DARK CONSPIRACY

REFEREE'S GUIDE



SECOND EDITION

MASTER'S EDITION

DARK CONSPIRACY™

REFEREE'S GUIDE

BY

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SECOND EDITION

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Publisher: Dynasty Presentations, Inc.
P.O. BOX 221
Lake Geneva, WI 53147

www.dynastypresentation.com

Dark Conspiracy
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ISBN: 1-892886-01-4

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CHAPTER ONE

Dark Times

The World of **Dark Conspiracy** is our own, but projected just a few years into the future. This world has suffered a global economic collapse, sometimes called the Greater Depression, and a disintegration of the traditional nation-states. Nations still exist, but their actions are increasingly irresponsible or irrelevant, and many people argue that they have become obsolete. Large megacorporations rival the nations in power.

But the greatest change from today has been the appearance— gradually at first— of the Dark Ones. Now whole areas of countryside and urban centers have been taken over. In previous times, these areas would be called haunted. Now they are called Demonground.

THE STATE OF THE UNION

The United States of the near future is similar to that of today in outline, but differs dramatically in detail.

ONSET OF THE DARK TIMES

As the beginning of the new millenium approached, the world stood poised on the brink of the abyss. Global population approached critical levels. The socialist world had imploded economically, which placed major strains on the rest of the world's financial institutions. The capitalist world was at the end of several decades of reckless investments. Internationally, hundreds of billions of dollars had been loaned to third-world governments which faced insolvency and loan default. Domestically, investments by even traditionally conservative institutions, such as banks, insurance companies, and savings and loans, had been increasingly concentrated in high-risk ventures, such as large real estate development schemes, stock speculation, and "junk" bonds.

Rather than drawing back, humankind seemed compelled to leap into the yawning chasm. Greed and hostility seemed the principal motivations of key players in world finance and government. In the first years of the new millenium, waves of nationalist secession movements swept Europe, Asia, and Africa. Greed fueled the speculative binge among financial institutions. Senior officials, in their rush to make their fortune quickly and get out before the collapse, hastened the collapse itself.

Then came the wars—wars over oil in the Middle East, over land in the Indian subcontinent, over nationality in Europe. China slipped into anarchy and civil war, while new regional powers struggled for domination of their neighbors by force of arms. Mining facilities, factories, oil wells and refineries—all were targets in the flurry of border wars that left the belligerents impoverished, but still armed.

The result was an economic decline greater than any in modern history. Over a decade later, the Greater Depression still grips the world, and shows no signs of improvement.

THE DECLINE OF GOVERNMENT

Economic and social ruin outstripped the ability of government to deal with them, and so traditional institutions which promoted order began breaking down. Government still exists, but it is far more remote and less powerful.

As income plunged, so too did tax revenues, leading to a moratorium on debt repayment that sent a massive shock through the world financial community. Now few borrowers will buy government bonds (making deficit financing nearly impossible) and meager tax revenues will not support the previous levels of activity.

In the political arena, passage of the Voting Rights Act of 2001, which included provisions for voters to give their proxy votes to others in government elections, just as they previously could in corporate elections, has concentrated tremendous political power in the hands of large corporations. They, in turn, have done everything possible to limit the size of government.

The result is not only a dramatic decline in basic government services, but also a retreat from even trying to control certain geographic areas. Large stretches of countryside are now referred to as the "Out-Law," since they are out of the legal jurisdiction of any active governmental authority. Rural areas are the responsibility of county police, but in counties where there are no permanent residents, there are obviously no police. State police patrol the interstate highway system, but little else. The FBI still has nominal authority over a wide variety of situations, but financial and manpower resources are so limited that intervention is infrequent and haphazard.

URBAN SPRAWL

With the rise of huge agricorps and the collapse of traditional markets, people fled the countryside for the cities in accelerating numbers. The result is that in excess of 80% of the population of the United States now lives in a few gigantic, teeming urban metroplexes.

LIFE IN THE CITY

As the city populations have swelled with rural refugees, quality of life in those cities has declined even further. Unemployment is high around the globe, and crime has skyrocketed as a direct result.

Many small businesses—restaurants, shops, and light manufacturing facilities—have remained open, but it is more of a struggle than ever for them to keep the wolf from the door. Average salaries have steadily declined, while prices have continually increased. Transportation costs, in particular, have risen astronomically, forcing working people to move into the inner cities, closer to their jobs.

This has left the suburbs for the unemployed and rural refugees of the Farm Family Relocation Camps. Consequently, those suburbs have degenerated into nightmarish ghettos of squalor and crime.

Municipal police are responsible for order in the sprawling metroplexes, but large areas of urban slum are entered by the police only when in hot pursuit, and then with great caution. These areas are surrounded by signs reading "You Are Now Leaving A Controlled Zone."

With large areas no longer under police control, violent subcultures have inevitably grown up. Many gangs are based in the abandoned parts of town and strike out on raids

into the controlled zones. Police attempting to follow them are increasingly subjected to ambushes, and infrequent attempts to clean out these areas resemble a military campaign, with the police supported by armored vehicles and clearing the area building by building.

Yet, in the very center of the cities, new skyscrapers attest to the wealth of the international business conglomerates. Whole downtown areas are purchased by these corporate entities, then fenced off and reworked to house their employees in comfort while the rest of the world sits outside and watches with hungry eyes. Here, safe within well-patrolled walls and fences, a few glittering towers stand surrounded by lush green lawns and sparkling fountains. Many municipalities have ceded police authority to megacorporations for their own properties, relieving government of a financial burden while giving corporate executives virtual life-and death power in their own domains.

Working from the very center of a city outward, we find a region of high-tech, corporate affluence. These islands of affluence are surrounded by a mixture of depressed, but still surviving, middle-class housing and true slums. Picture the bulk of 20th-century Hong Kong, with streets packed with pedestrians and bicyclists, dotted with a sprinkling of cheap autos, through which an occasional elegant stretch limousine passes on its way to the megacorporate heart. Outside the city proper stretch miles upon miles of decaying suburbs, filled with desperate souls and rocked regularly by violence.

"ARE YOU ANYBODY?"

Much more rigid delineation exists between social classes than has been true in the past. Broadly speaking, there are three classes of society in industrialized nations: gnomes, mikes, and proles.



Gnome is a double play on words, hearkening both to the old term "Gnomes of Zurich," meaning the Swiss financial community, as well as to the contemporary term *nomenklatura*, or privileged class. Gnomes (or nomens) are the absolute financial elite of the world. Most gnomes are born to their station, with family money guaranteeing a superb private education and family influence securing choice entry-level position in corporate management.

Mikes are what is left of the middle class, and actually consist of two radically different groups: wage slaves (a term considered extremely offensive) and outsiders (or true mikes).

Wage slaves form the bulk of the salaried work force for the large corporations which control over 90% of the productive capacity and distribution channels of the industrialized worlds. They are middle- and lower-echelon managers, accountants, clerks, technicians, janitors, and security thugs. They are responsible for keeping the corporate machine running, both figuratively and, in the case of the automated factories, literally.

One area of economic endeavor at which corporate yes-men have never proven adept at, however, is the creative process itself. The outsiders are responsible for almost all creative effort in society. Not only are they artists, writers, and performers, they are design engineers, software designers, ad jingle writers, toy inventors, and hundreds of other occupations necessary to creating and selling products. Most work on a royalty or piecework fee basis, selling their work to the highest bidder.

The last group is the proles. *Prole* is the general term used to describe the vast underclass that clings to survival on the fringes of society. They are largely without regular income, and often without a regular residence. Many eke out a meager existence as ballotmen, selling their vote proxies to the megacorporations in return for a subsistence stipend used to buy food and clothing from company stores. Others live by crime and violence.

"GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE"

The nearly deserted countryside between the metroplexes, once the most pleasant land on the face of the Earth, has become a howling wilderness, nightmarish in its hostility.

"DON'T DRINK THE WATER; DON'T BREATHE THE AIR"

The global tensions and economic collapse imposed a war mentality on America, and during any war, environmental concerns take a backseat. Oil spills, toxic waste contamination, acid rain, ozone layer decay, and even nuclear radiation contamination are accepted as unavoidable. The corporations are unconcerned about what happens to the masses, as long as their own playgrounds remain clean, while federal governments have little or no ability to enforce the antipollution laws they once made.

A few aspects of environmental ruin apply globally. Background radiation has increased, both as a result of a thinning ozone layer and radioactive fallout from the few nukes and many R-bombs that many Third World countries have used. (R-bombs are a poorman's nuclear weapon, ideally suited to nations without the technical capability to

build nuclear devices. They consist of a high-explosive charge surrounded by nuclear waste. Upon detonation, they contaminate a sizable area with lethal radiation for 1000 or more years.)

Heavy levels of air pollution have brought about an increase in acid rain; polluted water is taken for granted in most populated areas. Even in the most developed countries, no one drinks water any more until it has been treated.

Weather patterns have been severely disturbed by atmospheric pollution. Extreme fluctuations in temperature and precipitation are much more pronounced than ever before. Rains are heavier, droughts are more severe, freezes often reach well into the tropics, and tropical heat occasionally finds its way nearly to the arctic.

The countryside has been almost completely abandoned. Only monster agricorps, a scattering of die-hard farm families, and bands of outlaw drifters remain. Many of the fields have become tangled wildernesses of brush, dotted here and there with copses of the fastest growing trees (given another few decades, they will have reverted to forest). Roads still run through rural regions, of course, but only a few interstate highways are maintained. About one town or village in five remains in existence; the rest are ghost towns. Technologically, these areas have taken a step back roughly 50 to 100 years.

With the abandonment of the countryside, natural wildlife has multiplied, but it is an imbalanced growth, a riotous explosion of life, without many of the biological checks and balances characteristic of earlier times. Insect populations have increased astronomically, sometimes covering the sky in dense clouds. In some areas, there has been a resultant explosive increase in the number of insect predators such as birds and bats, followed by increased numbers of larger predators, and so on. But disease organisms have been on the rise too, and unpredictable plagues sweep through these burgeoning populations, dotting the countryside with thousands of dead, bloated creatures. Consequently, the life forms that have been most successful are carrion eaters such as crows, vultures, and the like.

"YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE, ARE YOU?"

One of the most important social changes has been the increase in parochialism—the tendency for communities to view themselves as self-sufficient and to distrust, even hate, all outsiders. This has become particularly pronounced in the few surviving small cities and rural communities. Travelers are faced constantly with distrust, envy, and antagonism, local governments have been forced to take up the slack, and they have come to resent any federal or state intrusions into their authority. Very few people have the means to travel any distance, so strangers are, by definition, wealthier than normal, and locals resent being reminded of their own poverty. The fact that much less effort than ever before is devoted to educating the general populace increases that populace's isolation from outside ideas, cultures, and viewpoints, resulting in widespread bigotry. Finally, the very fact that the world has become such a miserable place for most people does nothing to enhance their friendliness toward strangers.

The rural Out-Law is much worse. Gangs wander the deserted back roads on motorcycles or heavily modified cars, many of them with weapons mounts. They live by robbery and extortion.

THE DARK

Worse than all the natural disasters which have befallen the world is a clearly *un*natural one. A dark force has returned to Earth, and now is causing even greater turmoil and misery. Its influence on the actions of humankind is detectable, but subtle. Increasingly, however, there are much less subtle manifestations of its presence.

THE DARK MINIONS

For eons, humanity has whispered stories about evil beings of supernatural origin: trolls, demons, vampires, zombies, elves, morlocks, and many more. Now creatures similar to these legends have begun to appear. The harried authorities dismiss reports about them as hoaxes, or the product of deranged minds. Some of the authorities deliberately cover the reports up, for sinister reasons of their own.

Most of what you know about the Dark Minions is rumor. You suspect that they are the servants of the evil force feeding off of the world's agony, rather than the actual source of the evil. You know they have some similarities to the creatures of legend, which may give hints to their weaknesses. But you also know that the legends were only the attempt of a primitive person to describe a very sophisticated being which he or she only vaguely understood.

DEMONGROUND

Bizarre areas are beginning to appear in uncontrolled territory, both in the cities and the countryside. Locals call them a variety of names, but the most common is Demonground. Since marauding bands no longer strike out from these areas, the police leave them alone, and attribute the strange stories about them to ignorant superstition. Most humans who venture into such areas never return.



In the countryside, Demonground usually has bizarre vegetation: bleak, twisted trees and tangled thorn bushes are the most common, with considerable stretches of bare, muddy ground or exposed bedrock. In cities, decayed buildings are often altered to include mazes of weird organic-looking tunnels. These are found either inside buildings or linking separate buildings, and they wander in seemingly random directions. Often they slope up or down and connect to the sewers or even lower levels of excavation.

CHAPTER TWO
Dark Earth

Referee, you will have the primary responsibility for setting and maintaining the appropriate atmosphere in your **Dark Conspiracy** campaign. In order to accomplish that, you need to have a firm grasp of just what **Dark Conspiracy** is really all about. Now, we are going to talk frankly about the ingredients that make up the **Dark Conspiracy** milieu.

Dark Conspiracy is set in the near future. But it is a bleak, shattered future. The Earth has changed dramatically in the few years which have passed. Obviously some central event has taken place to alter the normal course of history. As referee you need to be familiar with that event, while players will only know (at first) the results of it. As game time passes, they will gradually piece together the explanation. In fact, solving this mystery will be a major theme in the early adventures of your players, so it is important that, at least at first, you not let the cat out of the bag.

Please do not let this betrayal of secrets kill your own sense of the **Dark Conspiracy** mystique. The material presented here is intended as a firm foundation upon which you can build your own **Dark Conspiracy** campaign. It is not meant as a marking off of rigid boundaries. In other words, once you are privy to these basics, you can graft your own weird ideas upon them.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

In 1945, a large interstellar exploratory vessel entered the outer solar system. The vessel had been launched nearly 1000 years earlier, hundreds of light-years from Earth. The crew, which was composed of representatives of four different, highly intelligent, spacefaring races, was held in a state of suspended animation, waiting for the time that the ship's instruments would detect a world capable of sustaining life. By early 1946 the ship had penetrated to the inner solar system and had identified Earth as a habitable world, the one-in-1000 chance occurrence for which the ship had been built. It woke the crew, which began to survey and explore the planet.

The first probe was launched in mid-1946. While passing over the Pacific Ocean, it recorded the first of three nuclear detonations of the CROSSROADS test series at Eniwetok Atoll.

The news terrified the explorers. It meant that the inhabitants of the world were not only intelligent, but were poised on the brink of the atomic age. Space exploration would follow soon. Furthermore, additional atomic detonations in the atmosphere indicated a preoccupation with weaponry and a near-total disregard for the planetary ecosystem. Study of radio and early television broadcasts indicated a high degree of xenophobia and paranoia, perhaps brought on by the long and costly war recently completed.

While the inhabitants of Earth could pose no immediate threat to the explorers, within decades they would have the ability to do so. If they became aware of the presence of the aliens and made a concerted effort to destroy them, they could easily do so within as short a period as, perhaps, 10 years.

How was this so, given the advanced state of the explorers' technology?

First, the explorers were a small group, no more than a few hundred beings. They were completely isolated from their home worlds, which were located literally hundreds of light-years away. No help could be expected from that quarter.

Second, the aliens were, for all practical purposes, unarmed. Since their mission was one of exploration, they had a few side arms for defense against local animal life, but virtually no heavy weaponry. They were certainly unprepared to invade or conquer a planet containing over a billion inhabitants. More to the point, they were unwilling to do so—their intentions had never been aggressive or violent.

The decision was made to continue to survey the planet and the nearby worlds of the solar system, but to do so clandestinely.

In early July of 1947, a scout saucer experienced a complete and catastrophic electrical failure and crashed near Corona, New Mexico. Found in the wreckage were the bodies of two extraterrestrials. The bodies and the wreckage of the alien craft were taken to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base where they were first studied and, eventually, permanently stored. Very little information was gleaned from the investigation—no more than an 18th-century scientist would discover from the wreckage of a home computer if it were dropped from the top of a 20-story building.

After some time, Air Force and government officials were contacted by the extraterrestrials. This contact was extremely tentative at first, due to a tremendous reluctance on the part of the explorers to make their existence known to the public. They insisted that the government maintain the cloak of secrecy concerning their existence for fear that the resulting public hysteria would lead to an active campaign to exterminate them. Nevertheless, trust gradually grew between the ETs and humans, and a number of friendships develop over the years.

THE DOOR TO HELL

In addition to clandestine surveys of the Earth, the explorers were busy investigating most of the planets and moons of the solar system. In 1983, however, catastrophe struck. A small survey team discovered what were obviously structural ruins of tremendous age on the Jovian moon Io and ventured into the interior. Equipped with high-energy fusion disrupter drills, the explorers tunneled deep below the ruins, unknowingly breaking an energy seal on an ancient portal to an alternate universe.

The details of the encounter that followed will never be known in their entirety. What is certain is that the four extraterrestrial explorers encountered an alien consciousness which was both incredibly powerful and evil beyond the experience of any intelligent race. This was the first direct contact between a sentient race and the Dark Ones, inhabitants of twisted, corrupted alternate realities. Others were soon to follow. Three of the five explorers survived that first encounter, but their personalities were completely dominated by the darkling mind.

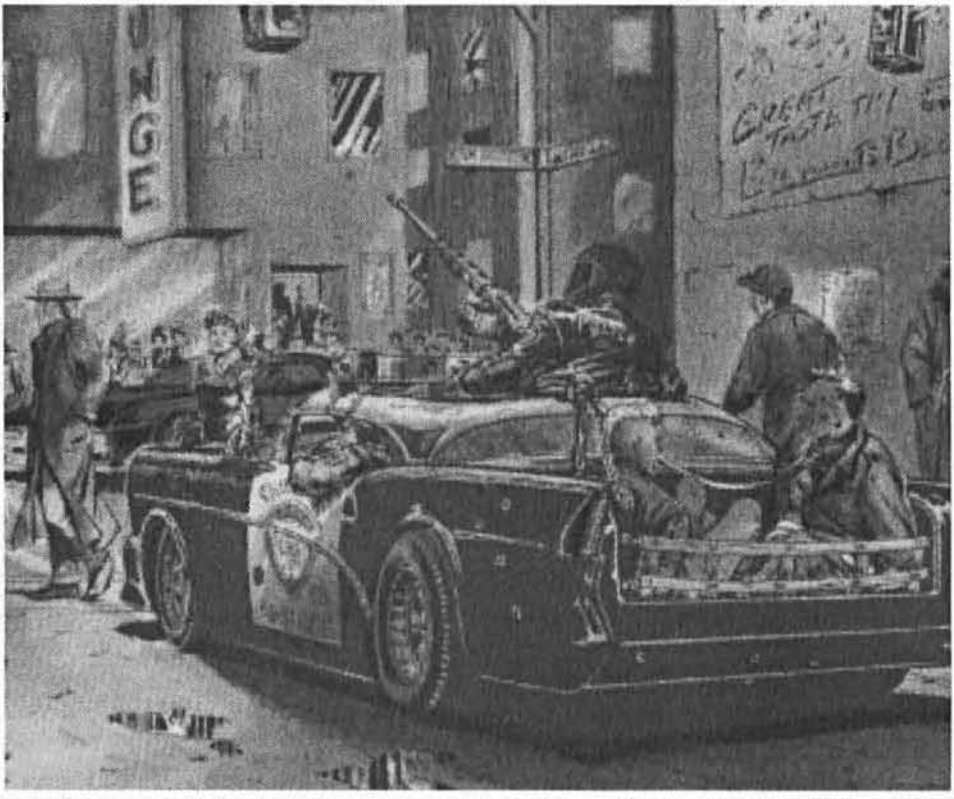
The four extraterrestrial races communicated empathically, and were accustomed to opening their minds to their companions. This made possible the catastrophe which quickly followed. Over the course of the next year, the Dark Ones' influence spread throughout the crew of the extraterrestrial exploratory vessel like wildfire, taking over mind after mind. By the time the crew realized what was happening, it had spread too far to stop. Those extraterrestrials whose minds proved too powerful to dominate were

murdered by their former crewmates. In the final weeks of the struggle that followed, one of the last surviving uncontrolled explorers offered the following observation to an Air Force lieutenant general: "I fear we have opened the wrong door."

Only a handful of extraterrestrials now remain alive who are not dominated by Dark Ones, and they are desperate, hunted fugitives. All have taken shelter with secret communities of human empaths, have they been able to escape detection. The protecting groups of humans carefully guard the secret of their location and even their existence. Even so, word occasionally leaks out due to one careless act or another, and then shambling, bloody horrors descend on the small cell, slaughtering all they find.

Many of the mentally controlled extraterrestrials were driven mad by the experience, although they were seldom reduced to a state of helplessness by their condition. Instead, they began exhibiting bizarre behavior. By 1985 reports began to appear in the news media, particularly the tabloids, of human abductions by UFOs, followed by horrifying biological experiments. Sometimes victims were returned to Earth, their memories erased. Neither the experiments nor the return of the subjects were the acts of rational beings. In fact, the very irrationality and seeming pointlessness of the abductions made it difficult for the victims to gain a public hearing.

A few of the controlled extraterrestrials remained rational (but possessed) and, at the direction of the guiding Dark Ones, began to visit numerous ancient sites on Earth. These sites were locked portals to other dimensions, dimensions which were only pale, dark shadows of our own, inhabited by twisted, perverted beings. For countless millen-



nia, the portals had been locked by energy barriers too powerful for the Dark Ones to overcome. Now, with the aid of the technologically sophisticated drilling tools of the extraterrestrials, they were able to breach barrier after barrier.

The mental efforts of these Dark Ones throughout the ages to bridge the gap between our dimension and their own had left their marks on humans in the form of mental impressions. These impressions had resulted in myths and legends: werewolves, vampires, zombies. In earlier times minions of the lords of these dark dimensions had slipped through the portals, but had eventually been either exterminated or driven into remote areas. Now, however, they have reemerged and have been joined by new monstrosities from beyond the dimensional portals.

THE CITIES

The cities of **Dark Conspiracy** are teeming, dangerous places. Many small towns have disappeared and the largest cities have now mushroomed into sprawling metroplexes each with millions of inhabitants. Most cities are made up of varying amounts of the following seven distinct types of areas:

Dreamland: Usually the heart of the city is dominated by the plazas of the largest and most important megacorporations. This area is called Dreamland by most city inhabitants as the standard of living inside its walls is far beyond anything they could aspire to.

Each of these plazas is surrounded by a sturdy wall (often decorated with colorful mosaics or murals) and typically covered with a geodesic dome similar to those over many sports arenas. There is considerable park land in the plazas as well as open spaces.

Corporate facilities are housed in massive towers. These have shops and restaurants on the lowest levels followed by middle-income apartments (for corporate employees) followed by the corporate offices themselves and surmounted by the living quarters of the highest executives of the company. Security is more exacting at every level. Corporate security provides virtually all law enforcement in Dreamland.

Living quarters at the top are palatial. Indoor personal swimming pools, sound-activated fountains, personal and robotic servants, and holographic entertainment rooms are only a few examples of the luxuries enjoyed by corporate leaders.

Mike-Town: Mike-Town is taken up with independent shops and modest-income housing. It has the look of a crowded and slightly run-down inner city neighborhood but it is vibrant and full of people making it on their own (if just barely). Municipal police patrol Mike-Town on an irregular basis but local volunteer community groups (a.k.a. vigilantes) supplement their efforts.

There is considerable night life in Mike-Town, as well and most business deals are by tradition negotiated over drinks at noisy, poorly lit bars. Bars in Mike-Town can be tough but are usually not deadly.

'Bot City: Most industrial production is carried out in automated factories. These are usually concentrated in industrial areas of the city, called "'Bot City" (due to the extensive use of robots). There is little residential housing (all of it very bad), and the only people usually found here are police, corporate security, maintenance technicians, and delivery personnel.

Precincts: Since passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1997, megacorporations have amassed tremendous political power by buying the proxy votes of financially destitute

people. Many of these so-called "ballotmen" live in corporate-supplied housing, similar to the "projects" of the late 20th century. Most of these projects house the equivalent of about one municipal precinct's worth of voters, hence the name.

Ballotmen receive a corporate dole consisting of small amounts of spending money, regular shipments of clothing (paper coveralls), food (similar to combat rations, typically Russian), and some luxuries (soap, eyeglasses, etc.). They spend their days in barracks-style apartments, watching free corporate cable TV, and their nights in the ramshackle sin-mills that surround them.

Ant Hills: These are the densely populated, low-income (and no-income) slums of the city. Many buildings are collapsed, and those standing are heavily damaged. (Only lucky inhabitants have running water, electricity, and intact windows.)

Crime is rampant, and violence an accepted means of interpersonal interaction. Many Ant Hill areas are no longer patrolled by the police, and are posted "You Are Now Leaving A Controlled Area." Occasional police sweeps (growing less frequent) are supported by helicopters and armored vehicles. Some are now officially police free fire zones, with 24-hour curfews.

'Burbs: The suburbs are also populated by the otherwise homeless poor. While there is occasional opportunity for employment closer to the city center, the suburbs are all but abandoned except by the destitute and mad.

Demonground: Urban Demonground consists of areas of the city now deserted by humans and inhabited by Dark Ones. These areas have been altered into habitats more familiar to their new residents.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

Before the Greater Depression, nearly every inch of arable land in the world was devoted to producing crops, with high-tech farm machinery, high-yield hybrids, and advanced fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides all working to maximize production. Now, a few enormous agribusiness conglomerates have taken over crop production, and with their coming a number of significant changes have occurred.

First, only a portion of the old farmland is in use any longer. The agricorps produce such high yields that most smaller operations have gone completely out of business. But the corps cultivate only a small portion of the possible land, so the rest lies fallow, producing (at best) thick tangles of weed and brush where once food crops flourished.

Second, the agricorps work by force-growing experimental hybrids with yield-enhancing chemicals, and by tilling the fields with no regard for erosion. After a few seasons of this intensive agriculture, the land becomes unusable, transformed into a chemical-stinking morass of clay and mud, worn to raw bedrock in spots. Then the agricorps move on to new fields and start the process all over again.

One result of all of this is an accelerated depopulation of rural regions. Only a relatively few die-hards remain. Some are farmers who refuse to leave their land, working to produce enough to feed themselves, with enough excess to barter with their neighbors or trade in the shrunken towns and villages. They also supplement their diets by hunting the new wilderness of abandoned fields.

If it were not for modern problems such as acid rain and radiation leakage through the Earth's riddled ozone layer, these rural populations would seem to have stepped backward nearly a century in time.

Corp Farms: Dotted across the landscape are huge agricorp farm complexes. These vast tracts of land are mostly roadless, as giant robot plows have obliterated most of the gravel, dirt, and blacktop roads which once linked farmhouses to the main highways. The farm complexes have machine shops, barracks for maintenance workers, a helipad (helicopters are used to inspect the land and move maintenance personnel to repair broken-down machinery), and crude recreation facilities.

Towns that lie on the periphery of these corp farms are both blessed and cursed by the corporate presence. Corporate workers are discouraged from mingling with the local population, but they often frequent town bars and dance halls for diversion. Relations between the town populations and farm workers are strained at best, and more often downright hostile.

Rural interstates are still maintained, to an extent, and patrolled by state police cars. Nevertheless, travel along the highways is dangerous, particularly at night. Megacorps which use the interstates to haul bulk cargo by truck maintain guarded fuel and rest stations along the road, but independent drivers are forced to purchase fuel, food, and lodging in local towns, often at exorbitant rates. Also, local sheriffs and police in the small road towns are notoriously brutal and corrupt.

The Out-Law: Just as there are parts of the cities no longer patrolled by the police, there are large stretches of the countryside which are officially out of any legal jurisdiction (except for the federal government). These areas are called the Out-Law. State law enforcement has long since been limited to highway patrols, and local law enforcement exists only where there is a permanent, gainfully employed, tax-paying population. Since large stretches of the countryside no longer meet that criteria, there are no police.

Much of the Out-Law is genuinely uninhabitable. As it is a favorite toxic dumping ground for the megacorps, parts of it are also nearly unhabitable. But other parts are sparsely inhabited by various groups of people estranged from society for one reason or another.

Biker is a generic term for the most dangerous of these, and it refers not so much to mode of transportation as to a brutal, violent life-style. Bikers travel in groups of from one to six dozen. Some ride motorcycles, but many ride heavily modified trucks and cars. These gaudily painted vehicles often have improvised armor and light weapons mounted on them, as well as having bizarre decorative additions. Bikers live by hijacking truck convoys, terrorizing local towns, or sometimes hiring out to the agricorps as local muscle.

Nomad covers a variety of less dangerous (usually) inhabitants. Nomads live off the land by hunting and foraging, and generally resort to violence only in self-defense. Nomads include Native Americans attempting to reestablish their bond with the land, eco-utopians practicing a simpler and less destructive life-style, men and women pursued by powerful corporations who have fled to the countryside, and a startling array of genuine eccentrics and crazy people.

Overseas: In Third World nations, where the countrysides were never so well developed, rural populations have been affected somewhat less severely than elsewhere. But urban areas have become even more economically depressed than ever before. As well, in portions of Africa, the Middle East, and Central America, vast stretches of land have been rendered uninhabitable due to residues from nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

TECHNOLOGY

One of the reasons that **Dark Conspiracy** has been set in the near future is because that allows the referee to use familiar concepts for basks, against which to contrast the world's strange twists. Technology in **Dark Conspiracy** is an excellent example of this.

RetroTek: Basic, everyday technology in the world is very much like that of the 1990s. For instance, people use telephones, not futuristic vidphones, nor archaic telegraphs, for long-distance communication. Televisions look like televisions, autos look like autos, there are still corner laundromats, and so forth.

But there are several quirks to that modern technology. First, one effect of the economic depression has been a general deterioration of what is commonly considered modern. Most consumer goods available to the common man and woman are no longer produced by corporations in Japan, Germany, or the US, but instead by the less technologically advanced corps in Mexico and the Eastern European states, and they resemble products from the US's '50s and '60s. So telephones are once again bulky, black things, rather than the sleek, colorful, lightweight plastic ones we are familiar with. Autos are boxier, a tendency reinforced by a 1940s retro-style movement. TV screens are smaller (and often black and white rather than color); radios are bigger. In fact, because of a growing shortage in semiconductors, many consumer electronics have reverted to vacuum-tube technology.

HiTek: But the second technological quirk runs in direct contrast to the first. That is, for those who can afford them, there exist virtual technological miracles. It is this market that Japanese and German megacorps now target. The wealthy can purchase pocket-sized portable computers with multimegabyte memories, holographic projectors



rather than TVs, programmable home appliances (such as self-powered vacuum cleaners that follow programmed routes and schedules), ultra-sophisticated electronic security systems, and even high-quality mechanical replacements for failing organs, or cloned replacements, if they prefer. A variety of robots are coming into use as well, although most of the mobile varieties are the result of military research and thus tend to be used for security tasks. In any case, the abundance of ultra-cheap labor has made personal servants affordable and fashionable for wealthy individuals.

DarkTek: The third technological quirk involves the technology of the extraterrestrial explorers, who are, almost without exception, in the service of the Dark Ones. This is one of the sources of cyborgs, for example. They also build organic computers composed of thinly sliced brain tissue. This is explained in greater detail in the DarkTek chapter. The thing to remember at this point, however, is that their technology is bizarre and quasi-organic in appearance and function.

SpaceTek: One area where technology has advanced slightly is the space program. Spacecraft in service consist of old versions of craft presently in use or on the drawing boards in the 1990s. Lack of funding has slowed adoption of new designs and greatly limited manned flights. Several small research stations are in orbit, however, all with major industrial and military applications as well.

Conveying Tech Differences: So how do referees convey the technology of **Dark Conspiracy**? First, remember to think of the bulk of it in '50s and '60s terms. Fast food comes from toaster ovens, not microwaves; home telephones are less prevalent and tend to be out of order a lot. Similarly, when PCs purchase weapons from a street source, what is available should be out-moded models stolen from a closed-down National Guard armory. Once that technologically degenerated mood is firmly set, start letting the PCs catch glimpses of how the wealthy live, or have them encounter an alien ray gun. Many real-world publications occasionally mention experimental devices and technological developments that you can incorporate, in final form, in your campaign. In each case, make sure to play up the contrast between this ultra-tech and day-to-day technology.

Global Production: There remains one final topic to be discussed concerning technology in **Dark Conspiracy**. That is the division of production among the nations.

It has been mentioned previously that Mexico and the Eastern European states have taken over the basic consumer market. In general, the East Europeans have a lead on Mexico in terms of production facilities, but Mexico has made advances in plastics manufacturing, due to its petroleum resources. Most of the world's packaged food comes from these two nations, as well, even though the US still leads the world in agricultural production. Both Mexican and Soviet corporations purchase crops from the US for their processed food operations.

The US has greatly decreased emphasis on consumer goods production, concentrating instead upon high-intensity agriculture, large aerospace and ground transportation equipment, and high-tech weaponry. Most of the wars that rage on the Earth find both sides equipped with weapons purchased from the US.

Japan and Germany, on the other hand, now concentrate upon competing for the attention of the ultra-rich. Most of the world's advances in consumer technology were developed by these two nations, and most gnome high-tech consumer toys are manufactured in one of these two countries.

THE DARK ONES

For as long as humanity has walked the face of the Earth, the Dark Ones have been with us, if only in our dreams. The Dark Ones are the masters of alternate, but parallel, physical universes, which brush against ours in only a few remote places, called conjunction points. The dark universes are, by comparison to our own, small and twisted versions of reality. Each is unique, and is dominated by a single, powerful life force a Dark One.

Dark Ones have occasionally slipped tendrils of power-thought through the dimensional barriers which lie between the universes, and the memory of their influence is reflected in legends of demons and monsters which are remarkably similar from culture to culture. Occasional humans caught glimpses of these universes and lived to tell the story, their nightmarish descriptions forming the basis for the human conception of Hell.

But it was highly advanced technology, in the form of a fusion drill used by alien archaeologists on the Jovian moon Io which finally broke the dimensional barrier and released the complete essence of a Dark One into our universe. Since then, captive spacecraft have visited other conjunction points and opened the dimensional portals to other Lords of the Dark bent on further exploiting our universe.

Although there are variations in the physical laws of the different dark universes, one thread which binds them all together is the power of life energy, which is the spiritual essence of all living beings. The power of the Dark Ones derives from their ability to channel and control this powerful source of energy. The mightiest Dark Ones live off the life energy of lesser beings, feeding on their spirit as earthly predators would feed on their flesh, thriving on the powerful energy discharges generated by pain and anguish.

For this reason, the Dark Ones use their powers sparingly, and always with the goal in mind of creating torment and misery. They do this in several ways. However, their thought and reasoning processes are so different from those of humans that many of their plans seem to make no sense. Many of them, in fact, do not make sense. The Dark Ones are cruel, implacable, nonrational beings.

Corruption: The Dark Ones have no bodily manifestation in our own universe. If capable of assuming one, they would probably (but not necessarily) be large and grotesque. However, their physical power would be little more than the average human's and they would be vulnerable to physical injury and destruction. Consequently, there is no reason to ever assume such a form.

Instead, the Dark Ones influence the world by twisting the thoughts and motivations of others. The rampant greed and brutality that permeates the **Dark Conspiracy** world is the result of weak-willed individuals giving in to the corrupting siren song of the Dark Ones.

Some of these humans have no belief in the supernatural, and merely think of themselves as realists. Others have joined covens or satanic cults, thinking that they have made a pact with the biblical Devil.

Whatever the belief structure of these humans, they wittingly or unwittingly serve the purposes of the Dark Ones, and thus are part of the **Dark Conspiracy**. Sometimes this will take the form of a detailed, purposeful plan. At other times, the end result will be ruin and misery for all concerned, including the human dupes. The Dark Ones do not care whose spirit feeds their boundless appetites.



Extraterrestrials: The members of the four spacefaring races who traveled to our star system decades ago, coming in peace and in search of knowledge, are the most pitiful of the souls captured by the Dark Ones. As their principal means of communication was empathic, their minds were extraordinarily open to capture and corruption. Now most of them are helpless slaves of evil, and many of those have been driven mad by the experience.

The extraterrestrials are extremely important to the Dark Ones, due to their mastery of technology. The Dark Ones themselves have virtually no ability to understand the principles of technology, and no patience for its systematic, routine demands. However, the technology practiced now by the captive-spirit extraterrestrials is a horrible, blasphemous perversion of their original science.

Dark Minions: The Dark Minions are the very embodiment of our worst nightmares, and for good reason: It is they who are the basis of our legends of vampires, trolls, werewolves, zombies, and demons. They are the dark fey folk of faerie legend, the lurkers in the shadows, the evil creatures of all our myths. And they are cruel beyond imagining.

The Dark Minions are the minor creations of the Dark Ones, fashioned from their own life force and sent out into the physical world to spread terror and destruction. Many of them can feed off of flesh or blood, thus allowing the Dark Master to consume all of the life energy of their victims. Others live off of life energy as well, but generate enough additional horror and suffering to make this investment of life energy worthwhile to their Dark Masters.

DEMONGROUND

Wherever there are portals into a dark universe, the surrounding countryside has been blighted and infested with the lower forms of Dark Minions, who serve as guards to keep wandering humans away from the portals (or kidnap the unwary and drag them in). Humans who enter such areas seldom return. Humans who know of these areas call them a variety of things, but in North America the most common name is *Demonground.*

Urban Demonground: Because the police have so much trouble with thugs raiding out of uncontrolled areas and then fleeing back to their Out-Law fortress blocks, the police seldom ask questions when the raids from an area suddenly stop. Since these areas were already Out-Law, there is no reason for the authorities to ever investigate them again, and they have many other demands on their resources.

While buildings still stand in these areas, they are now often linked by bizarre tubes and tunnels, constructed of a black or dark gray substance which is a cross between epoxy and cement. Some tunnels are several meters in diameter, others less than one meter (and humans can only crawl or wriggle through these). These now link buildings, sewers, and subway tunnels into an intricate maze-like hive. Many Dark Minions of the lower, less intelligent sort lurk in these areas.

Occasionally, the very centers of the corporate towers of Dreamland have secretly been transformed into hellish environments suited to the particular Dark Ones who control the megacorp. These particular parts of Demonground are usually accessed by way of the tower penthouses, but they then snake their way clandestinely through the heart of the building and down to the sewers below.

Rural Demonground: While urban Demonground is seldom larger than several dozen blocks, the rural form can extend for dozens of miles. These areas were usually barren and heavily polluted before the portals were opened, and are now even more desolate. There is virtually no vegetation aside from scrubby weeds, twisted thorn bushes, and a few blackened, blighted trees. Invertebrates are the most highly developed natural life forms remaining. Usually only worms and insects are seen.

There are seldom any structures in rural Demonground. Most former human habitats have been torn down and the wreckage scattered, as if in an orgy of destruction. The Dark Minions who inhabit the region live in very primitive shelters, such as earthen burrows, coves, and rotting hollow trees.

Occasionally a building or two is left standing, but usually for some specific purpose. It may cover the actual dimensional portal, or it may merely be intended to attract the curious, who will then become the next meal.

EMPATHY

Another major element of the **Dark Conspiracy** milieu is the incidence of empathic powers among humans. In response to the increased psychic activity on the Earth, many humans have begun to manifest extrasensory abilities, abilities that are closely tied to that natural world.

How powerful, potentially, is empathic power? At this time humanity has no inkling, but there is a growing suspicion that we have only scratched the surface. As a referee, you know that this is the case, as the entire means by which the Dark Ones interact with and manipulate the universes around them is by the psychic power humans label empathy.

Empathy amounts to the ability to sense and, in some cases manipulate, the life energy which is the spiritual essence of all living beings. Humans with empathic powers draw on their own life energy as well as the Earth's life energy field, which is generated by all native life forms, but particularly the higher forms of animal life. This shared life energy between higher life forms is the reason for the strong bonds between humans and animals, particularly mammals.

The Dark Ones resent, and even fear, this rise in human empathic powers, and even more than before seek to separate humans from their natural heritage. This is the reason, for example, that they have long been working toward making the higher forms of animal life extinct. The fervent desire of most of the Dark Races is to transform the Earth into a polluted, mechanical travesty of itself, with virtually no native living beings other than humans, on whom they will feed.

When incorporating empathic powers into your adventures, remember that they do not manifest in many people, and that even among those people with empathic powers, they are often so minor as to seem little more than an advanced intuition. Empathic powers are not publicly recognized as valid, but instead are the subject of speculation and conjecture, when they are discussed at all. Of course, tabloids claim that there are people who can predict the future by reading the lines in a cracked windshield and other such things, but few people give them much credence.

Below the surface of everyday society, however, there is an empathic community, composed of people from all walks of life and all parts of the globe, who know that these powers are on the rise and know something of how to use them. There have even been some secret facilities established to study the phenomena—some created by official government agencies, and others by private concerns. (This is the reason for the psychic test subject career, for example.) Among the entire empathic community, there are even a good number who also have at least some inkling of the Dark Ones' invasion, as well.

In day-to-day happenings, then, characters with empathic powers should be treated as mysterious. If they flaunt those powers, they are likely to get into all sorts of trouble, from locals who fear them or suspect them of fraud, from agencies that would like to collect them for experimentation, or from the Dark Ones who find them threatening and want to destroy them. Let your players know that empathic powers must be used subtly if they are to be effective.



CHAPTER THREE

Dark Races

It is the nature of humans to name things. We are tool users, and names are the tools by which we keep tabs (so to speak) upon the things around us. We name objects, actions, even ideas, then we classify those names into groups, and we go on to label the groups, and so on and on. We even label the overall system itself—we call it "language."

Language is so much a part of us that to most people it seems as natural as breathing. But that's exactly what makes it dangerous. As any foreign language student can tell you, language is arbitrary. Words are mainly just arbitrary sounds, and the arrangements we give them (our native grammar) is largely arbitrary as well. When we forget that, we start to mistake names for the objects they represent, to believe that creatures are limited to behaving as we define them.

What does this have to do with **Dark Conspiracy**, a horror game? We're glad you asked that question.

One of the primary themes of **Dark Conspiracy** is that nothing is ever quite what you expect it to be. Horror is supposed to scare you; that's what makes it fun. But it's difficult to be frightened if you know beforehand what a creature's exact abilities are and how best to defeat the thing. Mystery is a crucial element of horror.

It used to be that all horror involved mystery. Then came a period during which Hollywood began to codify exactly what it was to be a vampire, a werewolf, a mummy, or Frankenstein's monster. A werewolf, Hollywood told us, is a human who takes on the fur and facial features of a wolf. Lycanthropy was passed on by a werewolf's bite. And only a silver weapon could kill the creature. This is the "mythology" that most every modern American will recite if asked to describe a werewolf.

But if you could ask someone from Europe during the Middle Ages, you might have gotten a very different story. Werewolves might have been demons, or they might have been humans who turned completely to wolf form, perhaps without a tail. Lycanthropy might be "caught" by drinking water from a wolf's paw print, or maybe by drinking from a stream a wolf had just drank from, but perhaps only in the light of a full moon. The abilities of these and other supernatural creatures could only be guessed at.

And when you begin to consider American Indian legends, or Oriental, the accounts become increasingly less certain of the parameters of the creatures they describe.

Currently, Hollywood is returning to that sense of mystery and open possibility. *The Howling* series of films, for instance, have even included marsupial werewolves from down under. Horror films have wandered far from the staples of Bela Lugosi's Dracula, Lon Chaney Jr.'s werewolf, and Boris Karloff's mummy and Frankenstein's monster. We now are confronted with other dimensional creatures that steal your skin, brain-hungry zombies from biologic warfare programs, and slithering, post-holocaust mutants. The codification of horror is progressively being undermined to make way for new terrors of the imagination.

Dark Conspiracy is dedicated to that sense of open-endedness and mystery. And this chapter is the perfect evidence of that fact. Herein you will find creatures, many of which are creatures of legend, often with multiple explanations, always with a blurring of the forms we have come to impose upon them. Others are beasts of a particular fevered imagination.

As a referee, you are not obligated to follow even these descriptions. We have taken pains to make certain the creatures within have everything you will need for using them in your campaigns.

But you are invited to join with us in treading upon the boundaries, to adapt these visions as you see fit. Let your own imagination loose as you read about these dark abominations. Scare your players—they'll love you for it.

DARKLING ATTRIBUTES

Attributes for the various Dark Races and Minions (collectively called "Darklings") described here are given in human terms. But obviously they are not human, so there are a few things that need to be explained up front about some of those attributes. Note, for example, that some of these creatures have poison attacks. See "Combat & Damage" in the **Dark Conspiracy Player's Handbook** for an explanation of poison notation and effects.

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

The Darkling physical attribute ratings reflect the same things as for humans. But many secondarily derived characteristics—such as hit capacity, weight, load, throw range, and unarmed combat damage—are much different from what those primary attributes would indicate. Some creatures, for example, are much more resistant to damage than are humans, and as a result their hit capacity is far beyond what their Strength and Constitution would suggest. In their descriptions, such differences are indicated. If a difference is not listed, assume that the human norm applies.

MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

The Intelligence rating reflects the same sort of thing in Dark Races and Minions as it does in humans. But Darkling Education ratings are typically very low, not so much because the Darklings are ignorant, but because their knowledge is so alien. The Education rating, then, indicates their familiarity with human knowledge.

SOUL ATTRIBUTES

Obviously the Darklings are not pleasant, chummy creatures with sunny dispositions. Many of them are, however, quite forceful and charismatic. The Charisma rating, therefore, reflects not how likable they are, but instead how frightfully impressive. As for the Empathy rating, it indicates the same sorts of things as for humans; but while Empathy in humans projects warm and wholesome feelings, Darkling Empathy feels cold, cruel, and twisted.

DARKLING SKILLS

To keep things simplest for the referee, most individual skills are not listed for each race. Instead, referees should assume that the races have the following skills at the level of their associated attributes. Any other appropriate skills are indicated in the individual descriptions.

Constitution Skills: Swimming, Climbing.

Strength Skills: Thrown Weapon. Melee Combat (Unarmed) is indicated by the "Skill" notation in the statistic listings.

Agility Skills: Acrobatics, Stealth. Remember that Acrobatics means the creatures make normal Agility checks versus this skill instead, and at one level less difficulty.

Intelligence Skills: Navigation, Observation, Stalking, Tracking, Willpower.

Education Skills: None at full value. Biology, Chemistry, Computer Operation, and Physics are at one-half Education unless otherwise indicated.

Charisma Skills: Act/Bluff, Leadership, Language, Persuasion. Language will be appropriate for the region in which the creature is encountered. Leadership is generally through fear, and Persuasion is through greed, fear, or confusion.

Empathy Skills: Darkling Empathy (see below), Foreboding,, Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Project Thought, Willpower Drain. Most Darklings rely heavily upon Human Empathy and Project Emotion to enhance the natural dread humans feel upon encountering them.

NEW EMPATHIC SKILLS

Some Darkling have empathic skills that do not normally occur in humans. If you want to allow your PCs to acquire these skills, you may do so, but it is recommended that they only be acquired through Darkling contact and that the PCs be strongly encouraged to keep them secret afterward (otherwise some clandestine psychic agency may snatch them up for testing).

Note that the rules concerning task difficulty and power levels apply to these skills just as with other EMP skills.

Darkling Empathy: This skill works just like Human Empathy, except that it allows contact with Darklings rather than humans.

Dissolution: A few types of Darklings are able to control their bodies' molecular bonding to such an extent that they can become semi-liquid at will, allowing them to ooze through small passages. The process is hideous to observe, as the liquefying tissues lose their opacity, making internal organs visible. Of course, the creatures are able to return to solidity at will, as well.

Plant Empathy: This works the same as Animal Empathy, except with plants. Of course, there generally isn't much to do with a plant once you have made empathic contact, unless it is some sort of sentient Darkling plant.

DARKLINGS AND HUMAN EMOTIONS

Most Dark Races rely heavily upon the Human Empathy and Project Emotion skills to enhance the dread that humans feel for them (as if their appearance were not horrifying enough). Some of the more empathically powerful ones may even project feelings of goodwill, to lure humans off their guard. The mechanics for this are exactly the same as those for PCs, but there are a couple of ways in which referees can dramatize the results to enhance the game.

The referee should never tell players that their characters have been the victims of a Project Emotion attack. Whenever a PC is the target of such an attack, the referee should roll that PC's saves secretly. Then, if the save is failed, rather than tell the player that the PC feels "terror," "irritation," or the like, the referee should instead make the player believe that the PC has had a sudden sense of Foreboding, and it should be described in terms intended to evoke that emotion in the player.

For instance, a player whose PC is the victim of an attack of rage might be told, "Beyond the door you face, you sense a terrified child, locked away in a dark closet after having been tortured and maimed." If the PC bursts through the door and finds a couple of smug corporate execs seated inside, he or she will be likely to take immediate, rageful action, only to discover later that there was no child, just a figment of the imagination. As another example, a player whose PC is the victim of a terror attack might be told, "You have the certain sense that the Dark Minion you're facing isn't the only one in the vicinity. In fact, even now, you can sense dozens of them closing in on your position, and they feel really mean" (when, of course, there really aren't any more in the area). The trick is to invent a description that will evoke as much as possible the emotion in the PC, rather than stating the emotion directly.

Similarly, the referee should make secret saves for PCs who are victims of Project Thought, and, if those saves are failed, describe things in such a way as to make the players think the way the attack makes the characters think. For instance, the victim of a projected thought should be told that the thought comes from the Foreboding skill. As well, when faced with hallucinations, referees should not say, for instance, "You see a medusa," but rather, "Standing before you *is* a medusa."

AMOEBEONS

Strength: 18
Constitution: 16
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 14
Initiative: 14
Move: 1/5/10/20
Skill/Dam.: 8/1D6*
Hits: 60/60
 # Appear: 1D6+3

*Ratings are for "bare-handed" attacks. If an amoebeon enters the same space as its target, it can grapple rather than doing actual damage. A target which becomes entirely grappled will suffocate in a number of combat phases equal to its own Constitution rating.

Special: Chameleonlike image projection and body shape control. They also have rapid regenerative powers when food is available.

The Mythology

Amoebeons are a relatively new phenomenon on Earth. Consequently, there are no mythologies built up around them as yet.

The Reality

Amoebeons are known of only because their pictures have been captured on film by remote-viewing devices and because a few have been found frozen into a state of dormancy Also, a handful of psychics have been able to study them while in a trance state, avoiding vulnerability to the telepathic image projection amoebeons use for disguise.



Physical Description

Picture an amoeba of human size and mass. Equip it with rudimentary intelligence, telepathy, and telepathic image projection. Give it great powers of cellular control, such that it can shape its body into any desired form or size compatible with its mass. (When walking among humans, for instance, it actually takes on human form-two arms, two legs, head and torso, though the arms, legs, and head are pseudopods.) The result is an amoebeon.

Origins

Amoebeons were discovered in another dimension and brought to Earth by tentacular aliens in the late 1990s. They serve those aliens as a slave race of great versatility. They are strong enough to perform most physical labor unassisted, smart enough to be trusted with complex tasks (although not smart enough to pose a threat to their masters), highly damage resistant, able to blend into almost any crowd, and so powerfully telepathic that they can serve as universal translators. They have also been empathically programmed to serve their alien masters without question or hesitation.

Reproduction

Although originally only a few hundred amoebeons were released on Earth, there may be hundreds of thousands of them here by now, as they reproduce rapidly and almost never die.

Reproduction is by means of fission, fusion, or regeneration. When an amoebeon reaches a mass of approximately 150 kilograms, it divides into two smaller amoeboids of about 75 kilograms apiece. Each unit retains all the knowledge and memories of the parent unit, but has a strong desire to get away from its opposite member.

Reproducing by regeneration is also an option. If an amoebeon is damaged and loses a part of itself, not only will the parent creature regenerate the lost mass, but the smaller piece can also regenerate the parent over time, if it absorbs enough nutrients.

The third method of reproduction is sexual in nature. When two amoebeons with different genetic material meet under favorable circumstances (with a ready supply of

food), they merge for an hour before separating into three amoebeons, two with the genetic components of the parents and a "baby" with half its genes from each contributor.

Vulnerabilities

Amoebeons do not die of old age, nor are they vulnerable to most forms of attack. Their slimy, aqueous constitution tends to quench flame, while simply parting before most other attacks. High explosives can blow an ameobeon into pieces too small to regenerate, and they can be slain by strong acid, which dissolves them, or by highly toxic neuropoisons that disrupt their internal communications.

Feeding Habits

Amoebeons need a lot of food or else they become very lethargic, and what they chiefly like to eat is meat, especially human meat. Even better than flesh and blood is brain tissue. Any amoebeon that ingests brain marrow gains a temporary +1 to its Intelligence and a minute long-term gain which, over thousands of years, has brought their Intelligence on the whole up to its current level. Given several million years of evolution and ingestion of intelligent beings, the amoebeon could become the most gifted sentient being in the galaxy.

Amoebeons cannot digest bone or metal, though most softer objects can be assimilated. They feed by surging over their victims, quickly suffocating creatures that need to breathe, and dissolving the soft tissue, which is incorporated directly into their own ever-expanding bodies. Digestion takes two hours per point of the victim's Constitution.

Empathic Abilities

To gain access to food, amoebeons can empathically pass themselves off as human beings. Their image projection is so powerful that it overwhelms every mind within range. Few human minds have ever been known to successfully resist their illusion-casting under normal conditions. (A test of one-quarter Willpower skill is required to do so, and it can only be attempted once per encounter.)

The creatures are fully capable of going so far as to dress themselves in human clothing, carry human tools and identification, and take the place of individuals they have devoured, using their telepathic powers to pluck any knowledge they need about their disguise from the minds of nearby beings. They need up to six hours to digest, so they prefer to take humans when they are alone and secluded.

Their image projection powers work only against living beings. Mechanical sensors see them as they really are—oozing, polymorphic, translucent, watery-blue creatures shot through with coruscating globules of gold, silver and coppery red. They also have a faintly disgusting body odor that they cannot disguise, as they have no sense of smell. In fact, amoebeons have none of the regular senses of humanity—they do not see, hear, feel, taste or smell anything through their own bodies. Instead, they have an empathic, telepathic awareness of what is in the minds of all thinking creatures within a 500-meter range, the strongest awareness from the thoughts of beings that are closest. This impressive empathic sense makes them very hard to surprise.

Dogs and other domestic animals frequently detect the "wrongness" of amoebeons posing as humans and go crazy. Such animals may either attack or run away. If they get too close while attacking, the amoebeon will absorb the animal, even while telepathically shielding humans in the area from noticing that the dog is being eaten (though this allows a second Willpower test to penetrate the disguise, at Easy difficulty).

Final Notes

Few amoebeons are free agents. Most are encountered only in direct association with their tentacled alien masters. Amoebeons are believed to range throughout the temperate and tropical zones of North America and Europe. There have been no reports of them in the southern hemisphere or in Asia. They cannot last long in frigid climates, as temperatures below zero-degree centigrade tend to freeze their internal fluids and reduce them to hibernation. Then they cannot maintain their image projections.

ANIMATOR

Some Darkling races, notably the various extraterrestrials, have extraordinary biologic knowledge and technology. Among other things, some can create simple life forces called animators. When animators are projected into objects, they bring those things to life. They can make a disembodied hand crawl, for example, by temporarily restoring life force to the dead tissues. But they can also make a tricycle move about, or a block of stone slide along, telekinetically propelling whatever object they inhabit (this is a special case of the Telekinesis skill and requires no task rolls to succeed).

Most things animated in this manner betray almost no signs of true intelligence, but they can obey simple commands and perform straightforward tasks of limited duration (such as "crawl upstairs, get the tablet of Ra, and return here," or "attack that person"). Statistics for the creatures vary widely, depending upon the object being animated. Average statistics for a few of the most common are listed below.

ANIMATED AUTO
Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 6
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: 7/*
Hits: *
Appear: 1

* As automobile.

Special: Attacks per vehicle collision rules. Skill value denotes Vehicle Use skill appropriate to vehicle.

ANIMATED KNIFE
Strength: —
Constitution: 1
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 6
Move: 60
Skill/Dam.: 8/1D6
Hits: 2
Appear: 1
Special: Two levels more difficult to be hit, due to small size and great speed.

ANIMATED STATUE
Strength: 10
Constitution: 30*
Agility: 1
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 2
Move: 2/8/15
Skill/Dam.: 6/—
Hits: 80/160
Appear: 1
* Two meters tall.
Special: Attacks by making diving blows.

CRAWLING HAND
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 6
Move: 15
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6-1
Hits: 8/16
Appear: 1
Special: One level more difficult to be hit, due to small size.

BHUTA, DEVOURER OF THE DEAD

Strength: 10
Constitution: 20
Agility: 2
Intelligence: 9
Education: 14
Charisma: 2
Empathy: 16
Initiative: 6
Move: 3
Skill/Dam.: 4*/1D6
Hits: 100/200
 # Appear: 1

*A bhuta gets 1D6 attacks per action in melee combat due to its multitude of biting heads, skeletal limbs and slashing pseudopods of bone-encrusted flesh.

Special: With its various appendages, a bhuta can attack at long unarmed melee range. In addition to its melee attacks, a bhuta has two special attacks—it can release a noxious cloud of gas, and can use its pseudopods to grapple opponents and draw them into itself (see below). Bhutas are also able to create a special type of animator zombie called darbas (see "Bhuta's Children").

The Mythology

In Indian mythology, bhutas are the attendants of Shiva—the Great Lord, or Lord of the Beasts—when he haunts cemeteries. Also known as the 'Children of Anger," bhutas were thought to animate corpses and eat human flesh. Sometimes it is amazing how closely ancient mythologies reflect reality.

The Reality

Bhutas do indeed exist, surviving as pulsating mounds of rotting flesh beneath cemeteries around the globe. Under such places can be discovered a twisting maze of dirt tunnels, ranging in size from as small as one meter in diameter to as large as four or five meters. These passages radiate from the bhuta's lair (typically a huge chamber filled with human bones) like a bizarre spider's web. The tunnels exit through graves and tombs on the surface above. They can even reach to nearby structures, such as a mortuary or a human domicile. Prowling these grim alleyways are the bhuta's "children," the darbas, fashioned by the bhuta from its own body. A typical warren contains 5D10 darbas and one bhuta.



For the player characters, information concerning bhutas should be very limited, consisting mostly myth and speculation. These creatures are so utterly deadly that incredibly few humans have ever lived to report an encounter with them.

Only one of these entities has ever been vanquished. The incident occurred several decades ago in a rural farming community in southern Indiana called Bennington. After suffering numerous disappearances and discovering a maze of tunnels beneath the local cemetery, the small community of farmers gathered en masse and assaulted the bhuta in its lair. During the initial encounter, more than half the attackers were slain. Retreating to the surface, the farmers pumped thousands of gallons of gasoline, kerosene, and agricultural pesticides into the tunnels. Then this toxic mixture was ignited, resulting in a terrific conflagration which burned for three days and nights. Apparently, the bhuta was utterly destroyed, as no remains were ever found. Records of a "bizarre cemetery fire" in state archives mention reports of the "walking dead" and "a giant mound of quivering flesh." These reports explain the incident as a prank or hallucination brought on by mass hysteria. But PCs might be able to find old-timers in Bennington who remember the truth.

Physical Description

A bhuta is a hideous thing to behold. Its outer body consists of a globular mass of "fused" corpses. It can be as large as 10 meters long and five meters in diameter. The creature is adorned with scores of heads, some on long stalks of flesh and others visible just beneath its skin. Those heads that are not merely skulls are active—gibbering, crying, screaming, singing, and laughing. A bhuta can speak through any or all of its heads simultaneously, and can draw upon the memories of the people it has subsumed (thus its high Intelligence and Education).

Combat Abilities

The heads can also be used in unarmed melee combat to bite opponents for 1D6 damage. Heads on stalks can attack at long range (up to three meters distance).

Limbs of all shapes and sizes extend from the creature's body. Some appendages are completely skeletal, while others appear like normal human limbs or pseudopods of putrid flesh. Its limbs can be used in unarmed melee combat at long range and inflict 1D6 damage.

Additionally, its limbs can be used to make grappling attacks at long range. Up to four limbs can grasp a single human-sized target, meaning the creature can inflict up to 4D6 points of "control" damage per phase. Victims who do not break free (or are not freed by allies) are pulled into the bhuta's mass on the creature's next phase. Once inside, these hapless people begin to fuse with the bhuta, suffering 2D10 points of damage to each hit location each phase of combat after the first.

Each limb is considered to have a Strength of 10. Severing a limb requires 10 hits of damage from a single blow. Assuming that at least 10 points damage are inflicted, even gunfire can sever a limb.

A bhuta can also expel a gas attack once per engagement (it requires at least an hour to build up another blast). By opening a large orifice in its mass, the bhuta "exhales" a roiling cloud of putrescence. The cloud has a burst radius of 20 meters, centered upon the bhuta itself All creatures within this radius must make a panic check, except those protected by gas masks.

Those who fail must flee the cloud and spend one full combat turn recovering. In addition, at the start of each combat turn that characters are within the cloud (including the turn in which the gas is released), they must attempt an Average: Constitution test to avoid being overcome by the fumes.

Those who fail the Constitution check are incapacitated by coughing and vomiting. They are disoriented, confused and only able to move at a crawl. Such characters remain incapacitated for 2D10 turns, but are not required to make further checks for panic or incapacitation.

Characters who succeed at both the panic check and the Constitution check may function normally. The noxious cloud persists for 2D10 turns.

BHUTA'S CHILDREN (DARBAS)

Strength: 7
Constitution: 7
Agility: 3
Intelligence: *
Education: *
Charisma: 1
Empathy: —
Initiative: 3
Move: 2/8/15/25
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6+2
Hits: 30/60
 # Appear: 5D10**

*As per the appropriate NPC level.

**This is the average population of an entire warren. Usually no more than 2D6 darbas will be encountered outside their lair.

Special: Unlike most walking dead, darbas retain the Intelligence, Education and skills they possessed when alive, meaning they can use equipment, including weapons and vehicles. They do not retain Empathy skills, however—these are lost to them.

The Mythology

According to myths in India, darbas are risen dead who haunt cemeteries and eat the flesh of corpses.

An ancient legend tells that long ago, a young boy was trampled to death while at market. His family grieved so much that a curse fell upon the entire village. The rains would not come, and it was believed that the gods were angry because the villagers had shed so many tears over the poor, trampled boy. Crop withered, and cattle perished.

One night the grieving parents were awakened by their son. He had returned from the land of the dead, and his body was whole and unbroken. The people rejoiced and sang praises to the gods. It rained that very night, confirming the people's belief that a miracle had been bestowed upon them and that the curse had been lifted.

The youth assured his village that it was indeed a miracle and that more miracles were soon to come. "But first you must gather at the cemetery and make an offering to the gods," he told them. "If this is done, the dead shall join the living, just as I have returned to my family." Overwhelmed with thoughts of dead loved ones, the villagers

gathered at the cemetery the next night. They brought with them their most treasured dowries to be offered to the blessed gods.

As the boy promised, the dead arose. But they did not join the living. Instead, the living joined the dead. To this very day, that village is a cursed place. It is said that the mournful cries of the villagers can still be heard, rising from the blackened earth of the graveyard.

The Reality

Darbas are created by bhutas, servants of the god Shiva. Each bhuta's outer body consists of bones and rotting flesh. It is from this material that the bhuta fashions its "children," the darbas.

Physical Description

Darbas are a special type of animator zombies. A bhuta creates the animator spirit from within itself, and it can shape the body that will contain it from the remains of many different corpses. Thus, a darba may have several arms and legs, and even more than one active head. Typically, though, darbas conform to a vaguely human appearance.

The head of a darba retains much of its memories and intellect, though its personality is warped by the animator spirit given by the bhuta creator. Some darbas are fashioned to perfectly resemble a living person in order to infiltrate human society, using cosmetics and perfumes to conceal their decay. Upon close inspection, however, their true identity is apparent (a successful Average test of Intelligence is sufficient to penetrate the disguise).

Darbas can serve several different purposes for their bhutas. Typically, they act as guards to patrol the bhuta's warren of tunnels, which is almost always located beneath a cemetery. But they also serve as hunter-gatherers, collecting fresh corpses in the graveyard and taking them to be "joined" with the bhuta. On rare occasions, darbas will even leave the warren to hunt and capture living humans, who are taken back to the bhuta for consumption.



Although given a semblance of life by the bhuta, darbas continue to decay once separated from their "parent's" body. Each darba can exist for a maximum of 1D10 days before literally falling to pieces. Then, the creature is dead for good. Usually, though, the darba returns to be rejoined with its "parent" before decomposition completely claims ft.

