yourself as your Resistance group continued to try to be a major thorn in the Invid's side.

Four years passed, and the early optimism of your group gave way to fatalism and despair. Although the Invid presence on Earth appeared smaller, none of your strikes seemed to do any good. No matter how

many Invid you knocked out in a raid or ambush, there always were more ready to take their place the next day. Also, new lights began appearing in the night sky. Sparkling like stars but moving too fast to be constellations, you deduced that they could only be orbiting fortresses constructed by the Invid for some purpose which you could not guess at. The idea of a network of hives floating above the Earth made you fidget nervously in your sleeping bag at night. Meanwhile, more and more of your friends were killed in action, while supplies and new recruits slowed to a trickle.



Worst of all were the stories that you were hearing, of entire towns and cities wiped out or enslaved, and of more and more resistance groups being captured or killed. Even the famous ***Rook's Knights***, led by war heroes **Rook Bartley** and **Lancer**, were rumored to have been killed in an ambush (or captured and mutated into hideous creatures, depending on which version of the story you heard). Plus there was an overwhelming feeling of abandonment flowing through the Resistance. Where was the REF? Why weren't they arriving in starships like they had in the past, with new equipment, soldiers, and supplies to keep the resistance going? Had the Invid somehow destroyed Tirol and all the heroes like Rick and Lisa Hunter, Max and Miriya Sterling, and others were all dead now? Or had they decided that the cost to retake Earth was too high, and abandoned the planet to Invid domination? The sparks of hope still existed among your group, but they were growing fainter every day.

Then the war began to heat up again. Finally, after long years of waiting the REF once again returned, but not in the form of a huge space fleet this time. Instead, a small group of ships and men calling themselves the **REF Icarus Recon Mission** arrived, with their goal being not to defend or liberate the planet Earth, but instead to observe this new Invid force and eventually report back to Tirol with their findings. This put you off at first; why was the REF wasting time with reconnaissance when people were dying here daily? Still, Icarus brought with it skilled troopers and technicians, as well as much needed supplies in terms of protoculture cells, ammo, fuel, and new mecha. Most of all, Icarus brought much-needed hope to the Resistance. It proved to people that the REF at Tirol had survived, and were still trying to help Earth in any way that they could.

But on the other hand, the Invid were undergoing a terrifying metamorphosis of their own. Most of the older Invid mecha that you had become so used to fighting disappeared overnight, and in their place appeared devastatingly powerful new designs, packed with enough weapons and firepower to easily outclass the older mecha the Resistance was still using. More sinister however was the change in Invid tactics. No longer did the Invid blindly throw themselves into combat; instead they began to learn stealth and subtlety, and surprised and wiped out several resistance groups with well-planned diversionary attacks. This new sneakiness shocked you and your companions, giving you the strange feeling that someone NEW was leading the Invid this time around. However, events really started turning towards

the worst in late 2044, when your group received word that the Icarus fleet had been destroyed in orbit by coordinated strikes from Invid Space Fortresses. It seemed as if the last hope for humanity's survival had just been snuffed out by the unseen hands of the new Invid overlords.

Probably by now any sane man would have given up, thrown down their weapons and prostrated themselves in front of the nearest Invid to beg for mercy. There seemed little point to fighting on against such overwhelming odds. But then you had a experience that reaffirmed your dedication to the Resistance. While on patrol one day, you discovered a dirty, wounded, scared little girl all alone in the forest, trying desperately to hide in the brush. The girl was so exhausted that she collapsed in your arms without even telling you her name. You rushed her back to your camp where your medic cleaned her up, and you were shocked to find that after the medic had cleaned the girl's face that you recognized her! She was from your home town, now hundreds of miles away! Feverish and in pain, the girl told you about how the Invid had marched into your town and rounded up everyone there. Any who resisted were killed instantly. Worse yet, the survivors were separated into those who could and could not work, and the weak were exterminated while the strong watched. Then the slaves were led away in chains to farm protoculture for the Invid. The girl had escaped and fled the Invid and their frags, and by some miracle managed to find you. However, despite your medic's best efforts, the girl gave into her wounds and exhaustion and died during the night.

The next morning you were a changed person. Gone was the despair and fatalism, and in its place was a grim determination that while you lived, you would continue to fight so that humanity didn't simply pass into extinction as Invid slave farm workers. This you swore over the girl's grave, that you would continue to fight until all young people like her were safe and free.

