

NUMENÉRA™



THE HIDEOUS GAME

BY MONTE COOK



THE HIDEOUS GAME

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This low-combat, investigation-heavy scenario is presented in the format first showcased in *Weird Discoveries*. We call this format the “instant adventure,” as it is designed to be run with just four or five minutes of prep time. *The Hideous Game* is written for use at GenCon 2015, and GMs running it at the convention should read the whole thing rather than taking advantage of the low-prep nature.

One unique aspect of instant adventures is the keys. These are not necessarily literal keys—they are elements of the adventure that can be placed in different

points in the scenario, depending on where the player characters go and what they do. For example, a key might be an object found in a cabinet or in an NPC’s pocket. If the PCs never look in the cabinet but do negotiate a trade with the NPC, then the GM simply decides that the object is with the NPC. This allows the adventure to continue even if the characters miss a clue or never visit a certain location.

BRIEF SUMMARY

Weird inhuman creatures are playing a mysterious game of torture and murder, and the PCs must put a stop to the next round before more people perish.

DETAILS

This scenario takes place entirely in Qi, the largest city in the Steadfast of the Ninth World. If desired, it could—easily enough—be placed within any large city. Unlike many Numenera

scenarios, *The Hideous Game* does not involve exploring ancient ruins to scavenge technology or wandering in the wilderness to discover impossible locations. It takes place within the safe confines of the largest known city, the very place where one can find the Order of Truth and the Amber Pope himself.

The slidikin are inhuman creatures that appear to be playing a sort of game among themselves. The details of the game are

unknown, but they involve kidnapping, theft, torture, and murder.

The motives of the slidikin are impossible to decipher. That is not the point or

goal of this scenario. They are as inhuman as any beings the PCs are ever likely to meet. Do the slidikin see humans with nothing but contempt? We don’t know. Perhaps humanity is held in high regard, and that’s why they are the stakes of the slidikin game. And what about that game? Is it a competition? Is there a winner? What’s the prize?

The PCs will never learn the answers to these questions, and though that might be frustrating, mysterious, and terrifying, they’ll just have to deal with it. Their only goals are to stay alive and to prevent as much harm as they can. In that way, the slidikin are like a terrible storm. What makes the wind blow and the lightning strike? The PCs probably don’t know that, either, but they can still struggle to survive and be useful during its raging onslaught.

Events begin one night as the PCs hear muffled cries. Investigating, they find a man named Calvan Desenis in an elaborate



torture device. If they rescue him, they learn that he was kidnapped by mysterious figures and placed here. He spent the day in captivity and can probably lead the characters to the cellar where he was held.

If the PCs investigate the cellar, they find clues suggesting that someone was making fancy invitations. Shortly thereafter, they hear rumors of people being invited to an event that will occur in a few days at a place called Liach's Square. They can investigate some of the invitees (although little can be learned from the people) or the square itself, where workers hired by mysterious employers are installing devices. A bit of technical probing reveals that these devices will seal off the exits to the square.

On the day of the event, if the PCs do not intervene, the slidikin will cruelly murder thirteen innocents in the square, in full view of anyone in the area.



There is no pen in the cellar because slidikin write with their obscenely long fingers.

Motivating the PCs:
Sometimes, simply intriguing the players or appealing to their good natures isn't enough to motivate the characters to action. If this is the case, have a PC's close friend or relative receive one of the mysterious invitations. Or, if you need to be even more drastic, have it come to a PC.

SALIENT POINTS

- Calvan Desenis was kidnapped, held in a cellar for much of the day, and then placed in an elaborate torture device by the slidikin.
- The cellar has clues as to what the slidikin are about to do: send out invitations to an event that will take place in three days' time.
- Invitees are selected at random (or seem to be, to human sensibilities).
- The site of the event has only three exits, and workers secretly hired by the slidikin are unknowingly building force field projectors to seal them off.
- When the invitees arrive, the slidikin will torture and kill them in broad daylight.

STARTING POINT

The PCs enjoy a night of recreation, food, and drinks in a place called the Revelry. They aren't necessarily there as a group, but they are at the very least acquainted with one another, and maybe a few of them arrived together. However, they all leave around the same time—very late at night, many hours after darkness has fallen.

THE WRAP-UP

When the event is over, so is the scenario. Hopefully, the PCs have stopped the slidikin somehow.

KEYS

This scenario has two keys. One is an object, and the other is an event.



Slidikin puzzle trap. This small object shifts and changes, but a character can also intentionally shift and change it through concentration and experimentation. Someone can “solve” the puzzle by comprehending what shape and color the puzzle wants to be (the “goal” or solution changes every fourteen hours). If a PC tries to solve it and succeeds at a difficulty 6 Intellect-based roll, the puzzle remains static until the current fourteen-hour period is over, at which point it begins shifting again. If a PC solves the puzzle three times in a row, she sees a brief holographic projection of a slidikin and a diagram of its physiology. For that character, the difficulty of attacks against a slidikin is reduced by one step. If anyone ever attempts to solve the puzzle and fails, he sees a brief holographic projection of such disturbing content that he suffers 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor), and the difficulty of all tasks is increased by one step until the points are restored.