Combat Abilities

A darba can use its limbs to make unarmed melee attacks that inflict 1D6+2 points of damage. Even more disturbing, however, is the fact that darbas are intelligent enough to

employ relatively complex weapons, such as automatic riles, if the person from whom the darba's head was "harvested" possessed the appropriate skill in life. They have also been known to drive stolen vehicles during their forays into human society. Fortunately however, they cannot acquire new skills.

Though often unavoidable, puncturing a darba's body with missile or melee weapons can be a big mistake. The first time this occurs, a putrid cloud erupts from the darba's body, consisting primarily of gases from the organs and blood festering within it. The cloud covers a radius of two meters, centered upon the punctured darba. Any living, breathing creatures caught within the cloud must attempt a panic check, with failure meaning the character flees and must spend one full turn recovering. In addition, during each subsequent combat turn spent in the cloud, characters must attempt an Average check of their Constitution. Failure means they are overcome by the stench and are incapacitated by coughing and vomiting. Characters in this state become disoriented and confused, and are only able to move at a crawl. The condition lasts for 1D6 turns, but incapacitated characters are not required to make further checks for panic or incapacitation.

Characters who succeed at both the panic check and the Constitution check may function normally.

The noxious cloud persists for 1D6 turns. A darba can also intentionally expel the cloud from its mouth. But no matter how the gas is emitted—whether by a character's attack or the darba's choice—it takes a full 1D6 hours for the creature to build up enough fumes for another blast.

The trampled boy in the old Indian legend was almost certainly a darba. Given the dues that he was "resurrected" with no sign of the horrible injuries he sustained in life, was able to disguise the fact that he was still dead, and was intelligent enough to lure his entire village to the cemetery to be slaughtered, it is reasonable to assume it was no ordinary, mindless zombie. Perhaps a huge quivering bhuta still throbs beneath that graveyard in India, protected by the living corpses of a small Indian boy and his entire village.

BLEAK

Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: —
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 6
Move: 50
Skill/Dam.: —/—
Hits: —
Appear: 1

Special: Dimension Walk, drains life, immune to normal weapons.

Looking like animated shadows of cloaked figures, bleaks prowl deserted streets and desolate locations, waiting for lone humans to feed upon. The creatures have no actual corporeal existence but are instead merely psychic manifestations of utter human

despair. Somehow, they psychically feed upon the life force itself, aging their victims in the process. To do this, the bleak must be within melee range of its victim. Each successful attack causes aging, with the amount varying, depending upon the power level of the bleak's attack. A victim ages one year per point of power level the bleak scores.



Because they are incorporeal, bleaks cannot be damaged by physical weapons. Bright lights (floodlights, automobile high beams, etc.) will drive them away but do no real damage. Bleaks can be destroyed by empathic characters, however. To do this, the character needs only establish empathic contact with the bleak, using the Human Empathy skill to tap into its despair and drain it away. Any level of success destroys the bleak, but the quality of success determines what effect the empathic character suffers. To determine this, the character should roll a Difficult test of the Empathy statistic and calculate a power level for that roll. The character will then age a number of months equal to 32 minus the points of power level scored.

BLOODKIN

Legends of trolls and vampires have been spawned largely by one Dark Minion race in particular, often called the bloodkin. Bloodkin are roughly humanoid in shape, with a hairless, slug-gray skin that covers what would otherwise be a plated exoskeleton. Their arms are longer than a human's, with hands and feet that end in heavy claws. Bloodkin facial features differ markedly from a human's, consisting of a pair of lidless yellow eyes surmounting a muscular trunk instead of a human nose and mouth. The trunk ends in a pair of sharp pincers set in horizontal opposition.

Bloodkin are incredibly difficult to wound. Their skeletal plates provide impressive protection from internal damage. But even more importantly, their internal organs are largely undifferentiated, meaning there are no truly "vital" organs. Their nervous system is well dispersed throughout their bodies, and their circulatory system consists of a slow-moving nutrient bath, which makes it unusual for them to "bleed" to death, even from the severest wounds. Also, they heal incredibly swiftly from everything except burns, particularly if there is food readily available. Bloodkin feed primarily upon blood, the larger ones supplementing this diet with flesh.

Fortunately, bloodkin are very susceptible to damage from ultraviolet light, which gives rise to legends of trolls and vampires being afraid of sunlight. In general, the larger a bloodkin is, the slower and less intelligent it is. More specific information for bloodkin trolls and vampires is given below, along with average statistics for each type of creature.

BLOODKIN TROLLS



Strength: 12
Constitution: 18
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 3
Move: 1/5/10/18
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D10
Hits: 90/180
Appear: 1D6+3

Special: Trolls are treated as having an overall body armor value of 1. They do not suffer double damage from head hits, like most NPCs. They also heal very quickly, but UV light does special damage to them.

Trolls, the large, dumb bloodkin, tend to hide in caverns or abandoned buildings and wait for unwary travelers. (In days of yore, they often lay in wait under stone bridges.) Leaping out of hiding, they snatch unfortunate victims, tear them limb from limb, then suck the blood from the body and eat the internal organs, particularly the bloodiest ones such as the kidneys, spleen, liver, and lungs.

Trolls heal naturally from wounds at the following rates: slight, 1 hour; serious, 1 day; critical 3 days. For each half gallon of blood they consume, they heal one wound level almost instantaneously (effectively within one combat phase). Note that a human body contains approximately six pints of blood, enough to heal three wound levels.

Ultraviolet light does extra damage to trolls. Normal daylight does one point of damage per combat phase, as do black lights. UV lasers do double their listed damage against trolls. Thermite and white phosphorus explosions do UV damage per the concussion rules, in addition to concussion damage.

BLOODKIN VAMPIRES



Strength: 4
Constitution: 7
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 8
Education: 3
Charisma: 12
Empathy: 15
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/9/16/32
Skill/Dam.: 8/1D10
Hits: 50/100
Appear: 1

Vampires, the smaller bloodkin, are much more intelligent than their larger brothers, and are also highly empathic. As a result, they rely much more upon guile than upon brute force (although they are no stranger to that, either). A vampire will use its powers

of thought projection to make itself appear as an attractive human, then use emotion projection to draw victims near enough to be feasted upon. Generally, however, a vampire will not kill its victim immediately, but will instead keep a coven of victims, all weakened from blood loss, to serve it as slaves and bring it more victims.

Like trolls, vampires heal naturally from wounds at the following rates: slight, 1 hour; serious, 1 day; critical 3 days. For each pint of blood they consume, they heal one wound level almost instantaneously (effectively within one combat phase). This means that a normal human body, if completely drained of blood, will heal six wound levels for a vampire.

As with trolls, UV light does extra damage to vampires. Normal daylight does two points of damage per combat phase, as do black lights. UV lasers do double their listed damage. Thermite and white phosphorus explosions do UV damage per the concussion rules, in addition to concussion damage.

LESSER VAMPIRES



Strength: *
Constitution: *
Agility: *
Intelligence: *
Education: *
Charisma: *
Empathy: *
Initiative: 5/*
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: */*
Hits: *
Appear: 3D6

* As per human NPCs.

Special: Averse to bright light and garlic. Initiative 5 until one is downed, then normal Initiative.

Human victims of a vampire typically suffer from a related disease called iron-deficiency porphyria. This disease causes the gums to recede, making the teeth look elongated, and creates a craving for blood in its victims. As well, bright light becomes painful to their eyes, and certain natural chemicals in garlic makes them nauseous. Historically, bloodkin vampires have often played upon these symptoms, telling their victims that they are becoming immortal vampires as well, thus adding more confusion to the vampire legends.

Referees should choose an NPC experience level for these "lesser vampires," based upon where they were "recruited" from. However, because they believe themselves to be immortal, they will attack with incredible ferocity—treat them as having an Initiative 5, regardless of actual NPC level—until one of their number dies. At that point, they revert to their normal Initiative and attempt to flee. Unfortunately, by the next time they are encountered, their master will have convinced them of their immortality once again (explaining away their comrade's death as a fluke or illusion, perhaps).

BOOGEY MAN

Strength: 11
Constitution: 10
Agility: 12
Intelligence: 9
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 12
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/9/18/50
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 25/50
 # Appear: 1

* The last number represents the movement of the boogey man in its noncorporeal state.

Special: The boogey man has Human Empathy and Telekinesis skills rated at double its Empathy rating. It has Animal Empathy equal to its Empathy.

The Mythology

Nearly every culture has stories of a spirit that torments and haunts children. It has become so much a part of society that it is more than common to find a night-light or religious symbol posted in a child's room as protection.

The Reality

In reality, the boogey man is a creature of both shadow and substance. It has the ability to change from corporeal to noncorporeal form, a transformation which takes 1D6 phases to accomplish (the randomness representing the varying resistance to change that it encounters in our world). Usually, the creature is first encountered in its noncorporeal state in our dimension, the exception being when it is going for a kill.

Boogey men live on emotional energy put out by humans, primarily fear. They have found that children are much more likely to be scared of them than older persons, although senior citizens are also a targeted group. Infants (less than 18 months old) are strangely immune to the creatures, likely because they simply have not learned to be afraid of them.

Physical Description

In its noncorporeal state, a boogey man is basically no more substantial than a shadow. Upon close examination, a viewer will see the more sinister side to this shadow, however—it will appear to glide effortlessly about from point to point and to have small, glowing, red eyes.

The corporeal version of a boogey man lands 1.25 meters tall and weighs less than 60 kilograms. It is humanoid in appearance, with two long arms reaching nearly to the ground. The arms are capped with six 15- to 25-centimeter-long claws. The entire body (except for the head) is covered with long, matted, black fur which stinks of mildew. The boogey man has a hideous face with glowing red eyes. Its horrible, 10-centimeter-long snout ends in a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth.

Light Sensitivity

Sunlight burns boogey men, so they generally only appear at night or in dark, shadowy places. Direct sunlight causes 1D6 points of burn damage per phase. Similarly, bright lights—including normal room lights—that leave few shadows will force a boogey man to flee temporarily, although causing no actual damage. Despite parents' assurances to the contrary, a small night-light in a child's room may make the child feel better, but it will not protect the child from the boogey man. The only exception is if the night-light is shining directly onto the child, in which case the creature will be unable to physically harm the children until it coaxes him out of the light. Religious symbols, despite what folklore might claim, do nothing to hinder a boogey man's actions, though they may give a boost to the confidence (Willpower) of an intended victim.

Reliance upon Trickery

Boogey men are great tricksters whose usual tactics are to dupe and then scare their victims. This behavior is continued until the victims become emotionally exhausted, after which the evil creatures finish them off in some slow manner.

With a young victim, a favorite trick of boogey men is to animate a favorite toy, especially a rag doll or stuffed animal, while establishing an empathic link with the victim by means of its Human Empathy. (When calculating a boogey man's effectiveness with its Human Empathy, double the Willpower rating of victim over 55 years old and quadruple it for victims from 15 to 55 years.) This empathic contact is to make the child feel at ease with its newly animated toy until it has been lured into some dark place, such as outdoors, in a closet, or even under the bed. The boogey man will then reveal itself in such a way as to terrify the child and feed off of his fear energy.

With senior citizens, the tactic used is naturally somewhat different. The creature attempts to draw its victims into the dark by calling out to them and using Thought Projection to make them believe it is a friend or loved one. Once a victim is lured into the dark, the boogey man will simply stand back while the person becomes disoriented and frightened at not finding the caller waiting.



Feeding Limitations

The fear generated by a boogey man's attack is typically enough to sustain the creature's existence in our dimension for 1D6 days. A -1 die modifier is applied for each subsequent appearance to the same victim. When a boogey man reaches the point where it is receiving no further sustenance from a victim, it moves in for the kill.

Victims who have survived an attack by the boogey man are allowed a test of Intelligence during subsequent appearances to avoid succumbing to the creature's tricks. This test is Easy for victims aged 15 to 55, Average for those over 55, and Difficult for those below 15. Should a victim pass this test, the boogey man can gain no further sustenance and will attempt to kill the victim.

Combat Abilities

When a boogey man moves in for the kill, it will become corporeal and appear out of the shadows. All victims with weak Constitutions (3 or less for children and 4 or less for senior citizens) must pass an Average: Constitution check or suffer a fatal heart attack. Victims who survive this initial shock will be attacked physically. Boogey men prefer to kill by suffocation, especially with a victim's favorite toy or pillow. The killing will sustain the creature's existence on Earth for one day per point of Constitution the victim possessed. This sustenance is halved should the boogey man be forced to resort to a quick-kill method such as stabbing or bludgeoning.

Spotting the Creature

While in a corporeal state, a boogey man is immediately visible unless hiding in shadows, in which case an Easy: Observation test is required to spot it. While in a non-corporeal state, the creature is much more difficult to discover—a Difficult: Observation test is required.

BRAINEATER

Strength: 11
Constitution: 7
Agility: 11
Intelligence: 4
Education: 3
Charisma: 5
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 9/2D6*
Hits: 25/50
 # Appear: 1D6+3

* This Skill/Dam. attribute refers only unarmed melee. As noted below, braineaters can "absorb" skills from their victims, perhaps giving them the ability to use weapons.

Special: Skill Absorption at a level equal to twice Empathy level.

The Mythology

Folk tales of many races tell of creatures that can steal the memories, abilities and appearance of their victims, then take the place of those victims in their day-to-day lives—doppelgangers, fetches, and many others. Although several races of Dark Minions can perfectly imitate the appearance and perhaps even the voice of their victims, so far there have been no validated reports of creatures that can completely emulate the abilities of the mythical doppelgangers—which is fortunate for humanity.

The Reality

It seems that myths and folk tales have merged the abilities and characteristics of several Dark Races in their descriptions of doppelgangers. There are those who believe that the Dark Minion race known as the braineaters are a key part of these combined legends.



Physical Description

Braineaters are vaguely humanoid creatures. They stand a little more than two meters tall and are heavily muscled, with bony spines projecting from their bodies at various places. An average braineater masses about 125 kilograms. The creature's skin is pale gray and smooth, stretched tightly over its definitely nonhuman skeletal structure and musculature. Its head is overlarge, bald, with a domed forehead. Its eyes are large, yellow-white in color, with no discernible irises, and its pupils are vertical slits like those of a cat. Its nose is small, and its fairly human-looking mouth is supplemented by spiderlike exterior mandibles.

Braineaters are completely double-jointed and hideously fast. Their hands and feet have seven digits each, and each hand has two opposable thumbs. Each finger and toe is tipped with a hard and sharp bony claw. On the inside of the wrist is an eight-centimeter-long spur, sharp as a razor, supported by sufficient muscle to manipulate it like a gutting knife.

Braineaters are completely telepathic. They have no language, spoken or written, and seem not to understand the concept of normal forms of communication. This telepathy seems to be limited in range to about 100 meters; within this radius, all braineaters can coordinate their actions perfectly.

The creatures are by nature omnivores, much like humans. Their favorite diet is human brains, but they do not absolutely need them to survive. Given the opportunity, a braineater will usually eat at least one human brain per week.

Braineaters are nocturnal by choice, not through necessity. They are undisturbed by bright lights; their preference for darkness simply reflects the relative ease of hunting at night. The creatures are hermaphroditic, though an individual creature cannot impregnate itself.

Skill Absorption

Braineaters like to lurk in ambush, falling on their unawared prey, and killing the victims by tearing out their throats. Then they use their powerful clawed fingers to split open the victim's skull and extract the brain, which they devour as soon after the moment of death as possible.

The "moment of death" is a somewhat nebulous concept. Although the victim of a braineater attack is legally dead before the creature starts to feed, most of the neurons that make up the victim's brain will continue to live for several minutes, until they expire from lack of oxygen and nutrients. If the braineater devours a brain during this four- to five-minute "window," the creature can "absorb" and integrate much of the knowledge and experience, and even many of the skills, stored within that brain.

When a braineater eats a "fresh" brain, the creature must make a Skill Absorption roll to extract information from it. The exact difficulty level of the roll depends upon how safe and undisturbed the creature is during the period of absorption. If this roll is successful, the creature temporarily gains all the victim's skills to the level possessed by the victim, with a maximum level equal to the braineater's own controlling attributes. (Thus, a braineater who has absorbed the knowledge and experience of a military officer would gain skill with small arms and other weapons, understand the intricacies of tactics, etc., making it an incredibly daunting foe.) These skills and attributes remain with the braineater for a period of four days, after which they fade at a rate of one point per day.

The absorbed skills enjoyed by a braineater can never be higher in level than the skills possessed by the creature's last successfully absorbed victim. For example, suppose a braineater devoured the brain of a nomad ganger and successfully absorbed the victim's skills. If the nomad had Small Arms 3 and Streetwise 3, the braineater would now possesses these skill levels. Now suppose that two days later, the creature devoured the brain of an accountant who wandered across its path. If the accountant had Business 2, Computer Operation 2 and Small Arms 1, upon absorbing the contents of this new victim's brain, the braineater would gain Business and Computer Operation, both at level 2. Small Arms skill would drop to 1, and the creature would lose its points of Streetwise since the accountant did not possess this skill.

CHANGELING

TYPE I (MYSTIC)



Strength: *
Constitution: *
Agility: *
Intelligence: *
Education: *
Charisma: -1
Empathy: +1
Initiative: *
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: */*
Hits: *
Appear: *

* As per character being replaced.

Special: Dimension Walk, Telekinesis. Modifiers listed are adjustments to statistics of the character being replaced.

TYPE II (CYBORG)
Strength: +1
Constitution: *
Agility: +1
Intelligence: -1
Education: -2
Charisma: -2
Empathy: -2
Initiative: +1
Move: 3/10/18/35
Skill/Dam.: +2/+2
Hits: x2
Appear: 1



In faerie legend, the fey folk (see below) would sometimes steal a human child and leave a faerie impostor in its place. That impostor was known as a changeling. In **Dark Conspiracy**, even adults can be replaced by changelings, and nearly every type of Dark Minion does so at one time or another.

The more mystical races, such as the fey folk, tend to leave changelings that are in nearly every way just like the humans they replace. These are the Type I sort, listed above. Empathically, these changelings read the psyches of their targets, becoming intimately familiar with their personalities. As well, the changelings' growth is empathically guided to result in an identical physical appearance. But the changelings do tend to have higher empathic skills and lower Charisma ratings than the people they replace (reflecting that something feels slightly wrong about them).

The Type II changeling listed above is a cyborg replacement commonly used by extraterrestrials. A human who resembles the replacement target is surgically adapted to enhance the resemblance and to boost Agility, Melee skills, etc. The changeling is then hypnotically prepared to take the subject's place. Because they are less well-prepared in terms of memory and personality than the Type I changelings, Type II changelings are generally intended for shorter term replacements. For example, a state governor's bodyguard might be exchanged with a Type II changeling prepared to assassinate the governor.

There are basically only two ways to recognize that a person has been replaced by a changeling. The first is to notice lapses in the changeling's memory or behavior. This requires a test of the Observation skill: Difficult to recognize a Type I, and Average for Type II. However, this test should only be allowed when the referee believes it appropriate, such as when the changeling is under unusual stress, or when a character is spending a great deal of time with the changeling or was extremely familiar with the person replaced.

The second way to recognize that a person has been replaced by a changeling is when a friend shoots you in the back.

Changelings can be wonderful devices for the referee to use for enhancing PC paranoia, especially if you secretly have one of the PCs kidnapped and replaced. (You may want to keep this secret from the player of that PC until the changeling unmasks itself. Or, if you trust the person, you can recruit the player to run the changeling, promising to return the PC, with bonus experience points or something, if the job is done well.) The first time the PCs encounter such a changeling, the players will likely be shocked. After that, they will be watching over their shoulders all of the time.

CHARON

Strength: 6
Constitution: 3
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 7
Education: 7
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 4
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 5/2
Hits: 30/60
 # Appear: 1

The Mythology

There have always been tales of evil priests, necromancers and arcane sorcerers serving the dark and elder gods of antiquity. While our more primitive and highly superstitious ancestors knew of these foul practitioners and feared them, the tales evaporated under the strong fluorescent lights of the modem era. Until, of course, reality changed.

The Reality

Recent encounters with a deadlier, more powerful type of "Igor" have uncovered a new kind of minion in service to the Dark Ones. These minions fit the old legends of dark mages, and their powers and lack of fear set them apart from a typical mischievous Igor. The taint of evil has so corrupted them as to make them closer to the Dark Races than to mortal humans. They are a foul crossbreed, combining the worst of humanity and Dark Minion into one terrible soul. They call themselves charon, after the legendary ferryman of the dead, and the name may signify more than just a fondness for ancient mythology.

Earth legends describe Charon as the ill-tempered ferryman who transported the dead across the dark waters of the River Styx. The human charon see themselves as a connection between Earth and the Dark Ones, bridging the dark waters of the dimensional barriers without the trappings of ferry or pole to commune with their alien masters.

Each charon serves a particular Dark One. They are the closest thing to Earthly priests of the lords of the dark dimensions, often serving as twisted druids tending the blighted Demongrounds which have sprung up across the planet. Of course, communion with the alien minds of the Dark Ones tends to destroy even the strongest human psyche. Those who seek to join the ranks of the charon have a saying, paraphrased from Metzsche: "What does not drive you mad makes you more powerful."

Those who have actually become charon understand the truth: "With great power comes madness, and madness can be glorious."

Physical Description

The charon look human, but certain tell-tale signs hint at their true nature. The stronger the charon, the more demented and crazed he becomes. All have wide,

sparkling eyes that have gazed upon the horrific wonders of the dark dimensions. They wear black hooded robes, and ignore their own appearance, so that they have a haggard, unkempt look. The most powerful among the charon become skeletally thin, with sunken eyes, taut skin and pale complexions.

Initiates

Each charon (or dark wizard, as some call them) has one to three acolytes in his service. These human students seek to commune with the Dark Ones and to become full charon, serving the wizards faithfully until the time of testing. Testing seems to involve opening a mental connection between the acolytes and the Dark One they serve. Most die in the attempt or come away with shattered minds. Those few who survive relatively intact join the arcane ranks of the charon.

Abilities and Practices

Legends of the dark wizards have been with humanity since its beginning, and a small number of charon throughout the ages have held communion with the Dark Ones. Since the release of the Dark and the opening of the horrific dimensions, the charon have become more numerous. Most operate from within Demonground, but a few wander the world performing unfathomable tasks for their foul masters.

They are granted empathic powers normally unavailable to those of human stock, and they have power over a lesser Dark Minion race, called the spectrals (see the following entry), which have been created to serve as familiars and guardians to the dark wizards.

Other Dark Minions often work with the charon to accomplish specific tasks, and most pay homage to or at least tolerate the presence of the dark wizards. Many times, a charon will be orchestrating the activities of other Dark Minions, especially in situations that need an intelligent and guiding force to coordinate menace and mayhem.

Charon the Ferryman crossed the river to the Underworld on a regular basis. The charon regularly enter into a meditative state to send their minds across the barriers and into the dark dimensions. They draw power and knowledge from these sendings, and they relish the alien touch of the Dark Ones caressing their minds. After each sending, a charon wizard returns to his body a little more powerful, a little more knowledgeable and a little more mad.



Sendings into the dark dimensions are typically accomplished on the summer and winter solstices, which the charon believe generate additional power by the balancing of sun, planets and stars.

CHARON'S SERVANTS

The servants of charon, commonly called spectrals, come in a variety of shapes and sizes. All have been created by the Dark Ones to serve the charon, human priests of the Dark on Earth. They appear as iridescent shadows flowing around their charon masters or skulking in the darkness nearby. In the past, spectrals spawned the legends of familiars, demon servants, and ghostly contacts to the spirit word. Now we know them for what they are—foul Dark Minions with a taste for fear, blood and forbidden knowledge.

SPECTRAL HUNTERS

Strength: 12
Constitution: 8
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/9/18/36
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6+1
Hits: 36/72
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: One level more difficult to be hit in combat. Observation, Stalking, Stealth and Tracking at three times the controlling attribute.

Spectral hunters appear as long, thin shadows (approximately 2.3 meters tall) which glow with otherworldly light. No features can be seen within the dark abyss of a spectral hunter's face, save for the deep glowing hollows that serve as its all-seeing eyes. Its arms and legs are elongated caricatures of their human equivalents, but each ends in a single, big-knuckled, sharp-clawed talon. Hunters move swiftly and with unnatural grace for beings so awkwardly constructed. They are experts at Observation, Stalking, Stealth, and Tracking, and they delight in the hunt, using all their skills to remain unseen until the moment they decide to strike. Spectral hunters relish the smell of fear which mixes with the sweat of their prey, and they love the taste of warm, bubbling blood.

SPECTRAL GUARDIANS

Strength: 16
Constitution: 18
Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 3
Move: 1/5/9/15
Skill/Dam.: 8/3D6+1
Hits: 44/88
 # Appear: 1D6+3

Special: Foreboding and Observation at three times the controlling attribute.

Spectral guardians stand almost three meters tall, appearing as formless blobs of shadow with thick appendages and deadly claws. They are slow, plodding beings, given to long periods of total stillness as they perform the duties assigned to them. Guardians were created to watch and to protect. Skills such as Foreboding and Observation make up the bulk of a guardian's abilities, as well as the strength and skill to fight. Unlike their hunter and familiar cousins, guardians have no innate curiosity. They are content to remain where they are told, watching for signs of intrusion. When intruders appear, however, guardians become huge wrecking machines, dealing out destruction with their supernatural sinews and rending claws. They live for nothing more than this moment of combat and the inevitable kill, relishing the fear they inspire and longing to taste the blood coursing through their opponent's veins.

SPECTRAL FAMILIARS

Strength: 2
Constitution: 4
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 8
Education: 5
Charisma: 5
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 5
Move: 4/9/16/32
Skill/Dam.: 3/1D6
Hits: 14/26
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: One level more difficult to be hit in combat. Besides the normal mix of skills for Dark Minions, they also possess Animal Empathy, Bargain and Dimension Walk.

Spectral familiars are small, rarely growing much beyond one meter in length. They can take a humanoid shape, but most often appear as velvety shadows flowing across their master's body or hanging upon it like dark, otherworldly adornments. They are true servants in thrall to their charon masters, using their innate curiosity and divination abilities to uncover the secret things which haunt the dark wizard's dreams. Familiars have limited combat capabilities, but that is not what they are needed for. They leave battle and the physical skills to the hunters and guardians. Instead, a familiar relies most heavily on skills such as Animal Empathy, Language, Observation, Darkling Empathy, and Dimension Walk. They are the eyes, ears, and researchers of the charon, going into the Dark to bring back information pertinent to their dark wizard master's goals and ambitions.

Aversion to Light

All spectrals have an aversion to bright light. Normal daylight does one point of damage per combat phase; black lights do two points. Ultraviolet lasers do double their listed damage against spectrals. Thermite and white-phosphorus explosions do UV damage per the concussion rules, in addition to concussion damage.

Spectral Functions

Even the weakest among the foul brood that is the charon have access to spectrals. These shadow beings were created to serve the human priests of the dark, gifts from their masters in the dark dimensions. It appears that they serve the charon fully and without question, but it is assumed that the Dark One which created them can call them back to its side at will to complete a special task, or as punishment to an undeserving charon. Until that occurs, the spectrals exist to do the bidding of the dark wizards. Hunters are used to patrol Demonground, to stalk Darkling hunters and to kill enemies of the Dark wherever they hide. Guardians protect the charon and their domains, standing as silent sentinels against the forces of light. Familiars act as oracles, advisors, information gatherers and spies for the charon, going where the wizards cannot go to retrieve knowledge.



CHILD MONSTER

Strength: 2
Constitution: 3
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 9
Education: 4
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 3
Move: 1/4/8/15
Skill/Dam.: 3/1*
Hits: 16/32
 # Appear: 1

*Or by weapon.

Special: Human Empathy 7, Project Emotion 8, Willpower Drain 7.

The Mythology

Some kids look so sweet and innocent, it's hard not to trust them. Sometimes, though, you should look closer into their eyes, for some of them are hiding a dark secret.

Myths have been around for a long time about tiny goblins that run around sabotaging anything they can. Perhaps the truth is that the culprits aren't really ugly creatures but rather possess the aspect of children.

The Reality

A child monster is a malevolent spirit that inhabits the bodies of young human children. It exists to kill adults, pure and simple. These spirits enter our world from another dimension and seek children to possess. The process of taking over the children involves stripping them completely of their will and totally destroying their psyche. Once the process is complete, even the brain structure is altered, and nothing at all remains of the human child except the body.

Typical Behavior

When not in school, a child monster sneaks away from its "parents" and prowls the streets and businesses in the area of its home. The creature takes with it some favorite toy, such as a doll or ball, which it uses to conceal a weapon like a knife or gun. The creature then looks for an adult, preferably one that is alone. It tells the adult some story in order to get the victim to follow it. Once it has the adult in isolation, it will take out the weapon and kill its victim. Then the child will run to the police and blame the crime on another adult, usually planting evidence on the innocent before doing so.

The creatures also delight in using their parents' occupations as a means of murder. For instance, if a parent is a restaurant owner, the child monster may poison the food served there.

Another favorite tactic of these creatures is to run out into traffic, hoping cars will crash in an effort to avoid hitting them or someone will get hurt running out after them. Other malicious tricks include starting fires and luring firemen into deadly traps, or sabotaging automobiles, furnaces and construction equipment, etc., so that it will cause injury or death to the next user. In general, a child monster will do anything in its power to kill as often as possible before the human body it possesses grows out of childhood. Once the body has aged to about nine years old, the spirit within concocts a plot by which to kill the body in as gruesome and tragic a manner imaginable, in the sight of as many adults as it can. This is the only way in which the spirit can leave a body it has possessed and go in search of another, younger child to take over.

Often, a child monster will possess the child of an upper-class family. After causing the deaths of what neighboring adults it can, it will murder its own parents while they sleep, making it look as if they died as the result of a break in. The creature will then wait for the authorities to place it into foster care or for someone to adopt it. Once it has found a new family, it will repeat the process, using the adoption and foster-care process to circulate around the country and relying upon the disinclination of authorities to suspect a mere child of the crimes.



Child monsters favor urban areas and heavily populated suburbs, as it is easier in such places for them to stalk about unnoticed. While at school, they do their best to corrupt young minds with dark and sinister images. They encourage as many children as possible to commit destructive acts, but they are very careful about concealing their influence from adults.

Child monsters are master actors. They can convincingly portray any emotion for whatever the desired effect. To back up their facial expressions, they rely on the use of the Project Emotion skill to instill in adults a sense of pity, sympathy, trust or whatever other emotion seems most appropriate at the moment.

Despite their diminutive size, the threat these monsters pose to humanity is very serious. They operate with extreme efficiency and have an incredible focus of will. Since they inhabit the bodies of children, they are seldom suspected of complicity in the murders they perpetrate, and even if they are suspected, they can use their small size to great advantage in escaping.

If caught, of course, they will sacrifice the body they inhabit as soon as is possible. Because they have no concern for bodily pain, the only way to prevent them from killing their host body is to keep them in some sort of restraint, such as a straight-jacket and a padded room. Even then, the child monster will attempt to use its empathic skills to convince someone to let it out of the uncomfortable jacket for a moment so it can stretch its arms just once.

COBRA PEOPLE

Strength: 5
Constitution: 3
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 7
Education: 3
Charisma: 7
Empathy: 5
Initiative: 5
Move: 5/10/18/35
Skill/Dam.: 6/3
Hits: 28/56
Appear: 1D6+2



Special: Grapple to pin, then poison bite, damage 1p3, Disguise skill at full Charisma value.

Until recently, the cobra people dwelt only in the most remote jungles of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, where they were worshipped by primitive tribes of humans. With the chaos resulting from the Greater Depression, however, they have begun to expand their range into India, Africa, and Central America. Some have even been reported in the swamplands of the southeastern United States.

Cobra people appear human in most respects, but they are actually cold-blooded creatures with retractable fangs that inject extremely toxic poisons into their victims. Reports are that, like most terran reptiles, they lay eggs, but there have been some rumors of their mating with humans. Cobra people are carnivorous, swallowing their prey whole. Whenever possible, they prefer to eat human infants, but if pressed, they will settle for small animals such as cats, dogs, monkeys, young pigs, etc.

Typically, a small group of cobra people will contact a tribe of humans, convince it they are deities, and demand infant sacrifice in worship. In more civilized lands, the cobra people apparently infiltrate the criminal underground instead, taking positions of power, and using that power to obtain human babies on the black market.

DAEMONS

Strength: 23
Constitution: 18
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 6
Education: 2
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 16
Initiative: 6
Move: 4/8/30/50
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D10
Hits: 50/100
Appear: 1

Special: Dimension Walk. Some also have Animal Empathy, Pyrokinesis, Telekinesis, and/or Psychology.



Virtually every human culture has its demons, its evil spirits that plague humanity. There are the Hindu *asuras*, for instance, enemies of the benevolent gods. Among other things, they include *rakshasas*—a type of being that can only enter this world by taking on the form of an animal, monster, or beautiful woman—and *nagas*—which are serpent demons. There are the Persian *djinni*, spirits with physical bodies much like those of humans, but with nearly limitless magical powers. And there are also the *ifrits*, winged creatures of smoke, impervious to normal weapons, but susceptible to magic. There are the Japanese *oni*—huge creatures with

hideous faces, horns, and three digits on each extremity—and the *tengu*—spirits that possess the bodies of others. In Western myths, there are goblins, bogeys, ghosts, devils, and faeries, and a plethora of other beings. The names of the creatures vary as widely as the descriptions of their powers; nearly every tale describes them differently.

In **Dark Conspiracy**, these creatures are collected under one heading, *daemon*, from the ancient Greek word for *spirit* (whether good or evil). Daemons are physical creatures, but they are so highly empathic as to seem almost miraculous. The Dimension Walk skill enables them to enter proto-dimensions quite easily, disappearing from the Earth and reappearing at will. As well, they specialize in Human Empathy, Project Emotion, and Project Thought, using the latter in conjunction with their high Psychology and Leadership skills to manipulate weak-willed people. Some types are also quite good at Pyrokinesis and/or Telekinesis. A few have high Animal Empathy skill ratings, as well.

Daemons are perhaps the most pernicious of the Dark Minions, and there is speculation that they are very close in nature to the Dark Masters. That is, while many of the other races use humans for food or slaves, daemons seem to have no need other than the drive to create havoc.

The statistics and skills listed above are for the average daemon. Referees should feel free to adjust them to reflect the particular legend being recreated.

DESERT GHOUL

Strength: 7
Constitution: 4
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 2
Education: 2
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 4
Move: 4/15/25/40
Skill/Dam.: 5/2D6
Hits: 20/40
 # Appear: 1D10

The Mythology

Many tales throughout the world describe ghouls. Some stories tell of mindless automatons constantly in search of human flesh, others of men transformed into unholy creatures by their cannibalistic tendencies. Most of the beings described have only the most basic intelligence and are capable of capturing prey only via brute force. One type of ghoul that differs from the archetype, however, is the Arabian "desert ghoul" of the Middle Eastern and wastelands.

The Reality

Desert ghouls inhabit the deserts and barren mountains of the Saudi Arabian and Iraqi nations, although they may infest areas as far west as the Nile Valley and Sahara Desert, though no statistics are available to confirm this.

The total ghoul population of the Middle East is unknown. Experts believe that new human incursions into the desert over the last 40 years have resulted in more ghoul tombs and temples being discovered, and in the finders subsequently joining the legions of the dead. Not long ago, for instance, reports reached news agencies concerning a Saudi supply column classified as missing in action while crossing the desert on night maneuvers. A long-range patrol discovered the wrecked trucks and jeeps in a low valley in the central portion of the Sinai. The weapons belonging to the soldiers were found strewn across the ground. All had empty magazines, and the men had apparently fired into the desert around them in all directions.

None of the soldiers' bodies were found until two weeks later, when a tank column out on its own maneuvers some 80 kilometers from the location of the trucks discovered the fate of the men. They were found in a small depression, their uniforms torn from their bodies. Most had been entirely stripped of flesh. No evidence could be found to determine the identity of their attackers.

Physical Description

From a distance, the ghoul appears to be a normal human, wrapped in the loose robes and headdress common to the desert. Upon closer examination, their true nature becomes evident.

A ghoul's skin tends to be gray and sickly looking, hanging loosely from its wiry frame. Although appearing to be quite emaciated and feeble, it possesses remarkable strength for its build. The flesh on the creature's face is drawn tight across its bare skull and often shows signs of tearing when it has been unable to feed for more than a few months.

Its frightening features are its gray eyes, which are nothing more than orbs glowing with a dull, white light. Many people have seen eyes watching them from the darkness of the desert night, but most do not realize what they belong to, thinking them to be the usual nocturnal predators in search of sustenance.

Origins

The origin of these entities is a mystery, although several obscure legends, forgotten by most people centuries ago, give mention to these creatures.

The legends tell of the hidden tombs and temples within the deserts of these areas, many of them older than the pyramids of Egypt and South America. These places of power were dedicated to humanity's earliest deities, many of them apparently the black-hearted Dark Ones themselves. Foul incantations protected these unholy places, even after the last of the worshippers had long since died. With no congregations for the temples and no mourners at the tombs, the temples lay undisturbed for centuries until other people ventured into the deserts and built their homes around them.

The new inhabitants would discover the old sites and venture inward, their minds filled with images of jewels and gold. But even though the civilization that built them had died, the magic within had not, and each tomb robber who entered joined the ranks of the dead. Few escaped with their lives, and those who did never escaped with their sanity.

The powers that inhabited these edifices corrupted the bodies and spirits of their victims, and thus the ghouls of Arabia were born in the silent halls and crypts. As they once again ventured out into the night, they began to hunt for a new prize—human flesh.

Combat Abilities



Desert ghouls often work as a pack while hunting and stalking across the night sands in search of solitary prey foolish enough to walk the desert at night. They usually attack by surrounding their victims, keeping low to the ground to confuse the target as to their exact number.

Once within striking distance, they use their powerful arms to grapple their victims—a successful Difficult test of Strength is required to break free. Once the target is in their grasp, they use their long, prehensile tongues to stab through their prey's skin and inject their poison. If the tongue breaks the skin in the next phase, the target must pass a Difficult test of Constitution to avoid becoming too weak to struggle and incapable of moving at more than a crawl. These effects last for two hours, but the ghouls typically eat their victim (alive) long before that time runs out.

Although still vulnerable to combat damage, ghouls are resistant to it and seem to recover from it at a faster rate than human healing. Each combat turn, their systems heal 1D6 hit points.

DREAD SIDHE

Strength: 8
Constitution: 7
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 7
Education: 4
Charisma: 13
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/9/16/32
Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6+2
Hits: 80/160
 # Appear: 1

Special: A dread sidhe can create "groupies" (empathic slaves) with its bite. Besides normal skill levels for Dark Races, dread sidhe also have the Psychology skill at the level of their Intelligence rating.

Background

The dread sidhe (pronounced "she") are not really sidhe (fey folk) at all—they are an entirely different type of creature. However, they have come by their name because they are so often confused with dark elves (who *are* fey folk).

Dread sidhe are native to northern Europe. They are empathic vampires, feeding off the energy of human emotions. They prefer emotions of anger and despair, and they typically pursue a human career as a musician or an artist in order to engender those emotions. Realizing that adolescents and teenagers are prime sources of these emotions—that people at this age are in nearly constant emotional turmoil and are often looking for some sort of guidance (from nonauthority figures)—the dread sidhe have long focused their efforts on the young. When the rock 'n' roll movement started in England, they quickly recognized that involvement in the rock industry would give them easy access to kids.

General Description

The dread sidhe all appear basically human, but each has enlarged canine teeth (typically passed off as a cosmetic affectation). They do not use these fangs for drinking blood like traditional vampires, however, but rather to inject into their victims a controlling microorganism from their own bodies, forging an empathic bond that allows them to command these unfortunates. In modem parlance, this is typically called "making groupies."

Groupies

In order to create a "groupie," a dread sidhe bites its intended victim near a blood vessel, just as in traditional vampire tales. It then secretes through its fangs and into the victim's bloodstream a microorganism produced by its own body, through which it forges a permanent empathic link. In game terms, the bite does damage as poison, with a rating of 3p2. However, not only does the poison cause physical damage, it also begins to control the victim's mind, making the victim subject to that particular dread sidhe's will. Again in game terms, this control is represented by treating the poison damage also as "controlling hits." When the controlling hits reach a level equal to the victim's Intelligence rating, the victim becomes a devoted follower of the dread sidhe that bit him—a loyal groupie. The empathic bond that is formed has virtually unlimited range; in effect, the dread sidhe projects its wishes to the microorganism, and the microorganism conveys them to the victim's brain as commands.

Each dread sidhe can control a number of groupies equal to its Charisma rating. So individuals investigating the disappearance of a few teenagers may find themselves fighting a baker's dozen of fanatical followers. It is relatively rare for a particular dread sidhe to have a full set of groupies, however, as the creatures are callous and cruel, and groupie deaths are fairly frequent.

A groupie may attempt to disobey a particular command, but can only do so by succeeding at a Difficult test of Willpower. Of course, the master will generally respond by killing the disobedient groupie at the earliest opportunity. Note that succeeding to disobey a particular order does not break the empathic link. The groupie will still be under the power of future orders, and the master will remain aware of the groupie's approximate location (exact direction and rough distance). The only known way of completely breaking the empathic link is by killing the dread sidhe who forged it, after which the controlling microorganism will die.

Scams

As mentioned earlier, the dread sidhe feed on emotional energy. Therefore, most of their time and energy are devoted to generating strong emotions in a setting in which they can safely drink it in. Public events such as rock concerts, film showings, art exhibitions and occasionally even sporting events (particularly hockey or soccer matches) serve them well.

They can easily drink in enough energy to survive simply by visiting such events and mixing with the audience, but their pleasure is much more intense when they are themselves the focus of the attention. For this reason, most dread sidhe devote themselves to becoming quite adept at some type of performing art that allows them to draw their own crowds, as well as in Psychology, which helps them to manipulate those audiences.

Interestingly enough, however, the dread sidhe do not want superstar status. That would bring them unwanted attention. Instead, they like to move from place to place, staying in each location just long enough to perpetrate an elaborate "scam" on the locals. In its earliest stages, this scam is nothing more than advance publicity to gain the local population's interest. Shortly thereafter, the dread sidhe will arrive and begin performing at relatively small assemblies. As it gains growing interest from the locals, the creature will arrange larger and larger performances, culminating finally in a single, powerfully hideous conclusion to the sequence, such as prompting a mob lynching of some local figure, or a spree of looting, murder, and rape.

Afterward, the dread sighe will move on and lay low for a while before beginning again in a new locale under a new name.



DREAM MASTER

Strength: 5
Constitution: 5
Agility: 10
Intelligence: 6
Education: 1
Charisma: 15
Empathy: 12
Initiative: 3
Move: 10/20/30
Skill/Dam.: 5/2D6
Hits: 26/50
 # Appear: 1

Special: Dream masters have the ability to Dimension Walk.

It is not altogether uncommon to hear tales of people dying or suffering serious injury while sleepwalking. There have been tales of people walking out of windows, accidentally strangling themselves in twisted sheets or smothering themselves in pillows. Then there are those who simply died in their sleep with horrible contortions of fear on their faces. Many of these unfortunates have been the victim of creatures sometimes known as dream masters.

Physical Description

Dream masters are tall (just over two meters), thin (under 80 kilograms) humanoids with fairly standard human features. They have a bald, human-looking head, though the skin is darker and more leathery than normal for humans. Their hands have only four fingers, each nearly twice the thickness of a human digit and ending in a short but heavy claw.

Dream Haunting

A dream master haunts the dream of sleepers, but it can only prey upon the dream of people with at least some Empathy. Its favorite target is someone with a combination of great Empathic potential (i.e., a high Empathy attribute) but little control (i.e., low Empathic skill levels) and little resistance (i.e., low Willpower). Such people radiate their dreams strongly, like a sort of Empathic beacon, allowing dream masters to mentally bridge the gap between their dimension and our own. A dream master can do so once per day.

Once a dream master has discovered a suitable victim, it must insert itself into the person's dream. This requires a Difficult test of the dream master's Human Empathy skill, with the following modifiers added to the die roll: subtract the victim's Empathy attribute and add the victim's highest Empathy skill.

For example, a victim with Empathy 4 and Animal Empathy 3 as the highest Empathic skill level would yield a net -1 to the die roll. Note that this almost always results in a net modifier beneficial to the dream master.

If successful, the dream master will begin working to change the victim's dreams into hideous nightmares, using Project Thought

If unsuccessful, the dream master is incapable of entering the person's dreams and will leave in search of some other victim.

Sleep Deprivation

A Power Level is rolled for a dream master's Project Thought skill, as usual, to determine the quality of the creature's projection. But the level generated also determines the chance that the victim suffers weariness from having had a troubled sleep. At the end of their normal sleep period, victims must roll 1D6 greater than the power level achieved or suffer a temporary -1 modifier to all attribute and skill levels. (In other words, a 2 or better is required if Basic Success was achieved, a 3 or better if Level Two was achieved, and so on.) These negative modifiers are cumulative, so a character who failed the 1D6 roll three days in a row would be suffering a -3 modifier to all attributes and skills. For each four-hour period that a character sleeps undisturbed, the modifier is reduced by 1 point. Thus, a character could nap during the day to recover from the previous night's loss, for instance.

Characters suffering from weariness will tend to act irritable, and as the size of the modifier mounts, they may act increasingly irrational and paranoid.



Dream Death

Once a dream master manages to acquire a Stage Six success on its Power Level when using Project Thought to haunt its victim's dreams, the creature can cause the victim's death in one of two ways: The victim can be made to suffer a heart attack while sleeping, or the victim can be forced to commit suicide while sleepwalking. Surviving the first requires an Easy test of the victim's adjusted Constitution. The second can only be avoided by the intervention of other people physically restraining the victim. However, if someone intervenes in this way, the dream master may decide to manifest itself physically by means of Dimension Walk and battle the defender.

Dream Defenders

Because of the nature of the empathic link established between a dream master and its victim other empathic characters can enter the link as well. Anyone can "eavesdrop" on the victim's dreams by means of a successful Human Empathy roll. Those who also succeed at a Difficult test of Project Thought can force the invading dream master to make a second Difficult test of Human Empathy to maintain dream contact, but this time substituting the eavesdropper's highest Empathy skill for the victim's.

If the dream master fails at this second roll, its contact is broken, and it will leave in search of easier prey.

If it succeeds at the roll, both the original victim and the eavesdropper will suffer any effects of sleep deprivation caused by the dream master's Project Thought roll. Or worse, if the dream master manages to score a Stage Six success with its Project Thought skill, both victim and eavesdropper will be subject to the effects of dream death.

Role-playing Nightmares

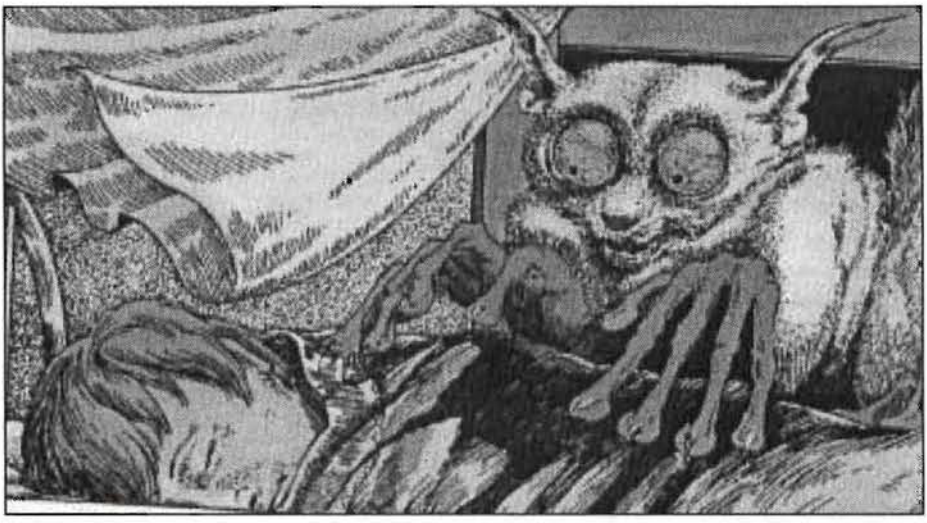
Referees are encouraged to role-play with their players the nightmares caused by a dream master, rather than simply announcing what the creature rolled and having the character check for weariness. The dream settings should be based upon the affected characters' skills and the intensity of the dream on the Power Level the dream master gained with its Project Thought roll. The dream master will tend to project images that play upon the character's weakest skills, and the character's subconscious will attempt to change the dream to something that allows the use of a more practiced skill.

For example, if a character is not much of a swimmer, the dream master might project images of a terrible flood sweeping over the character. A character who is good at Climbing might then choose to adjust the dream to include a tower that can be mounted. The dream master could respond by having the flood undermine the tower, causing it to fall. The character might then use a high Acrobatics skill to land safely on a spur of high ground, and so on.

If the dream master rolled well at its Project Thought attempt, the character would find his head nearly underwater before being able to dream up the tower. On the other hand, if the creature rolled poorly, the character might barely suffer wet feet before climbing above the water.

DREAMWEAVER

Strength: 2
Constitution: 3
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 5
Education: 2
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 16
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/9/18/35
Skill/Dam.: 4/2
Hits: 10/18
 # Appear: 1



A dreamweaver is one of the many Dark Minions that live for the misery they create to feed on, not for bloodletting and mayhem in themselves. The creature targets its prey when psychological defenses reach their lowest ebb—in the depths of sleep. It manipulates the very stuff of dreams, until the victim lives in a waking hell of warped desires, induced obsessions and ever-growing madness. Historically, most victims of dreamweavers have been diagnosed with a variety of mental illness and treated however their society deals with such unfortunates.

Folklore of medieval Europe came closest to slowly warping those dreams over the course of identifying the causal agent, however, with its tales of incubi, succubi, and personified nightmares. Because other Dark Minions follow similar modes of attack, and because a dreamweaver is rarely seen or captured unless it is careless, the creature has often been confused with other beings.

Physical Description

A dreamweaver's true form is that of a small, furry humanoid, about the size of a housecat. Dreamweavers have enormous eyes and thin, elongated fingers, lending it the look of an overgrown tarsier. One may enter a home in the empathic disguise of a forlorn kitten or a skinny puppy (particularly if it hopes to target a child); however, an open window is all the invitation a dreamweaver really needs. A pile of dirty clothing, a chair pulled into the comer, a box in the bedroom closet—all provide adequate hiding places for a dreamweaver while it waits for its victim to bed down for the night.

Modus Operandi

The dreamweaver's mode of attack is subtle—first reading the natural dreams of its victim, then slowly warping those dreams over the course of many nights. Every case is different. A dieting (or starving) victim might dream of a holiday feast. But the dream returns the next night with shadowy intimations of poison laced into the chocolate silk pie or maggots hiding in the rice pilaf. Subconscious fears about food grow. Soon the victim stops eating at home (but cannot explain why), then he cannot bear the idea of

eating out. Only food prepared personally remains edible, and eventually not even that. All the while, the victim is dreaming of fabulous banquets, with every gustatory passion enticing, all dread forgotten—until the lobster vomits butterslime and the thousand-year eggs hatch. A dreamweaver spinning this particular scenario might permit one category of food to go untainted, allowing the dreamer to avoid starvation and prolong the agony.

Or, then again, perhaps not.

Anything a person might dream is grist for the dreamweaver's mill. Anxiety dreams slowly become petrifying insecurity; the desire to get the upper hand on one's boss becomes a Napoleonic power fantasy played out on the streets; sexual fantasies take on darker permutations; and dreams of flying rocket out of control. All the while, the dreamweaver feeds on the dreamer's confusion, fear and madness, and on the equally satisfying emotions of anxiety from those close to the dreamer.

Progressive Symptoms

A dreamweaver's victim is likely to be unaware of the progression of events, particularly in the earlier stages. A dreamer experiences a few particularly vivid dreams, with the attendant emotions spilling over into the waking day. As the dreams become more psychologically dangerous, the victim's own defense mechanisms may kick in to shield him from recalling the actual dream. By the time those barriers are broken, the victim may be suffering hallucinations and delusions brought on by sleep deprivation. With natural dreaming increasingly derailed, the psychological strains feed back into each night's subsidence into deeper madness.

At first, the dreamweaver's victim wakens a little haggard, with flashback memories of disturbing dreams. The dreamer may sleep more than usual, or awaken in the night with a sense of foreboding and oppression.

The dreamweaver must be quite close to the victim to affect the dreamweaving for which the race is named. A normally light sleeper might even sense a small body resting on his chest, though the dreamweaver's exceptional stealth, agility and empathy make it very unlikely to be seen.

The length of time a dreamweaver works on its victim varies. A patient, experienced dreamweaver might be able to drag things out for a year, granting surcease for a time, then slowly building to another near-crisis before slacking back again. An impatient or particularly hungry dreamweaver can destroy a dreamer in a night or two, with the victim catapulted into waking nightmares that resonate to the darkest depths of his personality.

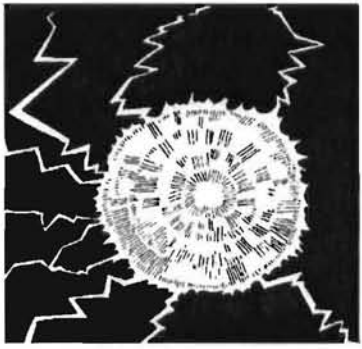
Breaking the Curse

Victims take numerous steps to shake the nightmares, some more effective than others. Changing where one sleeps works, but not for long, unless the victim makes a long-distance, permanent move. Watchers are often recruited from among spouses, friends, or health professionals—all of whom may be boondoggled if the dreamweaver wants to finish the "meal" it has started, and all of whom also need to sleep and dream. Tranquilizer and antidepressant drugs which suppress normal dreaming also muffle the dreamweaver's activities, but they cannot halt the dreams, nor permanently shield victims from their private stock of potential madness—drugs treat the symptoms, not the "disease."

Dreamweavers are a particularly cowardly race and—as can be seen from their attributes—they are not fighters. What skills they possess are used to acquire promising victims and otherwise remain out of sight. If a dreamweaver is actually discovered, it is likely to abandon its victim and seek another. If the first victim was particularly satisfying, though, the creature may return much later (weeks, months or years) and seek a more subtle, careful approach. To escape detection, some dreamweavers make a habit of not "riding" any victim to destruction, but only "sipping" briefly for a few nights or a week, then moving on before the victim suspects anything amiss. A trail of unease, weariness, short tempers and odd impulses is all that is left to show what has passed in the depths of the night.

ELECTROGEIST

Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: —
Initiative: 6
Move: 20*
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D10*
Hits: **
 # Appear: 1



* When in ball lightning form. Movement through an electrical circuit is at electronic speeds. Damage from an electrical circuit depends upon the circuits strength.

** Can only be destroyed by grounding or electrically overpowering.

With their penchant for causing mischief by energizing electrical devices, electrogeists can be very dangerous, and very strange, opponents.

Physical Description

The electrogeist is a strange construct of electrical energy, a being without form. Somewhat akin to the energy ETs, it is composed of ordered current, but it lacks the nucleus of the energy ETs. The electrogeist can assume a physical form, appearing as a rolling ball of electrical force. It only does this when it wants to traverse the physical distance between unconnected circuits

Electrogeists are quite rare, fortunately for many power grids. They live in electrical circuits, traveling via power lines. No circuit seems to be too small for an electrogeist; they have been known to occupy lap top computers and artillery range finders as well as larger energy matrices. There does seem to be a limit imposed upon the upper size of electrogeists, however: They can't occupy more than one circuit at a time.

Behavior

The habit of taking over all the electrical appliances on a circuit is what earned the electrogeist its name. An electrogeist will move into a circuit and animate all the electronics linked to that circuit, causing them to act without external activation. The electrogeist does what it can to turn the area its circuit rovers into electronic madness. The

devices can't do much they normally couldn't anyway, though, but the electrogeist can cause enough of an arc to connect a circuit that wasn't previously connected. For instance, a toaster couldn't walk off, or even load itself, but an electrogeist could arc to make its elements heat. The only way to stop an appliance from being controlled is to unplug it from the circuit.

Combat Abilities

Electrogeists can travel at electronic speeds when using electrical lines. They can arc across the distance between circuits that are no more than three meters apart.

If the circuits are farther apart, the electrogeist can form a ball of power resembling ball lightning and roll at the rate listed above, passing through any thin obstacle that isn't grounded. It can also make melee attacks at long melee range by using electrical arcs while in this form.

Electrogeists seem to delight in jinxing computers, switching or deleting data, and they take perverse pleasure in attacking computer savants (people with Computer Empathy). If an electrogeist gets the drop on a person who is using Computer Empathy, it can deliver an electric charge to that person, doing 1D10 damage per phase (applied to the chest). In most devices, the current is AC (alternating current), which causes the victim's muscles to lock in place, preventing escape unless someone else breaks the connection. If the victim is using a portable computer—one that works off internal batteries—he takes only a single burst of 1D6 damage, and the batteries are drained. (Damages are similar for characters in direct physical contact with an open electrical circuit when an electrogeist arcs it closed.)

Fortunately, computer empaths can easily detect the presence of an electrogeist in a computer system—even a Basic Success at Computer Empathy will reveal its effect on data flow—and they can use Project Emotion and Project Thought on it as on any other living creature. Furthermore, computer empaths may disconnect from the system before an electrogeist attacks if they score at least a Stage Two success with their skill.

Electrogeists love robots. A robot is a physical form, capable of great mischief, and if an electrogeist plans well, it can simply arc back to a convenient circuit when the robot gets blown to bits by its opponents.

Weaknesses

An electrogeist may be destroyed by overpowering it or grounding it. Overpowering an electrogeist can only be done by trapping the entity in a closed circuit and then flooding that circuit with major amounts of power (about 30 seconds of 440-volt industrial power or 60 seconds of 220-volt semi-industrial power would suffice, as would a five-second jolt of direct power plant feed).

Interestingly enough, nature seems to abhor electrogeists—their magnetic fields attract lightning. Electrogeists make themselves scarce during electrical storms, because a lighting strike hitting an electrogeist's ball form or circuit will almost always destroy the pest.

Grounding an electrogeist is easy when it's rolling lightning. Any significant disturbance of the ball will disperse it—a large explosion centered on or near the ball (an accurate grenade), dousing it with water or touching it with a grounding iron (say, a steel arrow trailing electrical wire).

Grounding a circuit-occupying electrogeist involves closing the circuit and draining the energy into the earth.

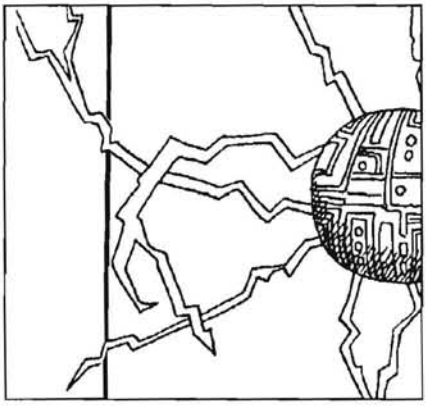
EXTRATERRESTRIALS

Extraterrestrials, or ETs, may well be the most difficult Dark Minions for the referee to convey effectively. The reason for this is that many players will not be used to thinking of ETs horrifically. They may have images of cute, child-sized humanoids with overlarge eyes like Chihuahuas in cheap velvet paintings, of aliens who have come to save us from ourselves. On the other hand, there are also ample examples of warty, bug-eyed monsters who have come to steal away Earth women. Neither of these images is quite appropriate for the paranoid horror of **Dark Conspiracy**.

Dark Conspiracy ETs are both subtle and horrific. They are mysterious creatures of soulless superscience. These extraterrestrials view our planet as a cage full of laboratory animals upon whom they can experiment. For instance, some years back, a magazine called UFO Reports carried within its covers stories of aliens taking over mental hospitals in New York state and performing head transplant surgery upon the inmates. Nearly every tabloid currently on the market carries regular features about aliens abducting someone and performing experiments on them. The paranoia surrounding these creatures is also evident in reports that they have established secret bases inside the Earth.

In **Dark Conspiracy**, these sorts of stories are all too true. ETs are taking over the planet—or at least they are trying to. It is they who were the major force behind the worldwide economic crash that began the Greater Depression. They are the ones who secretly control the largest megacorporations. They have offices within every major government, and secret experimental installations all over the world. In places, they have even replaced entire populations of towns. Like a metastasizing cancer, they have infiltrated human society at all levels.

But ETs are not merely one race. There are insectoid ETs, tentacular ETs, humanoid ETs with bulgy eyes and foreheads, and even some that are pure energy. These disparate races do not always work together well, which may be all that keeps them from completely enslaving the Earth. The one thing that all of the extraterrestrials have in common is that they are extremely advanced technologically.



ENERGY ETS
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 18
Education: 20
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 4
Move: 40
Skill/Dam.: 6*/4D10**
Hits: 4/8
Appear: 1D10/2

* Possesses the following special skills: Darkling Empathy 6, Human Empathy 4, Project Thought 10, Telekinesis 4, Willpower Drain 8.

** This is an electrical attack with a medium range of eight meters.

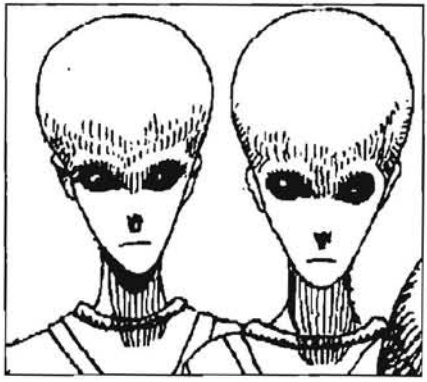
Special: Two levels more difficult to hit, due to small size. Armor value 1.

Each energy ET is a glowing sphere of pure energy, two meters in diameter, centered upon a tiny ball of matter (0.10 kilograms) that serves as its focus point. In combat, the creature gives off bolts of lightning, treated as a fire combat attack. It can only be destroyed by damaging its focal point, a fairly difficult thing to accomplish, given that the point is small and has a tough surface. Once that focal point is destroyed, however, the creature's energy disperses in a violent electrical display. Inside the tiny ball that remains, there can be seen circuitry of metallic veinings in a grainy, rocklike substance.

Energy ETs are the least likely of any ETs to directly intervene in human affairs. Typically, they merely observe. Sometimes, however, they will take action to destroy some human endeavor: an interplanetary craft, an advanced computer installation, or perhaps even a major nuclear power plant. In such cases, the devastation they cause can spill over onto local populations.

HUMANOID ETS

Strength: 3
Constitution: 2
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 11
Education: 16
Charisma: 2
Empathy: 9
Initiative: 3
Move: 2/7/12/20
Skill/Dam.: 7/2
Hits: 16/30
Appear: 1D6



Special: Pyrokinesis and/or Telekinesis. Some carry death-ray weapons and/or Dimension Walk devices.

These ETs are the staple of tabloid newspaper stories. (There is some evidence that they are the basis of some legends of elves and faeries, as well.) They look like hairless humans with small, slender bodies and overly large craniums. Their faces are small and delicate, with the exception of their oversized eyes, which are generally dark blue or black with no visible whites. Their features betray no emotions. They travel about in saucer-shaped vessels that are little more than flying laboratories.

The most frightening thing about these creatures is their utter disregard for individual human life. Like soulless laboratory workers, they collect specimens of humanity (or occasionally other terran creatures), conduct psychological or surgical experiments with them, then destroy or discard the test subjects when they are finished.

Most humanoid ETs stay very close to their vessels. Some of the most human looking, however, will sometimes infiltrate human society, if there is an end to be gained. They might join the research staff of a scientific facility, for instance, to sabotage its work.

INSECTOID ETS



Strength: 5
Constitution: 4
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 8
Education: 8
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 4/12/20/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/4
Hits: 24/50
Appear: 2D6

Special: Armor value 1 (versus melee only). Animal Empathy 10 (insects only—see below), Project Thought 6.

GRUBS

Strength: 10
Constitution: 13
Agility: 3
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 6
Move: 3
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D10
Hits: 40/60
Appear: 1D6

Insectoid ETs want humans for one purpose only: as food. But they would like to keep that food supply running for as long as possible. So, like cattle farmers, they work to keep their herds placid and productive. In the case of human cattle, this means maintaining social and political systems as well as feed and medicine. For this reason, insectoid ETs have been among the Dark Minions most directly involved in terran politics. many of the megacorporate strongholds in urban areas are actually nests of insectoid ETs—their outer blocks maintained in terran style as a facade of normalcy, but their inner regions transformed into bizarre, chitinous tunnels, oozing with moisture, and filled with hungry ET grubs. it is a terrible thing to be captured by these ETs and deposited in the nests as grub food. Even though the grubs are slow, there are multitudes of them, and a person cannot run indefinitely.