The arrival of your team's bio-mechanic at the campfire interrupts your grim reminiscing. He announces that he has finished repairing all the damage from your last raid, and has used up the last of your group's surplus fuel and ammo to restore the mecha to full operating capacity. "Your mecha are ready to rumble," he announces, "but there ain't no spares anymore so watch yourselves." Your group leader starts discussing possible targets to move against in the next few days. You flex your fingers as the faces of all the friends and allies who have died before you flash through your mind, and then you focus yourself on the plans your group is discussing. Soon it will be time to make the Invid pay for what they've done.

The fate of all humanity lies in your hands...

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THE THIRD INVID WAR
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(AND ANSWERS)

Last Updated: January 13, 1998

Greetings, and welcome to the **Third Invid War**! Thanks to everyone who's been sending us comments and compliments on our work; we really value your feedback. However, I've noticed several questions that come up again and again, so I thought I'd take some time to make up a list of answers to the most frequently asked questions (FAQs) about TIW. These questions and answers are listed below...

1. **How does TIW relate to the book 'End of the Circle'? Weren't Lancer and Sera killed after the Invid left? How about the comic series 'Invid War Aftermath'?**

2. **Doesn't having the Invid return to Earth after the TV series ends sorta contradict the show? Have you read Peter Walker's essay on the subject?**

3. **Could you post the complete rules to the Robotech RPG to your web site?**

4. **Are you officially related to Palladium Books in any way?**

5. **Do you ever plan to publish TIW as an official RPG supplement?**

6. **The Robotech RPG has a lot of flaws in it. Why don't you try and correct some of these flaws?**

7. **Why don't you use a better mecha gaming system like Mekton Zeta?**

8. **Aren't these mecha a little overpowered?**

9. **Do you plan to create any Destroids for TIW? Or Hovertanks?**

10. **How about a Shadow Cyclone?**

11. **You mention something called "Robotech: Guardians" several times in the web pages. What the heck is "Guardians", anyway?**

12. **Why the heck is TIW taking so long?? You should have had this supplement done long ago!**

13. **Can you make TIW available via anonymous FTP (file-transfer protocol) instead of the web?**

14. **Is TIW available as one file so I don't have to download all these HTML files?**

15. **I have some mecha designs here that I made up myself. Would you be interested in making them part of TIW or Guardians?**

16. **Where can I find books, toys, etc. from Robotech?**

17. **Is there any place I can see Robotech on TV or Video anymore?**

---

1. ***How does TIW relate to the book* 'End of the Circle' *by Jack McKinney? Weren't Lancer and Sera killed after the Invid left? How about the comic series* 'Invid War Aftermath'?**

   TIW doesn't relate in any way to the Jack McKinney Robotech novels or any of the Robotech comic series published by Academy Comics. First and foremost TIW is a sequel to the Robotech Role Playing Game, and is primarily based on that continuity of the Robotech universe. Therefore events in the novels or comics (such as the deaths of Lancer and Sera, or the entire Belmont saga from the comics) have no relation to events in TIW or sequels to TIW.

2. ***Doesn't having the Invid return to Earth after the TV series ends sorta contradict the show? Have you read Peter Walker's essay on the subject?***

   Yes, I have read Peter's essay on the unlikelihood of the Invid returning, and while I agree with most of it in a sense the damage has already been done. Like I said above, TIW is a **sequel** to the Robotech RPG, therefore I try to stay fairly consistent with events described in the RPG, including the questionable second invasion by the Invid of Earth. In fact, the primary purpose of TIW is to

try and continue what Palladium started, for better or worse.

Some people insist that any sequel to Robotech must be 100% consistent with the TV show above all else, or it really isn't a sequel to Robotech at all. Personally I think these people need to chill out a little. ^_^ I freely admit that TIW is not and never will be completely consistent with the Robotech TV series. However, I'm not going to loose much sleep over that. I hope that people will judge TIW based on how creative and entertaining it is, and not on trivialities and canonical nit-picking.

3. ***Could you post the complete rules to the Robotech RPG to your web site?***

Sorry, but the Robotech RPG is property of **Palladium Books** and is protected by international copyright law, which makes it a crime to publicly post material from the actual RPG books. You can probably get copies of the books from your local RPG store (look in the phone book under "hobbies") or you can write Palladium books directly for a catalog at:

PALLADIUM BOOKS
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International fans can try to order the books overseas from:

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USA

You can also order the books online from the Palladium Books website at **http://www.palladiumbooks.com**.