Slidikin tail. At this point, one PC notices that a cloaked figure begins to follow them. The PC usually spots the figure when he or she is alone. It never gets too close and excels at disappearing into the crowd or into shadow. This is meant to be menacing, but never confrontational.

MAN IN PERIL

One or more of the PCs hears a muffled sound, a bit like a cry for help, but it's difficult to discern clearly. Investigating means simply peering down a nearby alley, where they see someone in a niche along a building wall. A man—bloody, drenched in sweat, and terrified—stands at a precarious angle. Thin metal wire is wrapped around his body in places so tightly that it breaks the skin, and the wires extend to various areas in the walls around him, almost like he's caught in a spider's web. The wires all lead to some kind of device suspended in their skein, positioned directly in front of the man's face. Something sharp protrudes from the device. It seems clear that if the man moves much, he will activate the device. There are also wires wrapped around his neck, suggesting that even a shout from his throat might trigger it.

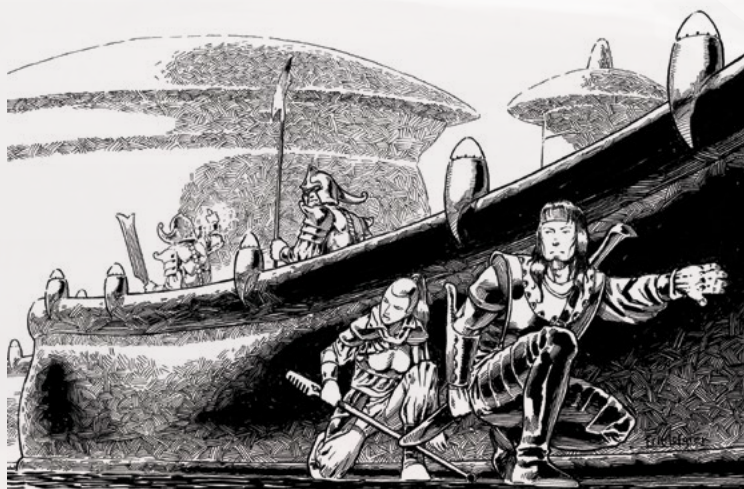
He's not up for much conversation, obviously, until he's freed. Freeing him without triggering the device is a difficulty 7 Speed-based task. Disabling the device is a difficulty 6 Intellect-based task. It's also possible to brace something in the path of the projectile, but whatever is used must be able to take a serious blow.

If the device is triggered, it fires a metal shard, automatically hitting whatever's in front of it and inflicting 10 points of damage. If it hits the man, who currently has 4 health, it kills him instantly.

If the PCs dismantle the device, they can cobble together a level 4 detonation cypher that explodes in an immediate radius, inflicting 4 points of damage from a pressurized burst.

The man is Calvan Desenis, an accountant who was kidnapped on his way to work that morning by "people with chalky skin who spoke with many different voices, sometimes all at once." He was blindfolded while being moved to a new location but smart enough—and familiar enough with the layout of Qi—that he thinks he knows where he was taken: a cellar in the very bottom level of the city.

The only other thing he can offer about his captors is that they spoke of "invitations for the next round of the Hideous Game," beginning soon.



THE CELLAR

The building is abandoned. The cellar has its own entrance, with a short set of steps leading down to it. The door is locked with a level 3 lock.

The cellar of the disused building has obviously seen recent use. Although it's mainly full of old crates and barrels (mostly empty), there is also a wooden chair with some cast-off ropes around it and a makeshift table of crates and planks. Atop this table are twenty-three sheets of paper and a half-empty ink bottle (but no pen). The ink and paper are of very high quality.

If the KEY is here, it is amid the paper and ink on the desk.

MUGGERS IN THE STREETS

On the street outside the cellar entrance, a young girl hides in a doorway and watches. This is Kala (level 2, stealth as level 4, running as level 3). She watches for potential victims to rob, and signals her brother Urlan (level 3; Armor 1) and his friend Grath (level 3) to move out to attack likely targets.

Kala watches the PCs, but unless they look weak in strength or numbers, she does not signal her brother. However, PCs looking around might see her hiding in the doorway. If she's spotted, she runs. If caught, she might be intimidated into telling her story—what she's doing in the alley and why—although she won't help anyone apprehend or harm her brother. But more important, if asked, she can relate that six figures in cloaks have been coming and going from the cellar for the last two days. She knows nothing about them, but they were "creepy."

RUMORS OF INVITATIONS

The PCs hear rumors that various people around the city are receiving invitations to a mysterious event that will take place in Liach's Square in three days' time. No one seems to know who sent the invitations or why the recipients were chosen, but people are certainly intrigued.



INVITED GUEST: THELIAN MYASTRE

Thelian is an actor currently performing a moderately sized role in a play called *A Bit of Revenge* at the Rivermore Theater. He is a pompous, self-important effete whose ego overshadows his talent. He doesn't know anything about the source of his invitation, but he's sure that it involves honoring up-and-coming people of importance in Qi. If asked, he happily shows the PCs his invitation, but he will not part with it under any circumstance.