The adults have a specialized form of Animal Empathy that works only with insects. By use of Project Thought, they are able to command any insects they are in empathic contact with (including their own grubs).

In appearance, the adults are roughly human size and look something like a terran cockroach, but standing upright like a mantis. The grubs are somewhat larger, averaging two meters in length and a meter in diameter, with pale, bloated bodies and glossy black heads.

TENTACULAR ETS

Strength: 11
Constitution: 11
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 11
Education: 6
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 3
Move: 2/4/8/15
Skill/Dam.: 6*/5
Hits: 26/50
Appear: 2D6

* Each does 1D6 attacks per action in melee combat, due to their multiple tentacles.

Special: Swimming 10.



The tentacular ETs are perhaps the most hideous looking of the ET races described here. They are amphibians that look something like a cross between a human and a squid. A fleshy, bulbous head surmounts an upright, fleshy torso, ringed by manipulative tentacles at shoulder level, and heavier, "walking" tentacles at floor level.

Their purpose is simple: conquer the Earth and make it their own. Fortunately for humans, there are very few of these creatures and they prefer to remain near the oceans.

FEY FOLK

The word "faerie" has not always meant only "of delicate beauty and magical charm" (as Merriam-Webster puts it). Many of the creatures in faerie legends are beautiful but cruel, and best avoided if at all possible. In former times, these were sometimes called the "fair folk," a euphemism used to avoid drawing their attention, but not entirely accurate. And humans who seemed touched by them were called "fay," meaning prone to faerie visions, or "fey," meaning doomed or fated. It is from the latter that we coined the term "fey folk" to represent the Dark Minions that spawned the faerie myths.

In legend, these creatures are strong with magical power, particularly the power of illusion (in fact, no one can be quite certain what they really look like), and they dwell in a world that touches our own but is somehow one step removed from it. In **Dark Conspiracy**, their entire purpose is to beguile in order to enslave or destroy. They are dangerous creatures, masters of terror and illusion, and they like nothing better than to drive people to madness and death.

The fey folk all are highly empathic, and they are so skilled at projecting thought images that they can give a victim waking dreams, creating a totally illusory world, if desired.

BANSHEE



Strength: 7
Constitution: 3
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 6
Education: 4
Charisma: 9
Empathy: 20
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 7/10
Hits: 16/32
Appear: 1

Special: Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Willpower Drain, Dimension Walk.

This creature projects its image a wailing woman in white cloak and robes, often at a stream or river, washing bloody cloths in the water. Legend is that it appears to a family when a death is imminent. In actuality, the banshee brings about those deaths by driving its victims to despair, then taking advantage of their weakened condition to make its attack.

BARGHEST



Strength: 16
Constitution: 14
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 6
Empathy: 18
Initiative: 6
Move: 4/15/30/60
Skill/Dam.: 5/12
Hits: 30/60
Appear: 1

Special: Animal Empathy, Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Willpower Drain, Dimension Walk.

Like the banshee, the barghest haunts its intended victim for days before finally attacking. At night, it sends horrible dreams of pursuit by ferocious hounds. During the day, it projects an image of a great mastiff, always prowling at the edge of vision, seen only in from corner of the eye. Finally, when its victim's terror has peaked, the barghest attacks. This attack always comes at night, and always when the victim is alone. Some people have tried to protect themselves by surrounding themselves with friends, but the barghest is expert at drawing its victims away from protection. One theory is that it projects an image of a friend to lure the victim out, then drops the illusion just before it attacks.

DARK ELVES



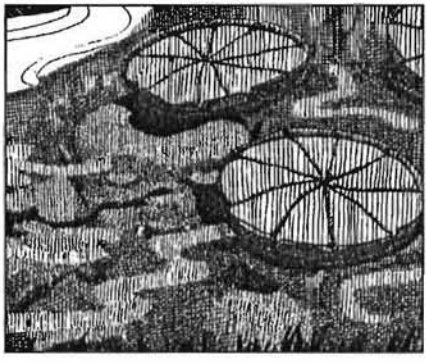
Strength: 6
Constitution: 4
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 5
Education: 4
Charisma: 9
Empathy: 10
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/10/20/35
Skill/Dam.: 7/4
Hits: 20/40
Appear: 2D6
Special: Dimension Walk.

The dark elves are apparently very human in appearance, although fairer than average. Legend is that they dwell in vast subterranean caverns, where they maintain entire underground civilizations. But the dark elves have always taken a great interest in humanity, a perverse interest which derives pleasure from human suffering and ruination. As a result, individual dark elves often join human society, where they pass themselves off as human, generally preferring to pose as artists, poets, musicians, or magicians.

The dark elves are incredibly cruel. In human cities, they prowl the most elegant night spots, looking for victims to invite to a "very private party. " Once a sufficient number of people have been collected, the dark elves lead them to an isolated spot and slaughter them in the most hideous ways imaginable. (For example, one particular slaughter involved a locked warehouse and a threshing machine.) In rural regions, pairs of dark elves will pose as travelers in need of shelter for the night, only to turn on their hosts and murder them in their beds.

The dark elves are quite capable of using any human technologies, although it is doubtful that they ever develop new technologies of their own. The one exception to this is the creation of animator spirits (see above), which the dark elves are quite accomplished at.

FUATH



Strength: 10
Constitution: 8
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 2
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 12
Initiative: 6
Move: 5/10/30/60
Skill/Dam.: 8/8
Hits: 25/50
Appear: 1
Special: Makes grappling attacks to subdue, then drowns its victims.

Fuathas (pronounced "fyathas"), or pookas, are a collection of various amphibious creatures that haunt bodies of water, in the guise of animals, intending to trick people in to drown. One of the most reported is the each-uisge ("ek-wiskey"), which appears as a horse, tempts people (particularly children) to ride, then carries them underwater.

A related creature is shellycoat, which lurks underwater waiting for a chance to grab unwary victims and pull them in.

GARGOYLE, LESSER



Strength: 12
Constitution: 6
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 7
Education: 4
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 14
Initiative: 4
Move: 10/20/45*
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 25/50**
 # Appear: 1d6+3

* This is flying speed; lesser gargoyles move at human rates when on foot

* * Lesser gargoyles have 1 point of natural armor on head and chest locations.

Special: These creatures have the Dimension Walk skill and two new Empathy skills: Empathic Screen and Sleep Projection (see below).

The lesser gargoyle may lack the strength and intimidation power of its larger cousins, but it makes up for both in cunning and deceit.

The Mythology

Medieval legends speak of succubi and incubi, sexual demons that visited monks and nuns in the night, tempting them to sate their lusts. According to the legends, those who succumbed to the temptation were found dead the next morning, their souls carried off to perdition by their nocturnal visitants.

The Reality

The legends of the succubus and incubus speak of insubstantial spirits, but in this, the legends are wrong. The lesser gargoyle is very much a creature of flesh, blood and bone. But it has used its empathic powers to confuse the minds of its viewers, intentionally perpetrating a protective falsehood.

There is no way of knowing what devious Dark Lord created the lesser gargoyles. Strong evidence exists that the creatures are not a result of natural development, but that they are humans warped into another physical form. The strongest evidence for this supposition is that they are cross-fertile with humans. In fact, lesser gargoyles cannot breed with one another to produce offspring—they must breed with a human being.

Physical Description

The lesser gargoyle is a bipedal humanoid creature that looks vaguely human, but with two large, batlike wings protruding from its back. It stands 1.5 meters tall and weighs approximately 70 kilograms. The wings are covered with criss-crossing red veins which are clearly visible through the skin. The creature has three-fingered hands and feet, each capped with a blood-red claw.

The head is bald and slightly oblong. The portion containing nose and mouth protrudes slightly and has two three-centimeter-long fangs which extend from the upperjaw. Folklore would have you believe that the lesser gargoyle uses these to suck blood from its victim's neck like a traditional vampire. Instead, the teeth are merely used for ripping open the victim's flesh.

The creature has deeply set, glowing red eyes, which see things in the red to infrared portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, rather than in the human range.

The head is surmounted by two pointed ears, very much like those of bats, and these are so sensitive that the creatures have been reported to overhear whispered conversations at distances up to 500 meter.

Empathic Screen

The lesser gargoyle has an innate ability to blend in with its surroundings. It is an excellent mimic of human behavior, but that is not, of course, the entire story. The creature also has a highly developed empathic sense that subconsciously recognizes when a human is looking its way and encourages the human mind to see a more normal figure than the gargoyle's true form. In effect, the creature will appear differently to different viewers, even if they are seeing it at exactly the same time. Those familiar with the ability call it an Empathic Screen.

Each time a lesser gargoyle is viewed by a human, a Difficult test of the viewer's Willpower must be made to determine if the viewer "sees through" the Empathic Screen. If the test is unsuccessful, the viewer sees the gargoyle as a nondescript human. If, however, the test is successful, a success level is generated for it in the way in which empathic power levels are rolled, but with the viewer's Willpower rating and the gargoyle's Empathic Screen rating exchanging places. That is, the success level consists of the viewer's Willpower plus 1D6, minus the gargoyle's Empathic Screen skill. The resulting number is compared to the Empathic Power Level Chart, with the following results:

Level	*Result*
Basic Success	The gargoyle appears as a human, but with a slightly projected upper and lower jaw, and with slightly pointed ears.
Stage One	As with basic success, but with a more pronounced "muzzle" and obvious fangs.
Stage Two	As with Stage One, but with a greenish cast to the skin.
Stage Three	As with Stage Two, but with obvious red eyes.
Stage Four	As with Stage Three, but with obvious bat-like ears.
Stage Five	Looks like a human with large bat-like wings, fangs, claws, glowing red eyes and a pale green tint to its leathery skin.
Stage Six	The creature appears as it really is.

Sleep Projection

Lesser gargoyles' usual tactics revolve around the sleeping individual. It really doesn't matter to them if the individual is alone or not. When they get into close proximity to their intended victim (within 10 meters) they use their Empathic Sleep Projection. The results of the power levels are as follows:

Level	*Result*
Basic Success	The victim's limbs feel heavy. -1 to Initiative.
Stage One	The victim feels drowsy. -2 to Initiative.
Stage Two	The victim is very sleepy. -2 to Initiative. Tasks are one level more difficult.
Stage Three	The victim keeps nodding off. -2 to Initiative. Tasks are two levels more difficult.
Stage Four	The victim falls asleep but can be shaken awake, in which case the effects of Stage Three apply.
Stage Five	The victim falls asleep and can only be kept awake if someone pays constant attention to doing so.
Stage Six	The victim falls asleep and cannot be wakened, even with physical pain.

Once the victim is asleep, the lesser gargoyle will use Project Emotion to bring about sexual arousal in order to breed. After breeding, female lesser gargoyles generally kill their victim immediately and feast on his heart, liver and brain. Male lesser gargoyles occasionally carry their victims off instead, keeping them captive until a child is born and weaned, then killing them. However, on very rare occasions, for reasons not understood, lesser gargoyles leave their victims alive.

The offspring of unions between lesser gargoyles and humans are apparently always lesser gargoyles.

GARGOYLE, MEDITERRANEAN

Strength: 15
Constitution: 20
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 3
Move: 5/10/30*
Skill/Dam.: 7/3D10
Hits: 100/200**
 # Appear: 1D6

* This is flying speed; Mediterranean gargoyles move at human rates when grounded.

** Mediterranean gargoyles have an armor value of 2 to head and chest, 1 to all other hit locations.

Special: Mediterranean gargoyles can Dimension Walk, and they have a special camouflage skill (see "Physical Description," below.)

The earliest sculptures of gargoyles are from the Mediterranean region, such as those discovered in the ruins of Pompeii. Legends surrounding the creatures appeared in Assyrian times in conjunction with worship of Baal, a fertility god and bringer of both life and death. But during subsequent centuries, interest in those legends waned until, in the medieval period, the subject of gargoyles took on a new fascination, as evidenced in the stone carvings adorning the roofs of the most significant Gothic structures.

Even now, the creatures live among us, often perching in plain sight among their stone representations adorning our roofs.

Physical Description

The Mediterranean gargoyle stands upright between three to four meters in height and weighs between 200 and 500 kilograms. It has very reptilian features, with a long snout and eyes set on the sides of its head. Its skin is a stony gray, and has a leathery look and feel to it. On its back are batlike wings which have a span twice as wide as the creature is tall. (Supposition is that the creatures have an innate telekinetic ability that at least partly negates their body weight; otherwise, it is impossible to understand how they could fly.) The Mediterranean gargoyle is basically bipedal. Its hands and feet feature two fingers and an opposing thumb, all very muscular and thick, and all ending in a long claw.

When standing still, the Mediterranean gargoyle has the ability to appear as if it is made of stone. It takes a Difficult test of Observation to recognize that the gargoyle is in fact not a statue.

If the creature is in its hypnotic state (see "Feeding Habits," below), there is a +2 die modification to this test.

Combat Tactics

The Mediterranean gargoyle loves nothing better than the thrill of the kill, preferably done in total anonymity—i.e., without the prey even realizing what hit it.

The creatures get the greatest enjoyment out of simply swooping down on unsuspecting prey and ripping it limb from limb.

One of the Mediterranean gargoyle's favorite tactics is to swoop down from a hidden position and grab its prey by the shoulders, then fly straight up several meters before dropping the victim, or fly forward at great speed to slam the victim into a wall or cliff face.

Swooping down and grabbing the victim requires a standard unarmed melee combat roll. To attempt this feat, the gargoyle must have clear maneuvering room to swoop down on its prey and continue its move away. Victim who are aware of the gargoyle's presence may attempt an Average test of Agility to avoid being grabbed. Victims who are grabbed suffer 1D6 damage to the hit location being held, due to the crushing power of the gargoyle's grip. Each combat phase thereafter, the gargoyle can climb upward two meters while carrying its prey. Dropped prey takes damage per the normal falling rules. Alternatively, the gargoyle can travel up to 10 meters horizontally per phase while carrying a human, then slam its prey into a vertical object, doing 1D6 damage to each hit location per meter flown in the phase just before impact.

Occasionally, a gargoyle will combine both types of impact, carrying a victim high into the air, slamming it into a wall, then letting it fall back to earth from the point of impact.

More important to the gargoyles than the actual damage done is the fact that the victim is typically stunned or incapacitated by the maneuver, allowing the gargoyle to swoop back down on the victim and rip its throat out with little or no resistance.



Feeding Habits

Mediterranean gargoyles find human hearts, livers, and especially brains to be delicacies, but will eat anything they have time to consume. They eat their prey on the spot of the kill nearly every time. 'The only real exception is the occasional kill in which they may make use of an edged weapon, decapitating the victim and saving the head for later consumption on their perch.

A Mediterranean gargoyle can consume meat at the rate of one kilogram per undisturbed minute. On the average, half the body weight of a human is considered nourishment for a gargoyle. Their metabolisms are such that they can subsist on as little as 10 kilograms of food a day and can store food up to one-fourth their own total mass within their bodies at any given point. When food is scarce, the can also enter a self-hypnotic trance and subsist on as little as one-half kilogram of this stored material per day.

GARGOYLE, ROCK

Strength: 8
Constitution: 7
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 4
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 7
Initiative: 4
Move: 15/25/40*
Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6+4
Hits: 28/56**
 # Appear: 2D10

* Movement given is flying rate. On foot, rock gargoyles travel at human rates.
** Rock gargoyles have I point of armor on all hit locations.

Physical Description

The inspiration for the leering stone guardians adorning many medieval churches comes from a creature generally called the rock gargoyle. Individual rock gargoyles vary in appearance, but most are greenish-gray humanoids with tough reptilian skin and yellow

eyes. Rock gargoyles usually have long, sharp claws on both their hands and feet, as well as pointed teeth and one or more horns. They have no visible hair on their entire bodies. Sprouting from a rock gargoyle's back are two huge, batlike wings. Those rock gargoyles that can speak do so in a low, gravely voice.

Broodhome

The creatures are most often used as guards by the Dark Lords and their more powerful minions. When a spot needing live-in guards is identified, a rock gargoyle queen may be brought in to establish a brood at the location to be guarded. The rock gargoyles fiercely defend their new nesting ground, becoming unwitting but fanatical guards for whoever placed them. Well-established Demonground locations can have quite large rock gargoyle populations that have been living and growing there for many years—this is one of the reasons so few who wander into a such a place ever wander back out.

Most rock gargoyles prefer to live in caverns or abandoned buildings where a network of easily defensible chambers have to be traversed by any attacker wishing to reach the queen and her eggs. In urban areas, the creatures make use of any sewer systems or large buildings for their lair. They are fanatically territorial and will fight to the death, even against the most overwhelming odds, in defense of their home and eggs. All rock gargoyles in a particular broodhome are related, having all hatched from the eggs of the same queen.

Rock gargoyles are nocturnal and do all their hunting at night, although they keep watch over their territory 24 hours a day.

Reproduction and Expansion

The queen is the only member of the community that is not asexual. A single queen lays a clutch of some 20 to 30 eggs per year in the community dung heap. These eggs then grow for a period of five years, absorbing nutrients from the decaying dung and constantly increasing the size of their shells, adding new layers on the outside as the inner layers are reabsorbed by the embryo. At the end of the gestation period, the eggs hatch into fully grown rock gargoyles which are immediately taken into the community.

At irregular intervals, one of the newly hatched rock gargoyles is a queen. When this happens, the new queen and the other rock gargoyles in that clutch form a new brood. If a Dark Lord desires to plant a new group of rock gargoyles, the brood may be transported to the new location to start a community. Or, if the local area is large enough, the new broodhome may be established in the same vicinity as the old one. If neither of these occurs, the queen and the rest of the hatchlings take flight in search of a new lair. Over time, this has produced many scattered and isolated groups of rock gargoyles which are no longer under the direct influence of a Dark Lord.

Rock gargoyles are not evil in themselves. They have no designs of conquest or desire to destroy. Like humans, rock gargoyles are chiefly interested in a secure, continued existence for themselves and the members of their community. Conflict arises when that security is threatened, rock gargoyles being savage fighters easily provoked by any intrusion. The Dark Lords prey upon these characteristics in using rock gargoyle communities to their own ends. A new queen and associated followers placed in a small rural town will cause a slaughter of the human inhabitants as the rock gargoyles establish a home for themselves. But those rock gargoyles who are free from a Dark Lord's influence can peacefully coexist with humans, as they nest in remote areas and hunt whatever small animals are in the area.

Mental Abilities

Under most circumstances, rock gargoyles are not familiar with human culture or technology, including language. Groups existing near human communities, or individual rock gargoyles whose groups have broken up due to death of the queen or some other reason, will sometimes gradually come to understand human ways. In extremely rare instances, rock gargoyles may even be encountered making use of captured or discarded human equipment. Gargoyles of this sort have higher Intelligence and Education ratings than those listed. Queens are generally 1 to 2 points higher in all respects.

Although some rock gargoyles may eventually learn to speak human languages, all rock gargoyles communicate with each other via empathic links.

Combat Tactics

Rock gargoyles are strong fighters. Their scaly hide provides them with resistance to damage, their claws and teeth strike out like daggers, and their skills are formidable. The rock gargoyle queen will enter combat only if absolutely necessary for the survival of the brood, as the loss of its queen is fatal to a community. The queen will never be encountered outside the confines of the lair. The closer a combat takes place to the rock gargoyles' lair, the more tenacious the creatures will be.

When possible, a rock gargoyle enters combat from above. It takes to the air, closes rapidly with its opponent and swoops down upon him using the claws on both hands and feet. During the first phase in which an airborne rock gargoyle attacks, it does double damage with its attacks, representing the additional impact of the dive. A maximum of two rock gargoyles may attack a single human-sized target from the air. A favorite tactic when rock gargoyles outnumber their opponents is to double up on an enemy, with one gargoyle remaining in melee to keep him busy while the other flies away to perform successive diving attacks.

The rock gargoyles' inability to utilize their special attacks and tactics within the enclosed spaces of their lair is an additional reason that they will fight to stop any intruders from ever reaching the entrances to the caves, tunnels or buildings in which they dwell.



GARGOYLE, SUBTERRANEAN

Strength: 11
Constitution: 13
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 5
Education: 2
Charisma: 5
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/9/18/36
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6+1
Hits: 40/72
 # Appear: 1D6

The Mythology

Their existence is reflected in the nightmares of the Middle Ages. From paintings to religious texts to cathedral statuary, it is evident that humanity was once haunted by images of demonic, winged creatures with leering smiles and evil, alien eyes. For some unknown reason, stone effigies of these fantastic and horrific beings were placed atop churches, cathedrals and other large structures—theories ranging from decoration to protective totems have been offered. What were these creatures, collectively known as gargoyles, supposed to represent? Were they fallen angels? Demons? Or were they something else altogether? Perhaps the collective memories of an early meeting between humanity and a Dark Minion race?

The Reality

Subterranean gargoyles are a race of underground dwellers which formed the basis for many of the earliest legends of demons around the world.



Physical Description

Subterranean gargoyles are man-sized creatures of reptilian stock, with horned heads, red eyes, forked tongues, stonelike hides and bat wings. Their wings are most vestigial, not providing actual flight capability, but allowing the subterranean gargoyles to glide from high ground to low, much as flying squirrels soar through the treetops. Subterranean gargoyles can use weapons and often employ modem firearms, but they prefer to feel their claws tear through flesh rather than allow a blade or bullet to have the honor. These egg-laying beings appear as both males and females, though humans can tell no difference between the two.

Past Accounts

This Dark Race was somehow dispatched to Earth countless centuries ago to open a way for the Dark Ones themselves. Though few in number, the subterranean gargoyles were much more powerful than the weak and fledgling humans roaming the surface of the planet. They felt certain they could destroy the soft-fleshed natives and prepare the way for their foul masters. And so the subterranean gargoyles, with pride and overconfidence, swept forth to battle early humanity. However, in this great and terrible war, the subterranean gargoyles were nearly wiped out. The survivors fled into the deepest cracks and crevices to lick their wounds and await orders from their masters. There they remained, venturing onto the surface only rarely, until the barriers between Earth and the Dark dimensions were recently penetrated and more of their kind swarmed onto the planet.

Humanity suffered great losses in that ancient, nearly forgotten war as well. Vague memories of the time of battle have survived to this day as nightmares, fear-inducing superstitions, and examples of fantastic art and architecture. For countless generations, the survivors of that war kept vigil against the expected return of the subterranean gargoyles, until one day the descendants of the first warriors no longer remembered what they were guarding against. Still, the images passed down remained powerful, spawning protective statues to keep the memory of the dark times alive.

Present Situation

When the great war ended, the handful of remaining gargoyles sought refuge in the hollow places within the Earth. In these hollows, they built their own civilization and waited for the Dark Ones to send reinforcements or to call them home. They waited, and centuries passed. The descendants of the first warriors became a forsaken lot, angry for being abandoned and jealous of the vast human cities growing on the surface. The subterranean gargoyles were never a prodigious lot, and their war-depleted numbers left them with precious few reproducing bodies. Humanity soon outdistanced them in numbers and achievements, leaving the gargoyles to remain in hiding, harboring their hatred like a fire in the endless night of the hollows.

During the intervening centuries, the creatures have watched the progress and the failures of humanity. They have vigilantly kept oral records to one day pass on to the Dark Ones, and they have tried to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their eternal enemies. Sometimes the subterranean gargoyles made small raids onto the surface, but they could never mount a full-scale war with their few numbers. So they watched, and they waited, and their hatred grew.

Future Plans

Then the Dark returned, and the subterranean gargoyles rejoiced. They knew their long vigil would be rewarded. Already, more of their kind have come across the dimensional barriers to join them in their underground hiding places. Plans are being presented, argued over, and set for the coming rematch between the subterranean gargoyles and humanity. The humans have developed many new weapons since last the subterranean gargoyles met them in battle. Even more disturbing is the huge number of them crawling over every available acre of the surface of the planet. But the subterranean gargoyles are a patient race, and plans proceed smoothly. With the added benefit of scores of other Dark Minion races to assist them, the subterranean gargoyles are sure that this next battle will be the last one humanity ever engages in. When the dust settles and the blood dries, only the Dark Races will be left standing. Then the true age of the Dark Ones can finally begin, sweeping across this pitiful globe like the curtains of an endless night.

GHOSTS

Haunt
Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: —
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: 16
Initiative: 6
Move: —
Skill/Dam.: —/—
Hits: —
Appear: 1D6/2
Special: None.

Poltergeist
Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: —
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: 12
Initiative: 6
Move: —
Skill/Dam.: —/*
Hits: —
Appear: 1D6/3
Special: Telekinesis and/or pyrokinesis at double the normal effect.

Ghosts are disembodied spirits that basically can be subdivided into two distinct types. The first type, sometimes called a "haunt," has no ability to physically affect real-



ity, but relies upon the power of emotion to take its prey. Even without a physical presence, however, a haunt can kill, either by overstressing weak hearts or by driving their victims to suicide. These beings rely heavily upon the following empathic skills: Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Project Thought, and Willpower Drain. The first is used to establish empathic contact with the victim. Once that link is formed, either Project Emotion or Project Thought follows.

Project Emotion is used to drive victims to a frenzy of fear. Each stage of power level with this skill temporarily makes all skill checks by the victim one level more difficult. (For instance, a Stage Two success at Project Emotion would make all of the victim's skill checks two levels more difficult.) Project Thought is used to command victims to self-destructive acts, from throwing themselves out of upper-story windows to killing themselves or attacking their companions. If necessary, Willpower Drain is used to soften the victims up.

The second type of ghost, often called a "poltergeist," is able to move objects, and so to make physical attacks. Occasionally, these ghosts will attack empathically as a haunt, but they prefer to use their telepathic and pyrokinetic abilities. For example, a poltergeist might telepathically lock the only door to a room, pyrokinetically set the curtains afire, then begin projecting sounds of insane laughter or empathically exaggerate the size of the fire. Note that poltergeists get double the normal effect for Telekinesis.

Most people believe that ghosts are the psychic residue of dead humans. In actuality, ghosts are merely another type of Dark Minion. (The one exception to this, the "data ghost," is actually nothing more than a collection of human memories trapped within a computer network.)

GLIMMERING

Strength: 9
Constitution: 9
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 2
Education: —
Charisma: 8
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 6
Move: 15/30/60
Skill/Dam.: 8/3D6
Hits: 30/60
 # Appear: 1
Special: Limited Dimension Walk abilities (see below).

Highly reflective—one level more difficult to observe than normal, one level more difficult than normal to hit in combat, and impervious to lasers.

Glimmerings are creatures from another dimension which were accidentally unleashed upon the world by the Dark Ones. The glimmerings inhabit an "antidimension" which exists in parallel to our own, but as a twisted reflection of it. The creatures may cross the boundary between the dimensions only when an empathic mind strays close to theirs, a phenomenon that occurs when an empath looks into a reflective surface and imagines (even if only subconsciously) that the reflection has a life and depth of its own. At that point, the empath serves as a beacon for the glimmerings to head toward, and they arrive seemingly through the mirror. Any reflective surface will serve—a store window, a pool of water, a wet street—as long as it is sufficient to give the empathic viewer an illusion of depth.

Physical Description

Glimmerings are about the same size and shape as a large, tailless dog, and they move on four powerful legs. That's where the similarities stop. A glimmering is almost completely reflective when in our world, like an animated, 3-D mirror, a shiny chrome animal. Only the eyes are different, appearing as black holes in the creature's head.

The front paws of a glimmering are long and slender and can operate as hands when desired. But they are also armed with heavy claws to match the creature's wicked fangs.

It is possible that legends of the *loup-garou*, a quadrupedal werewolf with no tail, may have been originated from early sightings of glimmerings.

Abilities

Glimmerings serve as servants of another entity (as explained below), and they are generally sent as assassins.

The creatures possess a rudimentary intelligence, sufficient to assure that they will always recognize their target, and able to make them fairly cunning at times. Unless there is a definite need for quick action, they are willing and able to patiently await the best opportunity to strike their prey. If there is a hurry, more than one glimmering may be assigned the same target.



While in our world, glimmerings are very difficult to watch for any length of time, due to their reflective nature. In combat, this makes them one level of difficulty harder to hit, and they reflect laser weapons away harmlessly.

If necessary, glimmerings can manipulate human tools, though it is difficult for them to aim firearms, given their quadrupedal stance.

The Battle for the Antidimension

Secret teams are working, both among humans and Dark Minions, to discover a means of using the antidimension as a method of nearly instantaneous mirror-to-mirror travel. What the minions know that human researchers do not, however, is that the antidimension is inhabited, and that it also contains a Dark Lord who is actively working to thwart entry by others. The glimmerings are this being's servants, and it uses them to mercilessly slay anyone who gets too dose to discovering a way to its hidden home.

No one has crossed over into the antidimension and returned. Worse yet, many researchers have unexpectedly died bloody deaths under mysterious circumstances.

As human researchers have yet to survive to report the appearance of glimmerings, no connection has been recognized between these deaths and mirrors, not even when one researcher was found slashed to bloody ribbons in his bathroom, right beneath the bathroom mirror.

At this time, it is uncertain whose "side" the creatures of the antidimension are on with regard to the conflict on Earth.

Among those few members of the empathic underground who know of the antidimension and the glimmerings, some confusion has been caused by the fact that the glimmerings have thus far been most active against the machinations of the Dark Minions.

GREMLIN, DWARF

Strength: 3
Constitution: 4
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 5
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 9
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/11/18/35
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6+2
Hits: 14/28
 # Appear: 2D6

Special: Computer Empathy, Demolitions, Electronics, Engineer, Lockpick, Mechanic and Telekinesis, each at the appropriate attribute level. Dwarf gremlins do not have Darkling Empathy.

Stunted, twisted and wholly malevolent relatives of the dark elves, dwarf gremlins are as adept at manipulating the workings of machines as their larger brethren are at warping the perceptions of humans.

Physical Description

Dwarf gremlins are small humanoids just over one meter in height. Their bodies are often misshapen and misproportioned, with overly long arms, bloated stomachs, large feet, mismatched ears, etc. Dwarf gremlins wear no clothes, and they have mottled green and black skin covering their bodies.



Modus Operandi

Like other fey folk, dwarf gremlins thrive on human pain and misery. A dwarf gremlin's raspy laugh has been the last thing many a person has heard before meeting his doom. Dwarf gremlins achieve their ends through the devices people rely upon, rather than by directly attacking people. In the technological world of **Dark Conspiracy,** the creatures seldom lack for devices to use. They spread chaos and destruction wherever they go in the form of seemingly accidental mechanical failures, circuit overloads, power outages and structural weaknesses, among other things—usually with fatal results.

Dwarf gremlins use both physical and empathic means to sabotage vehicles, equipment, and sometimes even buildings. Unless severely pressed for time, dwarf gremlins never do their damage in a careless, unthinking manner. Rather, they plan out the most efficient way of generating the most damage and horror from their attacks. When possible, they sabotage things so that human operators will not recognize that anything is wrong until it is entirely too late to stop it and so that lots of things suddenly fall apart all at once, increasing human feelings of despair at the situation. Because of the dwarf gremlins' Telekinetic abilities and high mechanical aptitude, referees are encouraged to let their imaginations run wild in determining what sorts of "mischief" the creatures are capable of accomplishing.

Due to their small size and relative weakness, dwarf gremlins use their superior speed and stealth to avoid confrontation if they can, but fight viciously if cornered. Their strong jaws (well exercised from chewing through power cables and electrical wires) and many teeth can prove dangerous, especially to unarmored characters. A dwarf gremlin's innate destructive talents are useful in combat as well, as any unfortunate attackers discover when their weapon belt clasps suddenly come undone, the safeties on their guns click on in the middle of firing, the pins on their grenades all mysteriously fall out, their pistols discharge while still holstered, etc.

Technology and Empathy

A dwarf gremlin's understanding of technology is solely for the purpose of manipulating it to destroy its users. The creatures do not construct or employ any devices of their own. The dwarf gremlin race neither possesses its own technology nor adopts that of other races. Instead, each dwarf gremlin relies entirely upon its natural abilities.

Furthermore, a dwarf gremlin's empathic power applies only to nonliving material. The creatures cannot empathically affect other living beings—they have no capacity to sense or project human emotion, project thoughts or drain willpower. They do not even possess the normal Dark Minion power of Darkling Empathy. Even without empathic assistance, however, their repulsive appearance inspires fear and loathing within most people who encounter them.

History

Although dwarf gremlin influence has been felt since World War II, it was only in the chaos of the Greater Depression that they arrived in number. Thereafter, the creatures multiplied and spread rapidly. Most urban centers across the nation are host to secret dwarf gremlin communities, contributing to ever-rising accident rates. Although the majority of rural communities are too far from the rich urban hunting grounds to attract dwarf gremlins, some of the larger towns across the countryside suffer from small, transient groups wreaking havoc when and where they can.

Larger groups of dwarf gremlins combine their Telekinesis to produce truly amazing results. They cause airplane crashes, complete power outages in medical districts, train derailments, plant and factory explosions, etc. Dwarf gremlins are able to exist in the busiest metropolitan areas, hiding in air ducts, sewer tunnels, automated industrial complexes and the like. They survive undetected on garbage, small animals, and occasionally the remains of their human victims.

GREMLIN, ENTROPIC

Strength: *
Constitution: *
Agility: *
Intelligence: 6
Education: 3
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 5
Initiative: 6
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: 6/*
Hits: *
 # Appear: 1

* Because the entropic gremlin has no physical form, these statistics are dependent upon the machine it possesses.

Special: Telekinesis.

One of the most alien abilities of the Dark Minions is their power to create animator spirits. Humans have been able to mimic many of the minions' empathic abilities and have a limited understanding of how some of the their twisted technology works, but there is nothing known to humanity that remotely resembles the processes involved in the creation of an animator spirit. What these life forces actually are is unknown, but the entropic gremlin is almost certainly the creature that inspired their creation.



Basic Nature

Entropic gremlins prefer to infest complex manufactured items. Automobiles and aircraft are their favored haunts, though space vehicles, with their millions of components, and old suits of armor, with thousands of hours of human effort put into careful hammering, etching and engraving, are both perfect for the entropic gremlin's use.

An entropic gremlin will not always seek to control what it has taken possession of. The creature might be content to possess a car, for instance, but let the human owner climb in and unwittingly go for a drive. Then, halfway through the trip, the gremlin might decide that it doesn't like where it is being taken and attempt to wrest control from the driver. In some cases, this becomes a contest between the human's Strength and the gremlin's Empathy, but in many devices the human is entirely unable to prevent the gremlin's takeover. This is particularly true in a "drive-by-wire" situation where there is no direct mechanical connection between the device and its controls. If an entropic gremlin decides to take control of an untended machine, its success is automatic.

Feeding Habits

An entropic gremlin receives its life energy by increasing entropy's effect on whatever device it has taken control of. A car will feed an entropic gremlin for about a day. A more complex machine, like an aircraft or computer, will supply nutrition for as long as a week. Something as complex as a spacecraft or advanced robotic unit could feed one of the creatures for as long as a month. By the end of the feeding period, the possessed device will have been transformed into a rusted, worn-out piece of junk.

This is not to say that problems won't crop up after mere minutes of an entropic gremlin's entry into an object. If the first failure in a computer was its microprocessor, then that unit would be useless to any human operator, though the entropic gremlin would still be able to get a week's worth of energy from it. The first failure in a car could be a vital part of the engine, or it could be the radio, the cigarette lighter, or the horn. No matter what problems initially crop up, the end result is always the same. If the entropic gremlin is allowed to maintain its possession of a machine, then the machine will ultimately be irreparably destroyed.

When a gremlin first invades something, the referee should decide how long that machine will feed it, based upon the information given above, the device's current condition of repair and what the referee decides is the personality of the invading gremlin. Then 1 D10 should be rolled, with the result multiplied by five, to determine at what percentage of the feed time the object will suffer a critical fault and become useless to its owner.

For example, if the BMW 1700xhi that a PC purchased were to become infected, it would feed a gremlin for about 48 hours (the 1700 is more advanced than a mere car—ask any owner!). A 1D10 roll yields a seven, which is multiplied by five for a result of 35. So, in about 17 hours (35% of 48 hours) the BMW's engine will blow, its axle will break or some other serious fault will develop.

It is possible, though, that an entropic gremlin will choose to hold a broken piece of machinery together. When a breakdown occurs, the gremlin may make a Telekinesis roll in order to keep the machine running by holding the broken piece together or even telekinetically propelling moving parts. (The referee should set the difficulty level to match the seriousness of the damage: Difficult for things such as blown or missing engines, Average for broken axles and the like, Easy for simpler things like wornout bearings or flat tires). Because of this, it is theoretically possible to drive a gremlin-infested car even though it has a broken axle, a couple of flat tires and no engine to speak of!

Before any gremlin-infested object is completely destroyed, the entropic gremlin will seek to abandon it and move into a replacement. When this time comes, the creature will try to bring the old object into physical contact with a new host in order to transfer itself

to the new item. This process takes an average of one hour. During this time, the two objects must remain undisturbed or the entropic gremlin will be unable to complete its transfer. If one of the objects is moved, the gremlin will be forced to remain in the original object and must recover its spent energy by feeding at double rate for one hour per 10 minutes spent in the exchange.

Extermination

There is no sure way to remove an entropic gremlin from a possessed machine. It might be lured out by placing another, more advanced piece of machinery near the first one, but this is a hit-or-miss tactic at best. The only way to actually destroy an entropic gremlin is to destroy the object that it is in possession of. The machine does not need to be burned into ash or ground into powder, but it must be damaged enough to be useless as a food source for the gremlin. An entropic gremlin possessing a car, for instance, would begin to suffer dissolution almost immediately if the car is crushed sufficiently to freeze up its major moving parts.

Many times the simplest way to destroy an entropic gremlin is to trap the machine it inhabits in a place with no other food source, then leave it for a period longer than the equipment can feed the gremlin. In effect, the gremlin starves to death. But this technique is risky since it is possible to overlook a prime food source in what appears to be a vacant building or empty stretch of desert, and the entropic gremlin will likely be very angry about the attempt.

GREMLIN, TORGOL'S

Strength: 3
Constitution: 4
Agility: 15
Intelligence: 6*
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 7
Move: 35/70
Skill/Dam.: 3/1D6
Hits: 25/50
 # Appear: 1D6

* Gremlins have a Willpower of 10.



Special: Gremlins have only three empathic skills: They have Dimension Walk and Computer Empathy at their attribute level, and Machine Empathy at twice that level. They are very difficult to be spotted by observers. Due to the creature's high Agility, aimed shots cannot be conducted against a gremlin, unless it is unaware of the firer.

The gremlin has long been linked to tales of misfortune and tragedy. These tales seem to become more prevalent the more mechanized human society becomes.

The Mythology

Gremlins have been depicted as smallish creatures which revel in making mischief, especially with machines. Generally, their pranks are relatively harmless, though they can be quite irritating.

The Reality

The myth of the innocuous, fun-loving gremlin could not be further from the truth. True gremlins love nothing more than inflicting pain and misery on the human race—the greater the pain, the better. They wreaked much havoc—from the Great Chicago Fire, to Three Mile Island, to the *Challenger* incident. They will not physically confront humans unless the odds really favor them. Instead, they use their Machine Empathy to cause machinery to malfunction and do their mischief for them.

Machine Empathy

The gremlins' Machine Empathy skill is apparently a very specialized version of Telekinesis. In order to best use its Machine Empathy skill, a gremlin must be stationary and undisturbed for five minutes while in close proximity to (within five meters of) the object to be affected. At the end of that time, a power level is rolled for the skill, with the following die roll modifiers:

-1 per minute less than five spent concentrating.
-1 per meter over five away from the object to be affected.
-5 if the object to be affected is out of the gremlin's line of sight.
+2 per additional gremlin cooperating with the Machine Empathy attempt.
+1 per minute beyond five spent concentrating on the object.
+5 if in physical contact with the object to be affected.

The effects of Machine Empathy on the object are listed at below, by power level achieved. If fatal malfunction is rolled, the object becomes totally useless until repaired and can, at the referee's option, be hazardous to those around it.

Repairing a malfunction requires a skill test of either Mechanic or Electronics (referee's option). The difficulty level is established by the power level achieved by the gremlin. Basic Success requires no roll; Stage Two or Three requires an Easy test; Stage Four or Five requires an Average test; and Stage Six requires a Difficult test.

Gremlin, Torgol's

MACHINE EMPATHY POWER LEVELS

Power Level	Result
Basic Success	The gremlin turns the object on or off, or causes it to malfunction for one combat phase.
Stage Two	The device malfunctions for 1D6 phases. On a 1D10 roll of 10, it fatally malfunctions.
State Three	The device malfunctions for 2D6 phases. On a 1D10 roll of 8+, it fatally malfunctions.
Stage Four	The device malfunctions for 2D6 complete turns. On a 1D10 roll of 6+, it fatally malfunctions.
Stage Five	The device malfunctions for 1D6 hours. On a 1D10 roll of a 3+, it fatally malfunctions.
Stage Six	The device fatally malfunctions.

Camouflage Ability

Torgol's gremlins are almost impossible to spot when hiding in any sort of shadow. If they are standing still, they are never spotted by casual observers. If a viewer is specifically searching the shadows and succeeds at a Difficult test of Observation, stationary gremlins are seen dimly. If the gremlins are moving, casual observers will notice them only if successful at a Difficult test of Observation, and viewers specifically looking for them will succeed by passing an Average test of the skill. Failure at any of these tests will cause viewers to think they have merely seen some trick of the light

Physical Description

Gremlins are roughly humanoid, standing less than a meter tall and weighing less than 10 kilograms. They have smooth, black, leathery skin covering their hairless bodies. Their arms are very long in proportion to their bodies, dragging on the ground even though gremlins walk erect. The creatures also have "wings" of a sort—a flap of leathery skin from elbow to hip, which they can use to glide through the air like flying squirrels. They can sail up to 20 meters from a single jump.

Gremlins have large, bulging eyes, which allow them to see nearly 360-degree in all but absolute darkness as if it were daylight. Bright lights or flashes of light cause them to suffer blindness for 1D6+1 phases after exposure and cause them to instinctively freeze in their tracks. Consequently, gremlins do not like to go out in the daylight or go into well-lit rooms, and they do most of their activity at night.

History

These gremlins are native to a proto-dimension and were "accidentally" discovered by a 12th-century alchemist named Torgol, who had been working to open a portal for the Dark One he served. Torgol found a world filled with gremlins. He also found that his very presence inflicted pain upon those creatures that were near him, pain caused, apparently, by his own empathic emissions. When he actively used any of his empathic skills, the gremlins nearest to him died. Using this ability as a threat, Torgol forced the gremlins into his personal slavery for centuries, killing thousands of them in the process. Then a mutated type of gremlin appeared who was unaffected by Torgol's empathic emissions. As their numbers mounted, they overthrew Torgol and killed him. Fortunately for other humans, the gremlins still have not recovered from Torgol's reign, and only the new mutation can safely pass through to Earth, as they are the only ones unaffected by Human Empathy.

Soon after the gremlins found the way to open the dimensional doorway to Earth, they realized they were too small in number and size to overtake the humans. But they had a great affinity for the machinery humans created. With humanity growing increasingly dependent upon machinery, the gremlins had found the perfect tool with which to strike.

HARPY



Strength: 4
Constitution: 2
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 3
Education: 2
Charisma: 2
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 4
Move: 15/30/50*
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6
Hits: 16/32
Appear: 1D6+1

* This is flying speed; harpies walk 5 and run 10 when grounded.

Special: Drop stones (treat as thrown weapon attack for 1D10 damage).

Harpies are filthy, vulgar, flying humanoids with a taste for human flesh. Most stand about a meter tall, with relatively human heads and torsos, but with the lower legs of a vulture, and with wings instead of human arms. Like blood vultures, they are primarily scavengers; but flocks of them have been known to attack living creatures, if the odds are greatly in their favor. Their preferred method of attack is to drop stones on their quarry (treat these as thrown weapon attacks doing 1D10 damage). Of course, this requires a suitable supply of stones and ample time to resupply between each attack. If time or head room is limited, they will hover within melee range of their victims and tear at them with their clawed feet.

Harpies usually haunt the wildernesses of the planet, but they can sometimes be found in the employ of other Dark Minions, occasionally even in inner cities.

HELLFIRE

Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: 5
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: 5
Initiative: 4
Move: 5
Skill/Dam.: 10/*
Hits: 24/48
 # Appear: 1

* Due to its incendiary nature, a hellfire causes damage as per the rules for burning gasoline. Once per combat turn, the creature may gust flame and cause double that damage for one combat phase.

Special: A hellfire has no physical body as such and thus has no physical statistics. Hellfires can only be damaged by substances capable of extinguishing flames. A fire extinguisher doe 1D6 damage, a fire hose does 2D6 damage, a water cannon does 3D6 damage, and a water bomb (aircraft portable) does 5D6.

The hits listed are for the creature's core. In each of its Initiative phases, the hellfire may move at the rate listed above, leaving behind a two-meter-wide wall of fire. Each square meter of this fire is worth 1 hit point for purposes of extinguishing it.

Every day, the men and women of the world's firefighting organizations risk their lives to extinguish the blazes that occur in human habitations. The majority of these fires are caused by electrical faults, arson, human carelessness, etc. Once in a while, no reasonable cause can be found for a fire, and it is blamed on a freak of nature. And sometimes firefighters talk of how the flames in one of these strange fires seemed " almost alive." The firefighters may not be far from the truth—they have unwittingly encountered a creature known as hellfire.

The Mythology

Some people claim that hellfires are spirits of the damned who somehow escape the nether regions and come back to the world above to wreak havoc upon living humans. Hellfires have no physical bodies, they explain, because they are formed from the substance of their supposed eternal prison—fire!

Other people insist that the creatures are spirits native to some dimension of elemental fire, mistakenly lost in our own dimension and striking out in a great agony of coldness.

Still others claim that hellfires are incredibly advanced animator spirits that some Dark Minion race links to flame, creating a terribly destructive (though relatively short-lived) servant.



The Reality

Whatever the creature's origins, when a hellfire comes into existence on Earth, it immediately begins to set ablaze anything and everything within its reach. Although it is almost totally indiscriminate as to what or who it ignites, the creature is not unintelligent. It possesses a cunning mind and enjoys mocking its victims, and if threatened it will take quick steps to neutralize its enemies.

Recognizing a Hellfire

Typically, when a hellfire is first encountered, an individual may notice that the fire does not seem quite right in its appearance and/or behavior. Observers who succeed at a Difficult test of Foreboding or Observation will recognize this wrongness. Although they will not recognize the hellfire as a living entity (unless they have encountered one before or make a outstanding success on the aforementioned "test), they will realize that this is much more than just an out-of-control barbecue. The problem is that most such people do not realize the intelligence and purpose behind the fire until it is too late to escape.

Being Stalked by a Hellfire

When the hellfire recognizes that someone is a threat to its existence, it will spread fire around that person in an attempt to cut off any escape route. Once this is completed, it will shrink the ring around its victim, taking great pleasure in watching the person suffer from oxygen starvation, then scream as clothes and hair ignite, to fall as a cindered husk.

Battling a Hellfire

Fortunately for humans, hellfires, once spotted, can easily be tracked, isolated, and either doused or let burn out. Hellfires have a mind of their own and are therefore slightly more difficult to track and isolate than are normal fires—they sneak through any opening left to them and leap gaps that normal fires could not. But a hellfire is an individual, and humans band together to fight fires, using their considerable technology to do so. In the end, traditional firefighting techniques always succeed in extinguishing the fire, although entire city blocks may have been destroyed in the meantime.

Also, Darkling Empathy and Project Thought can be used to freeze a hellfire in its tracks, if a Stage Six success is scored. There is evidence to suggest that Dark Minions who dwell in an area being ravaged by a hellfire sometimes secretly aid human firefighters rather than see their hunting grounds be destroyed. Certainly some members of the empathic underground have devoted themselves to tracking and battling hellfires, and often find occasion to lend firefighters a secret hand themselves.

In any case, hellfires recognize that they are doomed to live a very short life, so they devote themselves to wreaking as much damage as they possibly can, killing as many beings as possible in the process. Apparently, they do not much care whether their victims are human, animal, or Dark Minion, although they do generally prefer intelligent creatures to unintelligent ones, so that they can take greater pleasure in a victim's suffering and in the horror the victim shows when it recognizes the hellfire for what it is.

HUNGRY WOMAN

Strength: 11
Constitution: 15
Agility: 9
Intelligence: 3
Education: —
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 4
Move: 6/12/20/34
Skill/Dam.: 5/2D6
Hits: 16/32*
 # Appear: 1D6+2**

* Because of their barklike skin, hungry women are considered to have an armor value of 2 on all hit locations except their limbs, which have an armor value of 1. Any single attack that penetrates with at least 4 points to a limb is considered to sever it.

Special: It can make unarmed melee strikes, using the Skill/Dam. statistics listed above, but it prefers to grapple its prey to immobility (roll normal damage to determine points of control), then drain that prey's body fluids (see below).

Aztec mythology is filled with terrible spirits and frightening beings that feed on the blood and fear of humans and animals. One such creature is the hungry woman, a being so terrible that even the denizens of the Aztec spirit world shun it.

The Mythology

According to the mythology, before the Earth and sky were made, there lived in the spirit land an insatiably hungry woman with mouths on her wrists, elbows, ankles, and knees. Because her appetite was insatiable, Quetzalcoatl (the heroic Celestial Dragon) and Tezcatlipoca (the deceitful Dark Mirror) seized the woman and cast her out of the spirit land. She landed upon water, and when the two gods tried to push her under, she broke in half. Seeing this, the other spirits came and used her lower half to make the sky. With her upper half they made living plants of her skin, trees of her hair, pools of water from her eyes, mountains from her shoulders and valleys from her nose. Now, when it rains, she drinks. When plants wither or when living creatures die, she eats. But still she is not filled. And sometimes, at night, her cries for food can be heard on the wind.

The Reality

Scattered reports ranging from Arizona to Peru tell of encounters with a creature that could fit parts of this description. According to eyewitnesses, the thing is roughly humanoid—approximately 1.5 meters tall—but is apparently at least partly vegetable in nature. Its rough, dark body somewhat resembles a rotting log, and shaggy gray-green hair hangs from its lumpy head like Spanish moss, making its large, black eyes and gaping mouth nearly invisible. Stick-thin arms and legs protrude like branches from the body, with a cluster of stiff rootlets at each joint.

The creature feeds through these rootlets. Once it has immobilized its prey—typically by wrestling it to the ground—the hungry woman jams these rootlets forcefully into the victim and drains its liquids, leaving in the end a withered husk. This attack can

puncture armor up to armor value 1 and does 4D6 damage per phase to the hit location punctured, plus half that amount rolled to every other hit location. (As most NPCs are considered to have only one hit location, they therefore only take the 4D6 damage.)

When the hungry woman is physically immobilizing its prey, some of its limbs are pretty much occupied just holding the creature still. Referees will have to judge just how many limbs are occupied, based upon the size of the victim and the exact situation. But in general, a human-sized victim will require three limbs to immobilize; a creature half that size will require two limbs; and a creature one-quarter human-sized or smaller will require only one. The hungry woman can then attack to drain with each free limb—the referee should roll randomly to generate a hit location and each limb will do damage as described above.

If necessary, the hungry woman can simply strike a target with unarmed melee attacks. Armor has its normal effect in this case. The skill and damage rating given in the statistics section above are for this type of attack.

Hungry women are perpetually hunting (even immediately after having fed) and will attack nearly anything they encounter, as long as there is at least a one-to-one ratio of hunter to prey. They will not attack if outnumbered. Frequently, they panic groups of prey into splitting up. In such cases, the hungry women remain hidden from their prey (their mossy hair and thin, dark bodies are perfect for hiding in most vegetation, making Observation tests to spot them one level more difficult than normal), and they make their hunting cry, which sounds like a woman moaning plaintively. Most creatures find the sound terribly unnerving.

If necessary, hungry women can survive on the fluids of plants, but they require the juices of animals in order to reproduce. If a hungry woman can absorb hit points equal to 10 times its own in a single 24-hour period, it can bifurcate (split in half) and become two. This reproduction process requires an additional 24 hours to complete, during which time the original creature grows an extra head and set of limbs, preparatory to the split.

Because of their partly vegetable nature, hungry women are highly sensitive to herbicides. As a consequence, they tend to avoid areas of intensive agriculture, such as corporate farms. Instead, they frequent the wilds, especially the wilds of Demonground.



As can be seen, then, these creatures fit the hungry woman mythology fairly closely—given their plaintive cries, long hair and method of feeding, as well as the fact that they reproduce by splitting in half. Interestingly, the legend attempts to render the mythic creature harmless by using it to create the sky and Earth. But the attempt is to no avail—in the end, the hungry woman still cries out to be fed.

KHAR'LANKI

Strength: +1*
Constitution: +0*
Agility: +2*
Intelligence: +0*
Education: +0*
Charisma: +1*
Empathy: +2*
Initiative: +1*
Move: 3/10/18/35
Skill/Dam.: +1*/**, 1p4*
Hits: **
 # Appear: 1

* These are bonuses applied to the original human attributes once the process of change from the original human form has been completed. The poison damage rating listed is for the khar'lanki's poison claws.

** These values are figured normally from the appropriate attributes and skills.

Khar'lanki are a race of once-human people who now enjoy feeding on human cerebrospinal fluid and stealing human memories. According to ancient traditions they hold, their name means "soul drinker." One German scholar (who chose to remain anonymous), after learning of their tendency to live among human communities while masquerading as normal humans, was prompted to call them *Mitinwohner* ("dwellers within").

Physical Description

Some Dark Races are more obviously not of our world than others. The khar'lanki are of the "not-obvious" variety. They are human-looking, highly social and conversant on a wide variety of common human topics. Although outwardly they have an entirely human appearance, khar'lanki can recognize each other instantly. Some experts believe this is a natural, subconscious empathic ability.

Each khar'lanki was once entirely human. But like the mythic vampires, a current khar'lanki creates new khar'lanki from human victims. This is the races' only means of reproduction.



Unlike the vampires of myth, khar'lanki are not immortal. Each khar'lanki lives to be up to 500 years old, if left to die of natural causes. But khar'lanki are as subject to damage from weapons and the like as any normal human, and they tend to die very violent deaths if humans discover their true nature.

Feeding Habits

Khar'lanki fingernails hide hollow, retractable claws that inject a powerful poison into their victims, a poison that paralyzes mammalian nervous systems. If they successfully break an opponent's skin with these claws, they inject a powerful paralyzing poison. Although damage is calculated for this poison normally, it does no true damage. Rather, once it has achieved a critical level of hits to the target's chest, it renders the victim paralyzed for a number of hours equal to 12 minus the victim's Constitution.

Once the victim has been paralyzed and the khar'lanki has no further distractions, the creature grasps the victim's head tightly and extends a long, tentaclelike second tongue into the victim's mouth. This tongue worms its way upward through the victim's nasal passages and finally burrows into the cranium. The procedure takes roughly 60 seconds to accomplish.

Once in the cranium, the tongue serves as a drainage tube for drawing off the victim's cerebrospinal fluid. Each combat phase, it will drain 10 milliliters of the fluid. Normal adults contain roughly 95 to 140 milliliters total in the cranium and spine (90+CONx5). The victim suffers 3 points of damage to the head for each 10 milliliters lost.

For some reason not completely understood (most likely empathic), the khar'lanki also steals flashes of memory from the victim by means of this process. In fact, for the khar'lanki, the experience of stealing memories is as intensely pleasurable as the drinking of the cerebrospinal fluid.

When a khar'lanki feeds, it need not kill its victim; it can snack instead, drinking only a few milliliters of cerbrospinal fluid. This results in the victim suffering subsequent blank spots in his memory (particularly of the feeding period), fatigue and a terribly painful headache. Because these symptoms so strongly resemble a hangover, the victims rarely suspect that they have had an encounter with a monstrous creature. And even if they did, few of their acquaintances would believe them.

Reproduction

Khar'lanki reproduce by turning normal humans into new khar'lanki. These new creatures are subservient to the khar'lanki who created them, a factor of the empathic link created by the process of change. To create a new khar'lanki, the prospective "parent" must find a human of the same gender. It burrows its tongue into the victim's cranium as usual, but this time to infect the victim with a mutating virus. This virus spreads to every cell in the victim's body and joins irrevocably with the cell nucleus. Then the victim begins growing a set of retractable claws, poison glands and a tubular tongue. By the end of one month, the unfortunate human will have transformed fully into a khar'lanki.

How frequently a khar'lanki creates a new member of the race is entirely a matter of the "parent's" choice. But most tend to avoid doing so very often, as the race's existence depends upon secrecy, and an excess of khar'lanki would cause a suspicious decrease in the human population.

Behavior

The khar'lanki are unusual in that they try to pretend they are still human. They are fascinated by human thoughts and emotions. When they feed completely, draining their

victim completely of cerebrospinal fluid, they receive a sufficient lump of the victim's memories to allow them a gain of 1 point in whatever was the victim's highest skill. This feeding habit causes the khar'lanki to remember bits and pieces of memory from all its victims, leaving the creature with a mild multiple personality disorder.

To most humans, this makes the khar'lanki seem pleasantly strange and very knowledgeable, adding a charming eccentricity to their mystique.

LILITU, STRANGLERS OF BABES

Strength: 12
Constitution: 4
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 8
Education: 4
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 14
Initiative: 3
Move: 3/10/20/35
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 25/50
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: The Skill/Dam. statistics above are for a normal unarmed melee strike. However, a lilitu's preferred attack is to grapple its opponent, then drain the victim's blood through the orifices in its hands (see below).

All lilitu possess the ability to Dimension Walk, besides the normal Darkling Empathy skills.

The Mythology

References to Lilith, the "queen" of the lilitu, date back to biblical times. According to legend, she was a demon who strangled newborns and seduced men in their sleep, draining their blood in a fit of ecstasy. The legends go so far as to claim that she was created by God out of filth and mud to be Adam's first wife. From their union sprang a host of demons—the lilitu.

The lilitu appeared in various mythologies as demons who had long, scraggly hair and no mouth. They served as a suitable explanation for the sudden deaths of infants during the night. Sadly, these quiet, midnight deaths of innocents continue to this day.

The Reality

Today, we categorize the deaths of healthy, slumbering newborns as SIDS—sudden infant death syndrome. But this is merely a label placed on what is still a conundrum to medical science. Science needs to look deeper into the Darkness to uncover the horrible reality of the lilutu, who, among others, are the culprits.

Physical Description

The body of a lilitu looks very much like that of a thin, human female. It appears almost frail, with pinkish skin and long, gangly limbs. The lilitu's dark eyes are sunk deep into its skull. Hanging down well past its shoulders, a lilitu's hair is a matted tan-



gle of mud, dried blood and grit. A lilitu has no mouth on its face, but has a small, mouthlike orifice in the palm of each hand. It is with these that a lilitu steals the "breath of life" from slumbering babes and drinks the blood of sleeping men.

Reproduction

Typically, lilitu venture into our dimension for only one reason—to become impregnated. To reproduce, a lilitu must strangle a human infant, drawing the baby's last breaths through the orifices in its hands. Invigorated by this, the lilitu then uses its Project Emotion ability to seduce a sleeping male, preferably the dead child's father.

During the sexual act, the lilitu drains blood from the hapless man. This blood does not feed the lilitu (what does sustain them is unknown), but is stored in the creature's body and will be used to nourish its developing fetus. The lilitu does not drain so much blood as to kill the father, but will return to him once a month to take more blood until the child is born (approximately six months later). Because the blood of any human male will suffice, the lilitu will attempt to kill the father if its midnight feedings are somehow discovered.

Female offspring from this unholy union become lilitu themselves and venture into our world to become pregnant upon reaching the tender age of 13. Thus, in human terms, the apparent age of any lilitu encountered ranges from 13 to about 70.

It is believed that male offspring look much like their father and much less like their lilitu mother. What happens to them upon birth is unknown, but is rumored to be horrible beyond imagining.

In game terms, a lilitu can automatically score a stranglehold on a sleeping newborn. Unless someone interrupts the strangling, the infant is doomed.

When seducing a sleeping man, the lilitu uses its Project Emotion ability to instill the victim with feelings of uncontrollable lust. The normal rules for determining the results apply, but the difficulty level for the lilitu's skill rolls is Average. The victim remains asleep during the ordeal and has only vague memories of an erotic, frightening dream upon waking (and is probably very weak due to blood loss).

In rare cases, a very desperate lilitu may attempt to seduce a conscious male. In this situation, the difficulty of its task attempts is one-quarter the skill level, due to the lilitu's horrid appearance. The man has complete recall of what has occurred, which can result in severe emotional trauma—he has been ravaged by a ghastly fiend, and remembers every moment of the ordeal. In order to avoid the tale's spread, the lilitu will typically slay conscious victims.

Combat Abilities

Though it appears quite fragile, a lilitu has a grip of steel. Once it has grappled an opponent, usually by grasping the limbs or neck, the creature begins to drain blood through the mouthlike orifices in the palms of its hands. The mouths cannot penetrate armor, but can bite through normal clothing. Each orifice inflicts 2 points of damage to the location bitten, followed by 2D6 damage per phase to the victim's chest, representing general blood loss. The lilitu stops draining blood as soon as the victim suffers a serious wound, unless it is trying to kill. Because the creature's saliva contains a local anesthetic, the victim feels very little pain while his lifeblood is drained away.

If legends of the lilitu are true, and it seems they are, these creatures have been preying upon us for thousands of years. During this time they must have produced millions of children, not solely female, but male as well. What becomes of these baby boys? Perhaps one of your male characters will receive a knock at the door one night to find a young boy standing there with a strange glint in his eye and a familiar face: "Hello, Father. I've traveled a long, long way."

MARTERKIND ("TORTURE CHILD")

Strength: 1
Constitution: 4
Agility: 2
Intelligence: 7
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 9
Initiative: 3
Move: 2
Skill/Dam.: —/—
Hits: 20/40*
 # Appear: 1

* Due to the constant rapid mutation of its form, a marterkind is only affected by fire or explosive damage. Bullets and melee strikes have no effect on it.

Special: Empathic drain (see below).

History

It is a documented fact that Adolph Hitler was a great believer in the occult, but few people realize just how deep his faith in the dark forces was. During the fall of 1943, Hitler personally authorized the creation of a top-secret scientific department, specializing in the field of genetics and biochemistry, to work on a new form of weaponry that could be used against the Allied forces and eventually on civilian populations.

The purpose of this research unit was to ensure the continuation of the Third Reich by creating a genetically perfect human—based, of course, upon the Aryan ideal—a human who would then become the "supersoldier" of the German race. Hitler believed that this could be accomplished by combining the scientific expertise of his knowledgeable geneticists with the powers of his most trusted astrologers.

By impregnating 12 female test subjects with genetically altered and psychically charged embryos at an advantageous juncture of the planets, the project began.

Unfortunately, 10 of the 12 test subjects died within their first six months of pregnancy, consumed from within by a metastasizing growth that autopsy proved had begun from within the womb (interestingly enough, all signs of the fetus itself had disappeared). But, two of the women involved in the experiment survived to see their "children" delivered. The first of these offspring was a faceless abomination, gaunt and sickly in appearance. Fortunately, it was stillborn.

The second child exploded into the world at 3:15 a.m. on a cold winter night in 1944. Unable to hold any particular physical form for more than a moment, it was a mutating nightmare, creating mouths and eyes in its flesh for just seconds before transforming again. Before it could be brought under control, the mother, two orderlies and three guards died horribly, their lives literally drained from their bodies, all while the monstrosity lay writhing and spasming on the birthing table.

Dr. Heinrich Muller, head of the project, informed the Fuhrer of his failure, expecting harsh retribution from his master. However, after studying his report, Hitler ordered him to commence work on another batch of the creatures.

It is unknown whether Muller ever completed this second project, as his laboratories were captured by the Allies in the summer of 1945. It is quite possible, however, that his "children" still live, as no evidence of the project was found in Hamburg. Dr. Muller is known to have died in 1978 in Brazil, but information concerning his creations is scarce.

Physical Description

Each marterkind appears to be a constantly mutating and undulating mass of bilious flesh. Orifices and twisted, malformed limbs constantly form on their bodies and then degenerate into other forms. They are incapable of holding a single physical form for more than two or three seconds, and are reportedly oblivious to the environment around them, as they have no way of maintaining sensory receivers for any length of time.

Behavior

According to the most detailed reports, a marterkind survives by draining the neural energy from the nervous systems of intelligent creatures.