The only real book you need to play TIW is **Robotech II: The Sentinels** ($14.95, ISBN 0-916211-33-9), though **Invid Invasion** ($11.95, ISBN 0-916211-28-2) and the **REF Field Guide** ($14.95, ISBN 0-916211-36-3) would be helpful as supplements. Unfortunately two other RPG books referenced by TIW, **Return of the Masters** ($9.95, ISBN 0-916211-29-8) and **Lancer's Rockers** ($7.95, 0-916211-42-8), are no longer published by Palladium Books and are very difficult to locate.

4. ***Are you officially related to Palladium Books in any way?***

Other than the fact that I buy their products, no. ^_^ TIW is an entirely not-for-profit by-fans-for-fans production.

If you really want to get in touch with Palladium, there is a comment submission form on Palladium's web page at **http://www.palladiumbooks.com/Q&A.HTM**. You might also want to get on the Palladium internet mailing list, where reportedly some official Palladium representatives hang out from time to time. To subscribe to the mailing list, send email to **palladium-request@soda.csua.berkeley.edu** with the word "subscribe" (no quotes) as your subject.

5. ***Do you ever plan to publish TIW as an official RPG supplement?***

   Probably not. I'd prefer to keep TIW as a web-based RPG resource free for anyone who is interested in it for the time being. Also, I believe Palladium Books has a standing policy to not pursue manuscripts that have been previously published on the web.

6. ***The Robotech RPG has a lot of flaws in it. Many of the mecha designs don't accurately represent the show, the MDC system sucks, weapon damages are totally out of scale, etc., etc. Why don't you try and correct some of these flaws?***

   Correcting the Robotech RPG is not the point of TIW. It makes more sense NOT to try and improve on the gaming mechanics, because TIW is so dependent on earlier supplements and adventures produced by Palladium. Any changes I made to the rules for my supplement would in turn require dramatic changes to the already published stuff to make sure everything works together. It makes more sense to make my stuff 100% compatible with what's already been published, including all flaws therein.

   Here's why: making TIW fully compatible with the RPG also helps Palladium-haters who have adapted Robotech to other systems. How? Well, anyone who really hates the Robotech RPG but still plays it probably already has a whole list of house rules to modify the system into something they like better. Any house rules you are already using should work just fine with TIW mecha since they're Palladium-compatible, so you can continue to use your own rules systems without having to work out new ways to translate mecha to your tastes.

7. ***Why don't you use a better mecha gaming system like Mekton Zeta?***

   Since TIW is so closely linked to events in the Robotech TV series, it doesn't make sense to move to a different RPG system at this time. All the older mecha, characters, and locations that may pop up in a TIW adventure have already been covered by Palladium; why repeat that work? If I started using Mekton Zeta or a similar system for TIW I'd have to translate everything from Robotech into the new system, and even I'm not that ambitious right this moment. ^_^

8. ***Aren't these mecha a little overpowered?***

   That's part of the story. The technological power and superior numbers of the Invid give them a definite edge during the early years of the war. This gives players a better perspective of

desperation and helplessness when they realize that they are no longer hot stuff just because they own some Shadow Alphas and Vindicators. They will have to learn to be tactically smarter and more cautious early on in order to survive. As the war continues, the arrival of more advanced mecha from the REF helps to close the power gap, but the days of players knocking out entire hives via brute force with one Alpha and some cyclones are pretty much over.

9. ***Do you plan to create any Destroids for TIW? Or Hovertanks?***

   Originally, no. Most destroids, even the smaller scale ones, don't seem to fit into the geurilla combat scenarios of the Third Invid War very well. Without the speed and flight capabilities of Veritechs, or the small size and agility of Cyclones, Destroids are at a disadvantage most of the time against the Invid, since without the speed or ability to hide they can be cut to pieces by flying patrols of Invid mecha. Plus there's the problem of getting the Destroids to Earth in the first place, since most transports that attempted to get to the surface were atomized by the Invid Space Hives. Due to all the reasons above, I originally decided to not worry too much about Destroids for TIW.

   However, due to overwhelming demand I have decided to include a few Destroid designs in the supplement. They are currently in the planning stages and won't be available for a while yet. There is also a tenative Hovertank Mk. II design in the works for you Hovertank fanatics out there.