Reveal Show 'Em A to the players.

INVITED GUEST: YOU LAN THE SEAMSTRESS

Youlan is a middle-aged woman of simple means. She has no idea what the invitation is about, but she is thrilled at the possibilities. If asked, she eagerly shows the PCs her invitation, and if they convince her that it's a trap or a trick, she can be talked into giving it to them.

Reveal Show 'Em A to the players.

THE EVENT

The day of the event, people are gathered in Liach's Square to see what will happen. As the appointed time approaches, anyone without an invitation is shooed out by one of six well-dressed human men (level 3; each carries a hidden buzzer; hired to keep the uninvited out of the square, but they know nothing else). These men then take up positions at each of the three street exits and let the invitees in. When all thirteen guests have entered the square, the force field projectors activate, sealing off the street exits.

In the middle of the square is a table draped in white cloth, on top of which are thirteen crystal sculptures, each about the size of two fists. Anyone touching a sculpture suffers 6 points of damage from an electrical discharge.

Four slidikin are hidden around the square in cloaks. They won't reveal themselves unless the force fields have been activated or there is a disturbance that significantly interferes with their plan. In the former case, they begin killing the invitees while people watch. In the latter case, they intervene to stop the disturbance (probably the PCs) as quickly as possible.

Reveal Show 'Em B to the players.

LIACH'S SQUARE

Located in an affluent residential neighborhood, the small square is enclosed on all sides by several apartment buildings. Three large entryways between the buildings provide access to the square from the city.

The only way in or out of the apartment buildings is through doors that lead into the square.

During the days leading up to the event, workers install mysterious numenera devices on both sides of each street exit. If questioned, they are closed-mouthed. The workers have a perfectly legal permit to build in the square. They don't know what the machines do or who their employers are (and they don't care). They just know they're getting a nice payment.

The devices are level 6 force field projectors. When installed on both sides of an exit and activated, each device produces a transparent force field that lasts for twenty minutes.

If the object KEY is here, it is hidden next to one of the projectors.

GM Intrusion: If the PCs do anything illegal while in Qi—like sabotage the installed devices in Liach's Square—or cause any kind of major disturbance, it's likely that they draw the attention of the Zhev peacekeeping automatons.

If you have time, read "More Details" on the next page for information and ideas to enhance this scenario.



Qi, page 148

Zhev, page 268

Durkhal, page 149

MORE DETAILS

Read this section if you have time. If necessary, skim the section on **Qi** in the *Numenera* corebook to refresh your memory about the city.

LOWER QI

Qi is built on a number of different levels, with the upper classes living on the higher levels, and the lower classes living on the darker, lower levels. The early part of this scenario is likely to take the PCs into the lower regions of the city. This is where the cellar is located, and where they might encounter some muggers (or at least their lookout). Many of these places never see sunlight, and the air is choked with dust and soot. The buildings are made of grime-covered bricks. On the lowest level, many of the buildings have cellars and dank basements.

Pipes wind their way through the lower regions, carrying water to the upper levels and taking away sewage and waste. Creatures called **slime lurkers** by the locals dwell in and around the pipes on the lower levels, preying upon people and animals. The sudden appearance of a slime lurker would be a good GM intrusion in this part of town.

Slime lurker: level 4,
Speed defense as level 3;
health 30

UPPER QI

The upper levels of Qi are well lit and filled with beautiful spires and lovely homes. Towers for airship and balloon docks are everywhere. The **Zhev** patrol the streets and sweep vagrants and other undesirables to the lower city. This all becomes more evident the closer one comes to the **Durkhal**, the city complex that includes the Amber Pope's holy palace.

THE SLIDIKIN

The GM should do all that she can to make the slidikin as inhuman, strange, and downright creepy as possible. Every move and gesture is a threat of violence, like a razor held disturbingly close to one's throat. Or eyeball.

When slidikin move, it is with an odd, disjointed rhythm, as if they're not entirely in sync with the flow of time everyone else experiences. Their limbs don't seem to obey the laws of reality, suddenly turning around "backward" to easily climb the wall of a building behind them while the slidikin's body still faces forward.

When the creatures speak, they do so with more than one mouth at a time, saying more





than one thing, sometimes not always in the same language. When they attack, they make disturbing threats along the lines of, “I will show you what your own brain looks like, a piece at a time,” or “I will lick your eyeballs when you’re dead.”

RESEARCH AND INQUIRIES

Unless the PCs have access to something like the datasphere, they are unlikely to find any knowledge of the slidikin or anything called “the Hideous Game.” However, if they go to the Durkhal, speak with the Aeon Priests, and succeed at a difficulty 5 task to convince the bureaucrats that they are legitimate, after hours of talking to various people they are finally introduced to **Thuari Dennilan**, an Aeon Priest who knows the basics of the slidikin and has at least heard of the Hideous Game. She tries to find out everything the PCs know about it and offers to reward them if they learn more and bring her the information. The reward grows even bigger if they can stop whatever plans the slidikin have in Qi, for the creatures certainly mean the people of the city harm.