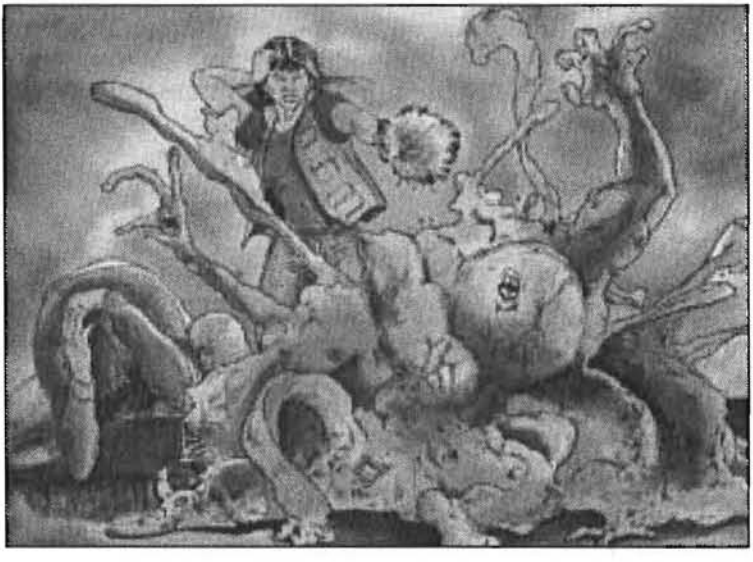
The marterkind has no physical means of attack.

In game terms, in order to drain a target's mind, the creature must first create an empathic link by Human Empathy. The marterkind must reach beyond the target's basic emotional state and at least into its surface thoughts in order to establish a stable channel for draining the mental energy (this means a minimum Stage Two success is required, higher if the marterkind wishes to reach out to a dozen meters or more). Once this is accomplished, a successful Average test of the marterkind's Empathy attribute will begin draining first the target's Empathy, then its Intelligence. A result of Basic

Success will drain 1 point per phase; a Stage Two will drain 2 points; a Stage Three, 3 points, etc. If the marterkind fails at its Empathy test, the initial link is broken. Once its intelligence reaches 0, the target dies. (if rescued short of death, the victim regains 1 point per hour.)

Current Situation

The locations of any existing marterkind are unknown at present, although in August of 2004 the bodies of an entire tribe of Indians were found deep in Bolivia, bearing no marks of physical assault, in keeping with the description of the five original victims back in 1944. Also, there have been whispers among the empathic underground of late to the effect that at least one marterkind has been contacted by and is receiving empathic tutoring from an unidentified source, and that it has been learning such Darkling Empathy skills as Telekinesis and Dimension Walk. If such is the case, this marterkind has taken a quantum leap forward in its deadliness.



MECHANIACALS

Not long ago, the tentacular ETs began to experiment with inventing a race of robots that could be sent on independent missions to dangerous proto-dimensions, without the necessity of having a living controller to monitor their progress and update their orders. What was needed was a robot that could extrapolate beyond its basic programming and that could continually resupply itself by scavenging parts from whatever environment it was sent to. A lab was built to conduct the experiments in secrecy on a world within an easily accessible proto-dimension. The experiments were successful in that a mechanical creature was created that could go to an alien environment and make a new body for itself from found materials—including living tissue, when and if it became easier to acquire than inorganic raw materials.

The robots were tested for use and put through several "generations" of evolution to see how they would adapt. Somewhere along the way, however, the new generations

lost their programming restrictions and began to scavenge the lab and its personnel for "parts" from which to make new robots. When they met armed resistance, they moved out into the proto-dimension at large, devouring all material (whether metal or living) in their way.

For reasons known only to the tentacular ETs, rather than simply abandon the experiment and seal the proto-dimensional world off from Earth, the experimenters decided to invent another group of mechanical servants, completely metal warriors programmed specifically to hunt out and destroy the first type. These hunters thinned the scavengers—at first. But they were soon countered by the scavengers' development of a new weapon, an electrical burst that could scramble a hunter's programming. The hunters' self-aware programming soon showed a glitch that was passed on by the hunter coordination computer—their program mutated from "destroy the mechano-organic life forms" to "destroy all organic life." The coordination computer passed that programming on to the hunter robots.

Only a few of the ET experimenters survived the slaughter. The proto-dimensional world became covered with robot wars as the two species battled for dominance, scavenging parts from one another in an endless cycle of destruction and rebirth. The few ETs that did not immediately fall victim to their runaway creations survived by fleeing the proto-dimension. The story of their failure soon spread to the rest of the ET community, and a great machine was invented for the express purpose of permanently sealing off the infected proto-dimension.

But some of the ETs' Dark Masters find the denizens of the machine world useful on occasion. And the proto-dimension lies in such close proximity to Earth's dimension that environmental conditions such as elevated sunspot activity sometimes breach the barrier and let something wander in or out. Some of the warring machines escape to Earth one way or another, where they run amok, killing and destroying or slaying and building. The scavengers have become known as "symbiods" and the hunters as 'steriloids." Together, they are sometimes referred to as "mechaniacals."

SYMBIODS

Strength: +3
Constitution: +3
Agility: -1
Intelligence: -2
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 0
Initiative: +1
Move: +0
Skill/Dam.: +2/x2*
Hits: x2
 # Appear: 1D6+2

* Besides conducting melee combat, symbiods have the ability to fire, with skill level 5, an electrical pulse that does 1D6 damage (triple damage to electrical machines, including robots) and has a short range of five meters. This pulse ignores any armor, automatically seeking openings or metallic parts through which to flow.

Special: Symbiods are devoid of feelings, so they cannot be affected by any Empathy skills. They are also technically dead, so they do not feel pain or suffer Initiative reductions from damage.

Hits to the head do quadruple damage to a symbiod.

The statistics modifiers listed are for a symbiod with a mechano-organic body and should be applied to the statistics of whatever once-living creature the referee decides to base the symbiod upon (preferably one the size of a wolf or larger). Symbiods encountered before acquiring a body are equal to Mark I steriloids, minus armor protection. Symbiods with purely mechanical bodies are equal to Mark II steriloids, minus armor protection. These symbiods do not have steriloid weapons, however, they merely have their own electric pulse attack.

The symbiods are the product of a race of robots invented by the tentacular ETs. Built originally as exploratory robots for proto-dimensional missions, they resemble half-meter-long ladybug shells equipped with retractable tentacles and walker legs.

Body Building

Upon entering a new environment, a symbiod tries to find materials to build a new body more appropriate to that environment. It can use completely organic material—only largish, mobile creatures are selected—if proper metal is not available. Frequently, a symbiod's body will be a mixture of both metal and organics because they find it easier to power organic tissue with their built-in motors than to build motors for purely mechanical bodies.

Building a body takes a symbiod an hour if it has a good supply of metal and electrical parts, and organic tissue. The resulting assemblage resembles nothing so much as a disgusting cross between a robot and an animated corpse, something like a dead cyborg model of the original creature, topped by the symbiod's original body as a sort of "head." Building a body from only metal and electrical parts (they can't build from organics alone) takes three hours and makes a tall, clunking robot form. A symbiod using only metals takes 12 hours to build a more agile body.

Reproduction

This propensity to build from organics is not, in itself, what makes the symbiods so dangerous. It is the additional fact that they can reproduce at a relatively rapid rate, as long as the proper materials (refined metal or plastics, and electronic parts) are available. Given these materials, one symbiod can build another from scratch in 10 hours. Thus, the quantity of symbiods in an area can theoretically quadruple roughly every day, as long as supplies hold out.

Behavior

Symbiod psychology can be expressed in one word—multiply. Symbiods exist solely to build other symbiods and increase their numbers. If threatened, they can and will fight (preferring to use their electrical blast rather than close for melee). If outclassed or in danger of being destroyed, they will flee if possible, with the reasoning that a destroyed symbiod cannot make other symbiods.

Symbiods can't (or won't) communicate with anything but another symbiod. A captured symbiod could be wired to a computer net and probed with Computer Empathy,

but its basic thought process would always be consumed with overwhelming desire—desire to build a body if it didn't have one, or to create more symbiods if it did.

Symbiods will attack humans (who are perfect for new bodies) and preserve the parts for use in future bodies.

STERILOIDS

Steriloids are killing machines, pure and simple, and they come in all sizes and shapes. For game purposes, though, they are divided into five basic types:

Mark Is are small, meter-large machines made for stealth and assassination. Mark Is might move on multiple legs, wheels or tracks, or even hover.

Mark IIs are hardier, man-sized machines. Mark IIs might move on multiple legs, wheels or tracks, or even hover.

Mark IIIs are car-sized and move on tracks or, more rarely, legs or wheels.

Mark IVs are tank-sized and tracked.

Mark Vs are building-sized and have to move (very slowly) on titanic tracks.

The steriloids were made for one purpose—to destroy the symbiods—but that one purpose has mutated to "destroy all life." They perform their new purpose very well. So well, in fact, that they are loathe to leave an area until they've seared it to slag.

The small steriloids are mostly interested in hunting mobile life forms (birds, animals, people), while the larger (Mark III-V) models devote themselves to complete life-eradication.

Steriloids hunt anything that has working organic parts, so they destroy both symbiods and walking dead. The vehicle-sized steriloids are particularly fearsome, since they can vaporize whole cities, if given the time, and they are impossible to kill without tanks or other superheavy weapons normally reserved only for military use. They have their weak spots, though—high-precision weapons (such as rifles or stabilized tank guns) can be fired through gaps in their armor. This adds one difficulty level to the shot, but reduces the steriloid's armor by half for purposes of the shot's penetration. Alternatively, brave (or suicidal) individuals can scale up on the robots—braving the lethal pincers, grippers and claws that spring from the machines' sides—and plant shaped-charges on these vulnerable areas, achieving the same armor-halving effect.

The steriloids are all self-aware and intelligent, their intellect increasing in proportion to size. Mark Vs are highly intelligent and learn very swiftly, striving to learn everything, while the smaller models tend to concentrate their education on learning the combat tactics of their foes.

Still, the steriloids are normally used to referring any new and radical data to their master control brain, back in their machine proto-dimension. If trapped on Earth, they are cut off from their master control and forced to make decisions on new data themselves. If presented with a very confusing situation or a choice dilemma, a steriloid may hesitate.

For example, a Mark I or II pursuing two people is likely to hesitate for a phase or two if the targets split up and it can't pursue them both. It will eventually make a decision to follow one or the other, but a crafty foe can put this hesitation to good use. The overall effect is that steriloids seem stupid, slow and hesitant when they first encounter new situations (like being stuck on Earth). However, they soon learn enough about their environment to lose this seeming stupidity and to begin acting with complete confidence.

A human could communicate with a steriloid—the machines have radios and speakers for voice communications. Some of the larger ones might even seem quite loqua-

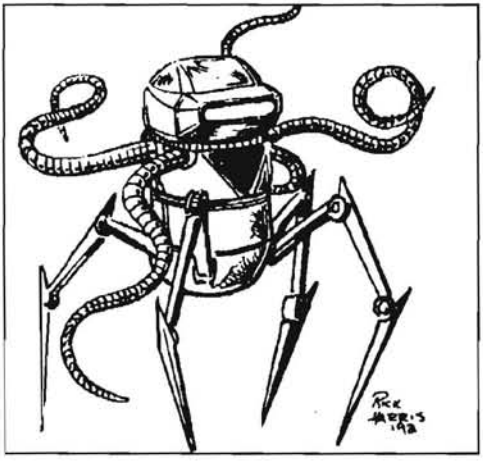
cious. However, they treat communication as just another form of intelligence-gathering and, in the end, cannot be swayed from their purpose of killing.

A Mark IV or V might be bargained with, perhaps to trade a small group of living beings (the PCs) for a larger group (perhaps a nest of insectoid ETs). But the bargainers should use the time gained to flee beyond the steriloid's range, for it will surely come back to destroy them after it's finished with the larger task. Steriloids are very thorough.

Do not inflict steriloids lightly on the average adventure group. A Mark I is an exciting and dangerous foe; a Mark II will require heavy weapons to kill; and the larger ones are projects for concerted military antitank efforts, with the expectation of high casualties.

MARK I (Nonvehicular Robot)

Like a small (one-meter) version of its tentacular ET creators, the Mark I steriloid tends to have eight limbs-four arms and four legs. For combat purposes, these limbs are paired together, with each pair being treated as a single hit location on the bipedal hit location chart.



Com Move: **35/25**
Fuel Cap. **NA**
Fuel Cons: **NA**

Initiative: 5
Agility: 5
Strength: 5
Constitution: 10
Skills: Observation 8, Small Arms (Pistol) 8, Stealth 5, Unarmed Combat Damage 7
Wt: 60 kg
Night Vision: White light spotlight

Weapon Data

						—Recoil—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Energy Beam	1	5	1	3	—	—	—	20

Damage Record

Head:	❑	*Chest:*	❑	*Abdomen:*	❑
R. Arm:	❑			*L. Arm:*	❑
R. Leg:	❑			*L. Leg:*	❑

Armor Values

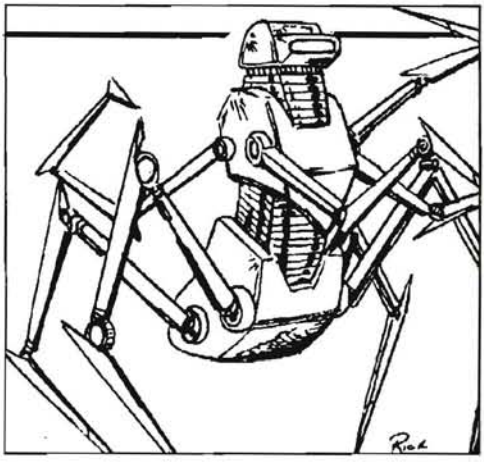
Head: 1
Chest/Abdomen: 1
Arms/Legs. 1

MARK II (Nonvehicular Robot)

The Mark II steriloid is twice the size of the Mark I (roughly two meters tall). It tends to be configured the same as the Mark I, with eight limbs-four arms and four legs. For combat purposes, these limbs are paired together, with each pair treated as a single hit location on the bipedal hit location chart.

Com Move: **30/20**
Fuel Cap. **NA**
Fuel Cons: **NA**

Initiative: 5
Agility: 6
Strength: 20
Constitution: 20
Skills: Observation 6, Small Arms (Rifle) 8, Stealth 3, Unarmed Combat Damage 11
Wt: 185 kg
Night Vision: White light spotlight



Weapon Data

						—Recoil—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Energy Beam	1	10	2	8	—	—	—	15

Damage Record

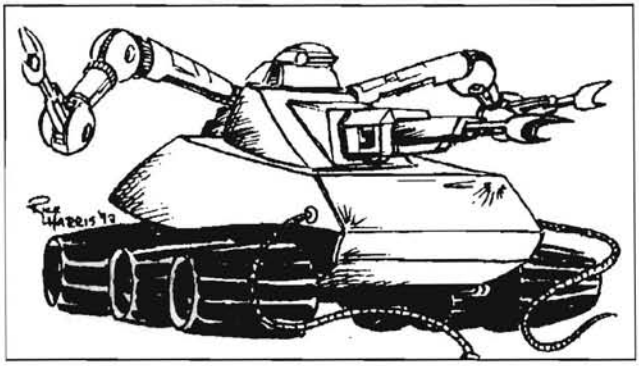
Head:	❑❑❑	*Chest:*	❑❑❑	*Abdomen:*	❑❑❑❑
R. Arm:	❑❑			*L. Arm:*	❑❑
R. Leg:	❑❑			*L. Leg:*	❑❑❑

Armor Values

Head: 3
Chest/Abdomen: 3
Arms/Legs: 2

MARK III (VEHICULAR ROBOT)

The Mark III is the size of a car and is treated as a vehicle in combat. When the "crew"servos or sensors ("sights") are destroyed, the Mark III cannot shoot. When the engine is destroyed, it cannot engage in any activity, but it can be repaired. When the brain is destoyed, the MarkIII is dead and beyond repair. The Mark III has several energy beams and can use weapons it has picked up. It can use as many weapons simultaneously as it has "crew" servos, at different targets. Because the Mark III is considered a vehicular robot, it cannot be engaged in melee combat; it can, however, conduct melee attacks versus living creatures and non vehicular robots. When the brain is destroyed, the Mark III is dead and beyond repair. The Mark III has several energy beams and can use weapons it has picked up. It can use as many weapons simultaneously as it has "crew" servos, at different targets. Because the Mark III is considered a vehicular robot, it cannot be engaged in melee combat; it can, however, conduct melee attacks versus living creatures and nonvehicular robots.



Cruise Speed: **120/70**
Com Move: **30/25**
Fuel Cap: **NA**
Fuel Cons: **NA**
Combat Statistics
Config: Trt
Susp: T: 3
TF: 8
TS: 6
TR: 5
HF: 8
HS. 6
HR: 5

Damage Record
"Crew" Servos: ❑❑❑
Sensors (Sight/Vision): ❑❑
Main Energy Gun: ❑❑
Secondary Energy Gun 1: ❑
Secondary Energy Gun 2: ❑
Traverse: ❑
Engine: ❑
Brain (Hit on "Ammo" Hits): ❑
Suspension: Minor damage ❑ Immobilized ❑

Weapon Data

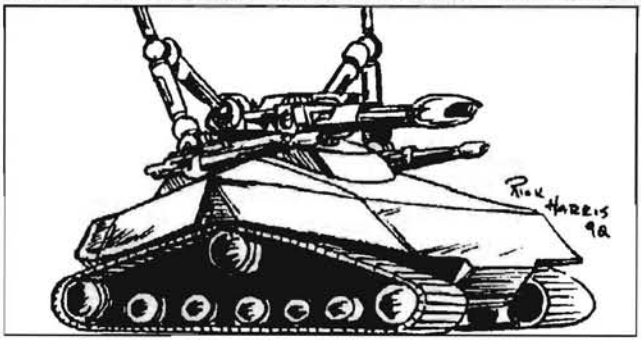
						—*Recoil*—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Main Gun	1	20	5-1-0	8	—	—	—	200
Secondary Gun	1	10	2-1-0	8	—	—	—	10

Skills: Heavy Weapons 6, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 8, Observation 3, Small Arms (Rifle) 10, Unarmed Combat Damage 1D6+1
Wt.: 1.5 tons
Crew: 0 (Robot Initiative: 5)
Night Vision: Radar, thermal imaging

MARK IV (Vehicular Robot)

The Mark IV is the size of a tank and is treated as a vehicle in combat. When the "crew" servos or sensors ("sights") are destroyed, the Mark IV can no longer shoot. When the engine is destroyed, the Mark IV cannot engage in any activity, but it can be repaired. When the brain is destroyed, the Mark IV is dead and beyond repair. The Mark IV has several energy beams. It can also use weapons it has picked up with the same skill of 6. It can use as many weapons simultaneously as it has "crew" servos, firing each at different targets, if desired. Because the Mark IV is considered a vehicular robot, it cannot be engaged in melee combat; it can, however, conduct melee attacks versus living creatures and nonvehicular robots.

Cruise Speed: 100/60
Com Move. 25/15
Fuel Cap: NA
Fuel Cons: NA



Combat Statistics
Config: Trt
Susp: T: 6
TF: 55
TS: 40
TR: 25
HF: 60
HS: 40
HR: 35

Damage Record
"Crew" Servos: ❑❑❑❑❑
Sensors (Sight/Vision): ❑❑❑
Main Energy Gun: ❑
Secondary Energy Gun 1: ❑
Secondary Energy Gun 2: ❑
Tertiary Energy Gun 1: ❑
Tertiary Energy Gun 2: ❑
Traverse: ❑
Engine: ❑
Brain (Hit on "Ammo" Hits): ❑
Suspension: Minor damage ❑ Immobilized ❑

Weapon Data

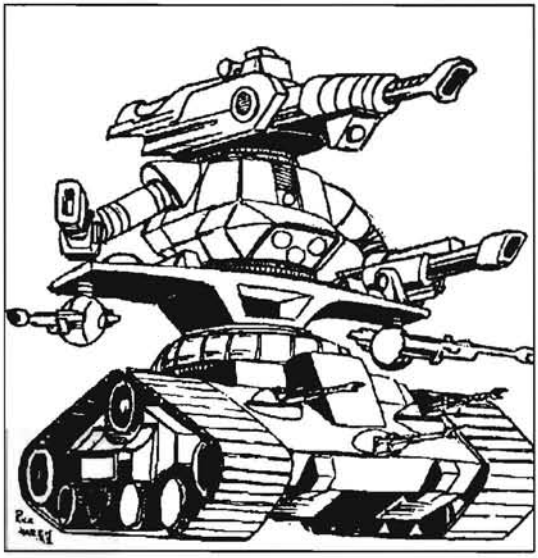
Weapon	*RND*	*Rng*	*Damage*	*Pen*
Main Gun	—	350	24	10-5-0
Secondary Gun	—	200	20	5-1-0
Tertiary Gun	—	30	10	2-1-0

Skills: Heavy Weapons 7, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 7, Observation 5, Small Arms (Rifle) 8, Unarmed Combat Damage 1D10
Wt: 45 tons
Crew: 0 (Robot Initiative: 6)
Night Vision: Radar, thermal imaging

MARK V (VEHICULAR ROBOT)

The Mark V is the size of a medium building and is treated as a vehicle in combat. Firing at it is two difficult levels easier than normal, due to its size. When the "crew" servos or sensors ("sights") are destroyed, the Mark V cannot shoot. When the engine is destroyed, it cannot engage in any activity, but it can be repaired. The Mark V has several energy beams of varying sizes. It can also use weapons it has picked up, with the

same skill. It can use as many weapons simultaneously as it has "crew" servos, at different targets. Because the Mark V is considered a vehicular robot, it cannot be engaged In melee combat, it can, however, conduct melee attacks versus living creatures and nonvehicular robots.



Cruise Speed: **40/25**
Com move: **10/5**
Fuel Cap: **NA**
Fuel Cons: **NA**

Combat Statistics
Config: Trt
Susp: T: 30
TF: 180
TS: 130
TR: 95
HF: 210
HS: 150
HR: 125

Damage Record
"Crew" Servos: ❑❑❑❑❑ ❑❑❑❑❑
Sensors (Sight/Vision): ❑❑❑❑
Main Energy Gun: ❑
Secondary Energy Gun 1: ❑
Secondary Energy Gun 2: ❑
Tertiary Energy Gun 1: ❑
Tertiary Energy Gun 2: ❑
Antipersonnel Energy Gun 1: ❑
Antipersonnel Energy Gun 2: ❑
Antipersonnel Energy Gun 3: ❑
Antipersonnel Energy Gun 4: ❑
Antipersonnel Energy Gun 5: ❑
Traverse: ❑
Engine: ❑
Brain (Hit on "Ammo" Hits): ❑
Suspension: Minor damage ❑ Immobilized ❑

Skills: Heavy Weapons 8, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 6, Observation 8, Small Arms (Rifle) 6, Unarmed Combat Damage 2D6+2

Wt: 800 tons
Crew: 0 (Robot Initiative: 6)
Night Vision: Radar, thermal imaging

Weapon Data

Weapon	*RND*	*Rng*	*Damage*	*Pen*
Main Gun	—	500	40	10-5-0
Secondary Gun	—	350	24	5-2-0
Tertiary Gun	—	200	20	2-1-0

Skills: Heavy Weapon 8, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 6, Observation 8, Small Arms (Rifle) 6, Unarmed Combat Damage 2D6+2

Wt: 800 tons

Crew: 0 (Robot Initiative: 6)

Night Vision: Radar, thermal imaging

MEDUSA

HUMAN STATISTICS

Strength: 4
Constitution: 6
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 6
Education: 5
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 9/5
Hits: 25/50
Appear: 1

Special: Poison-tipped tentacles on head and neck.



TENTACLES

Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: —
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: —
Initiative: 6
Move: —
Skill/Dam.: 6/1p1
Hits: *
Appear: 2D6

* Each hit to a medusa's head has a chance of destroying tentacles. See below for details.

Special: Short melee combat range. Each tentacle attacks separately, and all may focus on different targets.

Medusas are an unusual type of Dark Minion, because they originated as terran humans. Each medusa has grafted onto its scalp and neck approximately a dozen independently minded, stinger-tipped tentacles, each about 20 centimeters long. These tentacles give the creatures poison attacks in melee combat, in addition to their normal human attacks.

In the tentacle statistics listed above, # *Appear* refers to the number of tentacles the creature possesses, and the skill rating is each tentacle's chance of hitting. Melee range for the tentacles is short. Each tentacle strikes separately, injecting its target with lpl of venom. Tentacles can even hit targets to the rear and sides of the medusa, and each tentacle can attack separate targets.

If the referee allows, damage to a medusa's head may count additionally as a chance that some of the tentacles are destroyed. Each wound should be counted separately, and is multiplied by 10 for a percentage chance that 1D6/2 tentacles (rounded down) are lost. For instance, a blow that did 3 points of damage to the head would have a 30 percent chance of removing tentacles.

Many medusas let their hair grow long and thick to disguise the tentacles. Others prefer to wear wigs, hoods, scarves, turbans, or large hats.

MEN IN BLACK (MIB)

Strength: 13
Constitution: 12
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 5
Education: 4
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 6
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 9/1D6
Hits: 28/56
 # Appear: 1D6+2

Special: Unlike many Dark Minions, MiBs are able to use many types of human equipment, including ranged weapons. They have a skill of Small Arms (Pistol) 6. They also may have Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) 2. In addition, they have the usual Darkling Empathy skills.

The Mythology

The folklore that has sprung up around UFOs and many other forms of nonhuman technology is full of tales of "men in black" or "MiBs"—mysterious figures thought by many to be members of a covert government or military agency striving to prevent investigators from uncovering secrets humanity is not meant to know. These tales tell of MiBs intimidating researchers into dropping their investigations, seizing or destroying evidence, confiscating notes and photographs, and even causing the disappearance of particularly tenacious investigators.

While most of those who believe in tales of MiBs think the mysterious figures are human employees of the government, and thus supporters of the status quo, a few suspect that the MiBs are actually aliens.

The Reality

This latter group is at least partly right. There is a race of Dark Minions who perform the functions of, and perfectly fit the bill as, the mythical MiBs. Among those few humans who know the truth, there is still debate as to the "direction of causality" involved. Is the race of Dark Minions behind all the stories of MiBs? Or were the folktales just that—until the Dark Minions appeared and took on the identity of MiBs, perverting the tales to their own ends?

In any case, the Dark Minion MiBs function in much the way that UFOlogists have always said MIBs act. They seem to be closely related to ETs, working subtly or not so subtly to prevent investigators from learning anything of consequence about extraterrestrial visitors or their technology. Whenever humans are close to discovering something important about DarkTek or about the nature of the invasion, MiBs frequently appear on the scene to squelch the research, destroy evidence, and occasionally abduct or kill the humans involved.

Physical Appearance

MiBs are quite human in appearance. They tend to be large, often 1.9 meters tall or more, with a very powerful build. Normally, they wear conservative dark suits, and overcoats or trenchcoats. They also wear slouch-brimmed hats, seemingly designed to shadow their faces, with mirrored sunglasses. All their clothes and their obvious equipment is human in design and origin, seemingly chosen to imply that the MiBs actually are humans, and government agents at that.



Beneath their clothes, however, MiBs are definitely nonhuman. Their skeletal structure and musculature are undeniably alien. While their broad faces appear, at first glance, to be human, on closer examination their alien nature becomes apparent. Their thin-lipped mouths have too many teeth; their incisors and canines appear roughly human, but MiBs have two rows of molars.

Their eyes are their least human feature, having no whites, just large blue irises, and their large pupils are octagonal in shape. The creatures wear sunglasses to disguise this fact

and to protect them from bright lights. Without their glasses, MiBs see exceptionally well in even the dimmest lights, and they can see far into the IR end of the spectrum. In all but total darkness, MiBs suffer none of the penalties to accuracy that humans suffer. When not wearing sunglasses or other protection in illumination brighter than sunlight, however, MiBs perform all tasks at one stage of difficulty higher than normal, due to the pain and distraction bright light causes them.

MIBs have a relatively high Education attribute, particularly for Dark Minions, and they frequently have education-related skills, such as Psychology, at high levels. All MiBs—or at least those that operate among humans—are fluent in at least one human language. Their voices are well modulated, and are low and powerful as a result of the large resonant space of their chests. They never have a discernible accent, always speaking in the ideal of whatever language they are using. Few MiBs are literate, however, and those that can read do so slowly.

Combat Abilities

Except in the most unusual circumstances, MiBs avoid combat, preferring to use intimidation and persuasion to achieve their goals. They use their Human Empathy and Project Emotion abilities to create a sense of despair and futility in whoever they deal with. If circumstances warrant it, however, they are dangerous warriors. A blow from a MiB's hand inflicts 1D6 damage. In addition, MiBs invariably carry some form of weapon, usually a human-built pistol or submachinegun, although occasionally they are armed with hand-portable death rays or other examples of DarkTek. Fortunately for humanity, MiBs seem incapable of accepting cybernetic enhancements. Sometimes they wear human-style body armor; this is usually limited to Kevlar vests.

MiBs can be fierce fighters, willing to battle to the death if a mission requires it. MiBs can and will commit suicide at will if necessary to avoid being questioned or examined. One combat phase after death, the body of an MiB bursts into flame and is totally consumed within one combat turn. An immolating MiB burns at a high temperature, easily high enough to ignite any flammable material in contact with the body. The flames of a burning MiB inflict damage on those in contact with the body as does burning gasoline. The temperature is easily high enough to "cook off" ammunition or explosives carried by the MiB.

Other Notes of Interest

There is some debate as to whether all MiBs are "loyal" to the Dark Ones. Some humans suspect that some MiBs are working to protect the few extraterrestrials who have not been suborned by the Dark Ones. Others, however, fear that the interest some MiBs show in the "free" extraterrestrials comes from their desire to hunt down and destroy these "renegades."

MiBs appear to be sexless. Various theories exist as to their mode of reproduction, but the creatures' disconcerting habit of bursting into flame upon death has kept these speculations as just that—unproven theories. It is thought that MiBs are omnivores. Again, this is unproven, as no MiB has ever been seen to eat (despite some people's assurances that they like strawberry ice cream).

MESMER

Strength: 3
Constitution: 3
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 9
Education: 5
Charisma: 7
Empathy: 9
Initiative: 3
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6
Hits: 20/40
 # Appear: 1

Special: This creature is so adept at projecting terrifying visions into its victims' minds that it effectively combines the Project Thought and Project Emotion skills into one skill—Project Terror. It has Project Terror and Animal, Darkling and Human Empathy skills at a level equal to twice its Empathy attribute.

It can be as simple as walking into a store or restaurant and suddenly losing consciousness. It can be traumatic enough to cause permanent insanity. The attack of a mesmer is incredibly difficult to resist and sometimes impossible even to detect until it's too late.

General Description

The mesmer is a special subtype of humanoid ET. As such, it looks basically human, but with an enlarged, hairless head and large, dark, round eyes. The creatures disguise themselves in bulky, hooded robes and such when in human company, and they can project an image of normalcy into a viewer's mind if they notice someone watching them closely.

Modus Operandi

Besides possessing the usual Darkling Empathy skills, mesmers have developed such an expertise with projecting terrifying images into a victim's mind that they have effectively created a new empathic projection skill—Project Terror. As with other empathic projection skills, an empathic link must be established with Human, Animal or Darkling Empathy (whichever is appropriate) before the projection skill can be used, and the quality of the link serves as a limit to the quality of the projection.

The Project Terror skill enables the mesmer to inflict an assortment of terrible hallucinogenic experiences upon its target. The specific experience the mesmer introduces depends on what the mesmer detects when it first establishes an empathic link.

The mesmer uses its Human (or Animal or Darkling) Empathy skill to determine what the target's deeper fears might be at the moment, and if any particularly strong phobias exist. The fear it uses might be situational as well. A convenience store worker might be nervous about being robbed late at night, so a mesmer would probably project the illusion that some gang members have just broken in and are threatening anyone in the store.

The level of terror generated can be so great that the victim is immobilized from



fright. In order for this to happen, the mesmer has to achieve at least a Stage Four success with Project Terror. If this occurs, the target becomes paralyzed with fear and is not in any way aware of what is going on around him. This paralysis is in effect for as long as the mesmer maintains the projection. It can maintain the use of this skill and perform very simple actions (like opening doors or windows, walking across a room) but cannot operate any equipment or instruments.

If a target of the Project Terror skill is not paralyzed, he is still confused enough by the conflicting images of the projection and the real world that all task attempts are increased by one level of difficulty; the victim's Initiative rating is reduced by 1; and the victim cannot communicate more than three words at a time effectively.

The target does not need eye contact with the mesmer and does not even need to know of the mesmer's presence for the projection to take place.

If necessary, a mesmer will use Willpower Drain to reduce a target's resistance enough for a Stage Four success to be gained, if the target proved resistant to an earlier projection.

Empathic Slavery

Once a target has been paralyzed, the mesmer will often take advantage of the situation to begin brainwashing the target to respond to commands upon a later order.

This conditioning takes a total number of days equal to 3+ (2x Intelligence). For example, a character with Intelligence 4 would take 11 days to reprogram. Each day, the mesmer must reestablish a Stage Four success at Project Terror to maintain the process. The nature of the programming involves imprinting instructions into the target's mind.

Mesmers typically use humans to undertake complex tasks-usually involving some kind of sabotage. Targets of mesmers are, therefore, people who have some kind of access to sensitive areas such as airline mechanics, train station operators, bodyguards, air traffic controllers and the like. Victims become completely convinced that the only way of ending their walking nightmares is by doing whatever it is that the mesmer has planted in their minds.

Once the task has been completed, the victim generally slips into catatonia and has to be revived with psychotherapy and/or empathic therapy. The duration of the catatonia is based upon the character's Intelligence rating and the skillfulness of whoever is giving treatment. Consult the Catatonia Duration Table to determine how long the char-

acter remains catatonic. Catatonic characters must make an Average roll versus Intelligence to snap out of it, but they cannot attempt the roll until they are eligible according to the table. If they fail the roll, they will have to wait until the next longer period on the table to try again.

CATATONIA DURATION

*Statistic Total**	*Duration of Catatonia*
19+	1 hour
17-18	3 hours
15-16	9 hours
13-14	20 hours
11-12	2 days
9-10	7 days
7-8	14 days
5-6	28 days
3-4	36 days
1-2**	permanent

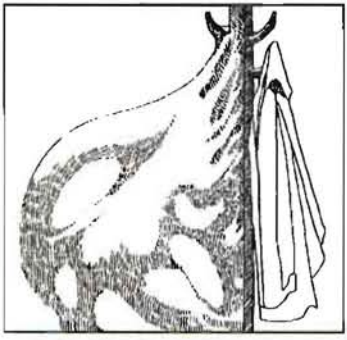
* Victim's Intelligence+Therapist's Psychology or Human Empathy (whichever is higher).
** Or failed 3-4 roll.

Thwarting the Plan

If the effects of a mesmer's brainwashing can be recognized early enough, they can be reversed before the victim completes the task assigned. To do so requires that the treater pass a Difficult test of Human Empathy, then scores at least a Stage Three success to reach the "real" person inside the shell of terror and programming left by the mesmer. For every hour the empath spends with the victim, the victim is eligible to make a Difficult roll versus Intelligence to recover. Victims who succeed at this roll have defeated their brainwashing and return to a normal state of mind. They are likely to have nightmares about the experience for quite some time, however.

MIMIC

Strength: 2
Constitution: 5
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 3
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 3
Move: 6/10/20*
Skill/Dam.: 4*/1D6+1
Hits: 20/40
 # Appear: 1



Special: Mimics possess Darkling Empathy at skill level 10, Observation 10, Stalking 5 and Project Emotion/Thought 8.

Physical Description

The mimic, in its true form, is a gaseous creature, about the same consistency as tomato soup. Its color is usually a neutral gray, though it can change this at will. The mimic can, after observing an object for several minutes, change into an exact replica of that object.

For some reason not understood, however, there is always one flaw in the replica. (For example, a mimic might imitate an analog clock, with the details perfect except that the hands are rotating counterclockwise instead of clockwise.)

Mimics are usually detectable on success at a Difficult: Observation roll, but the difficulty of the test will largely depend on how obvious the referee makes the flaw and whether or not the character is looking for it.

Mission

Mimics are employed by Dark Lords largely for surveillance purposes. They can move from room to room to follow a conversation, or even eavesdrop by remaining on a person in an inconspicuous manner (disguised as a pen, for example). Mimics are superior to other means of eavesdropping for these reasons.

Abilities

There are few limits to what a mimic can imitate. Size is rarely a limiting factor because mimics can change their density at will. However, the larger the object is, the less solid it will feel if touched. A mimic may have trouble imitating humans or other animate objects, depending on the situation. Mimics only imitate outward appearances. They have no voice, communicating with their kind and others who can understand via empathy. So if a mimic were to imitate a human being it would not be able to talk or laugh.

A mimic will also hesitate to imitate something it recognizes as having unattached parts. If a character should attempt to remove one of the parts (like taking a book from a mimic disguised as a bookshelf), the part wouldn't move, drawing unwanted attention. In all cases, the creature tries to mimic some singular item unless it has no alternative.

Unlike other Dark Races, the mimic uses its Project Emotion and Project Thought skills not to cause terror, but merely to enhance the facade it has created. Because of the way in which mimics communicate, their skill level in Project Thought/Emotion and Darkling Empathy are unusually high for their innate abilities. The mimic also utilizes its Stalking skill to keep up on those it has been assigned to monitor, should it not be able to somehow place itself on their person.

Combat

If a mimic is discovered, it will flee. If, for some reason, the mimic cannot escape (under a doorjamb, through a keyhole, etc.), it will expand its bulk so that it becomes a haze. A mimic may not expand more than this and may not contract to a size smaller than a tennis ball. it can not attack or be attacked in this gaseous form. Blows pass through the gaseous body, and it is too insubstantial to be much more than a breeze on a character's face.

If there is absolutely no other alternative, a mimic will solidify a portion of its mass to the hardness of bone with the general shape of a large club and will then attack with a Melee Combat (Armed) skill of 4.

If a mimic is killed, its body dissipates into nothingness.

The mimic uses flying as its main mode of movement, though it can also push itself along the ground at a rate of three meters per phase.

Social Habits

Most mimics live alone, although there are a few large groups of them (10 to 30) in most major metroplexes. These larger groups are typically assembled by a Dark Lord in order to keep them close at hand and in a central location. Mimics live mostly in dark, undisturbed places such as sewer systems, underground access tunnels, corners of subways, unused basements, etc. The larger groups generally dig their own tunnels somewhere in a small, sleepy suburb from which to base their operations into the city.

Mimics are asexual, reproducing when they have reached a certain age by splitting into component mimics of varying sizes, each with their own personality and intelligence. The mimics are continually growing, so the "parent" mimic will grow again until it is time to split once more.

All mimics are inherently mischievous, as well as rather cowardly. They are quick to run at any sign of danger, and they live to incite chaos and confusion. When mimics aren't working for a Dark Lord, they look for opportunities to cause confusion and wreak havoc on humans. Mimics sometimes take great delight in such things as dissolving into mist in front of people's eyes or forming into objects that can't be operated (e.g., forming into a book that someone tries to open but cannot).

MORLOCKS

Strength: 5
Constitution: 3
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 7
Education: 3
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 3
Move: 3/8/12/20
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: 12/25
Appear: 4D6



Special: Blind, but excellent senses of smell and hearing.

In *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells wrote of a far future in which the descendants of humanity had split into two separate races. One lived an idyllic, carefree life on the Earth's surface. The other race hid underground and cared for the first...because they used the surface dwellers as cattle.

Wells called that cannibalistic, subterranean race the morlocks. But he wasn't just writing fiction; the morlocks actually exist. They are short, pallid humanoids with incredibly developed senses of hearing and smell. Their eyes have completely atrophied, however, leaving nothing but smooth brow between their snow-white hair and their wide, quivering noses. Their jawbones are much smaller than are humans', which makes their pale, fleshy lips seem even more oversized, and their teeth are small and very pointed. Morlocks are primarily meat-eaters, their diet consisting mainly of worms, grubs, and raw cave fish. On the rare occasions when they can find warm meat, such as moles, mice, or bats, they go into a frenzy of ecstasy. But more than anything else, they prefer raw human flesh, torn with their teeth from a living victim.

The problem for the morlocks has been that humans are bigger and more technologically advanced than they are. Also, humans tend to stay above ground, where their sight gives them a long range advantage over the blind morlocks. Below ground, however, it is a much different story. In the stygian darkness of subterranean caves, humans panic without their sight advantage, and the morlocks can attack them en masse. It is a terrifying thing to be lost in the darkness and hear the patter of scores of bare feet approaching.

With the worldwide chaos that the Dark Minions have brought to Earth, humans have become somewhat more vulnerable to morlock attacks. There have been many recent news stories of entire populations of isolated villages disappearing overnight. The only clues as to their whereabouts are fresh tunnels dug into basements and cellars. Few people have been brave enough to explore those tunnels afterward, and even fewer of those who were have ever returned.

Particularly frightening is the fact that numerous firearms and other equipment have disappeared into those holes, as well. All indications are that the morlocks are completely capable of learning to use human technology.

MORRIGAN

Strength: 12
Constitution: 8
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 4
Education: 6
Charisma: 9
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 5
Move: 4/10/25/50
Skill/Dam.: 6/4D6
Hits: 30/60
 # Appear: 1
Special: Dimension Walk, Presence Sense (see below).

The Mythology

The mythology of the ancient Celtic people, who once held much of northern Europe as their own, is filled with tales of great demons and harsh, unforgiving gods. These terrible entities demanded offerings of blood and human lives to satisfy their lusts

and hungers, and it was the duty of the great and powerful druids to provide sacrifices from among the tribes.



Among these deities and demons, one of the most terrible and cruel was Morrigan, the destroyer. Little is told of her origins except that she was born of darkness and destruction during the terrible years of the Fomorian wars.

The legends tell how she was brought into being by the druids as a weapon of vengeance to use against the Fomorian hordes that had destroyed the land and enslaved the people. She fell upon the sea demons in a hail of bloodshed and destruction so great that even Balor of the evil eye, the greatest of the Fomorians, fled from the battle.

However, the Morrigan still held within her the lust for destruction and blood. Even as the last Fomorian fell to the ground, she turned upon her creators, tearing into their ranks, cutting down warriors and druids alike with her blood-stained talons. Thus began her reign of darkness in the myths of the Celtic tribes.

For seven years she roamed the lands, leaving the Earth scorched and lifeless in her wake. In desperation, the druids turned to Dagda, the God of the Earth, who—after a long and bloody battle—imprisoned the Morrigan beneath the Earth for eternity, never again to walk the realms of humanity.

The Reality

The Morrigan is an image from hell itself. Its reality is horrifyingly close to the reports of mythology.

Physical Description

The Morrigan stands some three meters tall when at her full height, but stoops down to just over two meters when she moves. Her skin is blistered and, in some places, rotted, revealing the twisted, tumorous bones beneath. Her huge claws are as strong as steel, yet appear cracked, having the texture and color of ancient ivory. Her eyes are dark as pools of night, absorbing light, yet she can see far better than any human. Her huge fangs and twin tusks are rotten and black with age, yet they are as mighty as her vicious talons. She is as strong and fast as a bear, and her senses are as those of a wolf. The Morrigan is virtually a manifestation of death itself.

Ceremony of Summoning

Although she is trapped "beneath the Earth" (actually held in a proto-dimensional prison), the Morrigan can be released through the use of an ancient ceremony, supposedly lost centuries ago. If called by this ceremony, she will appear before sunrise in a

shower of bloody rain, to begin her dark crusade once again. She leaves her proto-dimensional prison by means of the Dimension Walk skill, which initiators of the ceremony empower with their own Empathy (a combined Empathy rating of 50 is required). Few beings are willing to summon such a destructive creature, but bands of dark elves have been known to do so upon occasion.

Behavior

The Morrigan is untiring in the pursuit of her quarry, and even those who hide in fear of her wrath cannot long escape death.

The Morrigan does not hunt her prey using her normal senses. Instead, she uses a form of Human Empathy called Presence Sense to track her victims by the radiance of their very souls. Once the Morrigan is on your trail, she will never give up the chase.

This evil creature is also of an immortal race and thus can never be slain by mortal weapons. So great was the vengeance of the ancient druids that their creation was indestructible, yet capable of destruction far beyond the dreams of humanity. If she is "killed" while in this world, Dagda's curse transports her immediately from the land back to her eternal prison, where she licks her wounds and awaits her next call to Earth.

Few remember the Morrigan except in the legends of the Celtic race. Even fewer realize the dark truth that these legends hold. Of those cursed mortals who are unfortunate enough to meet face-to-face with this demon of vengeance, few have lived to tell the tale.

NUKIDS

Strength: *
Constitution: *
Agility: *
Intelligence: *
Education: *
Charisma: *
Empathy: *
Initiative: *
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: */*
Hits: *
Appear: 2D6-1



* As normal NPCs, except one in 10 has an Empathy ratings of 1D6+4.

Special: Empathic nukids have Darkling Empathy skills, including Dimension Walk, Dissolution, Pyrokinesis, or Telekinesis.

Nukids is a collective term for street gangs composed of mutated humans. It originated as a reference to radioactive contamination ("that dude's been nuked for sure"), but has come to refer to mutations resulting from other sorts of contamination as well (chemical, for example). The prerequisite for membership to a nukid "family" is having a mutation of some sort. Most of these mutations are merely physical deformations. But roughly 10% of the nukids also demonstrate one Darkling empathic ability or another, falling into one of four different classes: geists, slimers, spooks, and torches.

The term "geist" is a shortening of "poltergeist," and these nukids are highly telekinetic. "Slimers" are nukids with the Dissolution skill; they also tend to be slightly radioactive. "Spooks" are those with the Dimension Walk skill. And "torches" are pyrokinetic. All of these empathic characters also have other Empathy skills as per Dark Minions (as explained under "Darkling Skills," above).

Nukid gangs can be an excellent source of information for Dark Minion hunters, provided the questioners survive their first meeting. In particular, a number of the more hideously deformed gangs have taken up residence in the sewers, and some of these are great enemies to morlocks and dark elves. Unlike true Dark Minions, nukids are not actively out to ruin humanity. Instead, like nearly any other street gang members, they are merely unfortunate people in a dead-end life-style, with no hope for the future. Nukid gangs just have more to complain about than most others.

OGRE

Strength: 24
Constitution: 21
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 2
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/10/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 5/4D6
Hits: 56/110
Appear: 1

Special: Long unarmed melee range.



Ogres are basically huge, filthy, brutish humanoids that love to tear weaker creatures limb from limb and eat them. Their average height is about three and a half meters, and they mass up to 250 kilos. Most of them work as watchdogs for other, brighter Dark Minions, but occasionally one will escape into the wilds of the Earth. These escapees maintain a very primitive existence, hunting with their bare hands and wearing untanned animal skins for clothing, giving rise to legends of bigfoot, yeti, and (in ancient times) cyclops.

THE PALE

Strength: 8
Constitution: 5
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 6
Education: 4
Charisma: 7
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/10/20/40
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: 26/52
Appear: 1D6+2

Special: Dimension Walk. Leech heat from victims, see below.

Like the bloodkin, the pale are another source of humanity's vampire legends. These creatures are much more human looking than are the bloodkin, however. Members of the pale are tall and gaunt, with relatively short torsos but long, spindly limbs. (Generally the pale average a full two meters in height and about 70 kilograms in weight.) Their skin is incredibly pallid, and their hair (which grows thickly on head, neck, and shoulders, like a lion's mane) is pure white. Their eyes are pink, like an albino's. To disguise their inhumanly long limbs and short torsos, the pale tend to dress in billowy clothes and wear flowing cloaks. They prefer black because it make them less visible at night.

Despite their relatively human appearance, the pale do not feed like humans. Instead, they leech body heat from warm-blooded creatures, preferably from human beings, leaving their victims as cold corpses. (They can drain a body down to almost 0 centigrade—32 Fahrenheit—just short of the freezing point.) To do this, they must create an empathic link with the victim, while physically in contact, skin-to-skin. (In order to establish the link, a pale must have a few minutes to concentrate, which means that it may not do so during combat—but it could grapple a victim to immobillty, then simply hold the victim while the link is created.) Without this link, they cannot absorb heat effectively, which is why nonliving heat sources will not serve them. Daylight, for example, might provide them with sufficient energy for survival, but it severely burns their sensitive skin and eyes. Similarly, rumor has it that two FBI agents once tried to keep a captive pale alive in a hot tub, but the creature died of hypothermia even as its outer skin layer was blistering away.

The pale are nocturnal hunters, shunning the bright, hot light of day. They almost always operate in packs. When prey is scarce or human resistance is strong, the creatures can enter a hibernative trance to wait for better times. They can only leave this trance by absorbing more heat, which means that a victim must be within the immediate vicinity.

The amount of heat that can be leeched from different victims varies considerably, of course (especially if the victims are of different species). As a rule of thumb, however, referees can estimate that for victims that are drained completely, each kilogram of body weight translates to about 45 minutes of activity for a pale. The heat from an average adult human (let's say 70 kilograms), for example, could maintain one pale for a little over two days (52.5 hours, to be exact), or two pales for one day, etc. A good-sized rat might keep one pale active for an hour or so.

Some of the oldest and wiliest of the pale are able to stop feeding from their victims



short of causing death, saving them to feed upon again and again. The average human can survive down to a body temperature of about 25 centigrade (77 Fahrenheit), but will become comatose in the process and require special care to be rewarmed. Humans can remain coherent and able to care for themselves with body temperatures down to almost 32 centigrade (90 Fahrenheit). Below this, they become delirious and eventually incapable of any activity at all. Following these guidelines, referees who wish to run pales that keep captive victims can multiply such victims' body weight (in kilograms, of course) by the number of degrees their temperature is lowered, then divide the result by 50 (100 if Fahrenheit), to determine the number of hours activity the pale gains. For example, a pale that leeched 5 C from a 70-kilogram human would gain about seven hours of activity (5x70/50=7). Assuming adequate food and shelter, the victim's body heat could certainly return to normal during that time, meaning the pale could feed once again.

Referees are encouraged to enhance the frightfulness of adventures involving the pale by having player characters captured by the creatures. Other PCs will certainly be horrified to finally find their friends locked in some damp cellar, shivering and blue with cold, and mumbling incoherently about tall, gangly, pale men.

PENANNGALAN

Strength: 5
Constitution: 6
Agility: 4*
Intelligence: 9
Education: 5
Charisma: 4*
Empathy: 17
Initiative: 3*
Move: 1/6/12/22
Skill/Dam.: 4*/1D10
Hits: 40*
 # Appear: 1

* These attributes are doubled when the penanngalan is in its "flying head" form.

Special: Telekinesis (for flight only). Limited Dissolution (see below).

Penanngalan suffer no damage from hits to any location but the head. They do not suffer double damage from head hits, and they heal very quickly from wounds (as per the rules for bloodkin vampires). Neither penanngalan nor the bodies they inhabit suffer Initiative reductions from damage taken. The bodies become unusable after taking a total of 20 hits, however.

The Mythology

Over the centuries, penanngalan have appeared in numerous mythologies, most accurately represented in the Malayan version of the vampire tale.

The Malayan vampires were abominations consisting of essentially undead humanoids able to detach their head and internal organs from their body. Once free of their torso, they could fly about at will, feeding upon the blood of the living.

The Malayan tales come close to the truth, but are not completely accurate.

Recent Reports

Of late, reports of modern penanngalan attacks have been radioed out of Malaysia. At first, there was only one highly questionable account, but more quickly followed. Now there have been reports from virtually every continent, including several from North America.

All reports are essentially the same—the witnesses tell of seeing a man approaching them. Then, as he neared, his head tore free of his torso, dripping the red and black slop of his internal organs. The head was said to fly with extraordinary agility, deftly maneuvering itself over a victim, which it throttled with its dangling organs. Some few who have reported these incidences also claim to have seen insectile protrusions dangling from the thing's neck, protrusions which were forced into the victim's eye sockets.

One strange fact keeps most folks from believing in the existence of the penanngalan: Many of the so-called "victims" of the attacks are seen in perfect health the very next day. All such "survivors" fervently deny that anything unusual has happened to them. Medical examinations have verified their good health, casting the eye of disbelief on many formerly reputable witnesses.

The Truth

The true form of a penanngalan is rarely seen, as they spend most of their time in a partially dissolute state inside the heads of human hosts. If they are spotted within a few combat phases of leaving a host, they appear as a head flying through the air with lungs, heart, and stomach dangling below. A successful Difficult check of Observation when first encountering a penanngalan in its flying head form will reveal the presence of insectile limbs hanging within the mass dangling beneath the head.

Physical Description

Once they have had a chance to remove the detritus of their last host from themselves, penanngalan resemble nothing so much as a black jellyfish on roach's legs. No facial features are readily discernible in the mass, though careful examination will reveal several dark spots which contain the thing's only sensory apparatus. The creature's legs are useless for any sort of movement (they use Telekinesis to fly) and are mainly used to grasp onto a struggling new host. Then the creature uses Dissolution to pass itself through the host's scalp and skull, permeating the victim's brain, effectively becoming a new part of the host's body.

Penanngalan must have a constant supply of new hosts. As parasites, they die quite rapidly if not encased in a human body. The creature's gelatinous composition is only truly safe within the confines of another creature's skull, most desirably a human's

Feeding Habits

Penanngalan feed very little, requiring the equivalent of only 2 damage points a day of blood, drained from their host. While infested by a penanngalan, a host is fully aware, but unable to break free of the control imposed on its body. Penanngalan are fond of causing harm to a host's loved ones, relishing the horror it invokes. Once a host is near death, the penanngalan will use the victim's last energies to find another host.

Combat Abilities

If forced to engage in combat, a penanngalan's host is often so damaged that the penanngalan must leave rather abruptly. The penanngalan occupies the head of the host and can only be damaged by head hits. However, the host body will become nonfunctional after sustaining 20 hits, and the penanngalan will be forced to depart. To do so, it reverses its Dissolution ability, becoming very solid, thereby causing the host's head to burst apart, upon which the penanngalan leaves the now headless body.

This trauma of being outside a protective skull causes a penanngalan 2 points of damage every combat phase (after the first) that it remains without a host.

Once a target is chosen, the penanngalan will attempt to grapple it. On a 1D10 roll of 1-4, any character attacking the penanngalan during the grappling will strike the wrong target. As the penanngalan is only large enough to grapple its foe's head, this is where any missed attacks aimed at the creature will hit.

Targets that are successfully immobilized by the penanngalan's grappling are then subject to infestation. Three phases after they have been pinned by the penanngalan, the creature will have penetrated the skull. At this point, the penanngalan is in total control of its target and cannot be removed by any means short of killing the host. Medical examinations will reveal nothing out of the ordinary, though X-rays might reveal a slight cloud within the skull (assuming that a penanngalan would submit to being photographed in this way).



PLAGUELING

Strength: 3
Constitution: 4
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 4
Education: 7
Charisma: 9 (1)
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 4 (3)
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/3p4
Hits: 20/40
 # Appear: 1D6+3

* Plagueling poison damage works a bit differently than normal—it is not truly poison, but disease. The number before the "p" is still the immediate damage done by the method of exposure (in this case, a clawing attack), but second number is the damage done per *day* rather than per phase. As with poison, all hits are considered to be applied to the chest, though symptoms will manifest all over the body. Once sufficient points have been accrued to cause death, the victim liquefies into a puddle of rot and decay.

Special: Reverse Dissolution at skill level 8—the creatures can liquefy at will, but must roll to become solid. Plaguelings prefer to move and fight in a dissolute state, which is their original form. Attributes listed within parentheses reflect their abilities in this form.

The Reports

Humanity has forever been involved in an ongoing war with disease. With the coming of the Dark, new and ever more hideous diseases have arisen. Of late, some locales are reporting a particularly horrific plague which breaks down the connective tissues in a human body and, over a period of several days, reduces its victims to puddles of slime.

The Reality

The "disease" being reported is actually the digestive process of a creature that infects its victims with digestive organisms, then returns to soak up the resulting nutrients at a later time. Some members of the empathic underground have begun calling the creature the "plagueling."

Physical Description

Plaguelings are liquid creatures in their natural state, able to fit through any space that is not completely airtight. In this amorphous state, they look like puddles of pink oil with clotted, dark clouds and strings of sandy matter swirling within. Their smell is atrocious, stinking of decay and rot, and is easily detectable at 20 meters or more.

Plaguelings are rarely seen in this form, however, as it immediately makes them a target. Normally, they masquerade as humans, at which they are quite adept. Though their odor is less intense in this state, they must mask it with perfumes and colognes. Animals can still easily detect the stench and will not come anywhere near a plagueling if they can help it. Humans are not nearly so perceptive and will need to make a Difficult

test of Observation to notice the odor. The only other distinguishing feature of a plagueling masquerading as human is its long, black fingernails, dark with concentrated digestive viruses.



Dark Disease

Plaguelings feed on human flesh. However, they have no internal digestive tract and must rely on specially tailored viruses—the "plague" organisms—to predigest meat for them. The plagues themselves are vile things, with varying symptoms, all resulting in the breakdown of tissues into a nutrient puddle.

Plaguelings must reach their target's blood system. In human form, they do this by slashing with their black fingernails. In their natural form, they enter one of the target's body orifices to get at the more tender blood vessels inside and scour them open with their internal grit. The results are the same in either case. Over the course of a few days, victims begin to "rot." Their hair and teeth fall out; huge, pestilent blisters form all over their bodies; and at last they die and liquefy into a putrid black and yellow mess.

Normally, victims are captured by the plaguelings and taken back to their lair to allow the disease to run its course. If an infected person escapes, however, things can get a bit more interesting. The digestive viruses are highly contagious and, in their final stages, can even be air-vectored over short distances. People who come into close contact with a person showing symptoms must make a Difficult test of Constitution to avoid contracting the virus—if they are close enough to smell the decay, they are close enough to become infected. Failure of this test indicates contagion, with the new victim beginning to show symptoms in 1D6+2 days. Obviously, then, the viruses are deadly and contagious with or without their plagueling carriers.

Infected persons can be cured by Empathic Healing any time before death and dissolution. This will kill the diseases, but an additional roll must be made to heal damage. Even if the first roll is failed, an empath can attempt to heal hit points, thereby prolonging the victim's life (at the expense of also prolonging the suffering).

Origin

Those in the know believe that plaguelings were the products of years of experimentation conducted on humans by ETs. It is thought that many of the more inexplicable plagues and mass disappearances of the time may be traced to these creatures. Whatever the case, plaguelings are one of the most hideous threats to humanity's survival.

PTERO-RAVEN

Strength: 2
Constitution: 5
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 20/40/80
Skill/Dam.: 3/2
Hits: 6/12
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Ptero-ravens possess only three Empathy skills—Human Empathy, Animal Empathy and Thought Projection (the latter two only usable on birds).

The Mythology

The raven has long had a black name in many cultures' mythologies: harbinger of doom, bringer of night, mysterious bird imbued with secret knowledge.

While the legends seem to have been referring to real ravens, the "terror-raven" (derived from the name ptero-raven) seems more likely to fit the bill.

Physical Description

A ptero-raven looks like a cross between a very large raven and the extinct proto-bird Archaeopterix.

It weighs about two kilograms, is bird-shaped and is covered with glossy black feathers. Its wing joints sport small manipulative claws; its feet are taloned; and its beak is festooned with wicked teeth.

Its tail is long, like a lizard's tail turned into a bird's. Its eyes are large and reflect the light, seeming to "glow" in the dark.

The creatures come from a dimension of pure evolutionary horror, a place where survival requires cunning and guile. Ptero-ravens are scavengers, and they delight in tormenting wounded or sick creatures, tearing pieces from their victims and taunting them as they do so.

Psychology

Ptero-ravens are a marginally intelligent species, having a well-defined and expressive language and giving one another a great deal of social cooperation and communication. They are frightfully curious, though inclined to sadistic morbidity. They are attracted to those in emotional pain, drawn by the feelings of anguish.

Ptero-ravens desire to know everything that happens, and they are assisted by excellent day/night vision and a keen sense of hearing. Thus, a ptero-raven learns much just by watching and listening, then flies off to tell its mates. What one ptero-raven learns, others in the area will soon know as well. (Ever notice the black birds cawing loudly to one another in the trees? Ever wonder what they're doing? They're gossiping to each other!).



Although they can chat to one another, ptero-ravens can only squawk disjointed words of human speech, barely enough to get their idea across.

These creatures are malignant in the extreme, detesting all species but themselves. They are very useful to the Dark Ones, since they voluntarily serve as spies, snoops, watchers and thieves for the servants of darkness. Many so-called sorcerers, empathic pawns of the Dark Ones, have gained information from ptero-raven "familiars."

Combat Abilities

On their own, ptero-ravens are pretty much harmless, although they can summon up mixed flocks of birds to plague their enemies. They love to taunt the frustrated and depressed, staying just out of harm's way and tormenting their victims with utterances of doom (some researchers have suggested that Poe's poem resulted from such a "haunting").

If attacked, a ptero-raven will attempt to flee. If one ptero-raven is killed, others will flock about the killer in vengeance, hounding the person and drawing the attention of any Dark Minions in the area until the killer is dead.

For the referee, ptero-ravens are useful as Dark Minion spies, snatchers of small, shiny objects, and general background color with which to annoy player characters.

RAVAGER

Strength: 14
Constitution: 13
Agility: 10
Intelligence: 7
Education: 6
Charisma: 8
Empathy: 7
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/10/20/35
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 24/48
 # Appear: 1D6



History

Back in 1997, the humanoid ETs began investigating what they knew to be a dimensional portal somewhere in Southeast Asia.

It was a great black pyramid within the jungles of Cambodia, a country which has almost always suffered from the brush wars forced upon it by many nations and corporations.

With the assistance of the Rakagi Corporation, a Dark Minion-fronted multinational megacorp, the ETs began excavations. The US government somehow became aware of the project, and several special forces teams were sent into the area to investigate. None returned. With their fusion drills, the ETs quickly broke through the portal and released the ravagers into our world. Even worse, the ETs soon took the creatures under their own evil control.

Physical Description

The ravagers constantly project a human image to all who see them. Only a very few empathically gifted individuals can see them for what they really are—hideous demonic servants with an insatiable appetite for human flesh.

The ravagers stand two meters tall in their natural form—and blood-red skin covers their bodies. Each has a pair of curled horns rising from the sides of its head. A ravager's large claws can shred a human to ribbons in bare moments, after which it feasts upon the victim, eating roughly half the body (even the bones) in one sitting. The creatures also possess a powerful tail, which they use for balance. Ravagers are quite agile, able to scale most walls with ease.

Behavior

Ravagers directly serve the humanoid ETs. With their disguise abilities, ravagers may take over entire towns. Many are used to infiltrate suspect organizations where the humanoid ETs expect to encounter resistance to their efforts. The creatures are also used en masse as assassination squads. There is nothing quite as horrible as the scene of frenzied destruction where a dozen ravagers have been sent on a death mission.

The ETs keep these servants in line by providing them victims and, if necessary, by using neural stimulation devices which cause great pain to the ravagers. The creatures will not risk the wrath of anyone who holds one of these devices and threatens to use it.

Ravagers must feed dally or a frenzy will overcome them, and they will embark on a bloody spree of death until their appetite is sated.

Some ravagers roam free, leaving a trail of half-consumed bodies in their wake, the supposed result of what is generally believed to be a "psychopath."

Illusion

Ravagers can disguise themselves as humans to great effect. They could be sitting on the maglev train across from you. They might work in your office, following you home every day. Ravagers are proficient at playing at being human, holding conversations, working at minor jobs, conducting daily business and the like.

Sometimes a human will see through a ravager's disguise. Each time a ravager is viewed by a nonempathic human, a Difficult test of the viewer's Willpower is made to determine if the viewer penetrates the illusion. If the test is unsuccessful, the viewer sees

the creature as human. If successful, the viewer catches a momentary glimpse of the creature as it really is. An outstanding success means that the viewer sees through the illusion permanently.

Empathic characters may also spot a ravager. This can be achieved by a successful Human Empathy task.

Basic Success merely allows the character to have a bad feeling about the creature, despite its very human appearance. Stage Two means the character feels very frightened by the person but is unsure why. Stage Three allows the character the certain knowledge that the ravager isn't human, despite appearances to the contrary. Stage Four allows the character to catch a glimpse of the ravager as it really is. Stage Five is the same as Stage Four, but for 1 D10 hours. Stage Six means the character not only sees through the ravager's illusion permanently, but will never be fooled by any other ravager.

Of course, a ravager may also discard its human appearance and appear in its true form at any time of its choosing.

REAVER

Strength: 10*
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: 8
Education: 1
Charisma: —
Empathy: 18
Initiative: 6
Move: —
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: —
 # Appear: 1D6+3

* When manifesting itself physically.

Special: Dimension Walk, Telekinesis.