10. ***How about a Shadow Cyclone?***

    Urk. Cyclones equipped with shadow cloaking devices seem a little overpowered, even to me. Most cyclones already have a cloaking system of sorts in the fact that they can use alternate sources of power instead of Protoculture when necessary. Plus there's the fact that the RPG makes enough concessions to Cyclone pilots already (heavy armaments and heavier armor) and the mecha doesn't need any more power-boosting. The shadow cyclone published in Protoculture Addicts years ago seems especially unbalancing to game play. For these reasons we have decided that Shadow Cyclones will never be an official part of TIW or Guardians. The shadow cloaking device can simply not be produced in a small enough size to be used in anything smaller than a medium fighter.

11. ***You mention something called "Robotech: Guardians" several times in the web pages. What the heck is "Guardians", anyway?***

    Basically, **Guardians** is the sequel to TIW. It will consist of three separate RPG supplements and will focus mainly on the Sentinels worlds after the Robotech wars have ended. Beyond that I really don't want to say much about **Guardians** right now; most of the stuff in it is still in the planning stages and I don't want to say something and then have to change it later. Please be patient.

12. ***Why the heck is TIW taking so long?? You should have had this supplement done long ago!***

TIW is a hobby, not a job. I'm not getting paid for this, so therefore other more important matters have to come first. I won't bore you with sob stories about how hard work is. Basically it comes down to the fact that after working 9-10 hours per day I usually don't feel very creative when I get home. I'm really sorry about the delays and lack of progress sometimes, but that's life.

13. ***Can you make TIW available via anonymous FTP (file-transfer protocol) instead of the web?***

    I'm working on it...

14. ***Is TIW available as one file so I don't have to download all these HTML files?***

    Yep! At ftp.io.com there is a file called **thirdinvidwar.txt**. This file contains all of TIW that is currently available in the form of a single text file for easy downloading. This file will constantly be updated as more stuff is added to TIW, so you will always be able to download the latest version of the supplement by downloading this file. Be warned, though; the file is over 100 pages long and growing rapidly. ^_^;

15. ***I have some mecha designs here that I made up myself. Would you be interested in making them part of TIW or Guardians?***

    Sure, I'm always interesting in seeing other people's designs and stuff! If you have some of your own mecha you've created for Robotech, by all means please send me copies. I'll even try to find space on my web pages to put them up, so that everyone can enjoy your creativity.

    HOWEVER, please don't think that just because I'd like to see your work I have a moral obligation to include it as part of TIW. If I don't include your mecha in TIW it's probably not because I don't like it, but more likely because it conflicts with something I have planned for TIW or Guardians. There is a story I'm trying to tell in TIW, and unfortunately some mecha designs just don't fit in with my plans very well.

16. ***Where can I find books, toys, etc. from Robotech?***

    Other than the RPG books (look at http://www.palladiumbooks.com/) **I don't know**. Just because I write stuff based on Robotech doesn't mean I'm the ultimate authority on all Robotech merchandise. Try posting a request in the newsgroups **alt.tv.robotech** or **alt.fan.robotech**. You may get lucky and find a lead on the item you're looking for.

17. ***Is there any place I can see Robotech on TV or Video anymore?***

    If you have cable and get the **Cartoon Network** then you're in luck! As of Monday, January 12, 1998 Cartoon Network has begun showing Robotech as part of their ***Toonami*** weekday lineup. In the U.S. the series airs Monday thru Friday at 4:45 PM eastern time (3:45 PM central). I have no

idea if Cartoon Network is showing Robotech on its international stations, and if so at what times.

If you don't get Cartoon Network (or don't get cable) you can still get Robotech on video. Family Home Entertainment (FHE) is currently releasing Robotech on VHS video, with 2 episodes per tape at $14.95 each. You can probably find some of these tapes in your local video store (**Suncoast Video** is a good store to try) or you can order them online from mail-order stores such as **Video Express**.

Well, those are the most frequently asked questions (and answers) about the **Third Invid War**. I hope this helps you understand what we are trying to do, but if you have further questions or comments by all means don't hesitate to ask! I'm always happy to talk about TIW at any time. Click on the box to the right if you want to reach me by email. Take care!

PLEASE double-check your return email address when sending me mail!