THE PCs GO TO THE AUTHORITIES

No one in the city has heard of the slidikin other than the Aeon Priest Thuari Dennilan. Anyone the PCs try to speak with will likely brush them off unless they provide concrete

details or evidence. At best (a difficulty 4 persuasion task), the characters can get assurances from a human representative of the Zhev that there will be some kind of Zhev presence at the event in Liach’s Square.

USING THIS IN A CAMPAIGN

The PCs might be recuperating in Qi after an arduous expedition or visiting on other business unrelated to any of these proceedings. The events of *The Hideous Game* are over quickly, and it’s possible that the characters’ actions (investigation, mostly) might coincide with the elements of another adventure taking place in the city at the same time.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Players who have been paying attention will realize that there were six slidikin at the beginning of the scenario, but only four make an appearance at the end. This means that even if the PCs took care of the slidikin in Liach’s Square, at least two more are still out there. The Hideous Game will continue. Where and when will the slidikin appear again? There might not be any way to predict what the creatures will do, but PCs who choose to track them might uncover their next sadistic, horrific, and likely elaborate plot.

Thuari Dennilan: level 4, all historical knowledge as level 5, all combat actions as level 2; has at least one defensive cypher

Slidikin hate memora (Ninth World Bestiary page 83) and vice versa, but no one knows why. Slidikin also appear to be terrified of philethis.



Philethis, page 252

Skulking from shadow to shadow, the slidikin dwell on the fringes of human society. They are bizarre creatures, their origins a complete mystery. While one might pass as a human from a distance, their chalk-white skin, lack of eyes or nose, and far-too-many mouths ensure that a close examination would prove them otherwise. In people's rare, brief, furtive, and frankly disturbing interactions with slidikin, they have made passing references to "the hideous game." This seems to be an incongruous competition among slidikin (and only slidikin) that involves dark deeds—thrift, kidnapping, mutilation, and murder. (It likely involves other things as well, but no one knows what they are, focusing only on those activities that affect humanity.)

Motive: The game

Environment: Human villages and towns

Health: 22

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Long

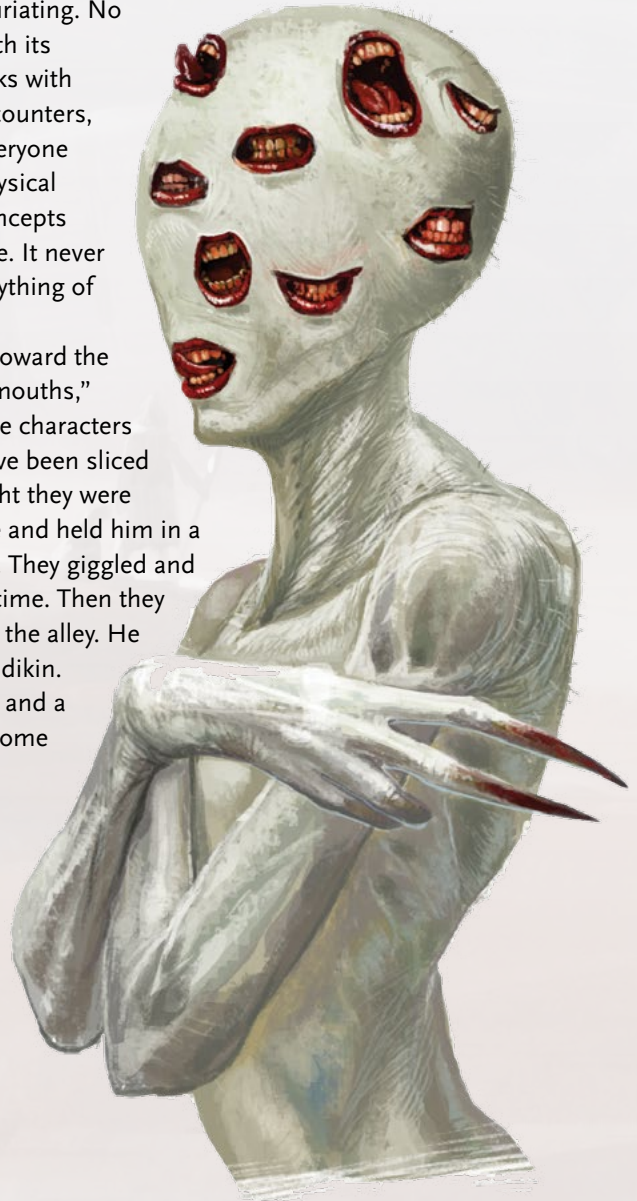
Modifications: Speed defense and stealth as level 6

Combat: Slidikin are likely to use weapons in combat, although they never wear armor, preferring to remain agile rather than encumbered.

Interaction: Talking with a slidikin can be infuriating. No matter what the situation, the slidikin, with its multiple, grating, whispered voices, speaks with outlandish contempt for whomever it encounters, as if it knows a great many things that everyone else does not. It finds odd things (like physical threats) humorous, and many normal concepts (like justice or revenge) incomprehensible. It never tells anyone the nature of the game or anything of its own nature.