The Mythology

Almost all human societies throughout history have recorded stories of the "hungry dead," the disembodied spirits of those who have died but who "live" on to wreak havoc, despair and death among the living. These spirits are known by many names—ghosts, haunts, wraiths and, in many places, reavers. Many tales claim that the spirits of the dead remember their identities and the events of their lives, and that their own descendants or those who loved them in life are their preferred victims.

The Reality

Regardless of their appearance and actions, and contrary to popular tales, reavers are not the spirits of the dead. They are, in fact, free-willed and autonomous Dark Minions, similar to haunts. Reavers are more powerful than haunts, however. They are also more intelligent, and more skilled at empathy, which they use to instill terror, despair and suicidal depression in their chosen victims.

Appearance

Reavers are normally invisible, although they can sometimes be detected by infrared or thermographic imaging systems as amorphous areas of lowered temperature. The temperature decrease caused by the presence of a reaver is usually only a few degrees, too subtle a change for most humans to detect. Many animals seem more sensitive to the presence of a reaver. Dogs, in particular, can sense their presence, and react with general unease. This does not mean a dog can track the actual position of a reaver (and communicate it to its master), however. Instead, animals generally just react with shivering and whining, and will not voluntarily enter the area.

Reavers can become visible as shifting, translucent manifestations of a human figure. In this form, the creatures are visually indistinguishable from haunts.

Unlike a haunt, a reaver can take on the appearance of a specific individual, drawing an image from the mind of its chosen victim. This requires the creature to establish a connection with the victim through Human Empathy. The reaver will always draw from the victim's memory an image of a loved one—perhaps a relative who is dead—and will assume that appearance to strike fear into the heart of the victim.

Reavers are unable to truly speak or comprehend any human language—their mental "architecture" is too unlike that of humans. But they are able to repeat phrases or words the victim remembers the loved one speaking, partially imitating the voice of the loved one.

The creature's empathic connection with its victim allows it to select phrases that are highly charged emotionally. A reaver cannot truly converse with its victim, and sometimes its selection of emotionally charged phrases will be inappropriate to the situation.



Combat Abilities

A reaver can attack physically, in unarmed melee. A successful strike inflicts 1D6 damage, in the form of intense and enervating cold. A reaver can also attack telekinetically by hurling objects, as can a poltergeist.

In visible form, a reaver can manipulate physical objects directly, not only through Telekinesis, and it has great physical strength. It will frequently use this ability to enhance the fear that its appearance generates, picking up "props" around it.

Like a haunt, a reaver can use Project Emotion to drive its victim into a frenzy of fear. Each stage of power level achieved with this skill temporarily makes all skill checks by the victim one level more difficult. Project Thought is used to command victims to self-destructive acts, from throwing themselves out of upper-story windows to attacking their companions. If necessary, the creature uses Willpower Drain to "soften up" the victim.

Reavers sometimes use their empathic abilities to convince the weak-willed that they truly are the disembodied spirits of dead loved ones, being kept on Earth and tormented by the actions of the Dark Minions. Frequently a reaver will convince its victim that it should be protected or "freed from its torment." The task that must be performed to "free" the soul is always destructive to the victim persuaded to perform it.

Reavers cannot be harmed or killed by physical attacks. They can only be destroyed by the use of Project Thought. If a character achieves at least a Stage Three power level against a reaver, the creature's life force is disrupted, and it is permanently destroyed.

Reavers are also adversely affected by fire. A reaver will not pass through a barrier of flame, and it will avoid sources of flame. If characters determinedly attack with burning weapons, the creature will use Dimension Walk to escape. Thereafter, however, it will attempt to track the movements and actions of the characters who attacked it so that it can prey upon them in a moment of weakness.

ROVER

Strength: 4
Constitution: 6
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 4
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 5/15/30/60
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 16/32
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Dimension Walk (see "Special Abilities").

Rovers are a DarkTek byproduct of body-grafting experiments by the humanoid ETs. They have since been fashioned to serve as reconnaissance drones, messengers and spies. Their name was apparently given to them by the ETs themselves, in a grotesque pun upon the creatures' mobility and doglike faithfulness to their masters.

Physical Description



The ETs fashion rovers out of various body parts and have developed large, double-bed-sized construction tanks in which to make them. These clear tanks are filled with a green, viscous liquid, nearly opaque, through which the careful observer can dimly make out the dozens of operating tools moving around inside (scalpels, tongs, drills, specimen restraints, grafting scourers, nerve removers, brain vacuums, etc.).

These vaguely arachnoid creatures have eight to 12 spindly legs, each ending in a curved, bony talon which the creature walks upon. The body is a yellowed, fleshy platform composed of various human body parts stitched together in a hodgepodge of eyes, ears, mouths and hands, interrupted by spiky tufts of hair. The body is given its lumpy shape by an interior skeleton composed of various bony plates (skull parts, pelvises, shoulder blades and even knee caps) grafted together into one large disk, housing a confusing collection of internal organs and scattered lobes from various brains.

Because of their multitudinous eyes, rovers can see in all directions at once, making them extremely difficult to sneak up on.

Intellect

Rovers are not particularly intelligent and will not enter combat unless they have to. They much prefer to clatter away on their sharp legs and hide. The creatures can scuttle across any terrain at incredible speed.

Due to their low intelligence, the humanoid ETs empathically program the rovers with simple instructions. These are normally orders like "Spy on X and report back when you're relieved" or "Stay here and note who comes by and what they do." Rovers are then deprogrammed by the ETs, who empathically "download" the information stored in their memory. In this way, the ETs may easily scout out their enemies and potential enemies. When humans encounter a rover, then, it is of the utmost importance that it not escape back to its masters.

Combat Abilities

If caught with no way out, a rover will fight ferociously, like a living ball of whirling blades. If killed, the biomass will disintegrate into a yellow puddle within a few hours' time. Within 10 hours, it will dry to a crusty stain.

Special Abilities

Some rovers may be programmed with the ability to Dimension Walk. This type of programming is a long process, and the ETs only take the trouble on rare occasion. Such rovers are the sneakiest kind and are almost impossible to catch before they "blink out" of existence.

Rovers may also be programmed to perform various special functions. For example, a rover could be programmed with Project Thought if the ETs wished to drive someone mad with horrible hallucinations.

Rovers can also be used as very good messengers and couriers. Occasionally they are used as assassins, although they are not as adept at this.

Rovers are used a great deal when spying on corporations and their activities. They are just about small enough to be able to scuttle around in an air-conditioning shaft, keeping watchful eyes on board meetings and other activities. They also utilize city sewer systems, which allows them to remain unseen by most humans when going about their business of fact finding.

STALKER

Strength: 12
Constitution: 8
Agility: 10
Intelligence: 6
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/10/20/35
Skill/Dam.: 5*/7*
Hits: 40/60**
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Dimension Walk.

* Unarmed. Stalkers typically use a darkness dagger (see below).

** Takes no damage from fire, lightning, oxygen deprivation or poison. Increase difficulty to hit stalker by one level in poor light conditions.

Activities

Dark Lords send stalkers out on assassination missions either singly or in pairs. They are also sent in small groups to promote mayhem, confusion and destruction. They are excellent agents for the Dark Lords in either case because of their extreme dedication to the tasks set before them, and because the stalkers themselves consume none of the energies that their actions release—it is all available to their master for channeling.

General Description

Stalkers appear as cloaked humanoid forms wielding large daggers. They are composed entirely of inky blackness, with no visible features. Their knives and cloaks are likewise entirely dark. A stalker's touch is slightly insubstantial and icy cold. Its voice is a low hiss, and it never displays any emotion. A stalker moves with almost unnatural

grace and speed, and displays incredible physical strength. It does not use its empathic abilities to project fear or dread, preferring not to draw attention to itself.

Stalkers are shadowy creatures that subsist entirely on the energies of the proto-dimension of their origin. For that reason, no stalker makes Earth its home. The creatures exist on Earth only temporarily, and must return to their proto-dimension for sustenance and replenishment of lost energy. A stalker forced to remain on Earth continuously without a direct other dimensional link will lose one point from all physical skills and characteristics for each 24-hour period, as well as being unable to recover from any wounds suffered. A stalker that is able to open a proto-dimensional portal may draw energy through it to itself.

Due to a stalker's otherworldly origins and makeup, it suffers no ill effects from such things as fire, electricity, asphyxiation, poison, etc. It suffers normal damage from physical attacks. When a stalker is injured, it bleeds liquid darkness of the same approximate consistency as human blood. The liquid will not stick to or stain any surface—it simply disappears back to its proto-dimension as it dries. The corpse of a slain stalker likewise disappears the turn after the stalker is slain.

A stalker never uses any missile weapons, attacking in melee combat with its dagger or going hand to hand if disarmed. Stalkers generally have no familiarity with Earth cultures or technology, although they usually have a rudimentary understanding of the language in their current location. Only after many missions to Earth does a stalker become familiar with Earth life, and on its own it will not use any human technology more complex than an elevator. Beyond this, Earth machinery is too alien to a stalker and requires specific instructions from its master. For example, if a stalker is sent to a security installation, it may be given the information to punch in a security code, but it would be completely unable to comprehend dialing a telephone.



This is not to say that stalkers are unintelligent—they are highly cunning, clever and ruthlessly single-minded in completing their tasks.

Water is an unfamiliar element to stalkers. While it does not damage them and they cannot drown, stalkers do not float and cannot swim. A stalker will not willingly enter a body of water deeper than its own height.

Darkness Daggers

Darkness daggers are constructed of an unidentifiable, slightly insubstantial, nonmetallic, nonreflective, jet-black material with special properties. Its blades radiate a localized field of intense cold which is completely insubstantial to inorganic material. The blades weigh approximately one kilogram.

A darkness dagger has a short armed melee combat range and a +2 hit modifier, and does 1D10+1/2 STR damage. In addition, armor worn by the target has no effect. The blade in its field simply passes right through it. The field extends to the hilt of the dagger as well.

If a PC should somehow acquire a stalker's weapon, the character may use it. The character would, however, be sought by other stalkers seeking to retrieve the blade and slay its possessor.

Due to the extreme cold, any character wielding a darkness dagger will take 1 point of damage per phase to the arm in which it is held. Gloves will not insulate a character against this damage.

STICK INDIANS

Strength: 10
Constitution: 12
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 7
Education: 2
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 2/7/13/25
Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6
Hits: 24/48
 # Appear: 2D6

Special: Stick Indians have extremely tough skin, at least as thick and as hard as well-cured leather, which gives them 1 point of armor. They use their minimal skills at Human Empathy and Project Thought to appear to be speaking the language of their observer, although in a pidgin version with some words that do not translate.

All Stick Indians have Dimension Walk.



The Mythology

The Indians of the northern Rockies have long known about a race of aboriginal beings that live in the remotest parts of the forest and seldom come out. Each tribe has its own name for these small

beings, but they have come to be known as Stick Indians because they appear sometimes to be almost a caricature of the tribesmen who live there.

The Reality

Stick Indians appear to be a very primitive people. They use no tool more complex than a stick or stone. They dress in uncured animal pelts, usually deer hide or beaver pelt. They stand no more than a meter in height and may be almost that wide.

Their bodies are square and brown, covered with a thin mat of coarse black hair through which the skin can easily be seen. Their arms and legs are grotesquely thin, with swollen joints at elbows, wrists, knees and ankles, also lending to the impression that the creatures are made of sticks.

Despite their small size and awkward appearance, Stick Indians are said to be prodigiously strong.

Their faces are squarish and covered with hundreds of wrinkles of dark brown skin. Their eyes are small, beady, black, and set close together. Their noses are large and flat, spread over half their face, often overhanging their flabby lips and jowly chin. They have coarse black hair which hangs down behind their heads in a wild, dirty mane, and males often have a sparse mustache and beard.

Their teeth are in poor condition, often consisting of a few broken incisors and sharp yellow fangs. The ears are large, stick out like jug handles, and are distinctly pointed. The creatures have six gnarly fingers on each hand, and six splayed-out toes on each broad flat foot.

Behavior

Stick Indians roam the wilderness, apparently at will, doing whatever they wish. The native American Indians say the creatures like to cause avalanches, raid traplines and hunt. Stick Indians sometimes speak to hunters who meet them in the forest, generally to demand tobacco or some other gift. If refused, they have been known to injure or kill the human.

They have great curiosity about children, and will poke and jabber with great excitement whenever they see one. If the child begins to cry, the creatures will howl with laughter, leaping up and down in their glee. Children who disappear or are lost in the wilderness are said to have been taken by the creatures.

Origins

There is no satisfactory origin myth for the Stick Indians in any tribe's cosmogony. They are definitely not part of the animal people of Indian myth who are said to have lived on Earth before humans came up out of the land below. Sometime within the last couple of hundred years, these humanoids simply appeared in the northern Rockies and took up their curious life-style. The natives of that territory prefer to propitiate the Stick Indians with small gifts and never to speak of them within the forest where they might be overheard.

STORM WRAITH

Strength: 6
Constitution: 7
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 2
Education: 1
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 4
Move: 320*
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: 30/58
 # Appear: 1D6+3

* This is flying speed. Storm wraiths do not use ground movement.

Special: Limited Dimension Walk, electrical discharge (see below).

The Mythology

Humanity has always held a subconscious fear of storms, thunder and lightning. Some would suggest that it isn't the storms themselves that frighten people, but the entities those storms release into the world.

The Reality

Storms build up an immense amount of power within them—enough power, in fact, to temporarily weaken the fabric of reality around them. This weakening of reality may only occur for a split-second, but it is long enough for the creatures known as storm wraiths to burst forth from their elemental proto-dimension, to run screaming through Earth's heavens.

Physical Description

Storm wraiths appear as gaunt, almost skeletal humanoids draped in tattered robes. Their fingers end with vicious, curved claws, and their gaping jaws are filled with jagged, barbed fangs. Most bear wisps of snow-white hair on their elongated skulls which themselves rest upon unnaturally long necks. Sparks of electricity discharge from the wraiths as they move, crackling in their mouths and eye sockets, and flashing from their limbs and robes.

Behavior

Storm wraiths' true motives concerning our world are unknown, but the creatures seem to take pleasure in attacking aircraft with their powerful talons, and occasionally in terrorizing individuals upon the ground.

They are capable of flying at incredible speeds without tiring, though they have never been observed for more than a few minutes, and then only in glimpses.

Storm wraiths can only reach our world during the most ferocious electrical storms, when their limited Dimension Walk ability is sufficient to breach the weakened gap between their dimension and ours. Once through the gap, they normally stay within the clouds, absorbing the electrical charges that they require to survive.

Several reports mention aircraft being physically attacked by these entities. The most famous of these is British Airways flight 299, which crashed upon landing at London's Heathrow Airport in 2011, with no survivors. The black box revealed that the copilot and several passengers spotted several dark figures crawling across the fuselage just before cabin pressure was lost and the entire electrical system failed. This information was not revealed to the general public. Although this is not concrete evidence that storm wraiths were responsible, there are very few other plausible explanations for the incident.



Combat Abilities

Due to the environment in which these creatures exist, they thrive upon electricity and are capable of storing vast amounts of it in their bodies. For this reason, anyone or anything coming into contact with a storm wraith will receive 2D6 electrical damage in addition to any damage caused by the creature's claws (unless shielded, any electrical system will burn out after this damage). This charge is direct current, so the victim will be stuck to the storm wraith unless a successful Difficult: Strength test can be passed. The damage from the charge is suffered each phase until the target can break free.

As a direct result of the electrical nature of the storm wraiths, they are immune to any effects caused by electricity, and they actually become stronger when struck by it. Each time a storm wraith is hit by any form of electricity, it immediately heals 1D6 hit points (though this cannot raise the creature's hit points beyond its original quota).

It is fortunate that very few of these creatures have ever been encountered, as the potential threat they pose far outweighs that of the storms they inhabit. 'The nature of their existence, combined with their sadistic racial psychology, makes them a terrifying force to reckon with.

Other Comments

One other fact worth mentioning is that some members of the empathic underground claim that the very first storm wraiths appeared during the 1980s, coinciding with the start of the NASA space shuttle program. The first unassisted launch in April 1981 by the space shuttle *Columbia* was delayed for two days by an intense storm over the Florida area which caused electrical damage to the vehicle on two separate occasions before finally dispersing.

The phrase "lightning never strikes twice" is certainly untrue in the case of storm wraiths.

SUPER RATS

Strength: 2
Constitution: 5
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 4
Education: 2
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 5
Move: 5/10/20/40
Skill/Dam.: 3/2
Hits: 8/12
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Individual super rats may know how to use human weapons (75% chance); some have Darkling Empathy. Super rats have Small Arms (Rifle) 4 and Thrown Weapon 6.

History

Rats have been around since the dawn of mammals on this planet; it is thought that they may have a common (and very distant) ancestor with humanity. However, it seems that ever since humans learned to till the soil, rats have sought to steal the fruits of their labor.

As humans moved together to live in cities, rats followed, living off the trash and garbage thrown away by a careless humanity. And whenever new advances enabled human populations to increase, rat populations increased right along with them.

When humanity discovered biological sciences, a new use was discovered for rats. Rats are biologically quite similar to humans, and they are small enough to keep in laboratories. In addition, they behave much like people in psychological stress experiments, so they quickly became popular as subjects for cerebral studies, as well as physiological experiments. In fact, the term "lab rat" all but replaced "guinea pig" when indicating a being subjected to various experiments. People treated lab rats in much the same way the humanoid ETs came to treat their human victims.

When research was conducted on genetics and enhanced evolution, using knowledge provided by friendly humanoid ETs, lab rats were used as subjects once again, this time with human genetic material injected. The experiments were successful, but the results were never triumphantly trumpeted to the public. The rats that were produced were *too* smart, too well-evolved and too *big* (up to a meter long)—they were super rats. These super rats were destined to be a serious threat to humanity's welfare and, consequently, were scheduled to be destroyed. Before that could be accomplished, however, these rats established an empathic contact with some of the Dark Minion ETs and arranged to be rescued—the entire research project disappeared one night, and none of the researchers were ever seen again.

The super rats began showing up time and time again, in sewers, snooping around government installations, creating nests beneath cities and towns. They seem to have become a sort of Dark Minion underground, interested in breeding (super rats can breed with normal, wild rats, producing super rat offspring) and preying on humans. Some of

the super rats are content to bide their time and protect their nest communities; others actively seek unprotected humans as food. Yet others actively aid ETs as specimen procurers and lab assistants, thereby taking their revenge on their former tormentors.

Super rats weigh between 10 and 15 kilograms.

Combat Abilities

Many super rats use weapons. Most favor small crossbows (*ROF:* SS *Dam.:* -2 *Pen:* Nil *Rld:* 4 *Blk:* 1 *Recoil:* 3 *Rng:* 5). Some wield small *(Blk:* 0-1) pistols or ET weapons. They also favor hand grenades, if they can acquire them and find the right location to use them. They can use nets to entangle and enmesh victims if they wish to capture their prey alive (usually for supply to humanoid ET vivisectionists).

Following super rats to their lairs (there is almost always more than one) is dangerous. The creatures are adept at rigging traps—deadfalls, nets, crossbow traps and spike traps are favorites. Furthermore, they often coat their crossbow bolts and spikes with filth, increasing the danger of infection. Characters who are stricken by such weapons and who fail a Difficult test of Constitution will require twice the time to heal from these wounds. Treatment with antibiotics within a few hours of wounding will reduce the Constitution test to Average.

Individual super rats or small groups are a nuisance to most Dark Minion hunters. Large groups of super rats pose a serious threat by themselves, and many are allied with inimical humanoid ETs.



TOXIC MOTHER

Strength: 3
Constitution: 5
Agility: 1
Intelligence: 7
Education: 1
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 15
Initiative: 2
Move: 3
Skill/Dam.: 3/1D10
Hits: 140/200
 # Appear: 1

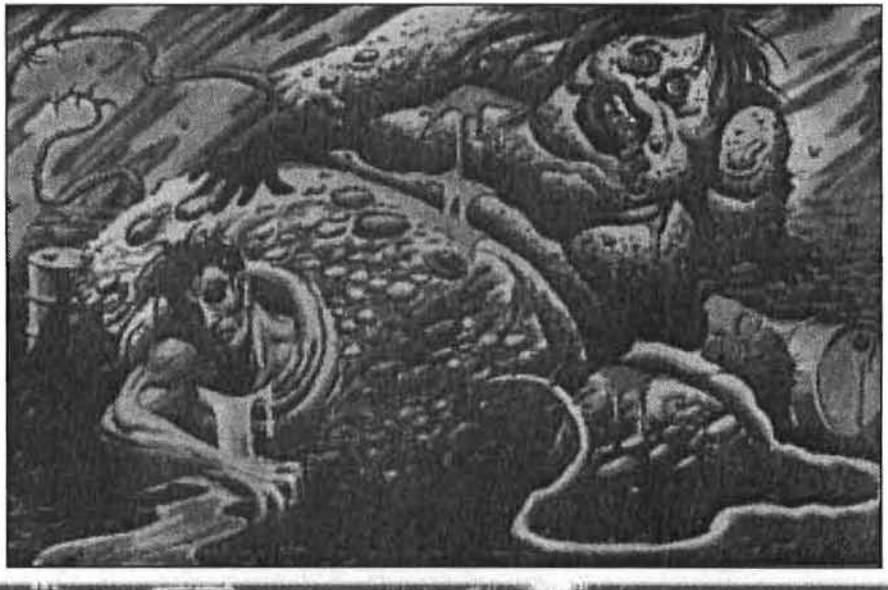
Special: Toxic mothers do not normally move, their bodies generally being far too bloated for normal locomotion. However, they may, in extreme duress, pull themselves along by their vines at a movement rate of 3.

Background

For decades, humanity has been dumping all manner of toxins into the planet's oceans and rivers. Organizations have dumped heavy metals, industrial waste and other poisons until there was no way to keep track of where they had disposed of what. And now it's time to pay the piper, because the toxins are coming back.

Physical Description

Toxic mothers generally look like huge, bloated women, covered with slime and dripping pinkish froth from innumerable suppurating wounds. Their huge rolls of cancerous fat completely hide their now vestigial legs, making movement almost impossi-



ble. Their arms, too, have become nearly useless, shriveling into twiglike appendages that twitch and spasm in response to the creature's agitation. Their only useful limbs are actually fleshy "vines" that radiate from their body (3D10 vines per mother). These vines are tipped with barbs that stick into the flesh creatures that they strike.

Some toxic mothers have blended into their surroundings more completely. These appear as repulsive masses of septic refuse, reeking of decay and poisons. In this form, they are virtually indistinguishable from the trash surrounding them.

Habitat

The underground lairs of toxic mothers are only found in the most loathsome locales—landfills gone putrid, illegal toxic waste dumps, foul sewage ponds and, of course, Demongrounds. Their lairs can normally be smelled for hundreds of yards. And the creatures' very presence further corrupts the areas so that even the air becomes somewhat corrosive. Anyone standing unprotected within 30 meters of a toxic mother's lair will suffer 1 point of damage to the chest location every 10 minutes. This represents the accumulation of airborne toxins in the character's system. Difficult: Constitution checks are required of all characters actually entering a toxic mother's lair. Failure indicates uncontrollable retching that incapacitates the character for 1D10 phases.

Behavior

Few people would be aware of toxic mothers if they had just stayed in their dumps. But the mothers are in constant agony from the chemical soup that rages through their bodies. The only manner in which they can ease this pain is through the act of expulsion, an act that requires human agents.

Every few months, a toxic mother disgorges a tiny seed into the air. This seed contains a minute fragment of the creature's awareness, its empathic powers. The seed is borne on the winds until it reaches human habitation. There it falls to the ground and begins emitting a psychic summons. In game terms, this is treated as a use of the Project Thought skill against everyone within a one-kilometer radius. Those who receive the summons and fail an Average test of Empathy or Willpower (whichever is higher) will be impelled to seek out the seed.

Once the seed has attracted someone to it, it opens a direct empathic link to the toxic mother, and the mother uses Project Thought to lead the victim to her lair. A Difficult test of Empathy or Willpower is required to break her control. When those summoned arrive, they are forced to nestle in close to the toxic mother. She then plugs her vines into them, pumping them full of her blood while drawing out their own. This helps the mother rid her body of toxins, and also nets her a few human slaves. Those pumped full of her blood have the same statistics as animator zombie, but are fully under her control.

The mother uses her "toxikids" to send humanity's waste back to it. The zombies haul loads of waste back to the city, dumping loads of septic sludge into the water supply, spreading radioactive waste in the streets, or whatever else they can do. This usually ends up drawing attention to the toxic mother. However, by that time, much damage has already been done. Many are the abandoned villages that dot this proud country, their inhabitants fled from or slain by the toxins delivered by the toxikids.

Combat statistics

In combat, the toxic mother is a horror. Her vines are spread throughout their lair, and with them her awareness. She cannot be surprised by any means and will always know the exact location of interlopers in her domain.

These vines are also her method of attack, lashing out at those who would do her harm. They erupt from the earth and strike with their barbs, doing the damage listed above. Any outstanding success against an unarmored location hooks the target with a barb. While it is easy enough to rip free from the vines (requiring an Easy test of Strength), doing so causes 1 D6 points of additional damage to the snagged location. Characters who do not pull free (perhaps having been snagged with multiple vines) are dragged toward the toxic mother at a rate of 30 meters per phase.

Anyone drawn back to the toxic mother will be attacked by her toxikids. There are always 1D6 with the mother, and they emerge from her bloated body in a burst of putrid fluids. Characters who witness this "birth" of toxikids must make a panic test.

Toxikids will typically try to grapple a character into immobility, then drag the victim into the mother's body. Characters implanted into the mother suffer 1D10 damage per round until slain, after which they reemerge as toxikids.

TULPA

Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Intelligence: —
Education: —
Charisma: —
Empathy: 2D6+1
Initiative: 1/2 EMP*
Move: —
Skill/Dam.: —
Hits: —
 # Appear: 1

* Round down.

Special: Telekinesis. Tulpa have no actual physical existence, but they use Project Thought to create an illusion of existence and Telekinesis to move things about while acting as if they are physically carrying them.

A tulpa is a phantom form, indistinguishable in all respects from whatever thing it represents. The creatures are created by the power of thought and imagination alone!

Only empathic creatures may create a tulpa, but they can be brought into being either intentionally or unintentionally.

Once created, a tulpa becomes a being in its own right and will. Unless destroyed, it will remain in existence forever. It has a mind of its own and may act as it wishes. Almost all tulpa feel a certain bonding to their creators and remain loyal to them, but some do not.

Many famed "wizards" of history have created tulpa. Some created them to assist them in their work, some for pleasure, and some for darker reasons. Energy ETs often create tulpa to serve as laborers. Other Dark Races are likely to use tulpa in their plans, as are highly empathic humans who are students of "magic."



Unintentional Creation

Some tulpa come into being almost instantaneously as a result of any intense emotion from a highly empathic character—including emotions resulting from suicide or violent death. A tulpa that comes to life in this way is always less than perfect in its appearance. The flaw may not be instantly apparent, but something, somehow will be very wrong with these creations.

Intentional Creation

Most tulpa are brought into being through a deliberate act of will—a long and painstaking process, typically requiring weeks of meditation and visualization before the first manifestation of the desired being.

If the creation of a tulpa is intentional, the creator must decide exactly what type of creature is desired. This may range from an animal, to a human being, to a hideous creature of imagination. Then the creator must maintain continuous concentration until the creature becomes real. Any distraction will cause the creator to fail, requiring him to begin again.

In most cases, the process of creation takes several weeks. During that time, the creator must go without such luxuries as sleep and food, remaining instead in a semicomatose state of meditation. This ability is beyond the capacity of most beings.

Process

Intentionally creating a tulpa requires a series of successful tasks in addition to a calm environment. Prerequisite skills are Project Thought, Project Emotion and Willpower. Creators must be experienced in meditative techniques and must have received instruction in the technique (perhaps by studying in India, etc.).

A creator must first decide—very specifically—what he desires in the creation. The creator must then pass a test of Empathy to enter a trance, with the difficulty being one level more strenuous than usual for the empath's environment. Next, the creator must

pass a Project Thought task and achieve no lower than a Stage Five power level. He must make a successful Difficult test of Willpower each week during the process to maintain concentration.

The referee decides exactly how long concentration must be maintained, but the following guidelines will help—a tulpa dog would probably take one week to create; a human would take one month; and a huge, shape-changing demon might take years.

The creator may take no other action during the creation time and may not be distracted. If the creator is distracted, the whole process is spoiled. Finally, the creator must make a successful Project Emotion task and achieve nothing less than a Stage Five power level.

Once the process is completed, the form becomes a reality and the tulpa is real! The referee should determine the (slim) possibility of the tulpa being hostile to the creator.

Obviously, creating a tulpa is a very difficult process. Only the most dedicated characters—or the most emotionally distraught—will succeed.

Destroying a Tulpa

Destroying (dispelling) a tulpa can only be accomplished by besting it in an empathic contest of wills. Both the tulpa and the character attempting to destroy it roll for a power level with their Empathy statistic. (Tulpa have no Willpower rating for this contest.) Whoever achieves the highest total wins the contest. If the character wins, the tulpa is destroyed. If the tulpa wins, it takes control of the character's body for a number of hours equal to the difference between the two power levels. The creature can cause the character to do anything short of committing suicide (including attacking friends).

UNDEAD

In **Dark Conspiracy**, the term "undead" refers specifically to dead creatures that have been brought back to a semblance of life, usually by an animator spirit (see above). The three primary examples of undead are animated mummies, skeletons, and zombies.

MUMMY



Strength: 9
Constitution: 9
Agility: 2
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 2
Move: 1/4/8
Skill/Dam.: 8/3D6
Hits: 50/60
Appear: 1D6/3
Special: Burns do double damage.

The ancient Egyptians mummified their most important dead, in order to enhance their success in the afterlife. Mummification typically involved having most of the inter-

nal organs scooped out, including the brain, and the resulting cavities filled with preservative herbs and linen padding. The important organs were sealed in special funerary jars. The rest of the body was treated with special chemicals to desiccate it, then wrapped in linen, doused in funerary resins, and placed in a sarcophagus. (It is the desiccation and funerary resins that make mummies vulnerable to fire, causing them to take double the normal burn damage.)

When this sort of mummy is animated, it serves as nothing but a vehicle for the animating spirit. The mummy is physically strong, but because of its brittleness, it is anything but agile. Of course, without a brain, the body has no intelligence of its own. The mummy's mental and soul attributes are merely given by the animating spirit.

There are cases of mummified corpses, however, in which the brain and internal organs were not removed. Generally, these cases involve accidental deaths by suffocation in conditions that prevented the corpse from decomposing or being eaten by scavengers. For example, mummified corpses have been found in extreme northern bogs, frozen in ice, or buried in desert sands. Similarly, there have been discoveries of stone cairns preserving some Eskimo and Viking corpses. If mummies such as these are animated, the animating spirit has access to the mummified brains' knowledge and memories (at least what remains after ages of death). Such mummies can be quite cunning and self-aware. Of course, it is entirely possible for the animating spirit to be created with above average mental and/or soul statistics, as well.

Mummies are most often created by dark elves, and are used to guard entrances to their underground facilities. Sometimes, however, they may be made by ETs or others of the fey folk.

SKELETON
Strength: 3
Constitution: 2
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/9/18/25
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6
Hits: 8/10
Appear: 3D6



Special: One level more difficult to hit in fire combat.

Like mummies, animated skeletons are the remains of corpses, which are then raised to a semblance of life by the infusion of an animating spirit. Generally, they are created by the dark elves to guard entrances to subterranean facilities. The dark elves also like to use skeletons to terrorize small towns, animating the contents of nearby cemeteries for their grisly entertainment. Occasionally, ETs or fey folk other than the dark elves will create animated skeletons, as well.

For the morlocks and dark elves, one of the most appealing things about creating animated skeletons is that they require much less life force to animate than mummies or

zombies. For this reason, greater numbers of them can be animated. That ease of animation also means that skeletons are much more agile than other animated corpses. Unfortunately, they are also much more fragile, doing less damage in combat, and able to withstand much less, as well.

WERES

There are at least two different types of were creatures that have formed the basis of legends of shape-changing creatures. The primary type is termed "true weres," the secondary "Moreau weres."

TRUE WERES

WEREBEAR
Strength: 13
Constitution: 15
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 4
Education: 4
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 7
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/9/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D10
Hits: 36/50
Appear: 1D6/3



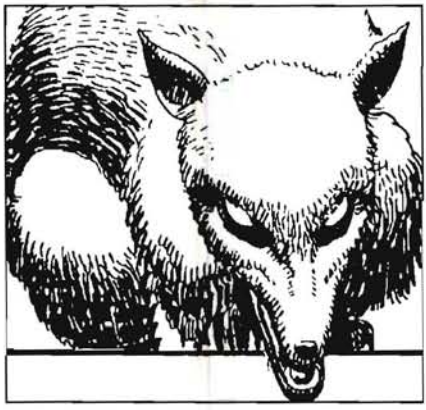
Special: Automatic human image projection. Silver disrupts Empathy.

WEREBOAR
Strength: 11
Constitution: 12
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: 2
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/6/10/18
Skill/Dam.: 5/2D6
Hits: 26/50
Appear: 1D6/2



Special: Automatic human image projection. Silver disrupts Empathy.

WERERAT



Strength: 5
Constitution: 2
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 8
Education: 6
Charisma: 7
Empathy: 10
Initiative: 5
Move: 3/9/17/32
Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6+1
Hits: 16/30
Appear: 2D6

Special: Automatic human image projection. Silver disrupts Empathy.

WERETIGER



Strength: 17
Constitution: 15
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 5
Education: 3
Charisma: 6
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/9/18/35
Skill/Dam.: 8/3D6
Hits: 30/60
Appear: 1D6/3

Special: Automatic human image projection. Silver disrupts Empathy.

WEREWOLF



Strength: 8
Constitution: 6
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 6
Education: 4
Charisma: 6
Empathy: 9
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/9/17/32
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
Hits: 22/44
Appear: 1D6

Special: Automatic human image projection. Silver disrupts Empathy.

True weres are bestial creatures that can walk either upright like humans or, more quickly, upon all fours. They vaguely resemble normal terran animals such as wolves, bears, boars, or even tigers but are able to disguise themselves by empathically projecting an image of human shape and features. Except during the period of the full moon, that is. Weres have a monthly rutting season which is tied to the lunar phases, and when the moon is full, they revert to bestial habits, dropping their human guise and mindlessly attacking nearly any terran creature they meet up with.

It is not possible for a human to become a were, but it is possible for the two races to interbreed, with a 60% chance of producing were offspring.

Contact with silver disrupts a were's ability to use empathic powers, including the projection of its normal human facade.

MOREAU WERES

A special subclass of weres is made up of humans who have been bestialized in ET experiments. Some have been surgically modified, having cat's eyes implanted to improve night vision, for example. Others are the result of chemical treatments that thicken skin, stimulate adrenaline production, etc. Some have even been created by genetic manipulation, resulting in creatures that are truly half human and half beast.

Very few of these experimental subjects survive. Of course, most are severely crippled. Only very rarely do individuals result who are favorably modified. Statistics for these creatures are as varied as their types. Generally, the referee should choose standard NPC statistics, then add a special facility, such as the ability to spray like a skunk or to cause extra unarmed melee damage with claws.

(These creatures are called Moreau weres in honor of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau.*)



WAILER

Strength: 6
Constitution: 4
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 5
Education: 4
Charisma: 9
Empathy: 8
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/8/16/32
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6+2
Hits: 16/32
 # Appear: 1D6+2

Special: Human Empathy, Project Emotion and Willpower Drain at twice the listed Empathy rating.

Whether wailers actually exist is the subject of some debate. Opponents of the idea argue that wailers are only an artifact of the human tendency to lump together unrelated but superficially similar sets—tantamount to a claiming that orcas and penguins are related because both swim efficiently in cold seas, and both are mostly black and white.

In fact, wailers; do exist. Historically, they have been universally perceived as seductive women encountered near water. They drown men, women and children under a variety of pretenses, often weeping or wailing over the deed. It is this active death-dealing role which (barely) distinguishes them from the banshee, to which they may be related. In different parts of the world, the wailers seem to have developed different tastes in victims and in kill sites, suggesting the likelihood of distinct subtypes.

La Llorona

In Mexico and the southwestern United States, tales of La Llorona are widespread. The story goes back to legends of the Aztec ghost known as the weeping woman (a translation of the Spanish "La Llorona"). La Llorona appears as a handsome woman wandering alone, weeping quietly, near streams, irrigation canals, and creeks. Her preferred victims are good-looking young men and children. La Llorona may briefly flee from an approaching man, as if to keep her personal sorrow to herself. However, if the man follows, she will eventually lead him to a place that looks like an inviting place for a tryst and that is very close to water deep enough for him to drown in when she attempts to wrestle him underwater. Children are not usually led on such a chase. A child foolish enough to try to comfort this weeping woman will be quickly thrust under water, and the body will drift until found.

The explanation of La Llorona's behavior is found in her purported history. A lonely widow with two young children, the woman who became La Llorona was seduced by a handsome rogue. He would not marry her and claimed the children as his reason. The widow drowned her children, only to find that he still spurned her—this time for being so heartless. She threw herself into the river to drown, but returned as a ghost, replaying her ghastly deed against children and revenging herself against a cruel lover.

Rusalka

From Slavic countries come tales of the rusalka (plural is rusalki). These wailers appear as young women alone or in groups of three or four. The first sign of their presence is often laughter or enchanting, unearthly singing. If a traveler follows the sound, the wailers are found swimming in forest pools and small bodies of still water—in spite of the fact they are most likely to be seen in winter!

Mist off the water can convince an unwary traveler that the water is heated by underground springs. Misty tendrils offer lip service to the women's alleged modesty, since they appear to wear nothing but their long hair. Hot water can warm chilled bones, and the women's sparkling eyes and free manner hint at other ways to chase off winter's cold. But the mist is under wailer control, and the water only seems warm for a short time. Once the victim enters the water, there is little chance of getting back out. Should the person be reluctant to enter, the rusalki are not opposed to simply grabbing an ankle and dragging him in kicking and screaming. A chase overland is not out of the question either, and a rusalka is unnaturally adept at moving through the forest swiftly and silently.

Rusalki are less particular than their Mexican cousins about who and what their victims are. They prefer young men, but any human will do.

Lorelei

Myths claim that wailers also infest the Rhine River in Germany. A solitary woman, or several women, sings a ghostly echoing call that travelers on the river find nearly irresistible. Boatmen fail to navigate the treacherous waters. Their crafts capsize or break up on the rocks, and the people drown, their bodies smashed by the rampaging water. The high cliffs overlooking the swiftest, most dangerous stretch of the Rhine lent its name to the inhabitants who became known as the Lorelei or the Rhinemaidens.

Like the rusalki, the Lorelei work alone or in small groups. They hunt along swift-flowing rivers with dangerous white-water narrows, and have the same catholic tastes as their Slavic counterparts. They engender less emotion, with destruction more on their minds than seduction. In the end, the result is the same—watery death.



Sirens

The best-known wailers of myth are the sirens who sang ocean-sailing Greeks to their destruction, and who Odysseus heard, yet survived to tell the tale. Reports place their cousins throughout the Mediterranean and off the east coast of Africa. sirens may be seen as the ocean-going variety of wailers. Undoubtedly the most powerfully empathic of the wailers, the sirens sing a song that is irresistible. Navigators steer the ships toward the sound, which carries easily across the water. Sailors and passengers alike crowd the railing for the first glimpse of the glorious singers. The most impressionable throw themselves overboard to swim ahead of the ship. The sirens choose rocky shoals that can easily rip out a ship's hull, however, with swift riptides to drag victims under the surging waters. These wailers rarely need to dirty their dainty hands to drown their victims personally—although if a strong swimmer struggles to their rocky perch, they will not demur.

Sirens may also account for legends of beauteous singing mermaids far out to sea. There, they sing only the most susceptible into the water for a playful, deadly dip. Evidently, the effort sirens spend in swimming reduces the extreme allure of their song to an intriguing but resistible echo of itself.

Others

The wailers described here are not the only ones possible. Consider, for example, an anguished young environmentalist encountered on the beach, weeping for an oil-slicked seabird and pleading persuasively for the PCs to help rescue some of the others, out at that rock outcrop just offshore...

WENDIGO

Strength: 19
Constitution: 16
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 4
Education: 3
Charisma: 4
Empathy: 7
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/9/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D10
Hits: 32/64
 # Appear: 1D6
Special: Animal Empathy and Dimension Walk.

The Mythology

The spirit of the north in Canadian legends, the wendigo has been described as a fierce wind, a human-devouring yeti, and even a stalking spirit that stays just out of sight to plague travelers and inspire fear. It is the spirit of the lonely places in the world's mythology, a cunning, fast-moving being that follows solitary wanderers and torments them with sighing whispers and half-glimpsed shadows. When the desperate wanderer finally collapses from exhaustion and loneliness, the wendigo moves in to feast.

The Reality

Since the aliens "opened the wrong door" and released the Dark upon our world, the Dark Races of legend have come out of hiding and have even increased their numbers to levels unheard of since the earliest days of our planet. Among these Dark Minions are the wendigo, the spirits of the lonely places.

Physical Description

The wendigo appear as huge, white-furred creatures with small, black eyes, rows of sharp teeth and long claws. They stand on two legs, but often walk hunched over so that their clawed hands swing just above the ground. As tall as three meters and weighing approximately 200 kilograms, it's surprising the wendigo is as fast and agile as it is. The creature is like the wind, fast and untouchable, nearly silent and mostly unseen.

The spirits of the lonely places often take on appearances that fit the environs they have claimed as their own. In northern climes, the wendigo appears as a great white-furred beast. In hot deserts, it stalks prey in the guise of a scaly, reptilian monster. In tropical jungles, it prowls as a humanoid cat with sabretooth fangs and thick, dark hair.

To tell if the monster hunting you is a wendigo, no matter what form it may take, you only have to examine the signs of its pursuit. The wendigo makes stalking a game, seeking to drive its prey mad with terror and exhaustion. It rarely allows itself to be seen before the game ends and it moves in for the kill. Wait. Listen closely. Is that the wind blowing through the tall grass? It may be nothing more than your imagination—but it may be the wendigo.



Behavior

With the depopulation of rural areas, the wendigo and its brethren have moved in to fill the vacuum. As more and more "lonely places" spread across the continents, more and more wendigo appear to claim them as their own. While not all take the appearance of the wendigo of the northern reaches, all behave in a similar fashion. They turn their territories into vast hunting grounds, lying in wait for travelers trying to pass through their lands. Then the thrill of the hunt begins. These hunting grounds serve as playgrounds for the wendigo, private reserves where they can stalk prey, torment it with unbridled glee, then pounce upon it in a bloody whirlwind of tearing claws and ripping teeth.

As intelligent and as savage as the untamed wilderness it calls home, the wendigo revels in tormenting and stalking travelers it sees as prey. It uses Animal Empathy to send the creatures of the wilderness against its prey, Human Empathy to soak in the fear its prey experiences, and Project Emotion to promote paranoia and turn travelers against each other. It likes nothing better than to corrupt its prey into feasting on the flesh of its fellows, turning rational, honorable humans into cannibalistic horrors through cunning and terror. When the prey finally succumbs to despair and terror, the wendigo moves in for the kill. After the long and desperate chase, the wendigo's prey often welcomes the release the spirit of the lonely places finally provides. Like complacent deer before the jaws of a wolves, broken and weary travelers offer their throats to the wendigo's dagger-like teeth in final acceptance of their fate.

For the wendigo, the hunt never ends. Its appetite is never sated, and when the feeding of one meal has ended, it must seek out new sources of food for the next. It can survive on animal flesh for a time, but it also needs the emissions of fear and terror that only human prey can project. For this reason, no matter what creature it might be in the middle of stalking, a wendigo will drop everything if it senses human prey in its territory.

Empathic Abilities

Wendigo make use of Dimension Walk to cover vast distances within their hunting territories quickly, and to appear and disappear from sight when stalking and terrorizing prey. Other Dark Minions are tolerated in the hunting grounds as long as other prey is available. If not, the wendigo will just as quickly turn on a Dark Minion as it will a human, seeking the rich emotions and the warm, blood-filled flesh of intelligent life to ease its constant pangs of hunger.

WILL O' WISP

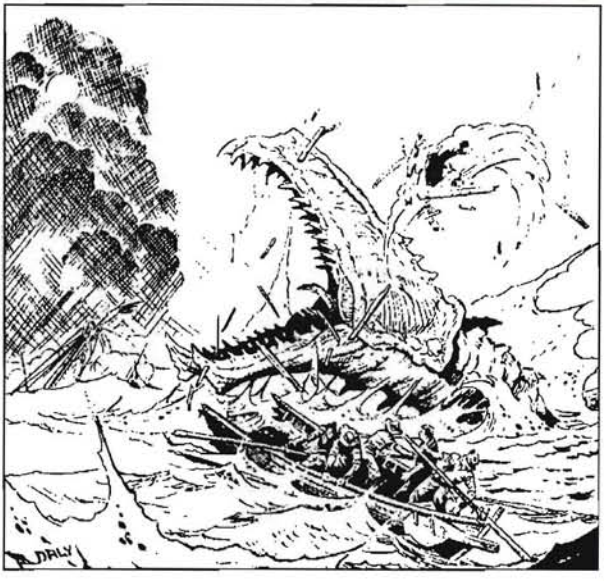
Strength: 7
Constitution: 7
Agility: 7
Intelligence: 8
Education: 5
Charisma: 2
Empathy: 10
Initiative: 4
Move: 2/8/15/30*
Skill/Dam.: 7/2D6
Hits: 50/100
 # Appear: 1

*These scores are for swimming. A will o' wisp's movement on land is at half these rates.

Special: Telekinesis.

The Mythology

Many times, beauty is merely a cover for something ugly. This is certainly the case with the legend of the will o' wisp. Individuals or small groups of people occasionally see small motes of lights dancing about playfully in the middle of a swamp. Or they see lights moving about below the surface of the water just over the edge of a boat or along some deserted stretch of beach. These lights are so beautiful and entrancing that individuals are drawn to them, following them until becoming lost in the swamp or drowning in deep water.



The Reality

Individuals lured by these faerie lights soon meet the true will o' wisp, which is by no means a beautiful creature of light.

The dancing lights are nothing more than a simple but effective lure to draw prey.

Physical Description

In their natural state, will o' wisps are hideous creatures to behold. They have very long, limbless, serpentine bodies. Their eyeless heads display trilateral symmetry—their mouths have three jaws. The teeth at the end of their jaws hook backward so that when they bite, they latch firmly onto their prey. The creatures also have a set of secondary jaws inside the first. Each secondary jaw ends in a single tooth which is actually more like a razor-sharp claw. They have a long, hollow "tongue," itself tipped with nasty barbs.

Combat Abilities

When they attack, will o' wisps latch on to their victim's torso with their outer jaws. The inner teeth then tear through muscle and bone so that the tongue can find its way into the victim's internal organs and consume them.

A will o' wisp prefers to have its tail anchored to some submerged object when it attacks, so that it can pull the prey below the surface to finish it off.

On the first attack, the damage is used primarily to figure "controlling hits," but half is also considered actual damage. After successfully latching onto their prey, the creatures cause an automatic 2D6 damage each subsequent phase to the hit location grabbed until the victim is dead. They may try to pull their prey below the water surface on the same round as they achieve sufficient controlling hits with their outer set of jaws. The victim then suffers the effects of drowning in addition to those of combat.

Psychology

Despite the fact that will o' wisps have no manipulative limbs, the creatures are actually quite intelligent, using Telekinesis to manipulate objects when desired, and using Project Thought and Project Emotion to create the illusion of "faerie lights" by which they lure their prey. The creatures are very evil and cruel, enjoying toying with unsuspecting individuals and then devouring them.

Telekinesis

Not only can will o' wisps use their Telekinesis for fine manipulation of tools and objects, they can also use it to defend themselves in combat or even to conduct an attack.

When used defensively, each power level achieved gives the creatures 1 point of armor, a sort of telekinetic force field that helps them to feed undisturbed. But this field is only effective against melee and gas attacks—it provides no defense against firearms or beam weapons.

Offensively, the creatures use Telekinesis to make ranged attacks, causing oars to attack their users, stones to leap from under the water and attack, and so on. The creatures much prefer to attack physically and will only resort to telekinetic attacks as a last resort.

Note that they can only use Telekinesis for one thing at a time—it can't be used both defensively and offensively at once.

Dwellings

This marine race has numerous cities in the oceans of the world and some in larger lakes. Will o' wisps have a tightly structured and ordered society based upon rule by the largest and most deadly.

The largest, deep-sea dwellers are big enough to consume whales or wreck sailing ships (and are likely a source of sea serpent legends). Those encountered in swamps are the outcasts of their society.

ZOMBIES

In voodoo myths, the word zombie generally refers to a dead body brought back to life to serve as a mindless slave, usually for agricultural work. In **Dark Conspiracy**, there are two different sources for these myths, plus one more modern type of zombie.

ANIMATOR ZOMBIES

Strength: 9
Constitution: 7
Agility: 3
Intelligence: 1
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 2
Move: 2/8/15
Skill/Dam.: 5/2D6+1
Hits: 30/60
Appear: 2D6
Special: None.

The first source of the zombie myths is a specialized form of animator (see above), one powerful enough to restore an entire corpse to physical function. Like mummies and animated skeletons, this sort of zombie is not actually brought back to life; instead, it is moved telekinetically by the animator dwelling within it. (This is a special use of Telekinesis that requires no rolls for success or effect.) Like other animators, these zombies are usually created by ETs or fey folk, to function as guards and troops. As a result, they are typically made with very low Intelligence, Education, and Charisma statistics. It is possible, however, for zombies to be created with high scores in these statistics (which ought to give the PCs quite a shock the first time they encounter one). The statistics listed above are for average zombies.

MOSS ZOMBIES

Strength: *
Constitution: *
Agility: *
Intelligence: *
Education: *
Charisma: *
Empathy: *
Initiative: *
Move: *
Skill/Dam.: */*
Hits: *
Appear: 1D6

* As per appropriate NPC level.

Special: None.

Moss zombies are apparently the result of an experiment in biological weaponry gone awry. They are not actually corpses brought back to life, but are instead living creatures infected with a bizarre form of plant life.

The zombie moss can only survive in warm, wet climates, such as Southeast Asia and Indonesia, and it only affects mammals. Apparently, when a mammal encounters the moss, it inhales airborne spores. Those spores remain dormant through much of the year, but during the rainy season, they suddenly sprout within the circulatory system of their victims, giving their blood (and skin) a greenish tint. As the infection mounts, it causes a chemical imbalance in the host which gives rise to murderous rages, much like rabies. The significant difference is that while rabies produces blind, unreasoning violence, typically occurring only when the subject is somehow provoked, the zombie moss produces a cold-blooded, cunning murderousness in which its victims stalk others of their kind. (There has been speculation that the murders are actually intended as mercy killings, to prevent others from later contracting the infection.)

By the end of the rainy season, the infection has completely filled the host's circulatory system, and the victim dies. Within two to three days, the corpse bursts open from the moss' rampant growth, and new spores are released into the air, beginning the process all over again.

There have been some isolated reports of moss zombies in Oregon.

YELLOW ZOMBIES

Strength: 8
Constitution: 9
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 2
Education: 1
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 3
Initiative: 4
Move: 2/7/13/25
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6-1
Hits: 18/36
Appear: 3D6

Special: None.

Yellow zombies are so named because of the putrescent, curdled, yellowish fluid that swells their skulls and nerve paths. This fluid consists of a type of microorganism that combines to form a community intelligence. It feeds on human nervous tissue and is able to stimulate muscle activity in the same way that nerves do. In other words, it is able to invade a human body, consume the nervous tissue there, and replace it at the same time, keeping the body functioning as long as there is any nervous tissue remaining for sustenance.

Unfortunately, living humans move too quickly for the organism to invade, so it generally settles for corpses, then uses those bodies to create more corpses from the living. The zombie organism begins its invasion with the brain, then works its way outward toward the extremities. Note that the organism does not actually return life to the corpse, only movement.

After all of the nervous tissue in a corpse has been consumed (a process that takes approximately three days), the zombie organism must move on to a new body. Each hour that it spends in a used-up corpse, portions of the community begin to die away, and control of the body steadily worsens. Generally, when the community finally leaves the old body, it does so by oozing out skull openings such as the ears and nostrils. Of course, it attempts to leave the old corpse while in the vicinity of several new ones, in order to split up and expand.

If the organism can invade a living human, it can feed for nearly a week, as it does not have to compete for its food with normal corrupting organisms. A living victim will slowly lose its personality, memories, and physical control over the course of the first few days of this period, and will spend the time in a horrific waking nightmare during which it has trouble separating hallucinations from reality. When running such an infected NPC, the referee should use the NPC's normal statistics to begin with, then slowly adjust them to reflect the infection's taking control.



DESIGNING YOUR OWN DARK RACES/MINIONS

Sources of ideas for new Darkling races surround us every day. Novels, movies, TV, and periodicals abound with strange creatures that can become the basis for a new threat to your PCs and the world in which they dwell. Or you may have an odd idea or two floating around in your own head.

In order to translate one of these creatures into **Dark Conspiracy** game terms, first write down a word description of the creature's appearance and behavior, without worrying about numbers at this point. As you write, new ideas will come to you, to help flesh out the description.

With that description firmly in mind, begin thinking about how to translate any special powers into rules. With the pale, for instance, we knew that we wanted creatures that leeched heat in a way similar to the manner in which traditional vampires drain blood, including the possibility of draining just a little, leaving the victim alive for repeated feedings. Just a little bit of playing with human body heat and weight revealed a relatively simple formula that would allow referees to easily keep track of hours gained for heat drained. A little testing revealed that the formula allowed for draining a human entirely and receiving a full two days of activity, as well as for keeping the victim alive by smaller feedings every seven hours or so. Of course, we had to set a limit on how low the heat could be leeched (not quite to freezing), as well as a rationale for ruling out other heat sources.

After all of this is done, work through the statistics, assigning numbers that seem reasonable, given the other creatures in the game. Human NPCs can be a great guideline for this. For example, if you want something about as tough as an Experienced NPC, you should give it an Initiative of about 3, attributes that average to about 5, and a combat skill value of 4. All human NPCs have a total of 20 hit points and can take 10 before they suffer the results of being slightly wounded. You should adjust this up or down to suit your creature. NPC unarmed combat damage is one-tenth of the product of Strength and Skill. Your creature may do more or less, depending upon natural weapons such as claws and teeth. Ideally, then, you should establish a die roll notation that averages about the same number (remembering that the average on 1D6 is 3.5, and on 1D10 is 5.5, so 2D6 average to 7, 2D10 to 11, etc.). When adjusting these things, keep in mind that a low initiative creature needs a fairly high skill level, if it is to hit in combat at all, while a high-Initiative creature can afford a lower skill level, as it will get many more chances to hit during the course of a battle.

Next, if you want the creature to be just a bit tougher, give it one point of body armor, representing tough hide perhaps, or make it somewhat more difficult to hit, due to small size, snake-like quickness, or the like.

Finally, if you haven't done so already, give the Darkling a name that reflects its nature, something that Darkling hunters will have coined for it. (Alternatively, you can start with a jazzy name, then build the description and statistics upon it.) Now you are ready to turn it loose upon your PCs.

CHAPTER FOUR
Dark Dimensions

The Dark Masters were spawned outside of our own universe. The dark, alien proto-dimensions where they came from could be used for rapid travel—a dimension walker could leave the Earth at one point and reappear, moments later, miles away.

There will be, however, plenty of questions regarding the proto-dimensions. Abstract questions like, "Where did the proto-dimensions come from?" and more utilitarian ones such as, "Can a dark elf use Dimension Walk skill to enter or escape from a locked room?"

Therefore, the two primary objectives of this chapter are to answer the "what if" questions that dimension walking raises and to show referees how to use proto-dimensions while maintaining play balance in their campaign. **Dark Conspiracy** would be much less enjoyable if a group of PCs without dimension walking capability could not defeat a much weaker group of dark elves who could enter the proto-dimensions. The dark elves should not be able to effortlessly elude a tracker, escape from an ambush, or kill the PCs using their special talents. Of course this doesn't mean that dimension walking would not be helpful in the execution of such tasks, just that it won't make them automatically successful.

This chapter is divided into two sections: The first details the metaphysics of the proto-dimensions and gives a general explanation of how they are related to the Earth and to one another. It also gives more detailed descriptions of the various methods of inter-dimensional travel, explaining how interdimensional travel is accomplished and the penalties of failure.

The second section is a listing of 12 proto-dimensions. Each of these proto-dimensions is ready for use in your campaign. Some of the proto-dimension descriptions also contain ideas for adventures that will illustrate some of the rewards and the dangers of walking the proto-dimensions.

A CAUTION

Referees will find themselves making more judgment calls when dealing with the proto-dimensions than with other topic. The reason for this is that **Dark Conspiracy** players will not have any real-life experiences to which they can compare their characters' interactions with the proto-dimensions. For example, the vehicle rules in **Dark Conspiracy** never once state that a car cannot be used to travel up the side of a building, yet players never seriously suggest that they want their PCs to attempt such an action. We all know that you won't get very far if you try to drive a car up a skyscraper. But what if you tried to dimension walk from the street to an office on the 58th floor of the same skyscraper? Would you get there? Would you get anywhere? There is nothing in everyday experience that answers these questions. This chapter is intended to fill in that information gap.

Referees should always be on guard against players who try to exploit the proto-dimensions. Dimension walking is a powerful ability, but those who possess it are by no means invincible. The proto-dimensions are highly unforgiving of overconfidence, willful ignorance, and poor planning.

META-VERSE

The universe as we know it is (in **Dark Conspiracy**) a portion of a *meta-universe* (or *meta-verse* for short), which is composed of three parts: the *interstices,* the *universe* (as we know it), and the *proto-dimensions.* The basic operating principles of this meta-verse are called *meta-physics.* A clear mental image of the meta-universe and its associated meta-physics is crucial for referees who intend to use the proto-dimensions in their campaigns.

META-PHYSICS

If the proto-dimensions could be seen from Earth, they would all seem to physically overlap the universe and one another. If the proto-dimensions could be seen from the interstices (also known as the astral proto-dimension), a very different picture would emerge. From either of these vistas, the proto-dimensions appear to be small bubbles of order in a sea of chaos. These two images, when taken together, explain all interdimensional occurrences. Transdimensional travel is not like regular travel at all, since the proto-dimensions are no real distance from Earth (or from one another), but paradoxically there is an interdimensional sea which the traveler must cross. A single step takes the dimension walker into another dimension but, at the same time, the journey often feels as exhausting as a walk of many kilometers.

Before going any further, however, we must discuss the three basic components of the meta-verse: the interstices, the universe, and the proto-dimensions.

THE INTERSTICES

The *interstices* are the foundation of the metaverse. They are the sea of disorder in which the birth of the universe occurred, and in which the universe and the proto-dimensions now float. Whether the universe continues to expand until it is infinitely dispersed or collapses back into a singularity like the one which gave rise to the Big Bang, the interstices will remain. The Interstices permeate each of the proto-dimensions. They are not a proto-dimension in themselves, although characters can travel to them (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not).

From the interstices, locations in both the universe and any of the proto-dimensions can be seen. These locations appear as shadowy, translucent forms, much as they do to mystics who are projecting their minds into the astral proto-dimension. This is not at all surprising. The interstices are, in fact, identical to the astral proto-dimension. The only difference between the two is the way in which they are experienced. When mystics journey into the astral proto-dimension, they send only their minds. Dimension walkers in the interstices are not separated from their physical form (much to their regret—the interstices are not very hospitable to humans and are not easily exited). The interstices will be discussed later in full details.

THE UNIVERSE

Billions of years ago, the interstices were completely homogeneous; then a fiery cataclysm known as the Big Bang gave birth to the universe. This early universe was nothing like the one we know today. It was highly energetic and inconceivably chaotic. It was hotter than the core of the hottest star, but no stars existed. Atoms did not exist—in fact, the sub-atomic particles from which they are made had yet to be formed. The

laws of physics were yet to come. In fact, some scientists theorize that this primordial universe had 40 or more distinct dimensions. This primitive universe did not last long. In less than a hundred millionth of a second, causality was established, quarks were formed, and the dimensions in excess of the four (three spatial and one temporal) we know today collapsed into virtual nothingness. The universe began to expand, matter began to coalesce and stars began to form. The rest is history.

The universe is self-consistent. Entropy is never reversed and, for better or worse, time always deposits us in the future, never the past.

THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Unlike the universe, the proto-dimensions were not created in the Big Bang. The majority of the proto-dimensions were formed when the universe began to expand. Like a ship on the ocean, the passage of the universe through what could be deemed an inter-dimensional sea left a vast wake. In this wake—a wake made up of waves of possibility in a sea of chaos—the proto-dimensions were forged. They are irrevocably bound to our universe as echoes are to the sounds which gave them birth. They are reflections of our reality given form. Some proto-dimensions, however, were forged in the deaths of prior universes. The meta-verse has spawned more than one universe, and the present one has predecessors. What force destroyed these other universes is unknown. Some minion hunters theorize that the Dark Masters are responsible for their downfall. Others suggest that the breakdown of these prior universes is the event that created the Dark Masters. Still others hold that the cycle of the universes is unrelated to the Darklings, and beyond their control. We will probably never know for sure.

Models and Analogies: A clear, unambiguous explanation of what the proto-dimensions are is not an easy thing to come by. Their existence isn't a part of the four dimensions that humans experience in their day-to-day lives. Many models are applied to the proto- dimensions, but none of them is completely accurate. The cosmological model in which other dimensions exist "above" and "below" the universe in a series of nested shells does not concur with the nature of the proto-dimensions and their inferiority to the universe. No model in which our dimension is a great sphere surrounded by a sea of tiny proto-dimensional bubbles explains how an empath walks through the dimensional barriers.



For those first learning of the proto-dimensions, one of the best analogies is a mystical one, taught to many empaths during their initial empathic training. The analogy asks the student to picture a long string of white beads. Each bead symbolizes a moment of time or a point of space. In this representation, the passage of time is little more than moving from bead to bead—away from the end of the string which is the past, and toward the end which is the future. People go from one bead to another and never notice the interruptions between the pieces of their universe.

Next, the analogy asks the student to imagine a different string of beads. It is made, in part, with the same white beads, and so the denizens of this universe still step from one white bead to the next. The difference is that there is a small red bead strung between each of the white ones. The red beads remain unnoticed by this universe's inhabitants, who can only travel from one white bead to the next. Whatever dwells within the red beads, it cannot interact with the universe represented by the white beads unless it could take a half step and, instead of moving from one red bead to another, move to a white bead.

Of course, there could be an infinite number of other colored beads between the white ones. The string is the meta-verse, the white beads the universe of Earth, and the colored beads the various proto-dimensions.

PHYSICAL LAWS

The fundamental physical laws in many proto-dimensions are not the same as those of Earth. In some proto-dimensions, they aren't even the same physical laws which were in force there an hour before. Some proto-dimensions dispense with such niceties as causality and stability. In some, the past is as flexible as the future and is constantly in flux. In others, there is no past as we know it, much less an immutable, self-consistent one.

These instabilities make interdimensional travel a risky proposition at best, and they are only one of the dangers which face a dimension walker. The environments found in many of the proto-dimensions are nothing like Earth's. Seas of lava, skies of chlorine, and mountains of methane ice wait to mercilessly slay the unprepared dimensional walk. As if that were not enough, the proto-dimensions are also the home the mysterious and malevolent Dark Masters, the vastly powerful Dark Lords (their lieutenants), and the majority of their Dark Minions.

TYPES OF PROTO-DIMENSIONS

The proto-dimensions can be divided into three broad categories: fragmentary proto-dimensions, halflands, and splinterlands. These categories are loosely based on the level at which causality functions in the proto-dimension in question, and are provided as a rough indicator of the complexity level of each proto-dimension. These categories are not too tightly defined, so it is possible for an individual proto-dimension to sit in a gray area between one classification and another.

In addition to these three categories, there is a fourth type of proto-dimension, the quantum proto-dimension, that is a subcategory of each category.

FRAGMENTARY PROTO-DIMENSION

The fragmentary proto-dimensions are the most unnatural of proto-dimensions, and are in some senses proto-proto-dimensions. They are often quite small and always very strange. At best, the goings on in a fragmentary dimension defy most or all physical laws. Fragmentary proto-dimensions are the easiest to describe, and can usually be summed up in a few sentences. Two examples (Wax and Angle) are included in sidebars. The elemental proto-dimensions that sorcerers occasionally draw upon are, for the most part, fragmentary proto-dimensions.

Not all fragmentary dimensions are reflections of the universe in an odd medium. Angle, a world of geometric shapes, doesn't resemble anything in this universe, except in the most general fashion.