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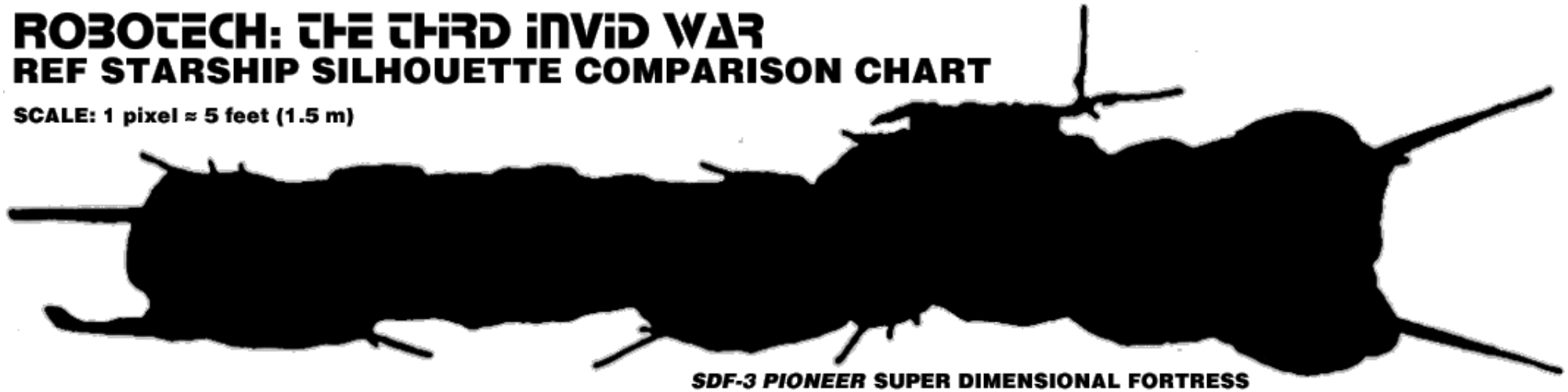
Last Updated: *Saturday, July 25, 1998*

ROBOTECH: THE THIRD INVID WAR
REF STARSHIP SILHOUETTE COMPARISON CHART

SCALE: 1 pixel ≈ 5 feet (1.5 m)



***SDF-3 PIONEER* SUPER DIMENSIONAL FORTRESS**
Length: 5322 feet (1622 m)

***CHIMAERA*-CLASS FRIGATE**
Length: 463 feet (141 m)

***GARFISH*-CLASS TROOP TRANSPORT**
Length: 350 feet (107 m)

***EXETER*-CLASS ESCORT**
Length: 700 feet (233 m)

***HORIZONT*-CLASS TROOP SHUTTLE**
Length: 198 feet (60 m)

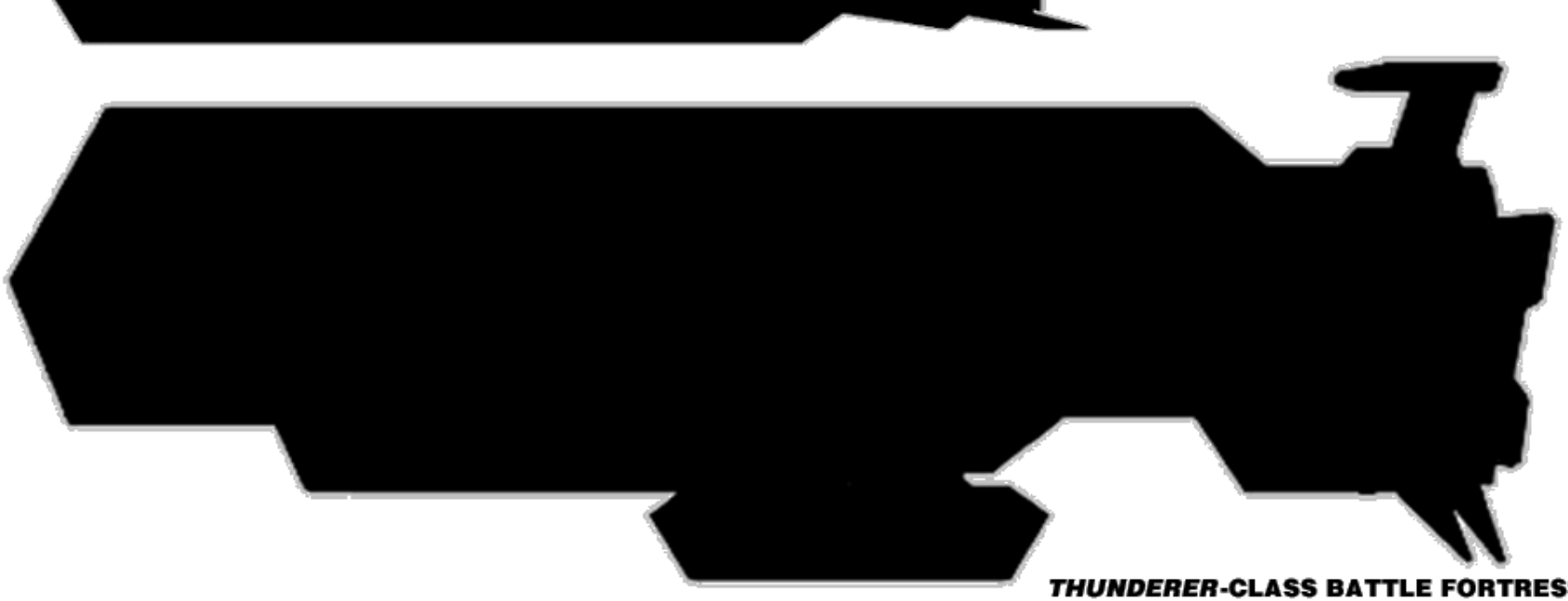
***WARRIOR*-CLASS DESTROYER**
Length: 750 feet (250 m)