Use: A man stumbles out of a dark alleyway toward the PCs, blood running down his face. "The mouths," he whispers hoarsely. "The mouths." If the characters examine him, they see that his eyelids have been sliced off. He says that men—at least, he thought they were men at first—grabbed him the day before and held him in a dank cellar overnight, bound and gagged. They giggled and whispered among themselves the whole time. Then they mutilated him with knives and left him in the alley. He gives a frantic, fevered description of a slidikin.

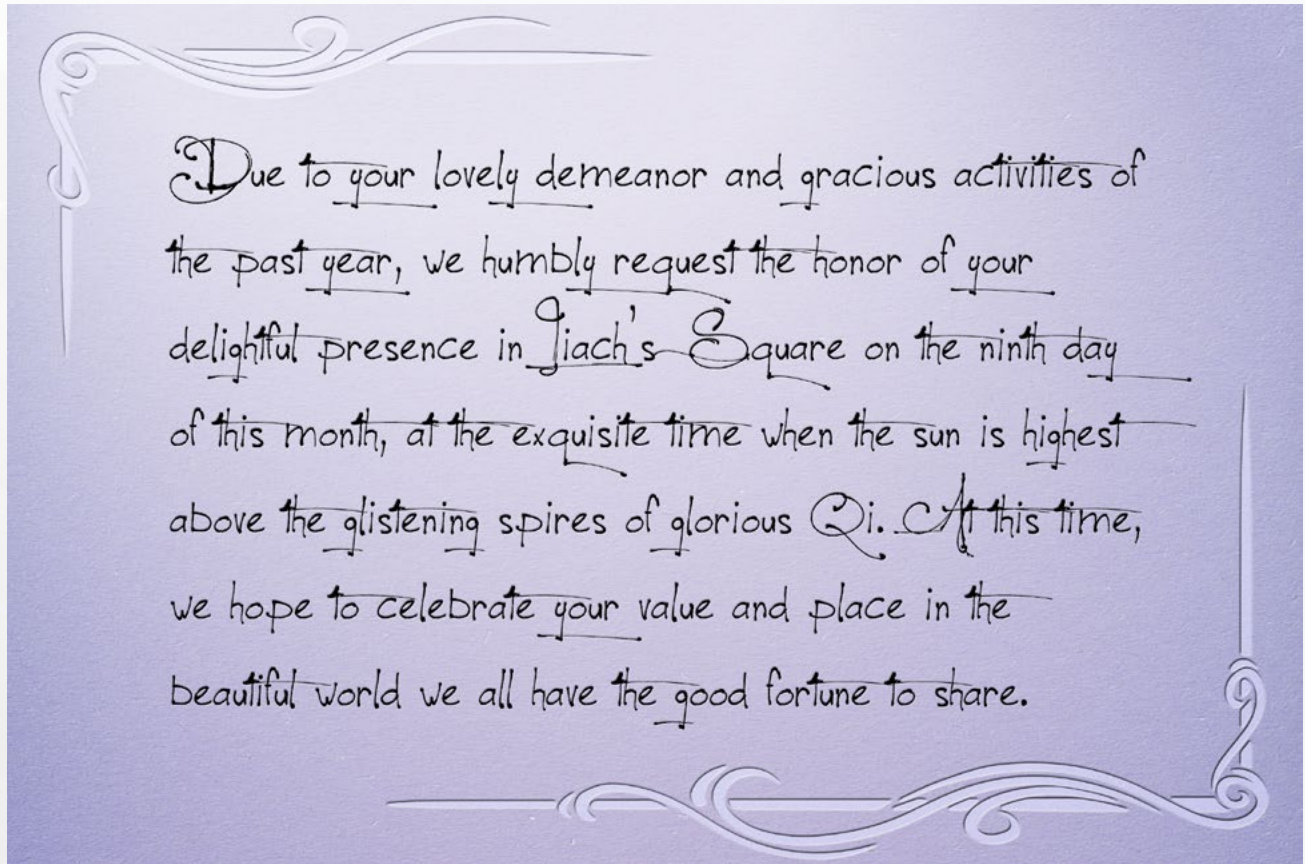
Loot: A slidikin very likely carries 1d100 shins and a cypher as well as a variety of knives and some poisons, knockout drugs, lockpicks, and other tools.



GM Intrusion: *The slidikin runs away and around a corner. If the character follows it, the creature is gone. Is there a secret door? Did it disappear into the shadows? Did it climb up to the roof? It's nowhere to be seen.*



A



B



BACKGROUND

Connection

Uraz is never fooled by your illusions or affected by your tricky abilities. You suspect it has something to do with the mechanism fused to him. You'd like to learn the limits, but you are hesitant to reveal his immunity.

During an attack by broken hounds, you risked your life for Tanasia, which isn't like you. For some reason, she never seems comfortable when that particular incident comes up.

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

You were tailing Karner because of his connections to someone of authority, thinking that maybe you could learn something useful. But he noticed you, and you had to play it off as being interested in the adventure instead.