There are usually no native life forms in a fragmentary dimension, but occasionally they are populated by life forms of an elemental nature, or creatures that have been transplanted there from other proto-dimensions and have managed to survive.

Pocket Proto-Dimensions: The pocket proto-dimensions or closet proto-dimensions are a subset of fragmentary proto-dimensions. These extremely small proto-dimensions are created by "pinching off" a few cubic meters of space-time, and isolating it as its own separate "bubble" in the seas of the interstices. This can be accomplished only by extremely powerful empathic or technological powers, and is not something very many PCs can hope to accomplish. Such pocket proto-dimensions can normally only be entered from one location, usually the point from which they were originally "pinched off." If the entrance to such a pocket proto-dimension is sealed from the outside, they make excellent "prison cells," because once the entrance is sealed, it cannot be unsealed from the inside. Except for the entrance, such proto-dimensions are impossible to leave, even using the most powerful Dimension Walk skills.

Space-time is so warped in these pocket proto-dimensions that time inside them passes very slowly (if at all). The energy available inside them is small, as well, and such pocket proto-dimensions are usually rather chilly (temperature inside one seldom exceeds 50 F/10 C). These two factors make them useful as "stasis boxes" for long-term storage (one might consider them to be a very efficient, very expensive, and very hard-to-get refrigerator).

HALFLANDS

Halflands are like the fragmentary proto-dimensions, but are less surreal. They are a better simulation of reality than the fragmentary dimensions, but even so, they would never be confused with the real universe. These sub-real qualities will remind many minion hunters of scenes from their nightmares.

A typical halfland is Gothic. Gothic is an endless castle with thrones, tapestries, ornate suits of armor, and tables laden with cornucopian feasts. Of course, castles, complete with all the trimmings, have been bulk on Earth, but the stone walls and torch sconces of Gothic were not fashioned by human, or even Darkling, hands. Characters who wander through Gothic will eventually realize that there is no world outside of the endless castle which they arrived in. Every door opened reveals more rooms, staircases, or long, drafty corridors lit by eternally burning torches.

There are often life forms to be found in the halflands but they are virtually never sentient. Often they are mindless killers (either living or machine). Other times they are little more than replicas of some Earthly life form, an exact duplicate physically but somehow inferior.

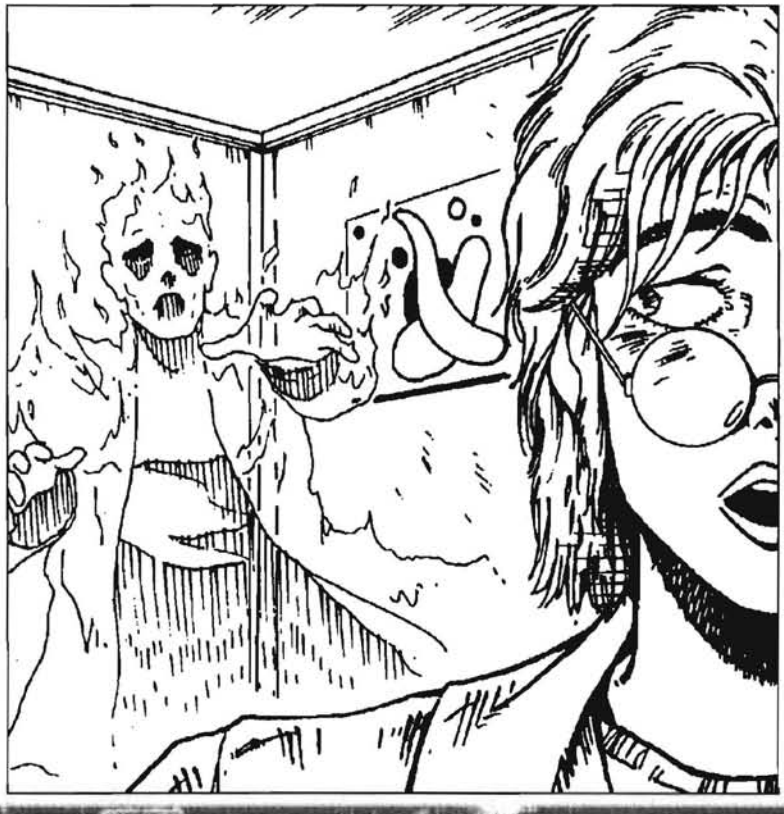
SPLINTERLANDS

The splinterlands are consistent, permanent worlds. They are still inferior to the Earth, but are as close of a simulation as can be found in the proto-dimensions. Splinterlands are the most real of the proto-dimensions. While the other types of proto-dimensions can be thought of as little more than a weird environment, the splinterlands are usually as well developed and as complex as the Earth. Instead of being defined by their environment only, as the other types of proto-dimensions tend to be, the splinterlands are primarily defined by the events that have occurred there.

Consider the Plaguelands. Originally this was a very Earth-like proto-dimension with tribes of simple humanoids who hunted the large mammals which lived there, build simple thatch dwellings, and made primitive tools of stone and wood. This idyllic lifestyle was shattered when a Dark Lord with an affinity for parasites discovered the proto-dimension.

The story of the Plaguelands is not remarkable. The vast majority of the splinterlands were once primeval, Earth-like places—forests, jungles, and prairies—until the Darklings found them. The remarkable splinterlands are the ones which have not been overrun by the Darklings.

Off-Ramp is an example of a proto-dimension that is in the fuzzy area between halfland and splinterland. Off-Ramp is a piece of a proto-dimension that was broken into fragments as a result of a titanic (and poorly understood) struggle (as explained in *Nightsider* adventure in the **Referee's Screen**).



WAX

Name: Wax
Type: Fragmentary
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: Special

Wax looks as if a life-sized wax sculpture of some place on the Earth was heated almost to its melting point moments before the characters arrived. The ground is covered in a gloppy, half-congealed layer of wax. Wax buildings lean at odd angles and threaten to collapse at any moment. Inanimate wax people melt into growing puddles of liquid wax, sagging wax birds perch on dropping wax tree limbs. The whole proto-dimension contains nothing but air and wax, no other kind of matter is present.

Of course, Wax never could have developed naturally. No simple change in physical law could account for every bit of material in the dimension being made of wax. Even more puzzling than the question "where did all the wax come from?" is the question "How did it come to be shaped like people, houses, and trees?" The Darklings didn't do it—they couldn't have. It is all far too perfect. Wax simply exists, an echo of Earth in a world of nothing but wax.

Wax has no assimilation damage value as such, but assimilation is very damaging; upon assimilation, everything becomes wax. Returning an assimilated object to Earth will halt the process, but the object must re-assimilate to Earth before it will return to its former material. Care must be taken not to damage the object in its wax state, because this damage will be reflected in its original state. The effect on living tissue is not pleasant.

ANGLE

Name: Angle
Type: Fragmentary
Discontinuity: 3
Assimilation Effect Value: 30

Angle is a proto-dimension of geometric shapes, and looks like it has been laid out with a compass and a ruler. There are no compound curves or irregular lines anywhere in Angle—everything is formed from three-dimensional geometric solids: spheres, cones, pyramids, cubes, and irregular polygons. Hills and mountains are cones, domes, or pyramids; the rivers are jagged, zigzag gashes through a landscape made up of conjoined irregular polygons.

All of the components of Angle are brightly colored in sparkling, jewel-like colors, so that everything seems to be made of cut glass. Angle has no native life forms, but visitors can occasionally find assimilated non-native life. Assimilation to Angle converts compound curves and irregular surfaces into features more suited Angle. This process is usually deadly for living things.

QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Within quantum proto-dimensions' boundaries, time and distance may be stretched or compressed, giving them a certain degree of utility to minion hunters who possess the Dimension Walk skill and need to be somewhere else in a hurry or who wish to accelerate the healing process. With this added utility, however, comes an increased chance of encountering Darklings who are also using the quantum proto-dimensions for rapid transit.

The quantum proto-dimensions are not an individual proto-dimension, but are, instead, a whole subclass of the proto-dimensions. Each proto-dimension and the Earth has a number of potential quantum proto-dimensions associated with it. If the proto-dimensions are the reflections of Earth, then the quantum proto-dimensions are the shadows of the proto-dimensions that they are linked to. A quantum proto-dimension shares many of the same characteristics as its parent proto-dimension. Both dimensions will have the same discontinuity and physics shift, if any. Environmental effects will be the same in a quantum proto-dimension as they are in the dimension to which it is linked.

The quantum proto-dimensions take their name from two strange effects that travelers there have observed. First, there is the nature of these dimensions' modification factors. There are, for example, quantum proto-dimensions that are stretched/compressed by a factor of 10 and others that are stretched/compressed by a factor of about 25. However, there do not seem to be any at any value between the two. Like the electron orbitals discovered by the first quantum physicists, the quantum proto-dimensions seem to have no in-betweens.

The other effect is this: When there is not an empath within a quantum proto-dimension, that proto-dimension appears to collapse in on itself and literally ceases to exist. Any inanimate object or non-empathic life form that is in a quantum proto-dimension when it collapses falls into the interstices.

The geography or topology of a quantum proto-dimension will strongly resemble that of the proto-dimension to which is linked. Earth's quantum proto-dimensions, for example, resemble Earth, but on a different scale, as discussed below.

Because the quantum proto-dimensions are much more directly linked to the proto-dimensions which spawned them, it is impossible to move into a quantum proto-dimension from anywhere but the one proto-dimension it is linked to, or to move from that quantum proto-dimension into any other proto-dimension besides the one to which it is linked. Even moving from one quantum proto-dimension to another that is attached to the same proto-dimension is not possible without a brief side trip back to their original proto-dimension.

There are other effects of this extremely tight linkage. No matter what effects of accuracy or skew a dimension walker attempts to achieve when entering a quantum proto-dimension, the results are always the same. The dimension walker arrives exactly at the corresponding point in the parent proto-dimension (exceeding the maximum amount of accuracy possible with other types of interdimensional travel). It is theorized that the reason for this is the extreme "proximity" that the quantum proto-dimensions have with their parent dimensions. What this means is that stages of success spent on

skew and accuracy are effectively wasted on the quantum proto-dimensions, although they could still be used to hold a portal open for an extended period of time.

The primary use of Dimension Walk stages of success in the quantum proto-dimensions, however, is increasing the degree of modification (stretching or compression of distance or time) found there. A powerful Darkling could enter a quantum proto-dimension where the degree of modification makes trips 1,000 times faster than they would be in the dimension they are linked to. The best that most humans can hope for, however, is a modification factor somewhere between 10 and 100.

PERCEIVING THE QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Empathic characters perceive the quantum proto-dimensions in much the same way they do the Earth. There is "ground" for them to walk on and a "sky" overhead, but it all has a vaguely surreal look about it, as if it were a dream image rather than something actually being seen with the eye. Everything native to a quantum proto-dimension appears to be black but differentiation of objects is not difficult. For example, small obstacles on the ground, the kind which routinely trips hikers on Earth, are readily apparent to empathic characters even though they should blend flawlessly into their background. This strange effect is a by-product of the fact that the quantum proto-dimensions are not perceived with the earthly senses but are, instead, sensed empathically.

It should be noted that while empaths can tell what locations in the parent dimension correspond to their location in a quantum proto-dimension, it is not possible to conduct a search of the parent dimension from a quantum proto-dimension. For example, if Scirocco was looking for someone in Mechaniaca, he could not retreat into one of Mechaniaca's quantum proto-dimensions and walk around there until he found them. The empathic directions sense that allows navigation in a quantum proto-dimension does not allow an empath to scan the parent proto-dimension.

Non-empathic characters in a quantum proto-dimension will be unable to see, hear, or even feel the ground beneath their feet. In fact, they will be totally unable to sense anything native to the proto-dimension which they are in. If someone or something comes into contact with them, they will feel it, but will be unable to see who, or what, is touching them, nor will they hear anything that is said.

Non-empaths who are left alone (without an empath) in a quantum proto-dimension are sent into the interstices when that dimension collapses.

It is possible for empaths to use their empathy to protect non-empaths from the effects mentioned above. If an empath establishes an empathic link with Human Empathy, Project Thought, or another similar empathic skill, the non-empath will be able to perceive their surroundings. They will, essentially, be piggy-back riding on the empathic senses of their benefactors. (Assume that empathic contact, once established, lasts the duration of the trip to that quantum proto-dimension.)

Presumably, the inability of non-empaths to perceive the quantum proto-dimensions is related to the fact that the presence of empathic individuals is what causes their existence in the first place.

NON-EMPATHIC CHARACTERS IN A QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSION

Non-empaths are unable to use Dimension Walk skill, but once they have been transported to another proto-dimension (by whatever means), they will be fully able to interact with that proto-dimension in most cases, the quantum proto-dimensions being the chief exception. Non-empaths will find interdimensional travel to be more dangerous than will their empathic counterparts (largely due to the danger that they will be trapped in another proto-dimension), but not tremendously so.

Referees should guard against making adventures that require specific empathic talents, since not every character can be empathic.

ENTERING THE QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Quantum proto-dimensions behave as if they had the same discontinuity as their parent dimension. It is an Easy: Dimension Walk task for a human to enter one of Earth's quantum proto-dimensions. Entering a quantum proto-dimension from Mechaniaca, on the other hand, would be an Average: Dimension Walk task for a human. Of course, this assumes that there are no environmental modifiers acting against the dimension walker. The player must state which type of quantum proto-dimension is being entered: time stretch, time compress, distance stretch, or distance compress.

Failure means that the empath is unable to open a portal to any quantum proto-dimension. Catastrophic Failure means two things: First, the portal is opened to the opposite modification than the empath intended: time compress instead of time stretch, for example, or distance stretch instead of distance compress. Second, the empath will not realize that the wrong portal has been opened until she or he enters the quantum proto- dimension.

If the task attempt is successful, then the referee should roll to determine the empath's stages of success for the task, and convert them into success factors. Success factors are handled differently for the quantum proto-dimensions. As was mentioned before, skewed and offset movement are not possible between the Earth and the quantum proto-dimensions, and accuracy is no longer a concern. Instead, these elements are replaced with *modification*, a measure of how much the time or distance in the proto-dimensions are changed in comparison to real world time or distance.

Modification is purchased, each stage of success buying 2 factors. However, unlike skew, offset, and accuracy (discussed later), not every factor spent on modification will automatically increase it. This is due to the way the modification levels are quantified.

For example, Robin must deliver an important message to an empathic underground cell 32 kilometers away. No vehicles are available, but she must deliver the message within 30 minutes. She attempts to dimension walk into a distance compress quantum proto-dimension, putting all success factors into modification. Traveling from Earth to one of Earth's quantum proto-dimensions is an Easy: Dimension Walk task, and Robin succeeds. The referee rolls again, and determines that Robin gets 3 stages of success , which converts into 6 factors for the Modification Table (2 factors for each level of success). Six success factors is enough to achieve a modification of 50, but not enough to achieve a modification of 100. Robin successfully enters the quantum proto-dimension where distances are compressed by a factor of 50, meaning that traveling one kilometer there is the same as traveling 50 kilometers on Earth, or traveling 0.64 kilometers is the same as traveling 32 kilometers on Earth.

Since a kilometer is 1,000 meters, 0.64 kilometers is 640 meters, which Robin could walk in 80 five-second combat phases (a walk is 8 meters per phase, and 640/8=80), which is 400 seconds, or just under seven minutes (400/60=6.66), not counting the time needed to open a portal and enter the quantum proto-dimension. By running part of the way, Robin could get there even faster. To walk 32 kilometers normally would take much longer, and Robin would never be able to deliver her message in time.

MODIFICATION TABLE

Factors	Effects
0	Time or distance is not modified
1	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 5
2	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 10
3	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 25
5	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 50
8	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 100
13	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 250
21	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 500

ENCOUNTERS IN THE QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSIONS

A simple encounter table for the quantum proto-dimensions cannot be created. However, it should not be too difficult for referees to create appropriate encounters if they keep the following in mind:

First, nothing will ever be encountered in a quantum proto-dimension that could not be encountered in the dimension which spawned it. If the Pale never travel to Pyre, then there will be no Pale in one of Pyre's quantum proto-dimensions. Likewise, non-empathic creatures cannot enter the quantum proto-dimensions alone. If a non-empath (human, Darkling, or beastie) is present, then there must also be an empath present who is stabilizing the proto-dimension's existence.

Darklings who rely on DarkTek to travel from one proto-dimension to another will not be encountered in the quantum proto-dimensions. This is because the various DarkTek methods of interdimensional travel will not function very well in the quantum proto-dimensions. A dimensional anchor left in an unpopulated quantum proto-dimension will fall into the interstices when the dimension collapses. This rules out the construction of a gateway in a quantum proto-dimension.

A dimension walking device could pop its users into the quantum proto-dimension of their choice but, unless one of them was already capable of dimension walking, they would have no way of getting back. If none of them had empathic talent, the quantum proto-dimension would immediately collapse around them. A second dimension walking device left in the quantum proto-dimension would end up in the interstices the moment that there was no empath in the quantum proto-dimension.

The final thing that referees should keep in mind is that the higher the modification level of the quantum proto-dimension, the more powerful the Darklings who use it are likely to be. Also, the higher the distance compression, the smaller the proto-dimension will be, and so the higher the likelihood of encountering any entity which happens to be there.

THE PROPERTIES OF PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Humanity has, for all its existence, lived on the Earth. Consequently, humans have trouble imagining things being very different. A few trips into the proto-dimensions will correct this deficiency. In the proto-dimensions, many of the things humanity assumes to be absolute are not.

SIZE AND SHAPE

All proto-dimensions are not created equal. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some seem almost as large as the universe, with planets, stars, and even galaxies. Others are not quite big enough to serve as a decent-sized broom closet. Earth's parallel in some proto-dimensions is a spherical planet. In other dimensions, it is a very limited piece of terrain.

BOUNDARIES

There are many ways in which the proto-dimensions are bounded. The important ones are discussed below.

Curvature: Many proto-dimensions curve back on themselves. For humans, who are natives to a spherical planet, this is easy enough to comprehend, but not as easy to deal with. This curvature is not part of the terrain, but part of the spatial fabric instead.

For example, imagine a group of characters who enter a proto-dimension, walk for four or five kilometers in what to them seems to be a perfectly straight line, only to find themselves back at the very point where they began. It is intuitively obvious that they have been walking on a sphere which is about five kilometers in circumference, but the terrain seems to be perfectly flat. To an astronaut standing on the surface of a planetoid, such curvature would be readily visible. The difference between the two cases is that in proto-dimensions it is not the ground that is curved, but the space-time continuum itself. Sometimes the curvature is even more pronounced. In a proto-dimension that is only a kilometer or two in circumference, characters might be able to see themselves off in the distance (weather permitting).

In addition, there is no reason to assume that the fabric of proto-dimensions will always be spherically curved. It could just as easily be as twisted as a corkscrew or as formless as a crumpled paper bag. Proto-dimensions are often in the form of cylinders, cones, toroids, and other complex geometric shapes. In a proto-dimension shaped like a toroid (a doughnut), characters could walk a kilometer due east, and, in doing so, circumnavigate the dimension, but waking due north, they could walk many times that distance and never get anywhere near their starting point. Through all of this, of course, the terrain seems perfectly flat, just as the surface of the Earth seems perfectly flat.

Navigation skill is almost useless in proto-dimensions; which are acutely or unevenly curved. The thought processes and intuitions which make up the Navigation skill are based on premises which are not valid in these proto-dimensions. Any Navigation task will be from one to four levels more difficult than normal, depending on the acuteness and variability of the dimension's curvature. The referee may decide to reduce this additional difficulty for characters who have spent some time in the proto-dimension in which they are traveling.

For example, the referee decides that Houston must succeed at a Formidable: Navigation task to return directly to where she planned on meeting her teammates (nor-

mally an Easy: Navigation task on Earth). Since Houston has an Intelligence of 7 and a Navigation of 4, her player will need to roll (7+4) x 1/2, or a 5, on a D20 to succeed. Her player rolls a 7, which is a failure, and so the referee decides that Houston spends as much time getting back to the rendezvous site as she would have if she had retraced her steps—so much for the direct route. If Houston had spent more time exploring the proto-dimension and had a better feel for its curvature, then the referee would probably have decided that the task would only be Difficult or even Average, in which case the roll of 7 would allow Houston to have succeeded In her attempt

Obviously, navigation devices are of no help with these tasks. Certain DarkTek device's inertial location system is designed and programmed to function on Earth. In a proto-dimension where walking a kilometer east and then a kilometer north does not produce the same results as walking a kilometer north and then a kilometer east, the device will only succeed at getting its user hopelessly lost.

Characters can attempt to modify these devices to function somewhere other than Earth. The task would require careful mapping of the proto-dimension in question (something which is not always very easy), plus the modification of the device which would require success at both a Difficult: Computer Operation task and an Average: Electronics task. If the conversion is successful, the device would function in exactly the same manner as it would on Earth, but the satellite cross-check features would be useless (the Earth satellites not being available anywhere else). A Compunav can only be modified for one proto-dimension at a time. Separate map chips must be burned for each proto-dimension the device is to function in. It is up to the referee to decide when a character or group has mapped a given proto-dimension well enough for this task.

Other effects besides curvature bound the proto-dimensions, but for the most part they do not pose as great a threat to navigation. These other boundary effects are described below.

Dimensional Barriers: Many proto-dimensions are literally walled off. Great and impenetrable walls reach up into the sky, demarking the edge of these tiny universes and leaving no question about their size or shape.

Some of these walls are perfectly black, absorbing all light and energy with no effect. They feel clammy to the touch, slick and cold even moments after being assaulted with a laser or a welding torch. It is always darker near these black battlements. In some proto-dimensions, clothed as they are in eternal gloom, it is as black as night at the bases of these gloomy ramparts.

COMBAT IN THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

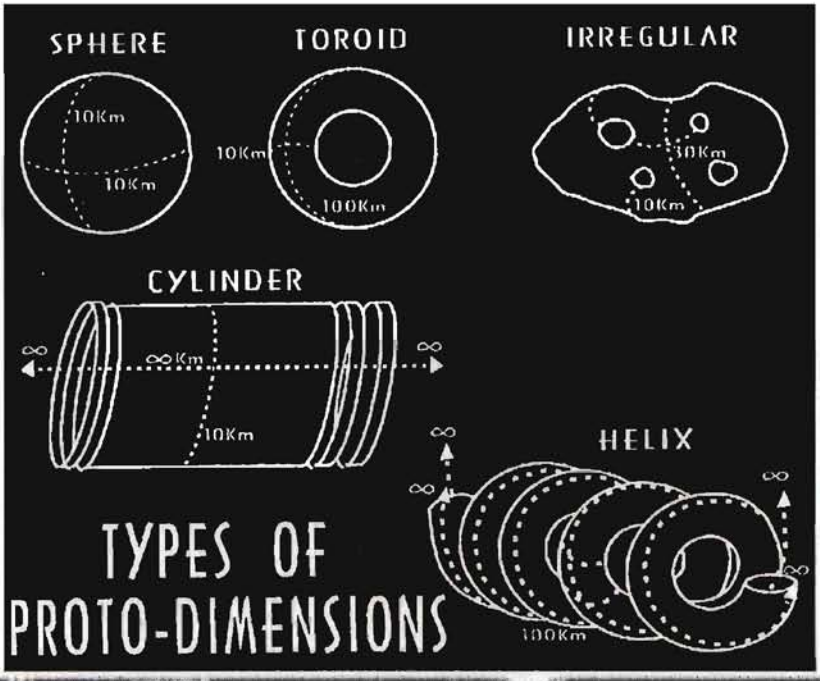
Most proto-dimensions where humans can exist for any length of time have physics and conditions which require no modifications to the combat rules. Where changes are necessary, they are discussed in the chapters dealing with the individual proto-dimensions. Referees creating their own proto-dimensions will need to consider how any changes in physical laws will change the way combat works in their proto-dimension.

Empathic talents work the same in all proto-dimensions, and are not modified for the purpose of combat by any change in proto-dimensional physics.

Othertimes the border walls are reflective. Looking at these walls is like gazing into a perfect mirror. They feel warm to the touch, reflecting every calorie of body heat from the person touching them. Shooting at a target's reflection in one of these walls with a laser weapon would be just as effective as aiming and firing the laser directly at the target. Such a ricochet attack with conventional weapons is not possible because of the deformation of the projectiles upon impact with the barrier. Were it not for this effect, bullets would bounce off of these walls with the same mathematical precision as laser beams.

There are infinite possibilities between these two extremes. There are walls that appear to be made of a gray, rubbery plastic which will yield a centimeter or two if pushed, but are impervious to damage. Others appear to be made of stone and can be chipped at but never penetrated. Still others have the quasi-organic look of DarkTek and will ooze bilious fluids from any cut or hole made in them.

Relativistic Barriers: One of the strangest types of proto-dimensional barrier isn't a physical barrier at all. It is, instead, a relativistic barrier like the one which prevents objects in this universe from reaching the speed of light. When PCs encounter a relativistic barrier, they will begin to notice that each step is a little more difficult than the last, as if they are going up an ever steepening hill, although they will not notice any difference in the terrain. After a few steps, they will notice that characters in front of them seem to be moving slower, and characters behind them moving faster. If one of the characters were to fire a gun in the direction of travel, the bullet would appear to lazily depart from the weapon, slowly fly a short distance, and fall to the ground. A bullet fired at right angles to the direction of travel would appear to behave normally to the firer, but would seem to be traveling very slowly to an observer behind the firer, and much faster than normal to an observer in front of the firer.



What is happening here is that each movement requires progressively more energy the closer the character's approach to the edge of the proto-dimension. Eventually, further movement toward the edge of the proto-dimension will require an almost infinite amount of energy, bringing movement to a halt. For reasons unknown, light can penetrate farther into the border area, so characters will be able to see farther than they can walk. Sky and land will seem to blend together into a mist or fog bank.

The danger of a relativistic barrier is that it cannot be detected until the characters actually begin to experience its effects, and, by that time, something might find them in their impeded state and be able to outmaneuver them by simply remaining "downhill."

Relativistic barriers become noticeable after moving about eight meters into them. Nothing can move more than about 16 meters into a relativistic barrier area before being halted by the relativistic effects. For each meter "uphill" a character is, movement is halved (actually, movement takes twice as much energy, but the final result is the same).

Relativistic barriers might be expected to have some unusual effects on combat, but this type of barrier is a very small proportion of the few proto-dimensions that have it, and combat situations are not going to come up often enough to make a full discussion worth the space. Empathic skills and melee combat proceed normally. Hitting a target when firing "uphill" becomes one level easier, firing "downhill" one level more difficult.

Gateways: In some rare cases, one proto-dimension may be partly or completely bordered by a colossal gateway into another. This is an unusual, and imperfectly understood, variation of the gateway in that it seems to be permanent and to require no anchors (see later section for a discussion of gateways). Whether these dimension separating gateways were created by the Dark Lords or are a natural product of the formation of the proto-dimensions is unknown. Certainly, no human is capable of closing such border gateways.

DISCONTINUITY

The weirder and less Earth-like a proto-dimension is, the harder it will be for a human dimension walker to move into it, and the more difficult it will be for humans to function there. The measure of this "weirdness" is referred to as the proto-dimension's *discontinuity factor* (discontinuity for short).

A discontinuity factor has little to do with what a proto-dimension is physically like. Mechaniaca and the Plaguelands both have a discontinuity of 1, but no one would ever mistake one for the other. It is, rather, an index of several factors, among other things the "nearness" of a proto-dimension to Earth, the natural antipathy the human psyche will have for the proto-dimension, and the extent of the Darkling presence there.

Dimensions which are similar to some Earth-like environment, follow the same physical laws that govern the Earth, and have not suffered a major invasion by the Dark Ones tend to have a discontinuity of 1. As these factors increase, so does the discontinuity.

The proto-dimensions which the Dark Masters call home, or at least would call home if such a pleasant concept as "home" existed in their malevolent psyches, have discontinuity factors well in excess of 10. When one realizes that the most powerful human dimension walkers have a very difficult time entering a proto-dimension with a discontinuity factor much higher than 5 or 6, one realizes how very alien the Dark

Masters must be. Some empaths theorize that this is what protects the Earth from a direct invasion by the Dark Ones themselves.

Discontinuity factors are not immutable. If a pleasant and Earth-like proto-dimension suffered a massive invasion by the Dark Minions, its discontinuity might be increased. If the influence of the Dark Ones was driven out of a proto-dimension, its discontinuity would be lessened. This should alarm those minion hunters who have had dealings with Demonground which, at least in terms of dimension walking, behaves as if it had a discontinuity of 1. If discontinuity is what is keeping the Dark Masters away from the Earth, then this drift must be stopped. If not, the Earth will be devoured like a ripe fruit.

To maintain the element of mystery, referees should never tell players the discontinuity of a proto-dimension. A discontinuity can be roughly deduced from the relative ease or difficulty of entering it, of course, but the referee should keep exact numbers (and any relevant die rolls) secret, announcing only the results.

CORRESPONDENCE AND SKEWED TRAVEL

Imagine an office building 50 stories tall, every floor a huge square one block on a side. If you were standing in front of the guard's station on the ground level and were moved straight up for 10 floors, you would come out by the water fountain in the legal department's stenographic pool. With this information we can say that the water fountain is directly above the guard's station. If you walked 10 meters toward the center of the building and then were teleported straight back down to the ground floor, you would come out 10 meters from the guard's station.

This is an example of correspondence. Every point on the 10th floor corresponds to a single point on the ground floor which is directly below it. The proto-dimensions are like the floors of an office building, only instead of being stacked above the Earth in the Z axis, they are "stacked" along what is sometimes called the "gamma axis." Just as Z is at right angles to X and Y, gamma is at right angles to X, Y, and Z. It is a concept that is difficult to describe in normal words (although it can be done mathematically).

So, when a party who leaves the Earth from the Akiga-Star chemical plant in Tampete, it travels on the gamma axis and arrive in Toxia, near a grove of gnarled trees. Later, the same group travels to Toxia from the Carolina Triangle and comes out near a swamp. The group decides to head south and, after a while, comes to a familiar grove of gnarled trees. Returning to Earth the group comes out, of course, on the front steps of the Akiga-Star Citadel in Tampete.

This is an illustration of what is called right angle interdimensional travel. But, as usual, things are never quite as simple as they first appear. Returning to the office building analogy, let's ask the question "What would happen if you didn't quite travel straight up from the guard's station?" Well, logically we can say that you would end up some distance away from the water fountain. Inaccuracies like this occur with dimension walking too. Dimension walkers who are not careful enough could come out as far as 10 kilometers away from the point directly "above" their starting point.

Conversely, individuals might try to deliberately move through the proto-dimensions on an axis which deviates from a right angle on the gamma axis. This would allow them to come out somewhere other than the point at which they would have arrived. This is called *skewed* travel by most dimension walkers.

Of course, referees should never tell players exactly where they arrive. The referee should not announce "You skewed a little, and have arrived 11.2 kilometers NNW of the chalk cliffs that correspond to Chiwaukee," merely: "You have arrived ... there are some chalk cliffs off in a southerly direction." If the characters are familiar with the proto-dimension, more information can be provided.

PHYSICS AND ASSIMILATION

Physical laws may differ from proto-dimension to proto- dimension. The wind blows because air travels from regions of high pressure to regions of low pressure. These high pressure areas are formed when the air is heated, which occurs because the sun shines on the Earth, which is possible because hydrogen can be fused into helium, and so on. Take away any link in this chain, and there will be no wind. Of course there will be other changes too. If, for example, air didn't travel from high-pressure regions to low-pressure regions, guns wouldn't work—there would be no force to push the bullets out of the barrel. Steam engines, cars, and (of immediate significance to arriving PCs) lungs would also be useless.

When the PCs first enter a proto-dimension, they may not notice the difference between it and the Earth. Part of the reason for this is that the objects in the proto-dimension are adapted to the conditions there. For example, let us consider a group of PCs visiting Slide. A creature from Slide, a proto-dimension where the force of friction is weaker than on Earth, will have developed other methods of locomotion. Even though everything is as slick as oiled glass, it will move around without apparent difficulty When the PCs try to take their first step, however, they will discover what is unusual about Slide: rubber-soled shoes on sand act like ice skates on a frozen lake.



Assimilation: Physical laws are a property of the dimension, not of the objects there. Assimilation is the process by which objects and beings from one proto-dimension gradually adjust themselves to behave according to the physical laws of another proto-dimension. What this means is that the PCs and their gear will tend to retain the influence of Earthly physics for a time, but if they stay in a proto- dimension for long enough they will become assimilated with that proto-dimension's physics. it will probably not be a pleasant experience—or, in many cases, a survivable one.

Let us return to our party visiting Slide. After several falls, some minor injuries, and the loss of a piece of equipment or two, the group of PCs decide to leave Slide and return to Earth to better equip themselves for the conditions they have found there. They return a few hours later equipped with golf shoes—now they can at least walk around without having to make an Agility roll for every step they take.

After an hour or so, they see some dark elves gathering mud from a creek bed (the dark elves plan to use the mud's low-friction properties for some act of mayhem). One of the PCs draws her pistol and is startled when it slips through her fingers. She bends down to get it and her foot slides out of her shoe. A companion grabs onto her jacket to keep her from falling, but it slides from his grasp and both PCs find themselves on the ground. The dark elves, alerted by the commotion, use their Dimension Walk skills to slip away (pun not intended). The PCs have learned a lesson about interdimensional physics they will not soon forget. Their equipment has become assimilated with Slide's low-friction physics.

If they stayed in Slide long enough, eventually their bodies would become assimilated. Blood cells would begin to slip through pores in their veins causing bruises. Shoulders and hips would slide out of joint with ease. Eventually the delicate systems which allow their bodies to function would fail and they would die. These are the dangers of assimilation to a universe that is too different.

The Effects of Assimilation: The effects of assimilation on simple inanimate objects must usually be determined by the referee using logic and common sense. Usually the more complex an item, the more likely it is to malfunction as assimilation proceeds. For example, a fully assimilated knife will continue to work in all but the most radically different proto-dimensions. Firearms, on the other hand, are a little more complex, and have more systems that can be disrupted by a minor change in physical laws. Something as complicated as an automobile, in which dozens of systems must function in unity, will almost never work perfectly after being assimilated. The human body is, of course, much more complicated than any motor vehicle.

Each proto-dimension will have an assimilation effect value given with its description (sometimes this will be 0). This number represents the damage a character will suffer as a result of assimilation. Once assimilation reaches the halfway point (30 minutes after assimilation begins), characters will begin to suffer damage. This effect will continue, and additional damage will be applied every 15 minutes after this. Before assimilation is complete (30 minutes after it begins and then, again, 15 minutes later), the damage done will be half the assimilation effect value, but once a character is completely assimilated, the full value should be used. The damage is applied to the chest in the same manner as poison damage. Other special effects of assimilation will be described in the individual proto-dimension discussions.

After assimilation damage begins, it is a constant, progressive effect. If a PC leaves a proto-dimension sometime between damage allocations, the referee should determine the amount of time that has passed and, from that, the amount of damage which the character has suffered since damage was last taken. Fractions should be rounded up, of course.

Naturally, anyone who is suffering assimilation damage will want to return to Earth, or a proto-dimension with Earth-like physics at the very least. This is a good idea, but just because the PCs have escaped a hostile proto-dimension does not mean they are out of danger. Even though they've moved into a less hostile dimension, individuals who are suffering assimilation damage are still attuned with the proto-dimension they've left.

If the PCs were fully assimilated, it will take them an hour to fully revert to normal. During that time, two more applications of half assimilation damage are applied to the PCs, at 15 and 30 minutes after their return. After that, they will have recovered enough that they will not suffer any more damage. Characters who were not fully attuned will only suffer half assimilation damage once more.

Note that the fact that characters carry Earthly physics around with them for a short time does not permit them to carry a little packet of Earth conditions around with them. If a proto-dimension contains no breathable atmosphere, is too hot, or is otherwise inimical to human life, characters venturing there must use other means to stay alive (scuba tanks, protective suits, sorcerous powers) or they will perish.

Resisting Assimilation: Resisting assimilation by a proto-dimension is a function of Empathy. For this reason, the first things to become assimilated with a proto-dimension's physics will be the inanimate objects which the PCs bring with them. Later, non-empathic PCs and ultimately the empathic PCs will be assimilated.

Inanimate Objects: It takes about an hour for equipment, weapons, and vehicles to become assimilated by a proto-dimension. The effect starts slowly, but will accelerate as time passes. Before 30 minutes has passed, there is almost no change in the operation of most equipment. After another 15 minutes, the change will be fairly easy to detect and the item may begin to malfunction. After the full hour, the item will be completely attuned with the new physics of the proto-dimension.

The only exception to this involves those non-living objects which are included in an individual's concept of self. Contact lenses, pacemakers, and even the ET machinery built into cyborg escapees and rogue androids will continue to behave normally, at least until the individual they are bound to loses attunement with Earthly physics. For most individuals, this includes commonly worn jewelry and clothing, but rarely weapons or tools. A cyborg escapee who is using a cyber hand, especially one which does not closely resemble a human hand, might have trouble with it long before noticing any other peculiar effects.

If a PC has a special piece of equipment, one which he or she almost always carries, a success at a Difficult: Willpower roll will allow that individual to maintain a link with it. This only works with a particular piece of equipment. If a PC *always* carries one particular Colt Krait, then the referee should allow a Willpower check to be made. If that person always carries a pistol and this time it just happens to be a Colt Krait, then the proper empathic link will not be established.

Life forms that are not resisting assimilation (such as unconscious humans) will adjust at the same rate as inanimate objects. In an hour, they will find themselves completely assimilated by the physical laws of the dimension which they are in. In most cases, characters will not want to do this since it usually means pain and, ultimately, death, but there are exceptions. One such exception is when the characters have returned to Earth after being assimilated by another dimension.

Non-Empaths Who Are Resisting Assimilation: Given the effects that most proto-dimensional physics shifts are likely to have on the PCs' bodies, it is much more likely that they would want to avoid assimilation rather than embrace it. The life force of any creature, even one with no measurable empathy, will allow it to resist assimilation. This resistance is the product of some slight empathic strength which is fundamental in the makeup of all life. For a non-empath to resist assimilation is an Easy: Willpower task which should be rolled when the characters enter the proto-dimension. Characters who fall will be assimilated at the same rate as inanimate objects. Characters who succeed will not begin to be assimilated for an hour. Characters who manage an Outstanding Success will not begin to be assimilated for two hours. After the resistance time has passed, assimilation will begin, and one hour later the characters will be fully assimilated.

Empaths Who Are Resisting Assimilation: Empathic PCs can resist assimilation by a proto-dimension for much longer than those who are not so empowered. One hour after empathic characters first enter a proto-dimension, they must pass an Easy: Empathy task in order to resist assimilation. After another hour, an Average: Empathy task, and so on. An Outstanding Success means that the empath automatically passes the next hour's roll, but the roll after that will still be two levels more difficult. When one of these Empathy tasks ends in failure, the empath will begin to be assimilated in the same manner as nonempaths.

For example, Roman has traveled to Slide to destroy a gateway with a combination of his Empathy skills and plastic explosives. He rolls a 20, an automatic failure, for the Easy: Empathy task an hour after he enters the proto-dimension. Roman's player knows nothing of this until the damage starts to be felt, however.



Half an hour later, Roman takes 10 points of damage due to assimilation (half of Slide's 20 points of assimilation damage). Roman's player curses his luck, but decides to take a chance and press on. Fifteen minutes later, he takes another 10 points of damage but, by then, he has managed to locate the gateway. After 10 minutes, he destroys the gateway and returns home. Since Roman was

present for two thirds of the 15 minutes (10/15=2/3), the referee decides to inflict two-thirds of the 20 damage points, or 14 (0.66x20=13.33, rounded up). When Roman returns to Earth, he takes yet another 10 points of damage before he re-attunes himself with the Earth. After that time, he is out of danger. This adds up to a total of 44 points of damage (10+10+14+10=44) to Roman's chest location, which (for Roman) is a serious wound.

Had Roman stayed another hour, he would have suffered a total of 114 points of damage: 10 points twice before assimilation was complete, 20 points when assimilation was complete and twice afterward, 14 points when he left the dimension and 10 points twice while he reattuned with the Earth (10+10+20+20+20+14+10+10=114). Of course, Roman would not survive this much damage, and he would probably have decided to abandon his mission before his situation become so dire.

ALTERNATE ASSIMILATION

For referees who wish to run a slightly more unusual campaign, assimilation can be allowed to take a different form. At the referee's choice, an object or being becomes something different upon assimilation. This transmutation should be into something analogous in the new proto-dimension—weapons should change into weapons, equipment into something with a similar function, clothing to clothing.

For example, Scirocco, Houston, and Fuller arrive in Gothic, and remain long enough for assimilation to begin on their clothing and equipment. Scirocco is clothed in army surplus BDUs with web gear and enough equipment to count as military gear. Fuller and Houston are clothed in primarily civilian clothing, but both are armed. Scirocco will find that his camouflage clothing will change into a suit plate armor from the late medieval era that Gothic reflects. his web gear will change into a baldric and scabbard for the short sword his XM-22 pistol changes into, and he will find a halberd in his hands where his M16A2 once was. Fuller will be dressed in the doublet, hose, and light boots of a late medieval courtier, his Remington 870 pump shotgun changed into a hunting crossbow, and the bandoleer of 12-gauge shells changed into a quiver of crossbow bolts. Houston finds herself dressed as a late medieval noblewoman, carrying a crossbow that used to be her XM-26, and with a gold-chased and filigreed stiletto hanging from her waist where her commando knife used to be.

Scirocco, Houston, and Fuller are fortunate that they ended up in a proto-dimension where humans stay human. Had they arrived in a proto-dimension where the dominant form of intelligent life a two-meter tall, upright blue arthropod resembling a lobster, their assimilation might have been even more of a shock to them (not to mention to their companions when they return to Earth).

A further point for consideration: Different types of creatures assimilate into different things. A referee might used this to good effect if a group containing a dark elf saboteur travels to the Blue Lobster proto-dimension—in that proto-dimension, humans assimilate into upright blue lobsters, but dark elves assimilate into gray-green iguana-like creatures. The dark elf saboteur would appear as an iguana wearing a lobster mask (dark elf disguised as human = iguana disguised as lobster).

Although it requires more work on the part of the referee, this form of assimilation can prove very challenging for the players and very entertaining for everyone concerned.

INTERSTICES: THE INTERDIMENSIONAL SPACES

The *interstices* are the foundation of the metaverse. They are the sea of disorder in which the birth of the universe occurred. Whether the universe continues to expand until it is infinitely dispersed or collapses back into a singularity like the one which gave rise to the Big Bang, the interstices will remain. The interstices permeate each of the proto-dimensions. They are not a proto-dimension in themselves, although characters can travel to them (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not).

The interstices permeate all that exists, the myriad proto-dimensions as well as the universe of Earth. From the interstices, locations on the Earth as well as in the various proto-dimensions can be seen under the right conditions. These locations appear as shadowy, translucent forms much as they do to mystics who are projecting their minds into the astral proto-dimension. This is not at all surprising, as the interstices correspond exactly to the astral proto-dimension. The difference between them is the way in which they are experienced. Mystics only send their minds into the astral proto-dimension, whereas travelers in the interstices are not disconnected from their bodies. This can be likened to a person in an airplane flying over the ocean and a person sitting in a rowboat in the middle of the ocean. A passenger in the airplane will be able to journey widely and see much. A passenger in the rowboat will see little, and will feel waves and get wet—especially if the sea is choppy. The interstices are a rough sea at best.

ENTERING THE INTERSTICES

Most dimension walkers do not willingly enter the interstices, although it would be an Easy: Dimension Walk task to do so from the Earth or any of the proto-dimensions. The only time most dimension walkers find themselves in the interstices is when they have suffered a Catastrophic Failure while attempting Dimension Walk, or when they have been placed there, either by a powerful enemy or DarkTek.

The reason that dimension walkers avoid the interstices is twofold. First, it is very difficult to escape from the interstices, much more difficult than common Dimension Walk tasks. It is more difficult to perform any empathic task which is a cascade of Dimension Walk while there. Any cascade skill of Dimension Walk is automatically two levels more difficult while in the interstices (Easy tasks become Difficult and Difficult tasks become Impossible). It is some small condolence that avoiding detection by the Dark Ones when using such tasks is two levels easier in the Interstices. Either some force shields the interstices from the Dark One's view or else the Dark Ones simply don't bother to look, figuring that anyone who is trapped in the interstices is doomed and not worth bothering with.

The other reason that dimension walkers avoid the interstices is that the environment will eventually drive those trapped there to madness. Humans and Dark Minions are equally subject to this madness—perhaps even the Dark Lords are not immune.

CONDITIONS IN THE INTERSTICES

Characters in the interstices will experience a sensation of disembodiment. It is not that their minds have left their bodies or that they are physically numbed by the dimension—there is simply nothing (or very nearly nothing) there to sense. The eye sees a hazy grayness, the ear hears a purer silence than most humans have ever encountered before, the air is odorless and tasteless and the sense of touch is assaulted with a barrage of pure nothingness.

Movement: Movement in the interstices is very much like flight. Characters can move a distance equal to the sum of their Intelligence and Empathy attributes every combat phase (this counts as an action). There is no acceleration or inertia in the interstices, and characters may move along any path desired, making right angle turns at full speed without ill effect. Even though there seems to be breathable air, characters will experience no "rush" of air as they move. Also, as there are no landmarks in the interstices—characters have no sense of movement unless there are others present.

Hearing and Visibility: Characters can see their own bodies, hear their own voice, and touch themselves. If the characters are not alone, they will be able to see the forms of their fellows and any beings they encounter (within 800 meters), hear their teammate's voices (within 160 meters), and even touch one another (assuming they are close enough to do so).

These sensory impressions are every bit as vivid as they would be on Earth, perhaps even more so when contrasted to the nothingness of the interstices, but they are by no means equal to the volume of stimulus that a human mind is used to. This absence of sensory input will eventually cause the PCs some problems, as are described below.

THE MADNESS OF NOTHINGNESS

After spending a few hours in the interstices, characters will begin to notice a few strange things. While time seems to pass, characters never seem to get hungry or tired. Likewise, the sensation of pain does not exist in the interstices. Even death does not exist in the interstices. It would seem that an individual could spend all of eternity there with no ill effects. This is, of course, wrong.

After spending 24 hours in the interstices, characters must pass an Average: Willpower test or they will begin to hallucinate. If they succeed at the first Willpower test then they must make a Difficult: Willpower test after another 24 hours. If they succeed at this second attempt, they must pass a Formidable: Willpower test after another 24 hours, and so on. Once a character fails a Willpower roll, hallucinations will begin. These early hallucinations will be relatively benign. Large, brightly colored shapes will seem to drift by, dividing and merging. Shadowy figures will be seen in the distance. Buzzes, hums, and the sound of far off song will be heard.

Along with these hallucinations, another series of Willpower checks will begin. As before, the tests will start at the Average level and get worse from there. When one of the Willpower checks in this second series ends in failure, the character's hallucinations will begin to grow more and more horrific. Those brightly colored shapes will develop unpleasant details like tentacles, claws, and eye stalks and will no longer be content to merely drift by but will charge the character with their horrific maws wide open, exposing an infinitely deep pit lined with row after row of razor-sharp teeth (or whatever other horrific images the referee wishes to describe).

At this time, the third and final series of Willpower checks will begin. When a character finally fails a test in this third series, he or she will suffer a mental breakdown, the nature of which can be chosen from the Mental Breakdown table.

Companionship makes the emptiness of the interstices easier to take. Each of these checks becomes one level easier if the character is accompanied by one or more non-hostile PCs or NPCs (they need not be close friends, just willing to talk once in a while). A mystic using astral travel and communicating by empathic means counts for this purpose.

MENTAL BREAKDOWN

1D10	*Result*
1-5	Amnesia
6-7	Hallucination
8-9	Psychosis
10	Catatonia

Amnesia: The character will forget the events leading up to his or her presence in the interstices as well as any experiences there. Characters who enter the interstices as a result of a Catastrophic Failure at a Dimension Walk task will lose the ability to dimension walk until they recover. Characters with a high degree of familiarity with the proto-dimensions will suffer the greatest memory loss.

Treating amnesia is trickier than normal psychiatric counseling. Usually, each amnesiac has to recover on his or her own. Recovering from amnesia is an exception to the usual psychological counseling rule. Each time the amnesiac undergoes psychological counseling for a period of a week (at least 14 hours during that week), or is confronted with a great psychological stress or trauma, the amnesiac makes an Impossible: Willpower test for recovery. Some empathic abilities can help victims of amnesia.

Hallucinations: Ordinarily, the interstitial hallucinations will cease when the character is rescued. If this result is achieved, however, the character will continue to suffer from random hallucinations of a horrifying nature. If the character does not receive some sort of treatment, the hallucinations will, over time, grow worse and the victim will be unable to resist attacking whatever imaginary creatures torment him or her. This can make the victim of the hallucinations very dangerous.

Psychosis: Some portions of the character's mental makeup are so damaged by the ordeal that the character loses touch with reality. Often this will cause the character to suffer violent mood swings and to become very hostile, even violent, for no apparent reason. Unpredictability is the key word here. This requires twice as much psychiatric attention (two hours per week instead of one) as normal.

Catatonia: Characters who have been rendered catatonic by the interstices are those who have attempted to draw on some sort of inner strength by retreating within themselves. While this is not a bad strategy in the interstices, the characters tend to lose touch with the outside world and completely freeze up. They are trapped within their own minds. Catatonia cannot be cured with normal psychology. Only the individuals can escape the battlements they have erected within their minds. Certain mystic disciplines can assist in breaking these barriers.

Psychological Counseling: Each one of these mental breakdowns is usually capable of being solved with psychiatric assistance, after the character is rescued from the interstices. Unless otherwise noted, a character or NPC with Psychology skill can counsel the mentally disturbed character on resolving the problem. At least one hour a week has to be spent doing this to make any progress. After each four hours of counseling, the character may test to see if he or she can shake the problem. This is a Formidable test against the character's Willpower plus the counselor's Psychology skill level (failure means no progress, Catastrophic Failure has no further effect). Some mental problems have alternate methods of solution. These are listed with specific problems, as appropriate.

While they will not suffer additional mental breakdowns after the first one, the effects of that mental breakdown will increase with the amount of time spent in the interstices. A character who spent a year in the interstices and suffered amnesia, for example, might forget everything that she had ever known beyond the most instinctual things.

MYSTICS AND THE INTERSTICES

Mystics who find themselves physically in the interstices (in other words, mystics not using astral travel) suffer the same consequences as anyone else. Mystics may use all of their normal empathic skills from the interstices, but are subject to the same limitations as everyone else. Mystics should bear in mind that once trapped, they may leave their bodies and travel astrally if they wish, but their body is still in the interstices, and while their bodies will not suffer mental damage they are very vulnerable to physical damage (the "silver cord" will make locating them a very easy task for potential foes).

Mystics using astral travel cannot physically interact (touch, hear, or speak) with anything in the interstices, although they can see and be seen. They use Empathy, however. Astral travelers cannot be damaged by melee or fire combat.

GETTING OUT

The increasing chance for hallucination and madness makes it desirable for characters in the interstices to get out as quickly as possible. This is, however, much more difficult than normal interdimensional travel.

Characters trapped in the interstices will first need to locate a dimension which they can escape to. This is a Difficult: Dimension Walk task and can only be attempted once per day. Characters will have little control over what dimension they find. It could be a proto-dimension which they have been to before, or it could be a totally new one. There is a good chance (4 or less on 1D10) that they will be able to locate Earth (some believe that this is because Earth is in the home dimension of humanity and that Darklings would have a higher chance of finding their own home dimensions).

While locating a dimension is merely a Difficult task, actually breaching one with an interdimensional portal from the interstices is an Impossible: Dimension Walk task. This is because the characters, not being in any proto-dimension, lack the interdimensional leverage that would make such a task easier to accomplish. If the task ends in failure, the characters will be pushed away from the proto-dimension which they attempted to enter and must attempt to locate it again.

"Hauntings": Characters can attempt to draw the attention of inhabitants of the proto-dimension they have located and convince them to open a portal, if these inhabitants are capable of such an act. Since characters in the interstices will appear as very faint, translucent figures, this will be difficult to do. Most people on Earth (as well as non-Darkling races of the various proto-dimensions) would either believe that they had seen a ghost or that they were hallucinating. Sound can be transmitted from the interstices to a proto-dimension, but it is usually very, very faint, and tends to become mutated. Most sounds coming through from the interstices tend to acquire a metallic, jangling aspect, likened by some to the ringing of small bells, by others to the clanking and clattering sounds made by chains. The human voice tends to be mutated as well, either slowing down and coming to resemble a moan or speeding up and becoming a shriek.

Communication from the interstices is possible using visual elements, but as a victim trapped in the interstices is very difficult to see at the best of times—visual communication is only slightly better than auditory communication. Empathic communication from the interstices is the best choice of a bad lot.

A trapped character can attempt to locate a particular individual In a proto-dimension. This is possible only between characters who have formed a close personal friendship or an emotional attachment (this is up to the referee to decide) and is a Difficult: Empathy task. Once the target character has been located, the trapped character may lock on and attempt to draw his or her attention.

Empathy: Characters with Empathy skills can attempt to use them from the interstices, but each task becomes one level more difficult, and characters will be under normal stress at a minimum. For example, sending a "Help, I'm trapped in the interstices! Open a portal!" message via Project Thought would normally be a Difficult: Project Thought task but would become a Formidable task.

Rescue: If the trapped character can convince someone on Earth that they are indeed seeing a ghost, there is a chance of them calling in a paranormal investigator (6 or less on 1D10). There is a chance that this individual will quickly realize what is really going on (5 or less on 1D10). To be rescued, it is merely necessary to open a portal to the interstices in the near vicinity of the trapped character—they will then be able to step out under their own power.

Leaving a character trapped in the interstices is a nasty thing for a referee to do. If a character cannot leave the interstices any other way, the referee may choose for the



character to "wash up" in some proto-dimenstion or another.

Once characters do manage to get out of the interstices, they will immediately suffer the effects of any damage they have suffered. Characters who have suffered one or more critical wounds should be treated as if they had just suffered those wounds the instant that they exited the interstices. Of course, critical wounds to the head are immediately fatal upon leaving.

COMBAT IN THE INTERSTICES

For simplicity, combat in the interstices is assumed to take place on a more or less two-dimensional plane, in a manner similar to standard combat. The following changes are implemented for interstitial combat.

Movement: As noted, characters can move a distance in meters equal to the sum of their Intelligence and Empathy attributes every combat phase (this counts as an action).

Empathic Combat: Empathic skills are used normally in the interstices.

Melee Combat: All melee tasks are one level more difficult in the interstices.

Fire Combat: Fire combat is conducted according to the basic rules. Recoil has the same effect as in the basic rules (decreasing accuracy), since uneven rotational velocities will cause the firer to spin. It will difficult to perfectly compensate for these forces through movement, and the net effect will be a loss of accuracy proportional to the volume of fire. Projectiles behave as if there is drag, and will eventually slow to a stop at the end of their extreme range.

In addition, recoil causes the firer to be pushed in the opposite direction at a speed equal to the weapon's recoil rating in meters per five seconds. For example, a character firing an M16A2 rifle in semiautomatic fire would be propelled backward at the rate of three meters per five seconds. The same weapon fired at full auto would propel the character backward at five meters per five seconds. Characters may attempt to compensate for this movement.

Damage: The sensation of pain does not exist in the interstices—wounds will cause no pain. This means that characters in the interstices are virtually immune to the effects of combat damage until it reaches very high levels. A character can suffer any number of critical injuries and not die—even critical injuries to the head. Instead, locations that have suffered serious or critical injuries are merely rendered useless (critical injuries to the head make the entire body useless). Characters who suffer injuries need never roll for loss of consciousness. Unconscious characters cannot use their physical body, but can use any empathic talents they may possess, and can still move.

A character who is literally vaporized by some horrific weapon will not die, but rather live on as a disembodied consciousness (in this case, the character can never leave the interstices, and is thus dead as an adventuring PC).

Healing: Normal healing does not take place in the interstices, but empathic healing can take place, per the regular rules.

USING THE INTERSTICES

The interstices do not have a great deal of adventure potential. Even the dimension walker whose skill is advanced enough to allow relatively easy escape from the interstices would not be eager to visit them with their danger of madness, but just because the interstices are not a vacation spot, that does not mean that they are without a certain amount of utility.

Injured characters who are placed in the interstices will not die, or even suffer from their wounds. Characters could place an injured friend there then, after obtaining the medical help their friend needs, return to retrieve him or her. Minion hunters doing this had better be sure that they will be able to retrieve this individual promptly or else they will have condemned someone to an endless limbo of horrific hallucinations and eventual madness, a torture from which death offers no release.

While putting friends in the interstices may be a bad idea, they are an ideal place to put enemies who do not have the powers of Dimension Walk. Characters with the Interrogation skill who are interviewing prisoners who have been left in the interstices long enough to hallucinate will find their task to be one level easier than normal. If the hallucinations have been allowed to reach the horrific level, then the task will be two levels easier. This process will take at least two days though, and so will not be useful in a crisis situation.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE INTERSTICES

It is possible to have encounters in the interstices. The creatures encountered there are, like the characters, trapped in the interstices. Consult the following table to produce interstitial encounters (referees should roll once for every eight hours spent in the interstices). All encounters are at the extreme range of vision (as noted above). Other encounters may take place at the referee's option.

INTERSTITIAL ENCOUNTER TABLE

D6 Roll Encounter

1-3 **Physical Entity:** The encounter is with another physical entity, possibly an Earthly human, possibly a humanoid creature from one of the proto-dimensions, possibly a marooned Darkling. The entity is quite mad and will behave in a totally irrational



manner. Assume that the entity is only capable of hand-to-hand combat at a reduced damage and skill rating due to damage from previous encounters. This pathetic creature is likely to break off its attack as quickly as it began.

4 **Interrupter:** The encounter is with an interrupter which has destroyed a pair of dimensional anchors and has fallen into the interstices. If every empathic character can roll their Empathy or greater on a D10, then the interrupter will simply drift past, but if one of the characters falls this roll, then the interrupter will detect them and swerve toward them. Characters who have already begun to hallucinate must subtract 1 from their die roll; characters who have gone onto horrific hallucinations must subtract 2; and characters who have developed an insanity must subtract 3.

If the interrupter does attack the characters, it will attempt to grab its assailant with one of its tentacles (skill 6). If it succeeds, it will begin to drain Empathy, and then Intelligence from its target at the rate of 1 point per turn. When a victim's Intelligence reaches 0, that victim will die—this is, in fact, the only way to die while in the interstices. Empathy and Intelligence which have been drained by an interrupter will return at 1 point per hour once the victim escapes. It is a Difficult task of Strength to tear free from an interrupter.

Interrupters have an overall armor of 1 and 100 hits worth of tentacles, all of which must be destroyed to render the device/creature harmless. Shooting the tentacles with normal ammunition or setting fire to them does little good, which leaves explosives and physical attacks with edged weapons like machetes as the most effective weapons. It is possible to attack the nucleus of the device with normal gunfire, but hitting it requires an aimed attack. All damage done by aimed attacks on the nucleus should be halved before it is applied to the device. Interrupters move as if they had a combined Intelligence and Empathy score of 12. Characters who can travel 13 meters per phase while in the interstices can effectively escape from an interrupter. Unfortunately, those who cannot escape are in the most danger of being killed by one. Fast travelers can tow slow ones at the loss of two meters per combat phase.

5 **Bleak:** The encounter is with a bleak which attacks the characters and attempts to drain their life forces. While it is normally impossible to age in the interstices, or suffer any of the other ravages of time, the bleak's attack will be an exception to this rule. The bleak can be destroyed in the usual way (see *Dark Races*).

6 **Haunt:** The encounter is with a Haunt, which begins to pursue the party and harass them with its empathic abilities. The haunt will do its best to accelerate the characters' descent into madness by draining their Willpower. Haunts will follow maddened or very injured individuals until they exit the interstices in hopes that they will die from their condition soon afterwards.

Destroying Haunts: Haunts can only be destroyed in the interstices, and only then by the use of Project Thought. An attacking character must achieve at least a Stage Four success against a haunt in order to permanently dissipate its essence (destroy it).

DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL

This section discusses empathic interdimensional travel. The most convenient method of travel between the proto-dimensions and Earth is by means of the Dimension Walk skill, but before summarizing the rules relating to that skill, we will lay out some historical background.

PRIMITIVE MAN AND THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

The first humans who traveled to the proto-dimensions probably did not initiate those journeys themselves. It is most likely that they slipped through holes in the interdimensional fabric, weak spots in reality, and found themselves somewhere else. The vast majority of them quickly died as a result of their misfortune, landing in places totally inhospitable to any life. A few might have survived for a time, trapped in unfamiliar worlds with no companionship besides the bizarre creatures that roamed there. These peculiar disappearances went on for some time without notice. In humanity's primeval past, death was always lurking just out of view and disappearances were a fact of life—life was harsh, and predators were strong and numerous.

After time, however, there were cases where people vanished in front of witnesses. These events were the seeds for legends. Many tales were told of those who were whisked away by magic spells, or were carried off to the realm of the gods.

Eventually there were those who returned home after blundering into a proto-dimension. Some of these individuals were early empaths, rare individuals who were capable of waking between the dimensions—most were just lucky. Either way, the return to their home villages would cause changes. Some would be shunned, others revered. Some villagers would accuse these returned travelers of being rejected by the gods, or in league with demons. Others would revere them as prophets, sages with secret wisdom to shed light on an incomprehensible world.

Mystic traditions formed around some of these interdimensional travelers. Their followers would undertake vigils and vision quests in hopes of seeing the "lands beyond." Of course, in most cases, neither the voyagers nor their followers had the power with which to breach the interdimensional barriers, and so they never saw the proto-dimensions again. Sometimes these mystic schools would develop into primitive religions, and the proto-dimensions would provide the images for heavens and hells. Other times, after nothing had come of their efforts, they would simply disband.

Only very rarely would the early interdimensional walkers have the empathic abilities necessary to return to the proto-dimensions. More rarely still, they were able to gather a few followers who were also able to dimension walk. Over time, the first schools of sorcery were born.

THE FIRST DARKLINGS

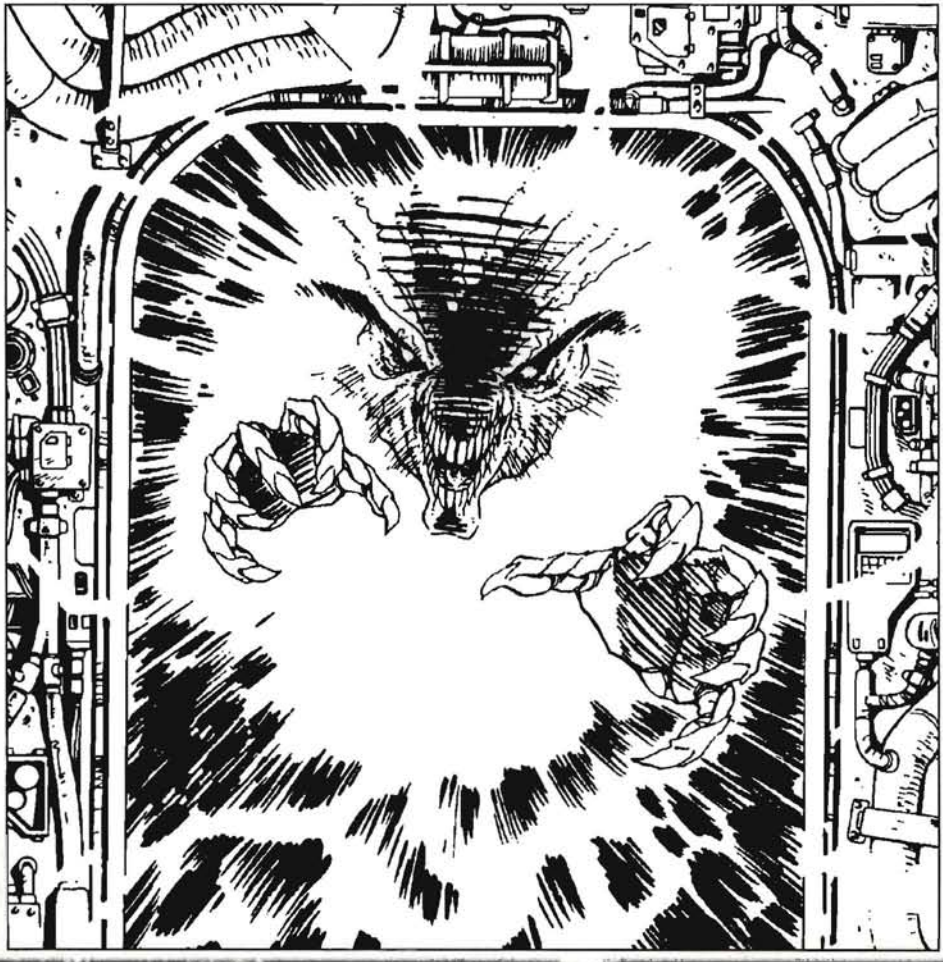
Just as the first dimensional travelers from this universe leaked into the proto-dimensions, there were things—sometimes like humans, sometimes not—which seeped into this universe. Before 1983, when the ETs opened the gate on Io, entry to the universe of Earth was almost impossible for Darklings. For reasons not completely understood, the pathways to Earth were almost completely closed to them.