VAF-9/VBF-3 LEGIOSS VERITECH
Length: 74 feet (23 m)

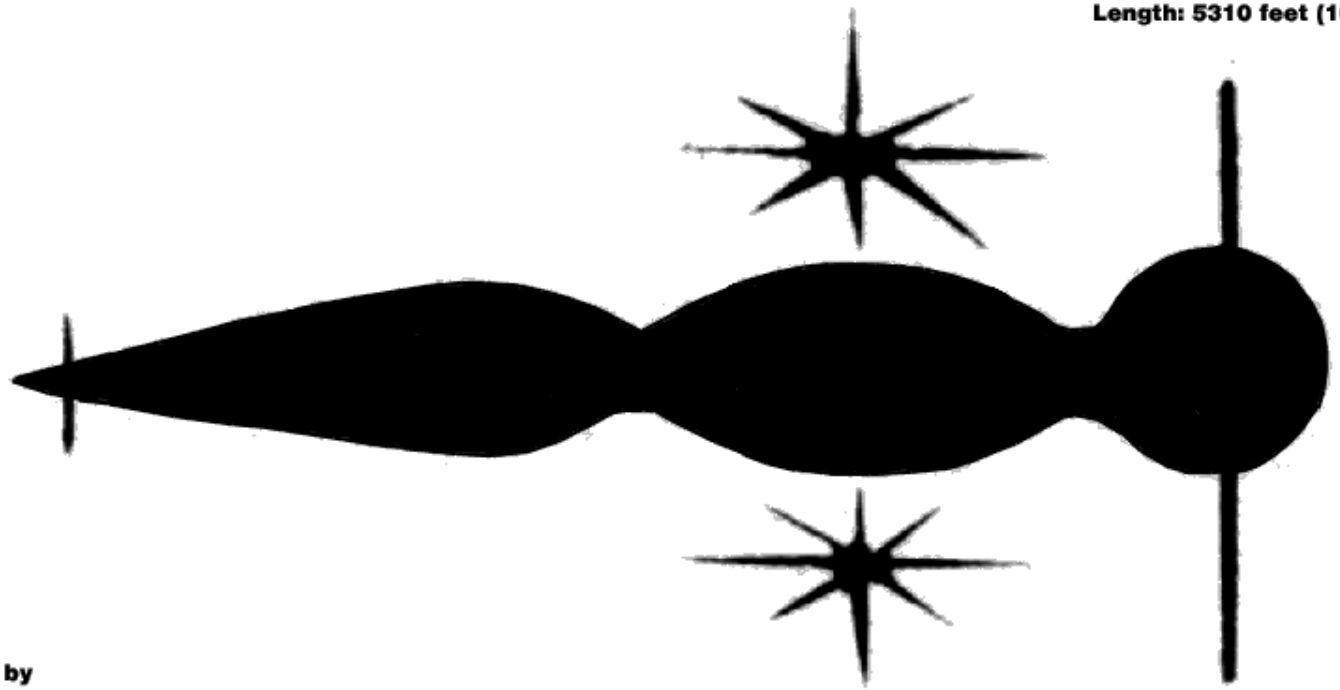
***TOKUGAWA*-CLASS CRUISER**
Length: 2475 feet (754 m)

***IKAZUCHI*-CLASS COMMAND CARRIER**
Length: 2832 feet (863 m)

***ICARUS*-CLASS COMMAND CARRIER**
Length: 3042 feet (927 m)



***THUNDERER*-CLASS BATTLE FORTRESS**
Length: 5310 feet (1618 m)



***ARK ANGEL* (HAYDONITE CRUISER)**
Length: 3595 feet (1096 m)

Created by
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