Background

Your best friend from childhood is now an Aeon Priest.

NOTES

NUMENÉRA

Crail

NAME

Stealthy

DESCRIPTOR

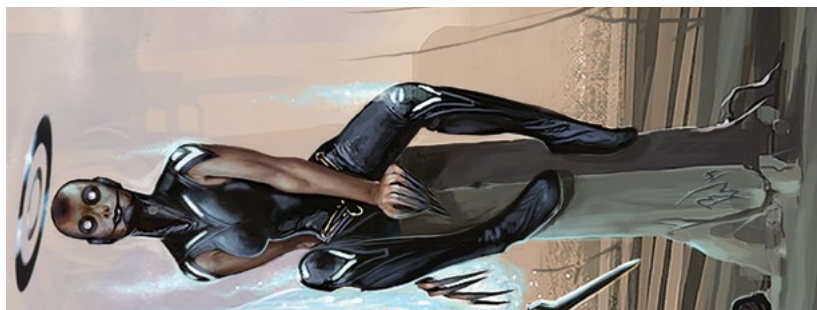
jack

TYPE

WHO

Crafts Illusions

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

BACKGROUND

Connection

Haro is particularly tuned into your mental powers. While you're within short range of her, the two of you are always in telepathic contact, and (if you were high enough tier), you suspect she would not be harmed by your Psychic Bursts.

You think you saw Uraz sleepwalk one time, though you wonder if it was his mechanical skeleton rather than his own mind that controlled him. The idea worries you, because you suspect you can't affect the minds of mechanisms.

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

Crail told you that she had a lead on a potentially lucrative information source. Unfortunately, she's since told you her lead has grown cold.

Background

You trained for a time with a group of Aeon Priests, and they still look upon you with fondness. Most of them, anyhow.