Humanity's encounters with these extra-dimensional beings were rare, but not soon forgotten. They were passed down from generation to generation as the basis of a body

of myth and legend. After several generations of telling, there was very little of the original truth left in these tales. Some were modified by early poets and storytellers to make a better tale, such as the story of Beowulf or the tale of St. George and his battle with a dragon. Others were commonly used by various religions to illustrate some moral lesson. This is why the Darklings remind us so much of the devils and monsters of primitive legend—although the Darkling invasion is a new phenomenon, a scant few managed to leak through in the past and become the basis of many tales of devils and monsters. The monsters of our myth and our nightmares are dimly viewed reflections of an unspeakably horrible reality.

DIMENSION WALKING NOW

The dimension walkers of the 21st century, if anything, have it worse than their predecessors. Science has carefully codified what is real and what isn't and most people, even the most open-minded, are not prepared to confront that which they "know" is not real. Practitioners of the various religions, people who should be less existentially minded, also tend to scoff at the stories a dimension walker might tell.



Worse by far than simply being disbelieved, or even accused of being in league with the forces of darkness, there is the possibility that the dimension walker will relate their tales within earshot of an individual who works for the Darklings. Turncoat humans and human-looking Darklings exist. Certainly, the Dark Ones will not voluntarily permit any dimension walkers that they locate to live for long.

The dimension walkers of the early 21st century have one other danger to face and one other responsibility to meet—both one and the same thing. Since the ETs opened the gate on Io, the proto- dimensions have become more and more dangerous. Places that were once lush and green, perhaps the inspiration behind half a dozen religions' images of heaven, would today inspire a view of hell. Earth, too, is becoming more and more hellish. Those who have the gift—the power to travel between the dimensions—have with it the responsibility to combat and turn back the invaders.

THE USES OF DIMENSION WALK

The empathic skill Dimension Walk is, apart from dealings with DarkTek, the only way humans can travel between Earth and the proto-dimensions. No place in the meta-verse is off limits to a powerful enough dimension walker.

Traveling to far-off locales isn't the only application of Dimension Walk. Not sure how to explain the dead Morlock to the local authorities? Open a portal into another proto-dimension and toss it through. Need to defuse a bomb? Just send it somewhere where it can't explode, or at least won't do any damage if it does. Need to breach perimeter security at a secret government base? What perimeter security? With a side trip into a nearby proto-dimension, you could materialize somewhere well within the base. Of course, these aren't special skills, just tricks—unorthodox uses of the portals which a dimension walker would normally use to move into another proto-dimension.

There are other applications of the Dimension Walk skill which are very different from trans-dimensional travel. Dimension walkers may use the same powers that they use to open portals between proto-dimensions to close the permanent gateways which the Dark Lords sometimes build. This task, described in detail in the section on interdimensional gates, is not an easy one. They can also do a dimensional scan to attempt to discover what proto-dimension another dimension walker has gone to.

Sorcerers, mystics, and psionics have a variety of cascade skills based on Dimension Walk. Sorcerers, for example, can use interdimensional portals to throw balls of fire, fly, and pass through solid objects, among other things.

LEARNING TO DIMENSION WALK

Learning to dimension walk is a complex, multi-step process. When learning normal skills, students usually watch their teacher perform a few tasks and then try it themselves with the teacher giving them advice as they go along. The difference between learning Dimension Walk and other complex skills is that an experienced teacher cannot immediately assist the student with the task.

To use an analogy, the Mechanic skill is like learning to fly an airplane. The teacher is right there in the cockpit, ready to take over if problems arise. Dimension Walk is more like learning to use a parachute. Teachers can tell their students what they should

do under different circumstances, but once a student has jumped out of the plane it is too late to ask questions. Students who live through parachute mishaps may ask their teachers for advice after they have recovered, but during the first attempt they are on their own.

The best method for learning the Dimension Walk skill is for the students to be empathically linked to their teachers, either with Human Empathy or Telepathy while the teachers actually perform the task. This allows the students to see what it "feels" like to perform the Dimension Walk task.

Characters intending to learn the Dimension Walk skill during play may not begin unless they have a teacher, or have been taken into a proto-dimension. Once characters have a Dimension Walk ability of 1, they may improve it in the same manner as any other empathic skill. New proto-dimensions can be learned from other empaths (through Telepathy or Human Empathy) or through experience (actually going to a new proto-dimension). Referees should keep in mind that most dimension walkers will not teach every proto-dimension that they know to every empath they encounter. This is especially true in the case of proto-dimensions which are free of the Darkling blight—empaths who have extra-dimensional safe houses aren't going to reveal them to everyone they meet. Members of a single empathic cell or a small team of minion hunters might share such information, but they would be unlikely to share too much of their knowledge with outsiders without a very good reason.

Familiarity: No user of Dimension Walk or any of its cascades can interact with any proto-dimension they are not familiar with. Since spending time in a proto-dimension gives the student the necessary psychic impression of it, teachers often introduce the various proto-dimensions to their students by taking them there. Most teachers of Dimension Walk begin by teaching their students to enter Earth's quantum proto-dimensions due to the ease of the task. Then, as training progresses, the teacher will usually take the student into the other proto-dimensions which they want them to know of.

It is also possible to exchange the psychic impressions of a proto-dimension with Project Thought, Telepathy, or similar empathic means. For such a task to work normally, a stage three success is required. Students who learn of a new proto-dimension via Project Thought will find that the difficulty level of their first trip there is one level more difficult if the link with their teachers was only at Stage Two, and two levels more difficult if the link was only at Stage One.

Starting characters will only know how to enter a few proto- dimensions. Neuropaths will only know of the quantum proto- dimensions. Psionics and mystics will be familiar with a number of proto-dimensions equal to their Dimension Walk skill. These will always be proto-dimensions which have low discontinuities, usually 1, rarely as high as 2.

Sorcerers will know of a number of proto-dimensions equal to twice their Dimension Walk skill, and, additionally, know of certain fragmentary proto-dimensions from which they can draw the power for their various sorcerous feats. These fragmentary proto-dimensions are all very inhospitable to humans and would kill them in the blink of an eye.



PORTALS: SOME DESCRIPTIVE MECHANICS

What happens when a character walks through a portal? The entrance to a portal appears as a rough square, through which the other proto-dimension can be seen, as if projected on an infinitely thin movie screen. This screen offers no resistance to objects moving through it, and light can pass freely (but sound waves cannot).

The empath creating the portal decides where the entrance is located, and what direction it "faces." The empath must be within eight meters of some part of the entrance.

The instant that more than 90% of a being or object has passed through the plane of the screen, that person or object is in the other proto-dimension (entering a portal counts

as an action in combat). Living entities pass through with the same vector (speed and direction) they had upon entering. Non-living objects (with some exceptions) do not. Clothing, equipment, and vehicles benefit from a sort of "life force" field that enables characters to walk through a portal wearing clothing or drive a vehicle through a portal without hindrance. Light passes through without being effected, but heat does not. Missiles and inanimate objects not receiving the benefit of the "life force" pass through, but retain none of their previous vector. What this means in practice is that bullets, arrows, thrown rocks, and the like will be transported to the other dimension, but will appear there without any momentum energy. A bullet will appear in the air just on the other side of the portal, and will then fall to the ground as the force of gravity takes over (assuming the other proto-dimension has gravity). The same thing will happen to thrown arrows, rocks, wind-blown leaves, and fragments from an exploding claymore mine. Characters could stand just on the other side of a portal from an exploding hand grenade and be unharmed (except perhaps the light from the explosion might flash-blind them temporarily, like the afterimage of a photographic flashbulb). A windblown insect or a bird in flight, however, would enter the other proto-dimension traveling at the same vector it entered the portal. DarkTek with an organic component counts as alive. Robots and intelligent machines are not alive for this purpose.

Referees should exercise common sense in applying this rule. Bacteria or fungus on a thrown rock will not count the same as the passengers in a car. Objects do not chill to absolute zero when they pass through, but molten lava from Gehenna will come through as room-temperature volcanic rock. A candle carried by a person will remain lit, but a torch thrown through will not.

Entrances to interdimensional portals are one-sided—viewed from the "other side" they appear as black rectangles. For example, Roman creates a portal in the middle of an open field. Roman is facing north, and decides that the portal will appear one meter in front of him, with its opening facing him (i.e., south). Two other characters are also standing on the field, both non-empaths—Rosenkranz two meters due south of Roman, and Guilderstern two meters due north. Rosenkranz can see the portal entrance, and can see Roman (outlined by the other proto-dimension), but cannot see Guilderstern any more, because the portal is now in the way. Guilderstern sees the portal as a black rectangle, as the light that passes through it ends up in another proto-dimension. He can no longer see the others.

Roman takes a few steps forward, is transported to the other proto-dimension, and turns 180 degrees. Rosenkranz can still see him, but now sees him as an image on the "movie screen" of the portal entrance. Guilderstern sees no change. Roman can still see Rosenkranz, but Rosenkranz appears to Roman in the "movie screen" that the portal appears to be in the other dimension.

Guilderstern now walks a few paces south, and walks through the black rectangle in front of him, encountering no resistance. Rosenkranz sees Guilderstern appear in front of the portal. Roman sees Guilderstern appear in front of him, between himself and Rosenkranz. Guilderstern suddenly no longer sees the black rectangle, but now sees Rosenkranz and the countryside behind him.

If Guilderstern were to take steps backward, he would pass through the portal to the other proto-dimension, and probably back into Roman (unless the empath side-stepped out of the way).

DIMENSION WALK: A STEP-BY-STEP ANALYSIS

Like any other task a **Dark Conspiracy** character might attempt, the Dimension Walk task can be broken down into several smaller jobs. The first of these jobs that empaths must perform is warping space-time with their empathic abilities to form portals. It is these portals that allow them to slip out of one proto-dimension and into another.

The next technique that empaths must master is sometimes referred to as *seeking*. What this power allows them to do is to find the proto-dimension to which they want to travel. Empaths must learn to reach out with their minds through the portal they have created and scan the interstices, looking for the target proto-dimension. As was stated above (under "Familiarity"), it is only possible for empaths to locate dimensions which they have actually visited.

Once the target proto-dimension is found, empaths must connect the portal to it. The two entrances, both of which resonate with the empathic energies of the dimension walker who opened them, are "in phase" with one another. They are automatically connected. After they are open, all that is left for the dimension walker to do is step though the portal out of the source dimension and into the target dimension.

All of this is done as a single task roll, the specifics of which are detailed later.

THE DANGERS OF DIMENSION WALK

The Dimension Walk skill is, as any sorcerer will attest, one of the most dangerous empathic skills to learn and/or use. Opening a portal causes "ripples" among the proto-dimensions. The longer such portals are held open and the greater the discontinuity between the two proto-dimensions involved, the larger the ripples will be. The Dark Ones can detect a dimension walker from the presence of these ripples and, if the Dimension Walk skill is used for a long enough time, they can zero-in for the kill.

Sorcerers are in the greatest danger since they specialize in Dimension Walk, but no empath who uses the Dimension Walk skill is safe from this phenomenon either. This is one of the reasons that there so few neuropaths with the Dimension Walk skill. It is not that they are unable to develop the skill without a tutor, just that without the wisdom and warnings of a skilled dimension walker, they usually don't live through enough practice to master it.

If a mistake is made while scanning for the target proto-dimension, it is possible to connect with the wrong proto-dimension. This is one way to find new proto-dimensions—it is also a good way to die a horrible death. In the worst possible case, the proto-dimension's environment will be instantly fatal. More commonly, this will merely force "lost" dimension walkers to loiter in an unfamiliar proto-dimension while they try to get their bearings—dangerous but not necessarily fatal.

If the portal into the target proto-dimension is not properly opened, the dimension walker could end up in the interstices. This is usually worse than going to the wrong proto-dimension, as escaping from the interstices is very difficult, and an extended stay there can drive a person mad.

WEAKENING THE INTERDIMENSIONAL FABRIC

The holes that interdimensional travelers open never close completely. Dimension walkers who allow their portals to collapse naturally, and observe carefully, will see that while they diminish rapidly in the first few seconds (and become useless for interdimensional travel), the process slows down as time passes. A few minutes after a portal begins to close, it will be a microscopic spot, but by the time these portals reach the size of a single atom they have virtually stopping closing. Even portals closed by the will of an empath never completely disappear.

Walking through the spot where a portal recently (within 24 hours) was closed will cause anyone who does so a sharp, sudden pain, as if they had been stuck with by a very long pin. They will, however, suffer no damage, and the pain will vanish in an instant. After a full day, the portal will be small enough to pass unnoticed through a human being.

This does not mean that these sub-atomic-sized micro-portals do not have any macroscopic effect. Once a few hundred micro-portals collect in an area, they will noticeably weaken the interdimensional separation there. Attempts to dimension walk to and from this weakened location will be one level easier, much like Demonground. In fact, it is likely that a place which has been altered this way will become Demonground in time. This is one of the reasons why sorcerers must keep moving. If they don't, their activities will create patches of the very Demonground which they are fighting against.

Charons frequently open portals at random to expedite this process. Often they will attempt to pass themselves off as kindly sorcerers and teach young empaths just enough of the Dimension Walk skill to allow them to open portals, then they abandon them. These unfortunate students usually do not last very long if they continue to practice the techniques which the Charons have taught them. They either end up in the interstices or the victim of some minion of the Dark Ones. The Charons don't care—they will find other empathic dupes to be their "apprentices." All that is important to the Charons is the fact that every portal that is opened weakens the Earth's dimensional barrier a little more.

The most curious thing about this phenomenon is that the truth of the matter is not hinted at in folklore. In virtually every legend involving sorcery or mages, the use of magic depletes the Earth's reserve of arcane power and makes further use more difficult. Yet what actually occurs is the very opposite. Every use makes future use a little easier until, ultimately, the region is so "magically" active that it is unsafe for human habitation. Likewise, the mages found in folklore are usually hesitant to take new students, but Charons are eager to "honor" unskilled empaths by teaching them just enough to be hazardous. Some minion hunters theorize that these tales have been spread by Charons over the centuries. If prospective students/victims believe that sorcerers rarely take protégés into their tutelage, then they will be less likely to question their master's motives—which is, of course, exactly what the Charons hope for.

THE DIMENSION WALK TASK

There are many factors involved in interdimensional travel. This makes resolving a Dimension Walk task slightly more involved than many other **Dark Conspiracy** tasks, but the same general sequence applies: Determine the difficulty level of the task, apply any level modifiers, calculate the target number, and make the die roll.

Note: Mystics may substitute Astral Travel skill for Dimension Walk skill when opening portals to proto-dimensions.

DETERMINING THE DIFFICULTY LEVEL

First, the difficulty of the task must be determined. There are two factors involved in determining the difficulty of a Dimension Walk task. The first factor is the difference between the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension and that of the target proto-dimension. For every point of difference between the source proto-dimension and the target proto-dimension's discontinuity, the task becomes one level more difficult. So, for example, moving from Earth (which, by definition has a discontinuity of 0) to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 would be a Difficult task (Easy for 0, Average for 1, Difficult for 2).

The second factor is that creatures who are from a proto-dimension with a certain discontinuity are empathically repelled when trying to access proto-dimensions with different discontinuities. A human attempting to dimension walk to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 would find it to be a Difficult task (Easy for entering a 0, Average for entering a 1, Difficult for entering a 2, and so on).

These effects are additive. Using both factors, it is an Impossible task for humans to move from Earth to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 (two shifts for the difference between the discontinuities and two for the repulsion the proto-dimension has for the human empath's psyche). These factors, taken together, yield the Combined Dimension Walk Difficulty Table for beings (human or Darkling) attempting a Dimension Walk task.

To use this table, the referee should determine the difference between the discontinuity of the being's home proto-dimension and its source dimension, and then perform the same calculation for the being's target dimension. Cross-referencing the two numbers will reveal the task's difficulty. The "H" line under Source and the "H" column under Target represent the being's home proto-dimension or a proto-dimension with the same discontinuity.

The Human Dimension Walk Difficulty is designed specifically for use by human dimension walkers. It eliminates irrelevant portions of the table, and thus incorporates only the lower right quadrant. This table is more compact, easier to use, and less confusing to look at. To use this table, simply cross-index the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension (the Source column) with the discontinuity of the target proto-dimension (Target), and read off the resulting difficulty level. Zero discontinuity represents Earth, or a place almost completely identical to it.

Neither tables take into account the Dimension Walk task difficulty level modifiers which will now be discussed.

Difficulty Level Modifiers: There are several factors which can modify the difficulty which the tables yield. Like all Empathy tasks, the difficulty of Dimension Walk is raised or lowered by the stress of the environment in which an empath has to work.

It is one difficulty level easier to Dimension Walk while in a totally secure situation and one level more difficult in a stressful situation. Situations of great and incredible stress, are two and three levels more difficult, respectively.

When entering or leaving Demonground with Dimension Walk, the task should be treated as if the Demonground is a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 1, rather than of 0 like the rest of the Earth. This reflects the influence that the Dark Ones have there and the fact that the interdimensional walls have been worn thin by the accumulation of the sub-atomic-sized micro-portals mentioned under "Weakening the Interdimensional Fabric."

There are other factors which are unique to a single proto-dimension. Some are *Hardened* and it is more difficult to enter them. Some are *Sticky* and are more difficult to exit. Some are *Magnetic* and are easier to enter, and a rare few are *Softened* and are easier to exit. All of these changes are by one level unless the description of the proto-dimension says otherwise.

Die Roll: Once the difficulty of a Dimension Walk task is determined, the referee should calculate the target number which the player needs to roll to succeed. If the die roll is greater than the target number, the task attempt is a failure. If the number is 10 greater than the target number, then the player should roll again. If this second roll is also 10 greater than the target number, the task attempt is a Catastrophic Failure.

If the task attempt ends with a simple failure, then nothing happens. The empath was either unable to open a portal out of this proto-dimension, or was unable to locate the target proto-dimension. The empath can, of course, wait a few minutes and try again. Assume that it takes an empath one minute for each point that was rolled above the target number to regain the composure necessary for a repeat attempt.

There are several possible outcomes for Catastrophic Failures. The portal could lead to the wrong proto-dimension, the empath attempting the roll could be stunned or injured by some sort of interdimensional feedback, or a Darkling might have noticed the attempt and come to attack the dimension walker. The dimension walker could miss a proto-dimension and end up trapped in the interstices. It is up to the referee to determine the results of a Catastrophic Failure depending upon the game situation, and some of these results are limited by the character's empathic discipline.

Even if the task roll indicates a success, that does not automatically mean that the empath has succeeded in opening a portal. If an empath is injured or startled during the phase in which the task was attempted, an Average: Willpower task roll must be made. If the roll is a failure, then the portal degenerates before the empath (or anyone else) can move through it. An empath who succeeds at a Dimension Walk task, but then fumbles due to a failed Willpower roll, does not have to spend much time trying to regain composure, and may try the task again during the next combat turn.

For example, Darla is in Grey and wants to travel to Airborne. Airborne has a discontinuity of 2. This would be an Impossible task If Darla was on Earth, but since Grey also has a discontinuity of 2, the task is merely Difficult. While not very dangerous, Grey is too weird for Darla to be relaxed enough to get any environment bonuses. The task is Difficult, and Darla's Dimension Walk asset is 6, so her player needs a D20 roll of 6 or less to succeed. Her player rolls the D20 and gets a 14, a failure, but not Catastrophic Failure. Since her the roll minus her target number equals 8 (14-6=8), Darla must wait eight minutes before she can attempt the task again.

Another example: Silicia the dark elf is "withdrawing" from a group of minion hunters while they finish off two of her cohorts ("better them than me" is Silicia's motto). She decides to escape into the proto-dimensions and hope that the humans will either be unable to dimension walk or will not know the proto-dimension she has gone to. She picks Gothic, with a discontinuity of 2, as a likely destination. Since Gothic has a discontinuity one higher than her home proto-dimension, and Earth's discontinuity is one lower, the referee checks the -1, +1 intersection on the Combined Dimension Walk Difficulty Table and finds that this is a Formidable task. Since humans with automatic weapons are chasing her, the task is one level more difficult, or Impossible – long shot, even for a powerful dimension walker like Silicia. Her target number is 5, but the referee rolls 18 on a D20. The referee rolls again and gets a 7—Silicia's attempt has ended in Catastrophic Failure, and the referee decides that she has been pitched into the interstices, an ignominious fate, even for a Darkling.

COMBINED DIMENSION WALK DIFFICULTY TABLE

	Target Proto-Dimenion's Discontinuity												
Source	*-6*	*-5*	*-4*	*-3*	*-2*	*-1*	*H*	*+1*	*+2*	*+3*	*+4*	*+5*	*+6*
-6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
-5	—	8	8	8	8	8	8	—	—	—	—	—	—
-4	—	—	I	I	I	I	I	—	—	—	—	—	—
-3	—	—	8	F	F	F	F	8	—	—	—	—	—
-2	—	—	—	I	D	D	D	I	—	—	—	—	—
-1	—	—	—	8	F	A	A	F	8	—	—	—	—
H	—	—	—	—	I	D	E	D	I	—	—	—	—
+1	—	—	—	—	8	F	A	A	F	8	—	—	—
+2	—	—	—	—	—	I	D	D	D	I	—	—	—
+3	—	—	—	—	—	8	F	F	F	F	8	—	—
+4	—	—	—	—	—	—	I	I	I	I	I	—	—
+5	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	8	8	8	8	8	—
+6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

E: Easy task; **D:** Difficult task; **F:** Formidable task; **I:** Impossible task; **8:** The dimension walker must roll against his or her Dimension Walk asset divided by 8; **—:** Most dimension walkers (humans and Darklings alike) do not possess the raw empathic power required to make such as trip.

HUMAN DIMENSION WALK DIFFICULTY TABLE

	Target						
Source	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
0	E	D	I	—	—	—	—
1	A	A	F	8	—	—	—
2	D	D	D	I	—	—	—
3	F	F	F	F	8	—	—
4	I	I	I	I	I	—	—
5	8	8	8	8	8	8	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

A: Automatic; **E:** Easy task; **D:** Difficult task; **F:** Formidable task; **I:** Impossible task; **8:** The empath(s) must roll against their Dimension Walk asset by 8; **—:** Humans do not possess the raw empathic power required to make such a trip.

STAGES OF SUCCESS

If empaths succeed at the Dimension Walk task, then the referee should roll for their stage of success. Stage of success is determined by computing the power level according to the following formula:

Power Level = Empath's EMP Attribute + Skill Level + 1D10 - (target's Willpower + INT)

The formula can be modified for the purposes of Dimension Walk tasks to:

Power Level = Empath's Dimension Walk Asset + 1D10

After the Power Level is computed, the result is compared to the *Empathic Power Level Table*, which gives the stage of success.

EMPATHIC POWER LEVEL TABLE

Power Level	*Stage*
0 or less	No Effect
1-9	Basic Success
10-17	Stage Two
18-27	Stage Three
28-36	Stage Four
37-45	Stage Five
46 or more	Stage Six



Players should spend some time deciding how their characters will utilize the stages of success to modify *portal size*, *duration*, *accuracy*, *skew*, and *vertical offset*. Each of these categories will be discussed more fully below. Since they will not know how successful they were until after they have arrived at their destination, they must be very cautious. If players plan on having their characters dimension walk to the 75th floor of an office building they will want to be sure that their characters will come out inside the building before they spend any stages of success on changing their altitude.

Note that all of the tables below read in terms of success factors. Neuropaths, psionics, and mystics may improve their results by two factors for every stage of success they have available. Sorcerers may improve their results by three factors for every stage of success. This means that a sorcerer who has achieved Stage Three success may purchase nine different factors from the various improvements listed below, either all from one category or from a mixture of the various categories.

Portal Size: The entry to a standard human-created portal appears as a roughly square opening two meters wide and 2.5 meters tall, leading into another proto-dimension, which is large enough for two characters of normal height to walk through, side by side, without ducking. Each success factor spent improving size will double either the width or the height of the opening, at the empath's option. Empaths who wish to create a portal large enough to drive a 2.5-ton truck through will need to spend a few success factors enlarging the opening.

Any being or object that does not fit completely within the boundary of the portal will not be transmitted. Upon moving through the portal. they (or it) will end up where they would have been had the portal not been there.

Duration: Duration is the amount of time a portal will remain open at a useful size. If no success factors are spent on duration, the portal will materialize in front of the empath who created it and only remain open long enough for that individual to step through. There will not be enough time before the portal's collapse for the empath to move out of the way and allow another individual through.

MULTI-STEP TRIPS

Many proto-dimensions cannot be entered directly from Earth due to their high discontinuities. The dimensional traveler must make a multi-step journey, traveling to proto-dimensions of increasingly higher discontinuities, in much the same way as a hiker can cross a stream by short hops from stone to stone rather than in a single superhuman leap. Instead of traveling from a discontinuity of 0 to a discontinuity of 3 (something which cannot be accomplished by a human), the empath might go from a 0 to a 1 (a Difficult task), then from 1 to 2 (a Formidable task), then from 2 to 3 (an Impossible task). After each trip, the empath must spend a certain amount of time reorienting and plotting his or her next jump. This time is equal to 20 minutes minus the numerical value of the empath's Dimension Walk skill; that is, an empath with a Dimension Walk skill of 8 would have to spend 12 minutes in reorientation and preparation before opening another portal. During this time, the empath and any companions are vulnerable to any environmental effects the proto-dimension may have, and to encounters. Each step counts as a separate "dimension walk to another proto-dimension" for the purpose of alerting Darklings.

No empath may use a proto-dimension as a "stepping-stone" without being familiar with that proto-dimension. Sorcerers are an exception to this rule—see the sidebar "Special Abilities of Sorcerers."

Assume, for questions involving the duration of a portal, that the empath who created a portal may move through it in the last instant of the combat phase in which the portal was opened. If a portal is opened for an extra phase, it is the phase immediately following the phase in which it was opened, not the phase it was opened in.

These success factors are different from those given previously in the *Player's Handbook*. This is due to the addition of accuracy, skew, and vertical offset. There are now more factors for the dimension walker to be concerned with, and without this change it would be nearly impossible for a dimension walker to take a friend along and manage any accuracy or a useful amount of skew.

The creator of a portal may will it to close at any time, and it will immediately collapse to a size too small to be of use. This enables an empath to close a portal before the time specified by the Duration Table.

Permanent portals, which could be made with a Stage Six success, can still be created, but only if a pair of dimensional anchors is installed.

DURATION TABLE

Success Factors	*Effect*
0	The portal is only open long enough for its creator to pass through.
1	The portal is open for one combat phase longer than its creator would require to pass through.
2	The portal is open for three combat phases longer than its creator would require to pass through.
3	The portal is open for a number of phases equal to its creator's Dimension Walk asset.
4	The portal is open for a number of phases equal to twice its creator's Dimension Walk asset.
5+	The length of time the portal remains open is equal to the duration in entry #4 doubled for each success factor over 4. For five success factors, double twice (2x2) for six success factors, double three times (2x2x2) for seven success factors, double four times for eight success factors, and so on.

Example: Reynard wants to travel from his kitchen (a secure environment, at least if you don't mind his cooking) on Earth to Mechaniaca (which has a discontinuity of 1). The task would normally be Difficult: Dimension Walk, but the bonus of a secure environment makes it Average. Reynard's Empathy attribute is 4 and his Dimension Walk skill is 3, so his asset is 7 (3+4) and his target number is 14 (2x7=14). Reynard's player rolls the D20 and gets a 3—not only is Reynard successful, but this is an Outstanding Success. The referee rolls a 9 on a D10 and adds 7 (Reynard's Empathy attribute of 4 plus his Dimension Walk skill level of 3), getting 16. He doubles the total (due to the fact that the attempt was an Outstanding Success) and ends up with a power level of 32 which results in a Stage Four success. Reynard is not a sorcerer, so his four stages of success will only buy eight success factors. Reynard's player, of course, doesn't know what Reynard's stage of success was, The plan was for Reynard to take several other PCs with him, so Reynard's player tells the referee that he wants to spend all of his stages of success on duration. Reynard's eight success factors will keep a portal open for twice Reynard's Dimension Walk asset doubled four times, or (7x2)x2x2x2x2 = 224

five-second phases. This is more than 18 minutes, far longer than Reynard really wanted the portal to be opened. Of course, Reynard can will the portal closed any time he wants, but all of the extra success factors go to waste (excess stages of success can't be saved for later tasks).

SPECIAL ABILITIES OF SORCERERS

Sorcerers, because they specialize in Dimension Walk, have special abilities not possessed by the other empaths.

For sorcerers it is one level less difficult to open a portal to any quantum proto-dimension. This makes sorcerers very valuable to any group wanting to get somewhere on Earth in a hurry.

As noted elsewhere in this book, all empaths can make multiple-step journeys in order to travel to the higher discontinuity proto-dimensions, limited only by their familiarity with the proto-dimensions used as stepping stones. Sorcerers do this differently. Using the analogy of crossing a stream on stepping stones, other empaths must be able to see the stones they use, but sorcerers create their own stones with each step.

These proto-dimensional "stepping stones" are a degenerate mixture of the sorcerer's source and target proto-dimensions. How these degenerate proto-dimensions exist is unknown—they cannot be seen from the astral proto-dimensions/interstices, nor can they be entered by other types of empaths. Characters who are in these stepping-stone proto-dimensions will suffer half of the environmental effects of both the source and target proto-dimensions and may encounter creatures from either proto-dimension's random encounter tables. The stepping-stone proto-dimensions vanish once the sorcerer leaves them (so it is a good move for his or her companions to move out first).

The number of stepping-stones proto-dimensions that must be traveled by a sorcerer is equal to the difference between the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension and target proto-dimension. A trip from a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 1 and one with a discontinuity of 4 would require three (4-1) intervening "stepping-stones." At each stepping-stone proto-dimension entered, the sorcerer must spend a certain amount of time re-orienting and plotting her or his next jump. This time is equal to 20 minutes minus the numerical value of the sorcerer's Dimension Walk skill.

Each step counts as a separate "dimension walk to another proto-dimension" for the purposes of alerting Darklings.

DIMENSION WALK DETECTION AVOIDANCE TABLE

Situation	*Task Difficulty*
Sorcerous Combat (atmosphere, gravity, temperature)	Easy
Sorcerous Combat (special)	Difficult
Sorcerous Flight for less than 15 minutes	Easy
Sorcerous Flight for more than 15 minutes	Average
Sorcerous Telekinesis	Average
Dimension Walk in same proto-dimension	Average
Extended Dimension Walk in same proto-dimension	Difficult
Dimension Walk to another proto-dimension	Difficult
Extended Dimension Walk to another proto-dimension	Formidable

Sorcerous Combat: using sorcerous powers affecting atmosphere, gravity, or temperature in a combat situation.

Sorcerous Combat (Special): Using fire or lightning in combat. This manipulation is much finer and much more powerful, and is easily noticed.

Sorcerous Flight and *Telekinesis:* These are very fine manipulations of dimensional interfaces, and have a distinct pattern that alerts those cognizant of sorcery to their use.

Dimension Walk: The farther and longer you go, the more impact it has on the proto-dimensional fabric, and the more noticeable it is. The term "same proto-dimension" indicates portals opened on the same dimension for the purposes of speeding travel or avoiding obstacles. The term "another proto-dimension" involves opening a portal to another proto-dimension to observe to interact with it.

Accuracy: Accuracy is the degree to which a dimension walker manages to counteract the effects of the various intangible factors which make precise interdimensional travel impossible. The value given for each success factor is the maximum probable displacement from the location in the target proto-dimension that corresponds to the character's location in the source proto-dimension. The value given for the following factor should be considered the minimum displacement. The referee should randomly determine exactly how far and in what direction the dimension walker ultimately ends up. One means of accomplishing this is to increase the lower number by a random percentage (a D100 roll) of the difference between the lower range and the upper range.

ACCURACY TABLE

Success Factors	*Effect*
0	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 10,000 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
1	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 5,000 meters away from the target point at which portal's creator was aiming.
2	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 1,000 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
3	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 500 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
4	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 100 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
5	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 50 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
6	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 10 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
7	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveler 5 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming. Precision greater than this is not possible for humans.

Example: Darla's player decides not to worry about accuracy at all. The referee figures she could end up anywhere from 5,000 meters to 10,000 meters away from her target in any direction, a variation of 5,000 (the difference between the lower range of 5,000 and the upper range of 10,000) and decides to increase the lower range by a random percentage. The referee rolls percentile dice and gets a 61, indicating that Darla is

a little more than 8,000 meters away from her target (161% of 5,000, or 1.61x5000 = 8050) and chooses northwest to be as good a direction as any. Of course, the referee doesn't tell any of this to Darla's player. If she really wanted to know where Darla was going to end up, she should have spent at least a few success factors on accuracy.

Skew: Skew is a result of non-right angle travel, but skew is not inaccuracy. Inaccuracy is the result of several random factors; skew is the deliberately caused shifting the "trajectory" of a jump. By engaging in skewed travel, interdimensional voyagers can avoid long hikes by simply arriving closer to a goal than right-angle travel would take them.

The values given in the Skew Table represent the maximum amount of skew that is obtainable for a given success factor. Players are not required to use every millimeter of this distance, and may choose to use any fraction of it that they want to. The skew direction is also the choice of the players.

The only restriction to skewed travel is that the distance must be specified as an absolute range, and the direction must be specified as an absolute heading. So, "29 kilometers at a compass heading of 195-degree true" or "30 kilometers to the south" would both be acceptable, but "about two kilometers from the dark elf castle" would not be.

If players do not have a better idea of where they want to send their characters than "two kilometers from the dark elf castle," a Navigation task roll may be used instead. The roll may be made for any character in the group. It does not have to be the dimension walker, just someone who knows the lay of the land in the target proto-dimension. If the Navigation task roll is successful, the PCs end up about where they wanted to be. If not, then the referee should decide how far off-target the group ends up. Only one Navigation roll is allowed for a Dimension Walk attempt, and it should be made after the Dimension Walk task has been declared. Like an attempt to jump a broad chasm, characters cannot turn back in the middle of a Dimension Walk task just because they don't like where they're going to wind up.

SKEW TABLE

Success Factor	*Effect*
0	The destination point may not be skewed at all.
1	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 1 kilometer.
2	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 2.5 kilometers.
3	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 5 kilometers.
4	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 10 kilometers.
5	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 25 kilometers.
6	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 50 kilometers.
7	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 100 kilometers.
8	The destination point may be skewed by as much as 250 kilometers.

Skew in excess of 250 kilometers is not possible.

Example: Scirocco is on Gothic, in a spot he knows corresponds to a psychic research facility on Earth. He decides to transfer into Earth, but does not want to arrive in the facility, as he would have problems explaining his presence to the security guards there, and might end up staying permanently. Scirocco's player tells the referee that he

wants to spend his first two factors on skew. No direction is specified. The referee determines that Scirocco gets one stage of success, enough to purchase two success factors, a skew of between 1 and 2.5 kilometers. The referee decides to split the difference, and Scirocco steps out of the portal 1.75 km away from the facility (2.5-1 = 1.5, 1.5/2 = 0.75, 1+0.75 = 1.75), well outside its three-meter tall chain-link fence topped with a coil of razor wire.

Vertical Offset: Dimension walkers normally materialize at the same altitude that they were at the proto-dimension they left. Dimension walkers who are standing on the ground in one proto-dimension will end up standing on the ground in almost any other proto-dimension which they travel to (assuming the target proto-dimension has any ground at all). This conservation of altitude is maintained for characters no matter where they are. Dimension walking from the tenth floor of a building will deposit an empath 30 meters or more in the air in the proto-dimension that they arrive in. Dimension walking from a passenger jet in flight would leave an empath 10,000 meters off the ground.

Conversely, if a character is on the ground in one proto-dimension but wants to come out on the tenth floor of a building in another proto-dimension, it would be impossible—except for offset travel.

Offset travel is, in fact, a variation of skewed travel, but, for reasons which are not clear, it is much more difficult for empaths to skew their travel in the Z axis than it is for either the X or the Y axis. It is commonly hypothesized that this is more an effect of the psychological make-up of humans and that some Darklings can offset themselves vertically with equal ease as in the X and Y axes.

Because of its elevated cost for humans, players must purchase vertical offset separately from skew. However, they may not purchase more than eight factors of both. That is, if a character wants to spend six success factors on skew, only two factors may be spent on offset. This reflects the fact that the interdimensional medium is only so flexible.

VERTICAL OFFSET TABLE

Success Factor	*Effect*
0	The destination point may not be offset themselves at all.
1	The destination point may be offset by as much as 10 meters (about three floors).
2	The destination point may be offset by as much as 50 meters (about 15 floors).
3	The destination point may be offset by as much as 100 meters (about 30 floors).
4	The destination point may be offset by as much as 500 meters (about 150 floors).*
5	The destination point may be offset by as much as 1,000 meters.
6	The destination point may be offset by as much as 5,000 meters.**

* Upper limit of buildings on Earth.

** This is well into the altitudes used for aviation on Earth.

Offset in excess of 5,000 meters (five kilometers) is not possible.

Example: Dominic is on Earth just outside of a megacorp citadel. He decides to transfer into Gothic, move to where the citadel would be, then return to Earth so that

he'll arrive inside the tower, preferably on one of the upper floors. His trip into Gothic is successful. On the return trip, Dominic's player tells the referee that he wants to buy five factors of accuracy and spend up to three others on offset. What he does not know is that the referee only rolled a 2 on the D20, and Dominic can only purchase two success factors. When he returns to Earth, he finds himself almost a kilometer away from the tower. If Dominic's player hadn't specified that the accuracy should be purchased before the offset, Dominic would have been as much as 10 kilometers away from the tower and 30 floors off the ground.

DIMENSIONAL SCAN

Empaths with the Dimension Walk skill can try to see where another dimension walker has gone to. To do this, they must be within eight meters of the point where their quarry's portal was opened. Then, with a little concentration, they may be able to gain some feel for the proto-dimension which their quarry went to by empathically examining the micro-portal. The task is Easy if attempted within one minute after the portal closed, but becomes one level more difficult with each passing minute. After six minutes have passed, no dimension walker with human level skills can get an accurate impression of their quarry's destination.

Basic success will reveal what proto-dimension the scanner's quarry has gone to. Outstanding Success will also allow the scanner to know if skew or offset movement was utilized.

Scanners who have never visited the proto-dimension to which their quarry has escaped will get a feel for the proto-dimension but will, of course, not know its name, nor will they be able to travel there based on that brief contact. If, in the future, they go to that proto-dimension, they may (if they succeed at an Average: Intelligence task) realize that they are in the proto-dimension which they had scanned.

SENSING A PORTAL

Opening a portal creates a "noise," but one that can be heard only by those with empathic talent. Human empaths will be able to "hear" the opening of a portal within 500 meters, and will be able to determine from what direction the "sound" came (although not all of them will know what it means). Darklings can sense portals from greater distances. Non-empaths will hear nothing.

Empaths in line of sight to a portal can see it, even in total darkness (although it will not illuminate anything else). To empaths, a portal appears as a rough rectangle, bounded by a glowing golden light, through which the other proto-dimension can be seen. To non-empaths, the only way a portal can be detected is by the different scene presented by whatever light from the other proto-dimension comes through the portal. A portal thus looks something like a movie screen, but it is a movie screen that you can walk through.

It is possible for non-empaths to walk through a portal and not realize what has happened to them, although this happens only when the source and target proto-dimensions are almost identical.

INTERDIMENSIONAL GATEWAYS

The easiest and most powerful method of transdimensional travel is through the use of an interdimensional gateway (sometimes called a gate for short). To use a gateway, an individual simply steps through the entrance at one end, and, in a single combat phase, is whisked off to the other side of the gateway. Once a gate has been built, the discontinuities of the dimensions involved do not matter. Empaths and non-empaths alike may use them. No task roll of any kind is required—gates function automatically. Likewise, since there is no task roll, users need not fear detection by the Darklings.

A gate works by directly connecting two dimensional anchors with a portal (a trans-dimensional tunnel identical to that created by empaths for interdimensional travel). Because of these anchors, it is possible to build a gate which will allow incredibly skewed interdimensional movement. In fact, it is possible to build a gate which connects one point in a proto-dimension to another in the same proto-dimension, a feat which the most powerful dimension walkers, human or Darkling, cannot accomplish.

In appearance, gates look very much like empathically created portals, the main difference being that a gateway's entrance is surrounded by its associated anchor.

BUILDING A GATEWAY

Constructing an interdimensional gate requires a great deal of time, effort, and energy. For this reason, their construction is usually limited to very powerful Darklings (usually only the Dark Lords and Dark Masters). Humans occasionally build or attempt to repair gates, but more often, however, humans destroy gates.

The first step required for the construction of a gateway is the installation of a dimensional anchor at each of the points which the gate is to connect. This means that



Dark Lords wishing to construct a gate must be able to access each of the locations, or have servants, either minions or human "Igors," who can install the anchors for them.

Once the anchors are in place, the portal must be opened. An empath who is trying to do this must stand before one anchor (within eight meters) and attempt to open a portal to the other. This is very similar to a normal Dimension Walk task (and counts as "Dimension Walk to Another Proto-Dimension" for purposes of detection), but because of the presence of the anchors, many of the normal limitations do not apply.

To determine the difficulty of this Dimension Walk task, compute the difference between the two proto-dimensions' discontinuities, and consult the Open Gate Task Difficulty Table. If the gate is going to connect two points in the same proto-dimension, the task is always of Impossible difficulty. The difference between the discontinuity of the target proto-dimension and the home proto-dimension of the empath who is attempting to open the gate does not matter for this task

OPEN GATE TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Discontinuity Difference	*Difficulty Level*
0	Easy
1	Average
2	Difficult
3	Formidable
4	Impossible

Stress, as with other Dimension Walk tasks, affects the difficulty of this task. Attempting to open a gate in a totally secure situation is one level easier; doing it in a stressful situation increases its difficulty by one or more levels. If one of the anchors is set in Demonground, treat it as if it were in a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 1 when calculating the difficulty of opening the portal.

Even if the roll indicates success, the task still requires an incredible amount of raw power. A Stage Six success is usually required to open a permanent gate, but if the far anchor is somehow energized, opening the gate will be easier. Applying 10,000 watts of electricity to the far anchor reduces the requirement to a Stage Five Dimension Walk success. The amount of power must be increased by a factor of 10 to further reduce the required stages of success. With the application of 100 million watts (10,000 watts x10x10x10x10), all that is required is a Basic Success with Dimension Walk, but bear in mind that this is as much power as a small city uses. Electricity is not the only means of energizing an anchor but, in most cases, it is the most convenient source of such vast quantities of raw power.

If the task is successful but the stage of success is insufficient to open the gate, or the task results in simple failure, then nothing happens. Opening a gate is empathically draining, however, and an empath who fails such an attempt must wait a while to recover from the failed attempt. Characters who failed the task must wait 45 minutes before they may try again. Characters who succeeded at the task but did not get the necessary stage of success should subtract their power level from the power level that was required and wait that many minutes before trying again. If a Catastrophic Failure is rolled during an attempt to open a gate. the far dimensional anchor is ruined and must be replaced before another attempt to open the gate is possible.

So, for example, if Roman is trying to open a gate and needs a Stage Five success and only ends up with a power level of 26 (a Stage Three success), he must wait 11 minutes (37, the minimum power level for a Stage Five success, minus 26, Roman's power level).

After a gate has been opened. very little energy is required to sustain it. This energy can come from virtually any source in advanced gates. The gate on Io, which the ETs unwittingly unsealed in 1983, is powered by the fusion disrupter drill which they used to uncover it. A gate which leads from Mechaniaca to Gehenna uses the heat of Gehenna as an energy source.

After a gate is opened, two more task rolls must be made to set the type and quantity of dampening metal required to seal the gate. The relative scarcity of the dampening metal and the quantity required determine how easy it is to seal a gateway. Both of these tasks may only be attempted once for a given gateway. Interrupted or aborted attempts count as failures.

SETTING THE DAMPENING METAL FOR A GATEWAY

To set the dampening metal is a Formidable: Dimension Walk task. Failure means that the dampening metal is sodium. The power level determines specific metal required.

For this purpose, the power level formula is as follows:

Power Level = Empath's EMP Attribute +Dimension Walk Skill Level + 1D10 - (DD)^2

In this formula, DD is the difference between the discontinuity levels of the two connected proto-dimensions. After determining the power level of the task, apply the result to the following table:

DAMPENING METAL

Power Level	*Metal*
17 or less	Sodium
18-36	Iron
37-54	Silver
55-71	Gold
72-88	Platinum
89-104	Lanthanum
105-120	Radium
121-136	Polonium
137-152	Uranium
153+	Plutonium

The material from which the anchor is constructed can effect the type of dampening metal a gateway requires. Anchors constructed primarily of iron increase the metal by one (sodium becomes iron, silver becomes gold, and so on). Anchors constructed primarily of silver or gold increase the metal by two levels (sodium becomes silver, Iron becomes gold, etc.). No other anchor construction materials can change the dampening metal. Both anchor must be built of the same material.

For example, Reynard and associates have successfully constructed a gateway, and now wish to set the highest possible dampening metal. Reynard first attempts to set the rarest possible metal: Reynard's Empathy attribute is 4 and his Dimension Walk skill is 3 so his asset is 7 (3+4). The gateway goes from Earth (discontinuity 0) to Slide (discontinuity 2), making the difference in discontinuities 2. The referee rolls a 7, and plugs the numbers into the power level formula:

Power Level=7+7+2^2=7+7+4= 18

A result of 18 on the Dampening Metal Table would ordinarily mean that the gate is dampened by iron. However, since Reynard and his associates have constructed the two anchors primarily of rolled iron structural members, the metal is silver instead.

SETTING THE REQUIRED QUANTITY OF DAMPENING METAL

To set quantity of metal required for dampening a gate is a Dimension Walk task. The difficulty level of this task is as noted on the Quantity of Pure Dampening Metal Table. The result of a failure is also noted.

Next, Reynard attempts to set the quantity of iron at 2.5 kilograms by attempting a Difficult: Dimension Walk task. Reynard's asset is 7 (3+4) and his target number for a Difficult task attempt is 7/2=3.5, which rounds down to 3. The roll is an 11, which is a failure, meaning that the gate is dampened by 200 grams of silver.

QUANTITY OF PURE DAMPENING METAL

Metal	*Impossible*	*Formidable*	*Difficult*	*Easy*	*Failure*
Sodium	30 kg	3kg	300g	30g	3g
Iron	25kg	2.5kg	250g	25g	2.5g
Silver	20kg	2kg	200g	20g	2g
Gold	10kg	1kg	100g	10g	1g
Platinum	5kg	500g	50g	5g	0.5g
Lanthanum	5kg	500g	50g	5g	0.5g
Radium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Polonium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Uranium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Plutonium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g

DIMENSION ANCHOR

A dimensional anchor (less commonly known as a physical portal) is a complicated device that acts as the entry point for an interdimensional gateway. One anchor is required at each end of an interdimensional portal. Human-built anchors always look like doorways smothered in electrical wiring and electronics. Darkling dimensional anchors take many different forms. Some look like the ancient stonework found throughout the world: the trilithon (three-stone) megaliths in Europe, stone temples and monuments in Egypt and Central America, or even Moai, the stone heads of Easter Island. Others resemble more mundane objects (picture frames, windows, doors, arbors, mirrors, signposts, and tombstones, for example). Still others have the sinister look of

DarkTek. There is no common type or size of dimensional anchor; they all seem to be custom built. Whether this is a result of the Dark Ones trying to camouflage their gates or is a reflection of their creator's personalities is unknown.

Most dimensional anchors have a door/window/ archway aspect about them, but some appear as solid objects and have an intangible doorway built into them at some point. Occasionally, there may even be a conventional doorway or other entrance that needs to be opened, unlocked, or moved aside before the anchor can be entered. The size of the opening is effectively unlimited, but few anchors will permit the passage of objects for more than three meters wide or high, and most are the size of a conventional human doorway. Obviously, the limiting factor in what can pass through a gate is the size of the anchor.

Building a Dimensional Anchor: It is possible for a human using only electronic components (no DarkTek) to build a dimensional anchor. Completing this task requires a great understanding of the proto-dimensions and electronic engineering. Any individual who wants to build a dimensional anchor must spend three hours at the proposed location for the anchor, taking electronic readings and measurements, and a month analyzing the results (each anchor must be specially attuned to its locale and to its partner). If an anchor is to replace a destroyed one, the builder must also spend an additional three hours studying the existing anchor it is to be paired with.

At the end of the month, make an Impossible: Physics task roll. If the roll is a failure, another month must be spent doing research before another roll may be attempted. If, on the other hand, the Physics task, roll is successful, the individual may attempt to build a dimensional anchor. This task takes a week and requires success at a Difficult: Electronics task. The components required to build an electronic dimensional anchor will cost $30,000 x (lD6/2), availability code R/S. The anchor produced will not be as strong as a Darkling-built anchor. Having access to an existing anchor for study makes each of these task rolls one level easier but does not reduce the amount of time it takes to perform any of the tasks. Such a human-built anchor weighs 100 kilograms, and looks like a conventional door frame covered in wires, and electronic components, connected to a large black box filled with more electronic components. Anchors may be moved once built (through gateways, if necessary), but may not be moved after activation without destroying their utility. Once an anchor has been activated (once its gateway has been opened), that anchor cannot be disconnected and reused in another gate (in other words, there is no such thing as a "used" anchor). This entire procedure (including the measurements and the month of study) must be gone through for each pair of anchors produced.

Electronic anchors are the only type humans are capable of building. Note that anchors built by Darklings need not be electronic, but may incorporate electronic, DarkTek, and/or completely unfathomable components. Human- and Darkling-built anchors may be used in the same gateway without difficulty (if, for example, a group of humans installed a new anchor to repair a damaged gateway).

Power Requirements: The power requirement discussed here is to maintain an anchor once created (the power needed to open a gateway is discussed above). Power requirements to maintain human-built anchors are up to the referee, but they must ultimately be electrical in nature. Each human-built anchor requires a separate power source. Referees should set a kilowatt requirement in the 500 to 10,000 range (or roll

1D20x500 kilowatts) for each anchor, but bear in mind that the only generator included in the basic rules is the 600-kilowatt portable model used with the Armington heavy laser, described in the *Player's Handbook*. The simplest thing is to simply plug the anchor into the municipal power supply, but anchors are not always located convenient to an electric socket. Requiring the players to devise power sources of their own (geothermal, solar, etc.) is good exercise for them.

Destroying/Disconnecting an Anchor: Destroying an anchor or disconnecting it from its power supply renders a gate unusable.

Most Darkling-manufactured dimensional anchors are equivalent in strength (but not in shape) to a half-meter cube of reinforced concrete and thus require about 128 damage points (DPs) of untamped or 32 DPs of tamped explosives to be destroyed. Some anchors are far stronger than this—the gateway on Io could probably, survive a direct hit with a tactical nuclear weapon. The more important a gateway is, the stronger its anchors will be, and the more difficult they will be to disconnect. Human-built anchors are half as strong as Darkling-built ones, i.e., they require 64 DPs of untamped or 16 DP of tamped explosives to be destroyed.

If an anchor can be disconnected from its power supply, that will render the gateway unusable until power is restored. The difficulty level for this action and the skills involved should be decided by the referee. Discovering a power source for human-built anchors should generally be an Average: Electronics task. Discovering a Darkling power source involves working out the function of the various moist lumps, pulsing tendrils. and gelatinous blobs of a DarkTek anchor, and should generally be a Formidable or Impossible task (referee's option) versus either Observation or Intelligence. Failure can mean that the PCs misidentify something organic but innocuous (such as grapevines) as the power supply, or that the PCs fail to locate a back-up power connection. The referee may wish to require several task rolls in order for the PCs to acquire the full picture (one to locate the power connections, one to determine how to disconnect them, one to succeed at disconnecting them, and so on). For Darkling anchors, it should usually be quicker and easier to just blow the thing up.

DEAD-MAN'S CURVE

As an example of the unique power supplies used in maintaining Darkling anchors, consider the following: A gate constructed by a group of dark elves in the mountains near Pittshio is located at the base of a steep valley wall. Halfway up the valley is a twisting hairpin curve known to the locals as Dead-Man's Curve due to the large number of accidents there. The anchor of the gate is powered by the death agony of automobile drivers that take the curve at too high a speed and leave the road to roll down the hillside into a small pond. Whenever the anchor's "battery" needs recharging (three or four times a year), the dark elves will replace the real speed limit sign with a fake indicating a higher safe speed and await results. (The sign is replaced after the accident to prevent law enforcement authorities from becoming suspicious.) Another method is for a disguised dark elf to encourage young sports car or motorcycle drivers to race along that particular stretch of road as a test of their *machismo*. A bucket or two of nearly frictionless mud from Slide is sometimes administered to help matters along.

DESTROYING A GATEWAY

Gateways require a considerable investment of time and empathic power to create, and are quite vulnerable if unprotected. Because of this, the Darklings usually do not leave their gateways unprotected. One or both of the dimensional anchors will be armored or fortified. The entrance may be inside a secure structure, or guarded by some powerful minion or beastie.

Once the PCs arrive at the gateway and deal with whatever security precautions have been taken, they can get on with its destruction. There are two main ways to destroy an gateway: destruction/disconnection, and empathic closure.

Destruction/Disconnection: The first method involves the destruction or disconnection of both of the gateway's dimensional anchors. When this occurs, the gateway becomes unstable and, like the portals created by dimension walkers, will collapse after the passage of time. Even without their anchors, however, gateways are equivalent to a dimension walker's portal on which six stages of success were spent on duration. This, coupled with the fact that gateways are usually only made by very powerful empaths. means that, even without its anchors, the gate could remain functional for as long as a day after both of its anchors are destroyed or disconnected.

If only one anchor is destroyed or disconnected from its power supply, the gateway cannot be used, but the portal remains in existence (connected to the intact anchor). If the destroyed anchor is replaced by a new anchor, or power is restored, the gateway will become fully functional again (the new anchor must be installed at the same location as the old one). Both human- and Darkling-built anchors can be used in the same gateway.

Simply disconnecting an anchor does not guarantee its destruction. A back-up power supply may exist which the PCs have not discovered, or the owners/ current users of the gateway may return and reconnect it before collapse occurs. The PCs must guard both ends of the gateway until the gateway collapses in order to be certain of the gate's destruction.

Empathic Closure: The second method of destroying a gateway is a two-step process which uses empathic skill as the second component. First, one of the anchors must be destroyed/disconnected. Next, an empath must approach to within eight meters of the gate's anchor and achieve a Stage Six success at a Difficult: Dimension Walk task. This pushes the other end of the interdimensional portal into the interstices. Sorcerers, with their specialized Close Portal skill, can complete this task with only a Stage Five success (but the anchor must still be dealt with first).

Because of the dangers discussed below, closing a gateway is, at best, a Difficult task (the empath attempting it has lots of distractions).

Dangers of Collapsing Gateways: While closing an empath's portal presents no particular danger, a collapsing gateway is a different matter. Once the portal has been expelled, the gateway will go dead and the hole in the interdimensional fabric will start to close, in much the same way as the portals made by dimension walkers.

Any individual within eight meters of the gate must make a Difficult Dimension Walk test to avoid being sucked into the portal. Simple failure means that the empath has been pulled into the gate and transported to the other end. Catastrophic Failure deposits the unfortunate empath in the interstices. It is possible for an empath to be transported to the other entrance, and then suffer damage from the explosive collapse of the gateway.

A collapsing gateway also releases a great deal of energy, unlike the collapse of a dimension walker's portal. The majority of this energy is bled off harmlessly into the interstices, but a percentage of it will be released out the open end (the end with the intact and functioning anchor) with explosive force 1D10 rounds after the collapse. If both gates are destroyed or disconnected simultaneously, the explosive force of the collapsing gateway will be completely vented into the interstices.

If the PCs are near the gateway when it collapses, the referee will need to know how severe the explosion is. This energy release is based on the stress which the portal was under and the resulting explosive force can be determined with the following formulas:

C: 5x(1+D)
B: 15x(1+D)

C is concussion, B is burst, and D is equal to the difference between the discontinuity of the proto-dimensions which the gate connected. The only exception to this is in those cases where a gate connects two points in the same proto-dimension. In this case, assume that D is equal to 5.

For example, If Roman destroyed an interdimensional gate in Slide (which has a discontinuity of 2) which led to Earth (with a discontinuity of 0), there would be an explosion. D would be equal to 2-0, or 2. Concussion from the explosion would be 5x(1 +2), or 15, burst would be 15x(1 +2), or 45. The referee rolls a 6, indicating that whatever happens to be on the other end of the portal has six phases (30 seconds) to get out of range. We will assume Roman passes his Dimension Walk task, and avoids being sucked into the collapsing gateway, otherwise he would also risk being caught in the explosion.

SEALING A GATEWAY

There are those circumstances where characters will be unable to destroy/disconnect a gate, or will have a reason to preserve it. In these cases, it is possible to seal the gate, rendering it useless until the seal is removed. There are several means by which this can be accomplished.

Blockage: Although it does not permanently seal it, a gateway can be physically blocked with tons of concrete, rubble, scrap metal, or other material. This does not prevent the gate from operating, but it does effectively prevent anything from coming out until the blockage is cleared. If the PCs simply dynamite a building down upon the gateway entrance, it will pile up around it, but any of the rubble that falls through the entrance itself will be transmitted. There will almost always be a small cavity on the blocked side, sometimes enough to accommodate a human-sized being, sometimes not, but almost always large enough to permit something to be transmitted.

Whatever happens, the forces on the other side of the gateway will eventually be able to tunnel their way through whatever debris is laid in their path.

If more subtlety is used, and something like a steel plate or a brick wall is erected almost touching the entrance, only the smallest of spaces will be left. Rubble or concrete can then be piled against the barrier, and the gate sealed for a slightly longer time. In the case of most Darklings, however, physically blocking a gateway will do little more than slow them down. In the case of the more powerful Darklings, especially the Dark Lords, it will probably not even accomplish that.

Distorter: The easiest way that a gate may be sealed is by installing a distorter near one of its anchors. The distorter effectively hides the two ends of the gate from each other making it impossible for anything to pass through the gate. Of course, the effects of a distorter are not permanent either. Eventually, its power source will run down, one of its internal components will wear out, or the users of the gate will send a party to deal with it. It is not possible to tell the difference between a gate sealed by a distorter and a dampened gate from the other end.

Dampening: The best way in which a gate's function can be interrupted is by physically blocking the entrance, and then using a dampening metal to interfere with the field around the blocked dimensional anchor. The combination of physical blockage and dampening prevent the gate from being unblocked from the other end, and the dampening metal requires no power source.

To determine which metal is needed, careful measurements of the field distortion caused by various sample metals must be made next to of one of the gate's dimensional anchors. The equipment required to make such measurements can be acquired from electronics supply companies and will cost about $400 (S/C). Samples of the likely metals can be collected for $200 (C/V). After an hour of these measurements, an Average: Physics task roll must be made. If the roll is successful, the PC will know what type of metal is required to dampen the particular field, and will know the quantity required. If



the roll is a failure, the metal will be known, but the quantity required will be incorrect. If the roll is a Catastrophic Failure, then the PC will determine a metal and quantity that is incorrect (referees should roll for this task themselves to preserve uncertainty). The referee should determine the dampening metal for a particular gate based on who (or what) created it and where it leads (referees should check the tables concerning this process for hints).

Mystics and sorcerers can discover which metal is needed by spending two hours next to the anchor contemplating the auras created by samples of various metals (no electronics needed). At the end of that time, make an Average: Dimension Walk roll. Success and failure are as above.

Once the dampening metal has been discovered, the PCs must physically block the gate with something substantial that completely seals it. This can be anything from panel fashioned from solid oak planks to a single piece of sheet steel. It must seal the opening completely, which means that the builders of the seal must fabricate it exactly to match the dimensions of the entrance, to the millimeter. Second, the required amount (or more) of the dampening metal must be built into the seal somehow. For a gate sealed by 25 grams of iron, simply bolting the oak planks together with iron stove bolts would suffice, or sealing the opening with concrete and steel reinforcing rods. For a gate sealed by gold, a sandwich of wooden planks and gold foil would do the trick.

The purity of the metal is unimportant. For example, a sodium-dampened gate that requires three kilograms could be blocked by building three kilograms of pure sodium metal (pretty nasty stuff, by the way) or 7.5 kilograms of table salt into the seal. Table salt is sodium chloride, a molecule made up sodium and chlorine atoms. Only 40% of the weight of sodium chloride is sodium atoms, so three kilograms of salt would contain 1.2 kilograms of sodium (and 1.8 kilograms of chlorine). To determine how much salt is required, multiply the weight of sodium by 2.5 (0.4: 1 = 1.0: 2.5). The weight of metal in other compounds can be determined by consulting a chemistry book and working out the relative molecular weights. The salt could be placed in small holes drilled into the oak planks and held in place with wax or cork plugs or a wood/salt sandwich could be fabricated.

After this has been accomplished, any empath can administer the final touch by making an Impossible: Dimension Walk task (sorcerers can accomplish this with a Formidable: Close Portal task). If successful, the gate is not only sealed, the blocked entrance (seal and all) vanishes without a trace, and the anchor goes dormant (consuming no power). If the anchor had an actual physical opening, that opening remains. If the opening was part of the gateway, it vanishes, and is replaced by solid stone, concrete, or whatever.

The other anchor still exists (the entryway turned solid black), but the gate cannot be used, and (more importantly) the sealed anchor cannot be unsealed until the anchor is brought back into physical existence. Where does the "vanished" anchor go? No one knows—no "lost anchor proto-dimension" has ever been discovered. Record the stage of success of this sealing task, for use in the inevitable unblocking attempts.

Merely placing the dampening metal in close proximity to the anchor will not seal the gate. The dampening metal must be used in concert with the complete physical blockage in order to seal the gate.

Interrupter: There is a DarkTek device called an interrupter which can be used to seal (and ultimately destroy) a gateway. These devices are spherical, a little smaller than a basketball, and are covered with light blue, translucent scales. If one is brought into the presence of a gate, it will begin to pulse and flex. If it is tossed into a gateway, thin vine-like tendrils will rapidly snake out from between the scales and begin to wrap themselves around the anchor. At the same time, other tendrils will reach through the gateway and envelop the other dimensional anchor. Within six combat phases (30 seconds), the entire gateway will be overgrown by the interrupter's tendrils, which will harden and render it unusable.

The interrupter will then proceed to feed on the empathic energies within the two dimensional anchors. After a period of time (50+5D10 days), the two anchors will be completely drained and the gateway will collapse. The interrupter will then fall into the interstices.

Removing an interrupter is a tricky job. Each side of a gateway will be overgrown with 50 hits worth of tendrils which have an armor value of 1. All of the tendrils on both sides of the gateway must be either cut away with melee attacks or destroyed with explosives (shooting them does little good, and they do not seem at all effected by heat) to restore it to working order. If one side is cleared but the other is not, the tendrils which were destroyed will regrow at the rate of one hit per hour. What this means is that to effectively remove an interrupter, it must be attacked from both sides simultaneously.

Interrupters do have offensive capabilities. When an active interrupter (one which has been placed in a gate) is attacked, its tendrils will become mobile again, and it will attempt to grab its assailant (skill 6). If it succeeds, it will begin to drain Empathy, and then Intelligence from its target at the rate of 1 point per phase. When a victim's Intelligence reaches 0 that victim will die. Empathy and Intelligence which have been drained by a interrupter will return at 1 point per hour until the victim is back to normal. It is a Difficult: Strength task to tear free (or pull someone free) from an interrupter.

It is impossible to carry an interrupter through a gateway.

Other Means: Referees may create other means of sealing and destroying gateways as they see fit. These can be DarkTek, advanced human devices, or proto-dimensional artifacts.