NOTES

NUMENÉRA

Etolas

NAME

Strong-Willed

DESCRIPTOR

nano

TYPE

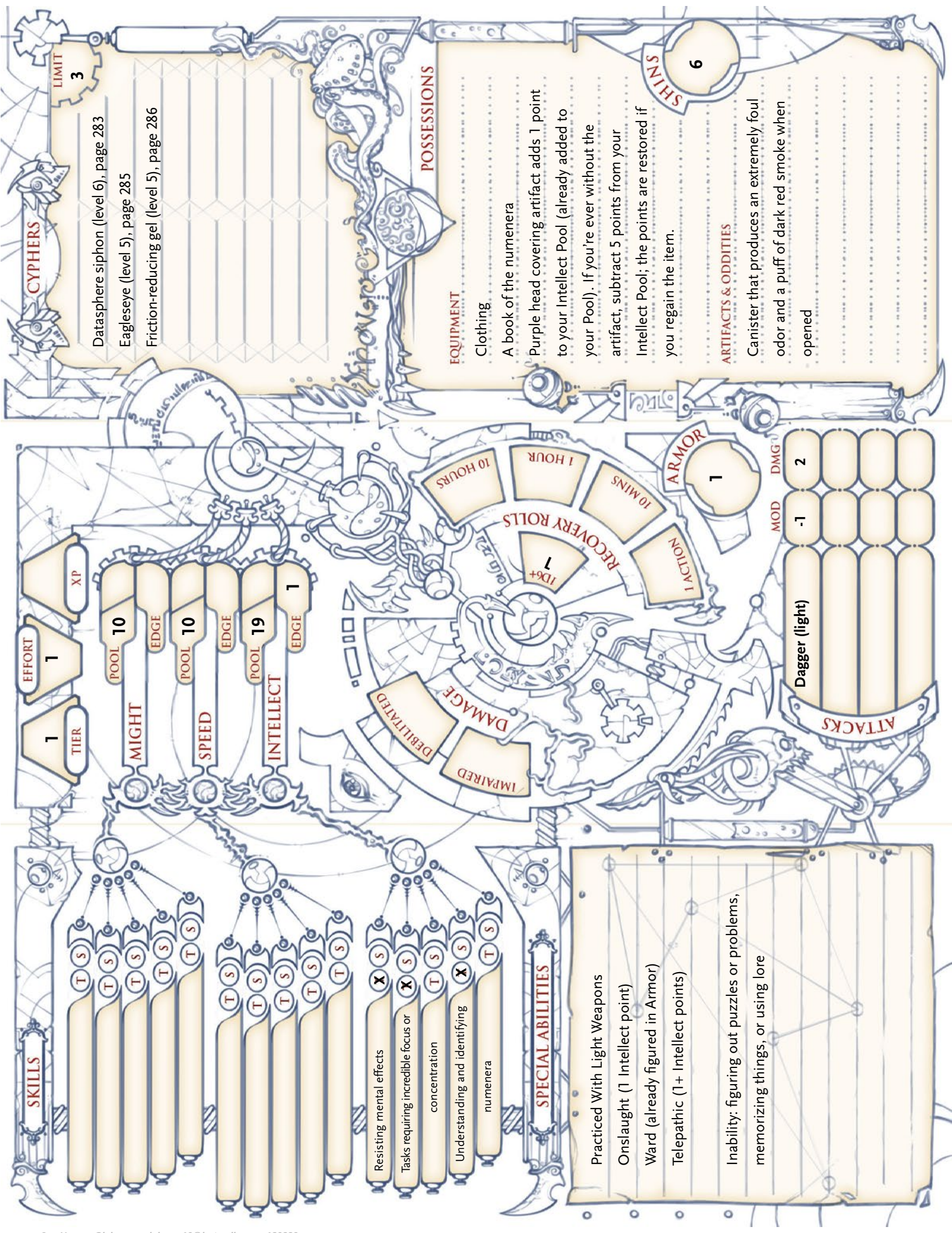
WHO

Commands Mental Powers

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION



SKILLS

TIER

EFFORT

1

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Resisting mental effects

Tasks requiring incredible focus or concentration

Understanding and identifying numerera

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Practiced With Light Weapons

Onslaught (1 Intellect point)

Ward (already figured in Armor)

Telepathic (1+ Intellect points)

Inability: figuring out puzzles or problems, memorizing things, or using lore

CYPHERS

LIMIT

3

Datasphere siphon (level 6), page 283

Eagleseye (level 5), page 285

Friction-reducing gel (level 5), page 286

POSSESSIONS

EQUIPMENT

Clothing

A book of the numerera

Purple head covering artifact adds 1 point to your Intellect Pool (already added to your Pool). If you're ever without the artifact, subtract 5 points from your Intellect Pool; the points are restored if you regain the item.

ARTIFACTS & ODDITIES

Canister that produces an extremely foul odor and a puff of dark red smoke when opened

SHINS

6

ARMOR

1

MOD

-1

DMG

2

ATTACKS

Dagger (light)

BACKGROUND

Connection

Etolas can cause your telekinetic powers to act oddly. Every once in a while, if he stands directly next to you, your powers are cancelled, but at other times, they seem to improve.

Karner seems like he's got something to prove to you. You suspect you may have accidentally insulted him and his flowery ways once.

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

You suspect that the other PCs won't succeed without you.

Background

You learned nano-sorcery in the temple of an obscure god. Its priests and worshippers, although small in number, respect and admire your talents and potential.

NOTES

NUMENÉRA

Haro

NAME

Clever

DESCRIPTOR

nano

TYPE

WHO

Focuses Mind Over Matter

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

BACKGROUND

Connection

You are always trying to impress Haro with your skill, wit, appearance, or bravado. Up to this point, anyway, she seems oblivious.

You like to imbibe, sometimes a little too much. You overdid it once, but someone brought you home safely. You're not 100% sure who it was, but it might have been Uraz. So far, you've been too embarrassed to ask.

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

Haro made an off-hand comment about some people being more flash than substance, and you joined the group to show her that some people can be both.

Crail kind of creeps you out, but you haven't told her that.

Background

You have a relative who holds a fairly high position of authority. You ran away from all that because governing and ruling seemed more trouble than fun.

NOTES

NUMENÉRA

Karner

NAME

Swift

DESCRIPTOR

glaive

TYPE

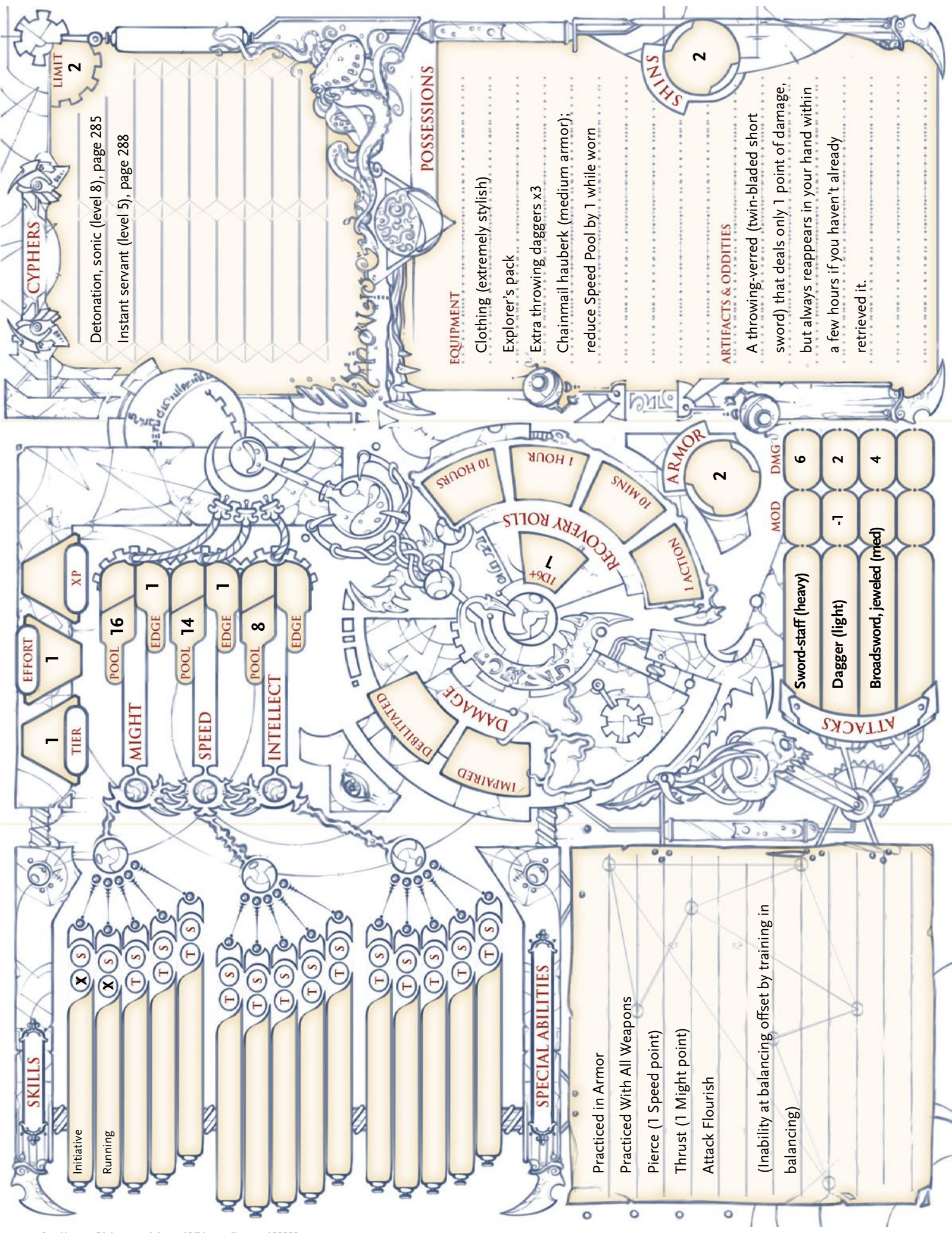
WHO

Fights With Panache

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION



SKILLS

Initiative

Running

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EFFORT

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TIER

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MIGHT

POOL

16

EDGE

1

POOL

14

EDGE

1

INTELLECT

POOL

8

EDGE

1

CYPHERS

LIMIT

2

Detonation, sonic (level 8), page 285

Instant servant (level 5), page 288

POSSESSIONS

EQUIPMENT

Clothing (extremely stylish)

Explorer's pack

Extra throwing daggers x3

Chainmail hauberk (medium armor);

reduce Speed Pool by 1 while worn

SHINS

2

ARTIFACTS & ODDITIES

A throwing-verred (twin-bladed short sword) that deals only 1 point of damage, but always reappears in your hand within a few hours if you haven't already retrieved it.

ARMOR

2

MOD

Sword-staff (heavy)

Dagger (light)

Broadsword, jeweled (med)

DMG

6

2

4

ATTACKS

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Practiced in Armor

Practiced With All Weapons

Pierce (1 Speed point)

Thrust (1 Might point)

Attack Flourish

(Inability at balancing offset by training in balancing)

BACKGROUND

Connection

You risked your life to save Crail's during an attack by broken hounds. You were wounded, and though you were healed, the wound still sometimes pains you. Whether Crail knows this is up to you.

You know a secret word that makes Uraz lose control of the mechanical skeleton he's fused to, apparently awakening a different consciousness within the skeleton. You're not sure the consciousness has the best interests of Uraz in mind, but boy, can it fight!

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

There is a reward involved, and you need the money.

Background

You trained in an isolated monastery far away. The monks think of you as a sibling, but you're a stranger to all others.

NOTES

NUMENÉRA

Tanasia

NAME

Graceful

DESCRIPTOR

glave

TYPE

WHO

Masters Weaponry

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

BACKGROUND

Connection

Tanasia knows a secret command word that renders you unconscious for up to one minute, during which time a “battle AI” comes online in your fused exoskeleton and acts according to its own mysterious agenda (which the GM determines). Once used, the phrase won’t work on you again until several days have passed.

You once found Karner so drunk (or otherwise altered by a drug) that he couldn’t say his own name. You brought him home and saw him safely to bed. You’re not sure he remembers.

Initial Link to Starting Adventure

The parts you need to repair and maintain yourself are running low, and you want to salvage new ones from locations rich in the numenera.

Background

You worked alongside your father, who was skilled in many things, and in fact fused you to the mechanical exoskeleton when you would have otherwise died from a terrible fall. Then one day he disappeared with no explanation.

NOTES

NUMENERA

Uraz

NAME

Mechanical

DESCRIPTOR

jack

TYPE

WHO

Fuses Flesh and Steel

FOCUS



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

NUMENERA GLIMMERS

Numenera Glimmers are inexpensive PDF-only products that allow us to respond to fans' desires for new material on the fly and let us delve deeper into the Ninth World, covering unusual and specialized topics that might not find a home in a larger publication.

Whether you're looking for new adventures and character options, Ninth World lore and culture, a cache of numenera devices, or just something a little weird, the datasphere has got you covered.



All Numenera Glimmers are also available on [DriveThruRPG](https://www.drivethrurpg.com/).