Unblocking a Gate: Digging out a blockage can be accomplished from the other side of the gate. A distorter or a simple dampening seal can be easily removed by anyone on the side of the gate on which is was installed. Darklings who find their pathways blocked in this way will, if they can, send agents to remove whatever is sealing the gateway in question. Because of this, minion hunters whose plans hinge on a seal remaining functional would be well advised to leave a rear guard to protect it from an almost inevitable attack.

Unblocking a gate with a dampened seal in combination with a Dimension Walk or Close Portal task requires that the anchor be brought back into existence with an Impossible: Dimension Walk task (Formidable: Open Portal for sorcerers) that achieves a stage of success greater than the stage of success of the empath who sealed the gate. This task must be attempted on the same side of the gate as the seal.

Finding a Hidden Gate

Empaths can locate a sealed and vanished gateway by succeeding at a Dimension Walk task. The difficulty level depends upon how close they are to the gate when they make the attempt (all other things being equal). Locating a sealed and vanished gate within eight meters is Easy. The task becomes one level more difficult for each eight meters added to the distance (0-8= Easy, 9-16= Average, 17-32= Difficult, and so on).

For sorcerers, this task is one level easier. For all empaths, this task counts as "Dimension Walk in the Same Proto-Dimension" for purposes of detection by Darklings.

DIMENSION WALK DEVICES

The dimension walk device is one of the most innocuous- looking pieces of DarkTek. It usually appears to be a glossy black cube with perfectly square corners. At some angles, though, it looks somehow wrong, as if it were turning and sitting still at the same time.

Most humans find it difficult to keep their eyes focused on a dimension walk device, and will suffer a slight sense of vertigo if they spend more than a few seconds looking at it. The disorientation is minor and goes away quickly, so it has no effect on combat or other task rolls. The devices do not seem to affect those who are observing them from close up (less than two meters or so).

Close observation of a dimension walk device reveals points of light within the cube: darting about, changing hues, pulsing, and fading. Imaginative individuals might think of a smoked glass fish tank containing dozens of brilliantly colored, geometrically shaped tropical fish. PCs who touch it find that it feels slick but not oily, somewhat reminiscent of a snake's skin.

Those who touch a dimension walk device might notice that the lights tend to move toward their hand. If they are brave enough to leave their hand on it for a full 30 seconds, the lights will form a geometric pattern beneath it. This is the device's control panel.

Working the dimension walk device is similar to using "point and click" software with a computer mouse. The lights can be moved into various patterns by dragging them along with a fingertip and made to change color by gently pressing them. Once the user ceases to touch the cube it sits, unmoving, for six combat phases (30 seconds). This delay is build into the device to allow its users to change their commands, but, of course, the PCs will not know this. If the device is not touched during the delay, it will project a transfer field. If it is touched, the cycle begins again.

After transmitting material, the device retains the pattern for six combat phases (30 seconds) before the points of light begin random motion again.

Patterns: The device can send PCs to any proto-dimension which they know the coded pattern for there need not be a device at the receiving end. Entering a pattern at random is very dangerous—there are millions of proto-dimensions, and most of them are deadly to humans.

It is possible to learn patterns by watching others use the device. PCs who are attempting to use a pattern which they have recently seen in use must succeed at an Average: Intelligence task to enter it correctly. If more than an hour has passed since they saw the pattern, entering it correctly becomes a Difficult: Intelligence task.

Attempting to enter a pattern using a videotape or photograph as reference is one level easier. The PCs must make their own judgments about the safety of the proto-dimension accessed by a pattern obtained by observation. Unprotected humans stepping through a device can be assumed to be going somewhere that is not immediately deadly.

Entering the pattern takes a full combat phase (five seconds). This means that from the time a character can first touch the device to the time the device will begin to project its field is three combat phases (15 seconds). If a group of adventurers intend to use a dimension walk device to escape from pursuers, they will need plenty of time to summon the control panel, enter the code and wait for the field to come up.

Transfer Field: The field which a dimension walk device projects is always in the form of a cube and is always twice the size of the device from which it is projected. The field is a misty, tangible-looking darkness which swallows the device that is projecting it. It is not possible to see what is on the other side.

Characters who enter the field will discover that the dimension walk device is no longer there, as if it has transmitted itself. When the field collapses, the device reappears, sitting exactly where it was before it was swallowed up by the transfer field.

The amount of time the transfer field stays up seems to be directly related to the size of the cube from which it is projected. The field usually lasts for two combat phases (10 seconds) plus one combat phase (five seconds) for every meter the device is tall (not the height of the field). The most common device is one meter in height, and would remain open for three combat phases (15 seconds).

The device will only transmit an item which is fully enveloped by the field. If part of an object sticks out, even just by a fraction of a centimeter, it will not be transmitted. The instant it is moved entirely within the transfer field, projection will occur. This means that if a character has a part of a jacket sleeve, the barrel of a rifle, or even a few hairs sticking out of the field, that individual will not be transferred. Usually this is not a problem for humans who can squat down, move an arm, or do whatever contortions they must. Moving a car, which is probably five meters long or more, is all but impossible with a one meter dimension walk device. The car could be taken apart, its pieces stacked within the device's field, and then re-assembled in whatever proto-dimension it ended up, but this is not practical in most cases.

The device is not very bright and has some difficulty discerning what constitutes a single transferable item. If a PC was dragging a length of rope into a dimension walk device's field, for example, the device would not transfer the character until the rope was dropped or pulled entirely within the field. The device's makers designed it this way as a sort of safety feature. Even the most powerful Darklings do not want to leave limbs or the tops of their heads behind. Anything not transmitted when the field collapses remains where it is.

Dimension walk devices can function in two different modes. The first mode is a relay function in which it sends its cargo to another dimension walk device (but does riot activate the second device). While there appears to be a maximum and minimum range for transfers within a single proto- dimension, the device seems fully capable of transmitting to any dimension walk device in any other dimension.

The second mode transmits the user to the exact corresponding point in whatever proto-dimension the device is set to transmit to. Skewed interdimensional travel is not

possible in this second mode. What this means is if a group of PCs use the same pattern that they just witnessed a group of ETs using, then they will be transported to the same place at which the ETs arrived.

The most common size of dimension walk device is about one-meter tall. Two other sizes are regularly found: a three-meter device which is capable of transporting a mid-sized car, and a seven-meter model which can handle most heavy equipment in its 14-meter field. There are some rumors of really *big* dimension walk devices, as large as 50 meters tall with a transfer field that is larger than a football field, but most minion hunters scoff at these rumors.

Destruction: Dimension walk devices have no armor. Inflicting more than 32 damage points on a dimension walk device damages it enough to render it inoperable; 128 damage points will destroy the device (firing a machinegun at the device will eventually destroy it; firing a TOW missile at it will destroy it more quickly). Remember, however, that if the PCs attach an explosive charge to a dimension walk device and then use the device for transportation to another proto-dimension, the demolition charge will also be transported.

Destroyed dimension walk devices crack open in several places, and release clouds of black gas which dissipates quickly. The colored shapes inside will dart out through the cracks, flutter in the air like butterflies for a few seconds and then flop to the ground, evidently "dead." They will vanish completely within minutes.

SENSING OTHER MEANS OF DIMENSION TRAVEL

Empaths can sense the operation of other means of dimensional travel under certain conditions.

Gateways: Opening a gateway creates a "noise" similar to the one created by empathically opening a portal. Once a gateway has been opened, however, it cannot be detected by empathic means with any reliability, although some highly advanced electronic devices can locate them.

An empath can determine where a gateway leads by standing within eight meters and succeeding at a Formidable: Dimension Scan task. Success gives a mental image of the proto-dimension adequate for identification if the empath has been to that proto-dimension. It does not give enough to travel there. Failure produces inadequate information.

It is possible for non-empaths to walk through a gate and not realize what has happened to them, although as with empathically created portals, this happens only when the source and target proto-dimensions are almost identical and when the anchor is large or well camouflaged.

Dimension Walk Devices: Dimension walk devices cannot be detected empathically. They can be located by advanced electronic devices (such as the gateway detector mentioned above), but only for the instant the device is transporting. Such readings are fleeting, and will seldom be of much utility except in locating devices that are used frequently.

Folder Pods: The "empathic beacon" organ of a folder pod (see *DarkTek* chapter) constantly projects a "homing signal" which can be detected by a Psychic Tracking task.

PROTO-DIMENSIONS IN A CAMPAIGN

There are many decisions that referees must make regarding how they will choose to run the proto-dimensions in their individual campaigns. This section will discuss a few important points to consider.

LOCALES

The most important thing referees must remember about the proto-dimensions is that exotic locations in and of themselves do not an adventure make. If the characters do not have sentient villains to struggle against, the players will feel more like people caught in a thunderstorm instead of larger-than-life heroes. No proto-dimensional environment will supply players with the kind of excitement that foiling a Darkling plot will. On the other hand, players almost always welcome an interesting puzzle which many proto-dimensions will supply.

What this means is that Dark Conspiracy referees must be careful not to depend on the proto-dimensions alone as adventures, but use their unorthodox environments as stages upon which adventures are played out. A good setting cannot make a bad adventure good, but it can make a good adventure better.

In some campaigns, a proto-dimension will be used for one or two adventures and will then be discarded. In others, they will be reoccurring locations, as common to the campaign as the neighborhood where the characters make their home-base. We have included proto-dimensions for both uses.

One-Shot Adventure Locales: Some proto-dimensions will be used once and never needed again. Fragmentary proto-dimensions and halflands are the ones that mostly fall into this category, as these require the least effort on the part of their creator, and can be discarded with little regrets.

Sometimes it is worth spending a little extra time on a one-shot locale, however, if the locale can be made the site of an adventure that will require several sessions to complete. Croatan is an example of this last variety of proto- dimension.

As Reoccurring Locales: There are many reasons why characters might send their characters back to a proto-dimension. Perhaps there is a Darkling base operating from there which requires periodic monitoring or an occasional raid. Perhaps it is the best way to get somewhere else. Perhaps the proto-dimension contains some vital resource needed in the fight against the Dark. Perhaps there are DarkTek devices to be co-opted to the side of the minion hunters. Mechaniaca and Plaguelands are examples of this type of proto-dimension.

ADVENTURES IN THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Some proto-dimensions serve as bases for Darkling activity. Darkling assets in such proto-dimensions will be well-guarded, a fact that characters who are running search-and-destroy or rescue missions in them should keep in mind. Some proto-dimensions are more or less free of Darkling influence, generally those which have no intelligent life for the Darklings to torment and are "off the beaten path" enough that the Darklings seldom go there and have no reason to stay. A rare few have never been discovered by Darklings, or have been sealed off for various reasons.

In any campaign, the use of the proto-dimensions will be very useful to get to where the action is. Of course, since Dimension Walk tasks are more difficult in tense situa-

tions, dimensional travel will not be as useful for getting away from the action once it has started. Considering the fact that it may take as long as 10 minutes for an empath who has failed a Dimension Walk task to try again, dimension walking becomes a very poor method of escaping firefights or other stressful situations.

Some players (the wise ones) will not want to use their Dimension Walk skill unless they have a very good reason. Other players will immediately decide to travel to every proto-dimension that they know. Referees should be prepared for both eventualities.

Another point to keep in mind is that time still passes back at home while the players are in one of the proto-dimensions (sometimes faster, sometimes slower), so if players start spending an inordinate amount of time in the proto-dimensions, things will start happening back at home that they will be unaware of and will be unable to do anything about.

THREE METHODS FOR PROTO-DIMENSIONAL ACCESS

The following are three methods which referees can use to let PCs access the proto-dimensions. Each has its strengths and its weaknesses. It is possible to run the proto-dimensions as a mixture of the three methods, some proto-dimensions working one way, some another. Referees should be sure to decide exactly how each proto-dimension they intend on using works before they introduce it into their campaigns. Players should probably have some knowledge of how the proto-dimensions that they know how to enter work.

The Everywhere Method: The first way in which the proto- dimensions could be run is called the everywhere method. The everywhere method assumes that every proto-dimension can be entered from every spot in every proto-dimension as well as any spot on the Earth. The only limiting factors are the discontinuity of the target dimension and the discontinuity of the empath's home dimension.

The advantage of this system is that it requires no extra work on the part of the referee. There are two weaknesses inherent in the everywhere method. First, it lacks flavor-especially if the players have read this entire chapter and are familiar with the ins and outs of the meta-universe. Second, referees who use the everywhere method are surrendering a useful device for controlling the flow of events in a campaign.

In combination with one or more of the other methods, the everywhere method should only be used for the fragmentary proto-dimensions which sorcerers tap into in order to perform their special feats and for one or two average proto-dimensions that virtually all human and Darkling dimension walkers know about.

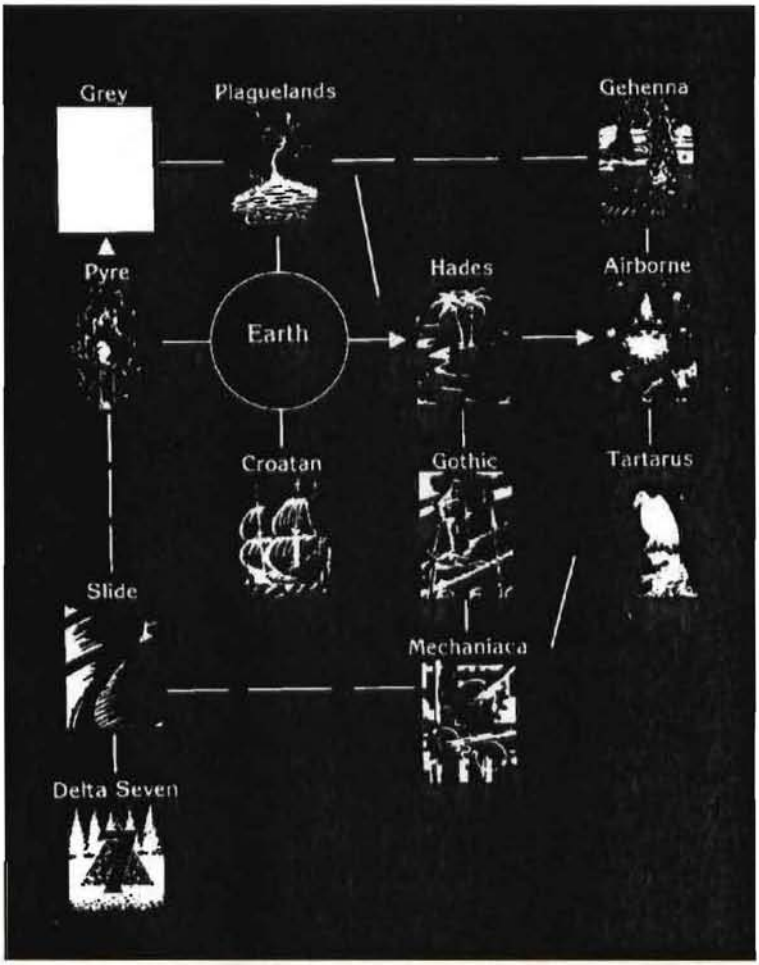
The Flowchart Method: Another method for refereeing the proto-dimensions is called the flowchart method. This method requires the referee to build a chart which shows how the proto-dimensions are connected. In a campaign using the flowchart method alone, only a handful of proto-dimensions could be reached from the Earth. Other proto-dimensions could only be entered by traveling through one of the proto-dimensions which was linked to Earth. Sometimes the connections work both ways, sometimes they are one-way links.

Consider the sample flowchart. If the PCs decide that they want to go to Gothic, they must first got to Hades. If, upon reaching Hades, they change their mind (oops), then they have a problem. The journey from Earth to Hades is a one-way trip. They will have to go to the Plaguelands just to get back to Earth, or make their way back by a more

roundabout route through Airborne, Gehenna, and the Plaguelands. Characters who want to go to Gray must travel through the Plaguelands on their trip out and again on their trip back. Voyagers to Pyre can go directly back to Earth.

In campaigns that use the flowchart method, referees should allow the construction of gates that ignore the flowchart's restrictions. Using the example flowchart mentioned above, a gate could be build to connect Gray directly to the Earth or Tartarus to Hades, even though neither of those trips could be made with in a single dimension walk. This is, perhaps, why the powerful Dark Lords, who could dimension walk to any proto-dimension despite its discontinuity, would prefer to build gates. With a gate, they do not have to deal with the intervening proto-dimensions or chance entering the home proto-dimension of a rival Dark Lord.

When the PCs are sent to a random proto-dimension as the result of a Catastrophic Failure, referees should ignore their flowcharts. Likewise, If the PCs should end up in the Interstices, which, by definition, are connected to each of the proto-dimensions, the proto-dimensions which they find should have nothing to do with the referee's flowchart.



The Limited Access Method: When correspondence was discussed earlier, the fact that some proto-dimensions are much smaller than the Earth was not discussed. One way that this fact could be dealt with is to assume that in a dimension which is 1,000 times smaller than the Earth distances are compressed and that a trip of one mile in the proto-dimension will correspond to a trip of 1,000 miles on Earth. The problem with this is that it makes it too easy to pop into a proto-dimension, take a short walk, and pop back onto the other side of the Earth. Another way to handle such a case is to use limited access.

When using the limited access system to referee the proto-dimensions, it is assumed that a proto-dimension which is smaller than the Earth (or another proto-dimension) only corresponds to a small portion of the Earth's surface. The closet diminsion in which Nosferatu were imprisioned in Nightsider work in exactly this way. Those micronian proto-dimensions a subterranean chamber.

For example, a referee could decide that Grey only corresponds to a small portion of North America, say the Southwest. Adventurers who want to travel to Grey must first go somewhere in the Southwest, perhaps Santa Fe or Tucson, before they can enter the proto-dimension.

The biggest advantage of limited access is that it gives referees a means of steering their players. If the characters wish to travel to the ravagers' home dimension (see *Dark Races*), they would have to go to Southeast Asia where the ETs released them from their proto-dimension. A clever referee with an idea for an adventure set in Southeast Asia might decide to give the players a phony clue regarding the ravagers and their home dimension. The result: The players send their characters jetting off to Cambodia without the first clue to what is really going on.

Limited access also adds a topology to the proto-dimensions. It seems much more consistent if the home proto-dimension of the Morlocks can only be entered from deep underground or that of the cobra people can only be entered from somewhere in Vietnam. This, in fact, could be taken to the extreme and given a kind of "sympathetic magic" aura if the referee exercises a little careful planning. If Mechaniaca could only be entered from the industrial northeast states, or, perhaps, only from certain industrial cities like Detroit, Michigan; Gary, Indiana; or Birmingham, England.

Naturally, referees who want to use limited access will have to do a little extra work to define just what parts of Earth correspond to just what proto-dimensions. They will also have to deal with situations where the players really want to send their characters to some far-off place in order to access a proto-dimension at exactly the time when it is least convenient to the referee for them to do so.

Another way limited access could be handled is to increase the difficulty of opening a portal to the proto-dimension in question the farther away from a corresponding location the character attempting the task was. For example, opening a portal to a dimension that corresponded to the jungles of Southeast Asia from an abandoned farm in Idaho should be extremely difficult.

As with the flowchart method, the referee should ignore ordinary restraints when the PCs are sent to a random proto-dimension as the result of a Catastrophic Failure.

MAINTAINING THE ELEMENT OF MYSTERY

There is no mystic force keeping **Dark Conspiracy** players from reading this book, and, therefore, knowing everything that it says about the proto-dimensions. The tragedy in this is that while players who know all about the proto- dimensions will have a healthy respect for their dangers, they will feel no element of fear or mystery. Instead, they will start working out statistics on their characters and trying to figure out how best, mathematically, to ensure their characters' survival. This is exactly the opposite of the basic philosophy behind **Dark Conspiracy**.

There are many techniques which referees can use to keep their **Dark Conspiracy** campaigns from becoming flat and mechanical. As has been said before, many things in **Dark Conspiracy** are left only partially defined so that the referee has a great deal of latitude. There is nothing to keep a referee from designing a proto-dimension which exactly resembles one of those presented in this chapter except for certain important features.

Keep 'em Guessing: Referees may wish to change a few things around in order to shake the confidence of players who know too much. For example, a referee might change the setting of Hades from a tropical paradise to an unspoiled wilderness reminiscent of Croatan or a pine forest like that of Delta Seven, in order to mislead players who have "peeked" at this chapter and will immediately suspect any tropical island they end up on. Just remember to maintain play balance and be consistent.

Names: An important part of keeping the element of mystery in a game is how referees handle proto-dimensional names. Referees should avoid giving the name of a proto-dimension to the players. While the proto-dimensions described here are each given a name, the adventurers will never find a sign telling them "Welcome to the Plaguelands," or whatever. Also, just because a proto-dimension is given an "official" name, that isn't necessarily what NPCs in your **Dark Conspiracy** campaign should call it. There is no Board of Extra-Dimensional Nomenclature dutifully assigning official names to proto-dimensions. Ten people might have 10 different names for the same proto-dimension. Let the players decide what they want to call the new proto-dimensions they find rather than handing them the "official" name. This will add to their sense of discovery and avoid giving them hints as to what is coming up.

DESIGNING ADDITIONAL PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Every primal power or elementary substance hints at the existence of a fragmentary dimension. Likewise, every physical law could spawn a dimension with a physics shift. Such dimensions are easy to describe, and relatively easy to make up on the spot. They are most useful when a group of PCs is sent somewhere at random either by accident or by enemy action.

Almost any archetypical concept could be used as the basis for a halfland. The trackless deserts of North Africa, the impenetrable jungle of South America, even the giant parking lot at Disneyland could provide the inspiration for a halfland.

The splinterlands, with their additional complexity, offer more of a challenge to the Dark Conspiracy referees but still possibilities abound. What is the home dimension of the fey like? Or the proto-dimensions which inspired the Norse view of the universe? Inspiration can be taken from the full panoply of literary invention, from Shakespeare to Vonnegut. A proto-dimension based on Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, where

every 10 minutes everyone breaks into song, has some entertaining possibilities. Proto-dimensions reflecting novels such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or movies such as *Soylent Green* have great potential as well.

Name: During its design, a referee might want to assign a temporary name to a proto-dimension for ease in record keeping. The best temporary names are one or two words that summarize the key elements of the proto-dimension. Once a proto-dimension is used, however, the players should be allowed to name it for themselves.

Discontinuity Factors: Assigning discontinuity factors is a matter of personal judgment. How strange is the proto-dimension, compared to Earth? The factors assigned to the sample proto-dimensions can be used as a guide.

Assimilation: Assimilation effect values are another matter of referee judgment. How different is the physics of the proto-dimension compared to Earth? What kind of damage will assimilation to this new physics do to a human? Again, use the sample proto-dimensions as a guide.

Encounters: There can be no hard and fast rules about encounters, as there are so many variables involved. Bear in mind the comments made earlier, however, about making a proto-dimension more than just a patch of terrain to be traversed. Most "one-time" proto-dimensions should not need encounter tables, as all encounters should be of the planned variety (the referee stipulates when and where they occur, according to what best keeps things moving).

In recurring locale proto-dimensions, or in those used for impromptu adventures, encounter tables will take some of the load off of a referee. If using multiple dice on encounter tables, remember when setting them up that the results will be distributed in a bell-curve: on 2D6, the most common encounter should occur on a 7, and the least common on a 2 or a 12. Single dice (D6, D10, D20) will give even results throughout their range.

EXPERIENCE AND THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS (OPTIONAL)

The Dark Conspiracy rules allow characters to improve their skills by spending experience points on them. In addition to this, referees may want to allow their players to spend their experience points on familiarity with particular proto-dimensions to simulate their overcoming, to some extent, that proto-dimension's discontinuity. The way this works is that with the expenditure of a certain number of experience points it becomes one level less difficult for characters to open a portal to a particular proto-dimension.

As this effectively doubles the empath's Dimension Walk ability score, referees will want to be very careful about allowing players to do this. In campaigns where 30 or more proto-dimensions are regularly used, the cost should only be 4 or 5 points. In campaigns where only 5 or 6 proto-dimensions are used, the cost should be considerably higher (perhaps 10 or 15 points).

In addition, it is recommended that players only be allowed to spend experience points on a proto-dimension that their characters have spent a significant amount of time in during the current adventure. If Roman went to Mechaniaca during one adventure and all the experience points he earned there were spent on increasing his Small Arms (Rifle) skill, and then he fought cobra people in Florida during his next adventure, he should not be allowed to spend the new experience points he earned on familiarity with Mechaniaca.

Referees might also decide to allow players to spend experience points to bypass the effects of flowcharting and limited access. In a campaign where Mechaniaca only corresponded to the industrial northeast, for example, a player who has spent points on familiarity with Mechaniaca could open a portal to the proto-dimension from anywhere in the eastern US and Canada.

It should be stressed that this is an option and that referees are not required to allow players to improve their ability with a particular proto-dimension with the experience points they have earned.

AIRBORNE: THE DOMAIN OF SKY

Airborne is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2, and with a slight physics shift. This shift will not harm the characters in and of itself, but it will take some getting used to. Characters in Airborne will not take long at all to find the major difference between it and the others they may have encountered: In Airborne, there is no ground.



Name: Airborne
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION

Airborne, although it has no ground, very definitely has a "down." Everything in Airborne exists in free-fall, pulled by gravity in a single direction. Acceleration due to gravity is small, and when the PCs arrive in Airborne, they will seem to be floating. After a short time, they will begin to feel a gentle movement of air past them as they accelerate. Eventually, they will reach terminal velocity (the point where gravity and atmospheric drag exactly equal each other) and cease accelerating.

Airborne curves back upon itself, which means that after a few weeks of failing, a person or object will lap their "starting point" (although there is no reasonable way they could know this). Everything entering Airborne arrives on the same plane (i.e., the same level) and then begins falling. Vertical offset is unknown in Airborne, which means that players and referees need not concern themselves with their altitude when moving from Airborne to another proto-dimension. Horizontal movement results in corresponding displacement. Because of the peripatetic nature of the "terrain" in Airborne, however, there are no permanent landmarks for PCs to use (no chalk cliff or grove of gnarled trees) to mark a specific location, and no way to navigate. Gateways and anchors can be built in Airborne, but their construction presents certain engineering problems. Dimension walk devices can exist in Airborne, and function perfectly, provided they are supplied with power.

Fortunately for the PCs, the speed acquired from Airborne's gravity does not carry over when traveling to other proto-dimensions, otherwise they would be killed or seriously injured.

THE UNFRIENDLY SKIES—CONDITIONS IN AIRBORNE

"Landforms": Although there is no "ground" in Airborne, there definitely is terrain. This "terrain" consists of groupings of giant clumps of dirt, called "dirtballs." These groupings, like clusters of small asteroids, fall perpetually through the endless sky. These groupings can be anywhere from a few hundred meters up to several kilometers across and contain as few as 50 or as many as 50,000 individual bodies. The individual dirtballs are, on the average, a few dozen meters in diameter and are covered by a variety of plant and animal life. The dirtballs are irregularly shaped, although they are all roughly spherical. Extremely irregular shapes tend to break up faster, and wind stress on something as large as a dirtball has a much greater effect than on something as small as a human body.

These groupings are not regular in any way, and the individual dirtballs that are involved in them are not flying in formation. The individual dirtballs tumble and bump together, sometimes breaking pieces off of one another, other times sticking together to form larger bodies. Being between two dirthalls as they struck would certainly be fatal for any human being. Avoiding such an ignominious fate is not at all difficult and any conscious character can automatically do so.

There seems to be a cohesive force of some kind that makes the individual dirtballs stay together in groupings, but this cohesion can be overcome by an exceptionally large collision, and small dirtballs are occasionally sent spinning off on divergent vectors to become lone wanderers, drifting aimlessly through the air between the groupings.

"Water" Features: Airborne also has lakes, roughly spheroid blobs of water falling through the eternal sky. Most lakes are very easy to spot because each trails a thin, wispy

contrail of water vapor as it falls, like the tail of a comet.

Lakes, like dirtballs, collide with one another and with soil swarms. When two lakes collide, they are usually ripped apart and a very large cloud of water vapor forms as evaporation takes over. This ends in the formation of 1D6 new lakes, each of which leaves the encounter with a new vector.

Soil swarms collect moisture by condensation in the early morning, when they are still cool from the night before. The soil absorbs this dew very quickly, and capillary action draws it deep enough that the heat of the late afternoon is not enough to evaporate it all. Plants are thus encouraged to send roots deep into the soil of the dirtball, stabilizing it in the process. The soil dirtballs are held together by these root systems and a certain amount of natural adhesion; there is not enough gravitational attraction between soil particles to hold them together.

Night and Day: Airborne has a day/night cycle of roughly 20 hours, although there is no sun, moon, planets, or stars. At "dawn," the sky begins to brighten, and within an hour the sky is bright as day, the light and heat coming from "above" (that is, it comes from the direction opposite that which everything falls). At "dusk," the sky begins to darken. After an hour, the sky is as dark as it gets, which is about the same as a starlit but moonless night on Earth. Visibility is about 1,000 meters for dirthalls, 500 meters for human-sized creatures.

The temperature in Airborne rises and falls in synchronization with the light level, although the larger dirthalls retain the heat of the day for a few hours into the night, and remain cool for several hours into the day. At night it drops to about 10-degree C (50-degree F), during the day it can rise as high as 29-degree C (85-degree F).

HUMANS IN AIRBORNE

Any PC who is extremely acrophobic (possesses a fear of heights) will find it difficult to function in Airborne. Other characters may be initially unnerved by their predicament. Characters who cannot successfully make a Difficult: Willpower roll when they enter Airborne for the first time must attempt all tasks at one level greater difficulty than normal, and add 1 to any Panic roll that they have to make. This roll may be attempted again at the end of each hour spent in Airborne. If a character leaves and then returns to the proto-dimension within an hour, another roll is not allowed. This Willpower task only needs to be successfully completed once, after which the character has "learned to cope" with the conditions in Airborne.

Sounds: Even at terminal velocity, the rush of wind is not great. Conversations can be carried out, gunshots and shouts of warning detected, and screams heard over the normal distances for such things.

Movement: Humans in Airborne will find that their falling airspeed can be controlled (like skydivers do) by moving the arms and legs to increase or decrease drag, although this takes quite some time before any change can be noticed).

Other than falling, humans have two modes of movement in Airborne. They can "swim" at four meters per five seconds and can leap at 16. Leaping movement can only be done when a character has something large and solid to leap from. After leaping, a character continues in the direction jumped for eight phases (40 seconds), but speed is reduced by two meters per five seconds by air resistance (it can be further reduced by up to four meters per five seconds if the PC "swims" against the vector). Characters can

make equipment to allow them to travel faster after experiencing Airborne for the first time (Average: Mechanic or Engineering). Such equipment could consist of the aerial equivalent of swim-fins, some form of jetpack, or a more unusual contraption such as a pedal-powered ornithopter. How well such a device works is up to the referee. The EVA multitool allows movement 15 for its entire two-minute fuel supply.

Ground and water vehicles are useless in Airborne, for movement purposes at least. Aircraft function normally (more or less). Parachutes and paragliders will take minutes to deploy once opened, but once fully deployed will slow the user's descent to almost nothing.

Shelter: The soil of the dirtballs is quite loose, and it is a fairly easy task to excavate a person-sized cave/foxhole in a couple of minutes with bare hands. Such holes provide concealment, but little in the way of protection from attacking creatures (since they can also dig into the soil easily). Tent pegs, posts, and the like will not be able to anchor themselves in the loose soil of a dirtball firmly enough to hold a tent or shelter in place (the only way to do that is to find a tree/shrub with a large root system and tie the tent or shelter to it).

Combat: Combat in Airborne proceeds according to the normal rules except for the following:

All melee tasks are one level more difficult. Empathic combat is unchanged. In fire combat, recoil has the same effect as in the basic rules (decreasing accuracy), since uneven rotational velocities will cause the firer to spin. It will be difficult to perfectly compensate for these forces through movement, and the net effect will be a loss of accuracy proportional to the volume of fire. In addition, recoil causes the firer to be pushed in the opposite direction at a speed equal to the weapon's recoil rating in meters per five seconds. For example, a character firing an M16A2 rifle in semiautomatic fire would be propelled backwards at the rate of three meters per five seconds. The same weapon fired at full auto would propel the character backwards at five meters per five seconds. It will be difficult for characters to compensate for this movement unless they are equipped with some form of "swimming" equipment that will enable them to "swim" and fire a weapon at the same time (that is, something that enables the legs to do the "swimming" and the arms to do the firing).

LIFE IN AIRBORNE

The majority of the wildlife found in Airborne consists of small creatures which live in the soil swarms, either in burrows inside the dirthalls or in nests built in the trees/shrubs growing on them. These creatures will seem quite alien to the PCs. In addition, there will be a large number of predators. Characters who are familiar with ocean environments will tend to liken the dirtball swarms with the coral reefs of terrestrial oceans. All of these life forms tend to have large claws for clinging to dirtballs, and some have a form of wing or flipper for propulsion between dirtballs (to escape from a collision).

There are two types of dangerous beasties native to Airborne: piranha birds and skysharks. Neither of these creatures physically resembles its terrestrial namesake, but rather uses the same mode of attack as its Earthly counterpart. Neither is well equipped to deal with the firepower which most minion hunters carry and, as such, do not pose a great danger to most PCs. Instead, the greatest threat in Airborne is from the harpies (see sidebar), a life form not native to Airborne.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

D6	Encounter
1-2	Skyshark
3-5	Piranha Birds
6	Harpies

Roll once for every 4 hours spent in Airborne.

Note: In Airborne, since almost nothing ever walks, speeds are given as Climb/Cruise/Dive instead of Walk/Trot/Run. Climb is the sustained climbing speed, Cruise is level speed, and Dive is maximum speed during a dive.

Piranha Birds

 # Appear: 6D10
Attack: 80%
Move: 30/50/70
Initiative: 6
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 7
Skill/Damage: 3/2
Hits: 1/2

Piranha birds have the leathery wings and furry body of a large bat, but with the jaws and tearing beak of a hawk. Piranha birds, like their terrestrial namesake, move about in Airborne in large swarms like a school of fish, with no permanent home. A school/flock of piranha birds drops slowly, each individual executing a slow shallow spiral until they come upon an inhabited dirtball cluster. The flock then dives upon the cluster. Small prey they kill and eat individually. Larger prey is overwhelmed by dozens of them at once, swarming in and tearing at the victim with their razor-sharp teeth and claws, then swooping off to swallow their mouthful and circle back for another pass.

Skysharks

 # Appear: 1
Attack: 90%
Move: 20/40/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 7
Constitution: 9
Agility: 7
Skill/Damage: 6/1D10
Hits: 13/25

Skysharks look very much like large penguins, but with larger, toothed jaws. The front pair of flippers is equipped with claws and thus does triple duty (propulsion, steering, and holding prey). The rear pair is enlarged and used primarily for propulsion. Their method of feeding is to conceal themselves in the vegetation on a dirtball and dive upon their unsuspecting victims from above.



Harpies

Harpies are not native to Airborne, but are ideally suited to life there, and have taken up a more or less permanent residence. Harpies are described in *Dark Races* chapter, except that due to the lesser gravity of Airborne, their movement is 30/50/80. Harpies in Airborne like to hide among the dirtballs of a soil swarm, using them for cover as they approach their target. Then, using their terrific speed, they rush their prey using crude javelins, first as missile weapons and then as melee weapons. A normal harpy mode of attack, dropping stones from a great height, is largely ineffective in Airborne.



Name: Croatan
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 1 (special, see text)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

CROATAN: THE LOST COLONY

Croatan is a halfland, although its amazing history is more reminiscent of one of the splinterlands. The present discontinuity of the proto-dimension is 1, but the discontinuity of Croatan is much more flexible than other proto-dimensions. In campaigns where the referee is using the limited access method to run the proto-dimensions, Croatan should correspond to the mid-Atlantic coast of North America.

ARRIVAL

The PCs' first impression of Croatan is the air—it's clean. Clean in a way that few Americans have experienced since the early 1900s. There are no serious pollutants here, no noxious exhaust fumes, not even the rank smell of rain-soaked concrete, so familiar to minion hunters everywhere. In fact, the fresh air may actually seem to possess a smell

for urban-dwelling PCs. It stings their noses, like ozone during a storm. The sensation is not unpleasant, just unnerving.

As the PCs look around themselves, they see a virgin expanse of forest; again, like nothing they have ever had the opportunity to see on Earth. The trees are huge, often six or more feet in diameter at the base, and stretching higher into the sky than any of the characters had thought a tree could grow. They block most of the light from the ground, leaving the party in a kind of green twilight. The lack of light on the forest floor keeps down the undergrowth. There is a thick, springy blanket of lichen and pine needles, but very little in the way of bushes, vines, or brambles. Such dense ground-cover only grows in clearings, or where one of the great trees has fallen and smaller plants can find the sunlight they need to thrive.

Birds are singing, squirrels leap from branch to branch above, and the scrabbling sounds of small animals can be heard in the distance. The breeze has a hint of salt in it, as if the sea were very near. Nothing at all threatens the PCs. The setting is very near idyllic.

In other words, not at all what experienced characters have come to expect from the proto-dimensions.

STRANGERS IN THE FOREST

The PCs can explore as they wish, and enjoy the clean air and the presence of green growing things for a brief time. Ideally, the players will be paranoid enough (or experienced enough as minion hunters) to become nervous and expectant without the referee's encouragement. Once the jitters have set in, the group will experience its first encounter in this proto-dimension.

The PCs soon become aware of the fact that they are being followed. A tan and white shape can be seen, flitting from shadow to shadow, hiding behind the boles of the great trees. It appears to be a young woman, following them as they move through the woods, and trying to stay out of sight.

If the PCs allow her to notice that they have seen her, she will gather up her courage, smooth down her skirts, and boldly approach them.

She is brunette, in her late teens or early twenties, and dressed in a tan homespun woolen dress with a white apron-like overgarment and a cloth bonnet. She carries a half-filled wicker basket, and was clearly picking berries from the bushes in a clearing when she spotted the PCs. She will introduce herself as Virginia Dare, daughter of Ananais Dare. Virginia is vivacious, and absolutely enthralled by the PCs—she will make it plain that she has never seen anyone quite like them before.

"Strangers! How wonderful! Has a ship from England come at last?" Now that she has worked up the nerve to approach the PCs and speak, she will be hard to shut up. "You are most oddly dressed, gentles—you are not Spanishers, I hope. I have never met a Spaniyard, but my father has and you do not fit his description. What manner of men are you?"

"You must come and meet with my father—he's the Governor now, since Master White left us, God save him. Follow, and I will guide you to the Fort." With that, she will twirl about, and set off through the woods at a good pace, making sure that the PCs are following.

Virginia's appearance and clothing may leave the PCs puzzled. If any of the players recognize the name Virginia Dare, they will be even baffled—Virginia Dare was the English child born in North America on the 18th of August, 1587. Since she appears to

be about 20, that would seem to make the year around 1607. This might suggest to them that they have traveled back in time, unless the PCs know enough history to remember that Virginia Dare and the rest of the first English colony in America vanished mysteriously long before that date.

HISTORY LESSON: THE ROANOKE COLONY

In 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh, the English adventurer, undertook to establish a colony in North America. Raleigh's purpose in setting up a colony in the New World was not exploration, nor was it simple imperialism. Raleigh was a far more pragmatic man than that. He desired fame and (primarily) fortune. Raleigh determined that privateering (government-sanctioned piracy) was the best way to gain both his ends. He acquired a Letter of Marque (a sort of privateering license), and set out to prey on England's greatest enemy at that time, the navy of Spain.

Unfortunately, acting as a privateer against the Spanish treasure fleets meant sailing the Caribbean, where there were no friendly ports for English ships to use as re-supply points. In order to make privateering really pay, a safe haven had to be developed in the New World, preferably in a spot that the Spanish could not easily find or attack.

Such a location would ideally be north of the Spanish-held areas, and as near as possible to the sea-routes from England to the Caribbean. The outer banks of what would one day be North Carolina seemed ideal. The islands there form a chain, some distance out to sea from the coast of North Carolina proper. A colony sited on the islands in between the Outer Banks and the Carolina coast would be sheltered from the weather and hidden from the Spanish.

Having selected his site, Sir Walter Raleigh recruited colonists from among the dispossessed in England, and, with the assistance of Sir Richard Grenville and John White, placed a settlement on the island of Roanoke in May of 1587. The colony was named Virginia, in honor of Queen Elizabeth, who was known as the Virgin Queen. To an outside observer, the future seemed bright but, within the colony, the seeds of destruction had already been sown.

The expedition's vessels were commanded by Sir Richard Grenville, a man of high station and considerable wealth, but small ability as a leader. Grenville's earlier attempts to place a colony in the Outer Banks had already come to disaster—he had settled only military men, as a garrison. They had neither the knowledge nor the inclination to become farmers, and made their living by taking what they needed or wanted from the local Indian tribes. Grenville's original colony had been a complete failure, and served only to make the Indians wary of European intentions.

In command of the daily affairs of the colony was Ralph Lane—a stern disciplinarian, who prided himself on his ability to maintain order among the "lesser persons" who made up the colony. He had little regard for those "lesser persons," and disliked associating himself with them. Lane had been the leader of Grenville's colony as well, for a time, and distinguished himself primarily by conducting a surprise attack on a band of Algonkian Indians. The Indians had refused to provide the colony's soldiers with food and supplies, and Lane felt that that indicated their intention to attack the colony, once their supplies ran out.

The character of the settlers at Roanoke was somewhat better than that of Grenville's colony, but they were not exactly heroic individuals. Most were ex-military

men and their wives, or members of the poor lower class, willing to take part in adventurism against the Spanish in return for a chance to own land, even land so far away from their original homes.

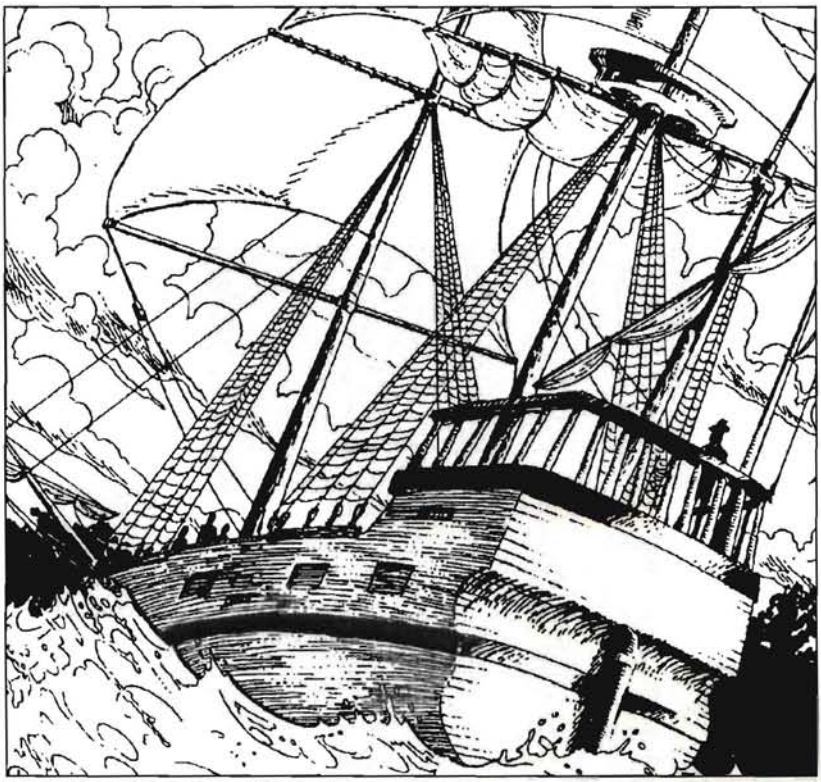
Leavening this group were colonists recruited from among London's tradesmen: apprentices, journeymen, and masterless young gentlemen (often younger sons of noble houses, who were unlikely to inherit anything significant). The young gentlemen, in particular, were looking for adventure, i.e., looking for trouble, and saw the colonization attempt as a great lark. Few had any farming experience.

From this odd lot, a viable settlement had to be made. One bright point in the otherwise murky social structure of Roanoke was Governor John White, a gentleman, artist, and scholar. White would eventually take over the leadership of the colony, and attempt to patch up the rifts torn by Lane and Grenville between the settlers and the Indians.

HOW IT ALL TURNED OUT

Once the colony town was set up, and a small fortress of earthen banks erected, White and Grenville set out for England to get additional provisions for the colony—tools, manufactured goods, gunpowder, and firearms, as well as beer and wine, flour, and other foodstuffs. The Roanoke colony was left in the control of Ananais Dare, White's son-in-law.

The colony enjoyed less than cordial relations with the local Algonkian chieftain, Moratok. He did not trust the English and, given the actions of Grenville's soldiers, and



even some of the Roanoke colonists, he had good reasons. Before a year was out, both sides decided to solve the problem once and for all—and amazingly for their time, both sides chose not to engage in wholesale slaughter. The colonists resolved to move to another island, Croatan, which Raleigh had previously explored, and where the Indians were supposedly more amenable to becoming Christians. One Indian from the Croatan tribe was with the colony already: a young convert named Manteo, whom Raleigh had taken to England on a previous trip.

The Indian shaman who advised Moratok, Quiyoughqwohanock, resolved to make sure that the settlers went far away, farther than Croatan Island. Farther than anyone had ever gone before.

Quiyoughqwohanock, as a shaman, was empathically aware, and familiar, in a limited way, with the proto-dimensions. When the settlers had gathered their goods, and readied the small ship that Grenville and White had left for their use, he exerted his empathic and sorcerous abilities, and sent the invaders as far away as he could imagine...

THE REST OF THE STORY (ON EARTH)

Governor White's ships were supposed to call again at Roanoke the following summer, with the additional supplies needed in the colony. When he left, White had realized that the settlement was in a precarious position, and that the colonists might have to abandon Roanoke for another site if Powhattan (or the Spanish) decided to move against them. He arranged for a secret sign to be left at the old colony site on Roanoke, if the colonists had to leave. The arrangement had been simple—carve the name of the place the colony would be moving to on several prominent trees—and cut a Maltese cross above it if the colony was forced to move because of Indian or Spanish attacks.

In 1590, after several attempts (foiled in part by the ongoing war with Spain, and Grenville's incompetence), White and his crew did return to Roanoke. They found the colony site abandoned. The colonists did leave the secret signs at the Roanoke site. A tree was found, carved with the letters CRO. A post of the stockade, just to the right of the entrance, was carved with the word CROATAN. Neither were marked with the distress-cross, so White knew that the colonists had left in an orderly fashion.

Due to difficulties with the ships, White decided to return to England before seeking out the new "Citie of Ralegh" on Croatan Island—he felt that the colony was safe, living near the most friendly tribe of Indians in the area.

In the following year, White made landfall at Croatan Island, and found not a single sign anywhere that English settlers had ever been there. The Roanoke colonists were never seen on Earth again, although several attempts to find them were made—some well into the following century. Ultimately, history assumed that the colony failed, and that the surviving Europeans were adopted by one of the tribes or sub-tribes of the interior.

THE REST OF THE STORY (OFF EARTH)

By the colonists' reckoning, it has been 20 years since they moved from Roanoke Island to Croatan Island—or what they think is Croatan Island. Quiyoughqwohanock's sorcery encompassed them, and passed over them completely, leaving them unaware of its existence. The colonists were sent into a proto-dimension so similar to the Earth they left, that they have never noticed the difference.

The leader of the colony is Governor Ananais Dare, Virginia Dare's father, and John White's son-in-law and hand-picked successor. He has kept the colony and its settlers in good order, and has managed to stay on friendly terms with the Algonian Indians of Croatan.

Although the colonists have had no contact with England in the past two decades, they have managed to survive, and even prosper. They have adopted many Indian ways, and in some cases, even intermarried with the Indians. The population of the settlement has grown slowly. When the new "Citie of Ralegh" was founded, its population was less than 100; now the population is nearly 130, and two infants now form the second English generation born in America.

The colonists have for the most part accepted the fact that they are a "lost colony." Despite their hopes, Governor White has never been able to return with any supplies from England. Most of the colonists have come to expect that he never will, believing that a war, plague, or other disaster has ruined England and prevented the return of a ship.

Once, at Ananais Dare's request, an expedition went back to Roanoke, to check for any signs of the supply ship's return. The men who volunteered to go don't like to be questioned about that trip. They say that they were attacked by spirits out in the forest. Headless Indians, ghostly gray-white "goblins" shaped like men, and other monsters harried them constantly and forced them to abandon their voyage. They returned without ever reaching Roanoke Island. No one else has attempted the journey.

THE "CITIE OF RALEGH"

The physical layout of the Croatan colony is much like its original incarnation on Roanoke. The settler's houses are timber framed, and generally contain one or two rooms. The walls are wattle-and-daub (made of woven twigs covered with clay), the roofs are thatched, much like the homes of peasants in England. The dozen or so homes and shops in the village are surrounded by a log stockade some 12 to 14 feet high.

A short distance away from the settlement stockade is the fort. Two large buildings are in the center, one a barracks, and the other a storehouse. The fort walls are earthworks, ranging from 10 to 12 feet high, and at least nine feet thick at the base. The outer faces of the walls slope in at a steep angle, and are covered with sod to prevent erosion. The earthworks are topped by sharpened stakes which point outward, set closely enough together to hinder any attempts to scale the walls. Outside the wall is a ditch, steep-sided, and generally eight feet deep, following the outline of the fort walls.

The overall shape of the fort, if it were seen from above, is cruciform, with each branch of the cross coming to a point at the end. This arrangement of walls allows for good crossing fields of fire, in case of attack. It is impossible to approach a wall or corner without coming under fire from the wall section opposite.

The two points of the fort which overlook the harbor have small bronze cannons mounted in them. These cannons, removed from Grenville's flagship, the *Tiger*, and later carried laboriously from the first colony site on Roanoke Island, represent the colony's only serious defense against Spanish attack.

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE SETTLERS

When Virginia Dare leads the PCs into the "Citie," the colonists will initially be guarded, but friendly. It has been 20 years since they have seen other white men, and many will express disbelief and amazement. In particular, they will be astounded by the player characters' clothing and mannerisms. England certainly has changed in 20 years! The colonists' first questions will concern Sir Walter Raleigh, and his current doings. They will also want to know why they have been abandoned for all these years. Where is the relief ship the group came in? What supplies have they brought? Did they remember the muskets? The powder? The new millstone? In short order, the player characters will be flooded with questions.

If the PCs go along with the colonists' expectations of them, and claim to be from Sir Walter Raleigh, they had better have a source of supplies and gear close to hand. These people have been waiting a long time, and they will not take kindly to being tricked or swindled. If instead the PCs claim to be shipwrecked travelers, or any other reasonably "normal" thing, the colonists will be disappointed that relief is not at hand, but they will be as helpful as possible to the PCs.

Note to the Referee: Keep careful track of what the PCs tell the colonists, and what the colonists are allowed to see of the PCs' unusual clothing and accouterments. Some of this information will come back to haunt the players later.

The PCs would do well to remember that, although colonists may be friendly, they have a nearly medieval mindset. They are easily frightened of the unknown, or of anything that smacks of "witchcraft" or "diabolism." If, at any time, the PCs attempt to explain the true situation to the colonists, they had best take extreme care to couch their explanations in language that the colonists can understand. It would be all too easy for the settlers to perceive the concept of "people from another dimension" as "creatures from the nether regions." They will then act accordingly: Witches are traditionally hanged or burned alive. Supernatural creatures will probably be shot where they stand (and then burned to ashes on a pyre).

LIFE IN THE ISLANDS

The Croatan colony has become self-sufficient by harsh necessity. The colonists produce rough linen and wool garments, but often the men wear doeskin, fashioned in the manner of Indian clothing. They have their own pottery kiln, and brickworks both in the open ground between the stockade wall and the Fort. The settlers have access to native copper deposits, and worked copper implements are their most common metal tools. They have a smithy, but no regular supply of iron except for the sparse bog iron deposits in the area, and do not have the facilities to cast it if they had any quantity. Iron tools and implements, particularly cooking gear, are treated as valuable heirlooms, and are carefully preserved (the blacksmith doubles as coppersmith and spends much of his time repairing broken tools). While the colonists can produce gunpowder, they cannot manufacture muskets, and the five they have are lovingly cared for. What little gunpowder they manufacture is stored inside the fort, and will be used to fire the two small cannons in case of an attack on the settlement. Most hunting is done with Indian-type bows, although the colonists mostly use copper arrowheads instead of chipped stone.

THE COLONISTS

The settlement contains about 130 souls, some of whom are treated in more detail below:

It would be unwise for the PCs to allow the colonists' "doctor" to provide medical care, since, like any knowledgeable man of his times, Doctor Martyn still diagnoses things according to the four humors known to medieval scholars. Contagion and sanitation are equally unknown. On the other hand, John Spendlove, the local barber, is quite adept at sewing up wounds, and many goodwives (a 16th-century term meaning the same thing as "Mrs," and sometimes shortened to "Goody") know some herbal remedies, learned from the Indians.

Griffyn Jones is the colony's spiritual leader. He is a tall man, with a shock of white hair which stands straight up on top of his head. He maintains, as closely as possible, the solemn and sober dress expected of a man of the cloth. Reverend Jones is not an overfriendly man, and will steer a wide berth around the player characters. If the PCs' party includes any women, he will be scandalized and outraged by the immodesty of their modern dress. ("Women in breeches! Who can believe such a thing? It is an abomination...")

Joachim Ganz, a lapidary, acts as the colony's assayer—many of the younger men are, like their fathers before them, searching for gold in their spare time, but so far only a few nuggets of any size have been found. Unfortunately for the gold-panners, there is very little that they can do with their wealth: There is nothing in the colony to spend it on. Ganz is over 60 now, and his apprentice Jack Harvye does most of the actual work. Jack is 19 years old, and has the distinction of being the first male child born in the colony. Since he is Virginia Dare's closest contemporary in age, he is comfortably expectant that she will marry him some day—perhaps soon. Virginia's ideas about this remain her own secret. If any of the PCs become attached to Virginia, or begin to pay her court, Jack Harvye will develop a strong hatred of that character, and will do what he can to thwart the PCs' plans.



An unusual member of the community at the fort is Manteo, a healthy but aging Algonkian Indian. Manteo is the unofficial "ambassador" between the colonists and the local Indians. He was captured by Raleigh as a youth, and taken to England itself, where he lived for several years. He has accepted Christianity and over the years most of the colonist's European ways. The colonists, particularly the Dare family, treat him as a respected elder statesman.

LIVING HISTORY

After the first rush of questions, the PCs are left to themselves, for the most part. They are treated as honored guests, of course, and many individuals may seek them out with additional questions, but they will not (at first) be expected to take part in the daily work of the colony.

The PCs will no doubt start to investigate their situation, and attempt to discover the nature of the Croatan proto-dimension. At this time, the referee can begin to feed the information from the above history lesson to the PCs, in the form of conversations with the settlers.

The PCs may take several days to snoop around the "Citie of Ralegh," the fort, and even the local Indian villages. News of their arrival is all that they hear, and they will soon realize that they have raised the expectations of the colonists.

For the past decade, the colonists have believed themselves to be forgotten, and secretly, each has given up hope of seeing a supply ship from England again. These beliefs were never spoken aloud, of course, but in their hearts, the colonists knew that they had been abandoned. Now, however, the presence of strangers has again kindled hope in their hearts, however irrational that hope might be. The settlers have been reminded that there are other people out in the world, and perhaps someday the lost colony will be found again.

THE RELIEF SHIP ARRIVES

A few days after the PCs' arrival, there is another momentous event. A ship has been sighted on the horizon. It will take the better part of a day for it to arrive, and when it comes at last into the bay, the colony will be excited to a fever pitch. The ship is flying an English flag.

As evening descends, a small boat is lowered, and 10 sailors will row to shore, amid much cheering from the assembled colonists. Leading the shore party is none other than Governor White, fatter and older perhaps, but hale and hearty all the same. He will greet Ananais Dare like a long-lost father, and exclaim over what a beauty Virginia has grown up to be.

Although the colonists do not see anything strange about the shore party, the PCs will quickly perceive certain... peculiarities. The ship's crew and officers are dressed oddly. Elements of modern dress—specifically the PCs' dress—are incorporated into the crew's clothing. If a PC is wearing jeans, then some of the sailors will be wearing blue denim pantaloons. If a PC is wearing a T-shirt with a slogan or insignia, similar things will be embroidered on the doublets of some of the ship's officers. Baseball caps with plumes of ostrich feathers, high-top, lace-up, rubber-soled seaboots, and even oddities like mirrored sunglasses will be visible (Governor White himself is wearing a pair of gold-rimmed Serengetti Vermilions). Weapons will be odd-looking mixes of the PCs' weaponry and those of the 16th century (imagine a matchlock M16, for example). If the PCs' group contains female characters, there will be women among the sailors, dressed almost identically to the female PCs.

SKEPTICISM

The PCs will quickly realize that these "people" are not normal. It may take them a little while longer to realize that Governor White's group is dressed in what the colonists might expect 20 years of European fashion to have produced, given that they believe that what the PCs are wearing is modern English dress. In fact, that is exactly the case: In Croatan, what you expect is what you get.

DARK DREAMS

Night will fall, and Governors White and Dare will retire to the Dare house, to catch up on 20 years of old news. The shore party will be made welcome, and will be as hounded with questions as the PCs were upon their arrival.

Governor Dare graciously introduces White to the PCs, of course, and invites them to be a part of the celebrations. White seems to be a friendly and personable man. He is a bit full of himself, and full of blustery, but there is nothing sinister about him, despite the PCs suspicions that all is not right.

Player paranoia being what it is, the oddity of ship. White's sudden arrival—and his bizarre mode of dress—will stimulate a good deal of fear in the party. Now is the referee's chance to use that fear. In Croatan, for reasons explained below, fear is a dangerous emotion to feel. Fear is partly the expectation that something bad is going to happen—and in Croatan, what you expect is what you get.

If the PCs have been speculating that a particular Darkling force or other may be working behind the scenes in the colony, or if the players fear or dislike a particular Darkling entity, they should face what they expect to face—suddenly, and without warning.

It is up to the referee to create this encounter out of the PCs' reasonable expectations. If the PCs think that dark elves are toying with the colonists, a group of dark elves will ambush the party as they are leaving the Dare house that evening. If instead the PCs have figured out that the entire situation is the work of a daemon they have encountered in the past, send it in. Likewise, if the PCs have expressed the idea that the "Citie of Ralegh" might be an extraterrestrial's idea of a human zoo, let them encounter ETs or evidence thereof. If the PCs have no specific fears, but suspect something, let them find traces of that something (footprints, discarded cigar butts, and so on) to fuel their paranoia.

If there is a Darkling attack, it should take place in a quiet area of the colony, away from the eyes of the settlers and of White's crew. The attack should strike suddenly, and be over just as suddenly. The PCs should not face overwhelming odds, even if they expect to be outgunned. None of the characters should be seriously wounded in this encounter, unless high-tech medical help is available.

In addition, if Jack Harvye has developed a dislike for one of the PCs, he will take this opportunity to hinder his rival. He will not attack the character directly, but he might, for example, shove his rival into the Darkling's line of fire, or make off with his rival's most useful weapon. Jack's goal is to get his rival killed, without the blame attaching to himself in any way.

GOING OUTSIDE

Now that the kid gloves are off, the PCs will certainly want to continue their investigation of the Croatan proto-dimension. They will have plenty of time, as the colonists are all involved in the unloading of White's ship.

White's crew are all friendly to the PCs, and extraordinarily helpful to the colonists. They see nothing strange about either their own style of dress, or that of the PCs. The English they speak is an odd mixture of the stilted 15th-century English used in the settlement, and modern slang. Again, they see nothing unusual about this.

The PCs will have to search elsewhere for their answers. If they leave the island,

they will find that the Croatan proto-dimension is exactly what they expect the historical North American continent in the 16th century to have looked like.

If the PCs travel farther afield than 25 kilometers or so, things will begin to change. The terrain will be less hilly, less natural-seeming. The vegetation will become sparse, and noticeably different from Earth vegetation, even that of centuries ago. Trees will be stubby, their leaves broad, thick, and fleshy. Birds and animals will all but disappear. Those few animals which can still be found will be burrow dwellers, able to hide within their secret lairs.

The PCs will notice, as they travel, that the weather itself seems to fade away. Day and night still exist, but there is little change in temperature between the two, and less change in illumination than one might expect. There are fewer and fewer stars in the sky each night. There is no wind at all, anymore.

Eventually, the dirt itself will begin to alter. It will begin to look gelid and thick, like mud made from soil and glycerin. The ground will begin to feel as if it quivers with every step the PCs take. Animal burrows can still be found, but their openings look less like holes in the ground, and more like... open wounds.

When the PCs examine a burrow, they will find that the badger-like creatures inside are half-formed, as if they are being "born" out of the fleshy earth itself. If the PCs investigate other burrows, they will see a variety of creatures: squirrels, birds, even deer, forming out of the fleshlike soil of Croatan. In one burrow, they will find creatures that look like humans—coppery skin, dark hair, and even the beginning buds of feather and shell jewelry. Algonkian Indians, forming from the fleshlike earth itself.

THE TRUTH REVEALED

The truth is, these creatures are all simulacra—nothing in the entire proto-dimension is real, except the English colonists. Even the Indians are not "real" humans, except for Manteo; they are all parts of the whole. The entire proto-dimension is alive—one single creature, filling the entire volume of Croatan.

If the PCs go far enough, they cannot go any farther—the space within the proto-dimension loops around, and they will find themselves coming back to the colony. It is impossible to travel more than 100 kilometers in any direction.

The living creature that fills the Croatan proto-dimension is highly empathic, and is also a strong receptive telepath. It is not intelligent in any way, nor is it a Dark Minion. It is simply a massive entity which reacts to the empathic emanations of creatures which come into its proto-dimension. It senses what is in their minds, and shapes parts of itself to mimic that mental image.

Twenty years ago, when Quiyouhqwohanock cast the Roanoke colonists into this proto-dimension, they expected to see a forested island, and that is what the proto-dimension's contents became. What form the Croatan-entity had assumed before their arrival can only be guessed at. Perhaps Quiyouhqwohanock or other shamans shaped it to their expectations before the colonists were sent there...

In the succeeding years, the colonists have never really noticed that their lives hold few surprises. Those things that they expect to happen, happen. So long as all the colonists stay together, the Croatan-entity senses only the average of all their individual expectations. In other words, nothing much happens that the community does not

expect. On the rare occasions when individuals have gone beyond the colonized area, they have been turned back by the products of their own imaginative fears. That is what happened to Dare's expedition back to Roanoke, years ago.

So long as the colonists do not all succumb to fear or strange imaginings all at once, the Croatan proto-dimension is relatively safe. Of course, there are certain difficulties: Henry Mylton went out into the forest one day to chop wood. By chance, he severed an artery in his leg with a missed blow of his axe, and bled to death, all alone.

That evening, back in the settlement, Rose Mylton (and everyone else) had every expectation that Henry would be back before nightfall, with his load of wood—and so he was. No one noticed that Henry seemed withdrawn and lacking in creativity after that night—he had never been very creative to begin with. He acts just like everyone expects he should act...

In this way, 17 of the settlers have been replaced by the Croatan-entity. Of the 130 people in the colony only 113 are human. Likewise, Governor White and all the men on his ship are simply created out of the colonist's expectations—expectations that were raised by the PCs' arrival. Bear in mind, the Croatan-entity does not do this out of malice, or any other human emotion. It is simply the way that the creature reacts to empathic signals. The creature cannot voluntarily stop reacting to the empathic vibrations of the life forms sharing its proto-dimension.

GETTING OUT (THE EASY WAY)

In Croatan, the effects of assimilation are not particularly severe—the proto-dimension simply gains the ability to read and anticipate that person's expectations. In some ways, this can be an advantage, if the PCs have figured out the nature of their assimilation, and the nature of Croatan itself.

Assimilated PCs will no longer be able to travel outside the colonized area of Croatan, until they realize the truth about the Croatan-entity. The proto-dimension will be able to read the PCs' expectations of what they will see and hear, and provide it. Unless the PCs expect trouble, or succumb to fear, they will find their journey outside the human-influenced area singularly uneventful. They will encounter more forest, more non-hostile Indian tribes, etc.

Attempting to travel in other ways while attuned can be interesting. It is not actively harmful, but it can have an insidious effect. Eventually, the PCs will tire of Croatan, and decide to leave, though they may prefer to use the term escape. In any case, they will set out, expecting to dimension walk back to Earth. It is a reasonable expectation, and in Croatan, what you expect is what you get.

The trip is easy, but, after all, Croatan is currently very similar to Earth, and so it doesn't have a very high discontinuity. If the PCs do not become suspicious, they will feel right at home on "Earth." It may take days or even weeks for the PCs to discover that they are still in Croatan, and that they are simply creating a new "colonized area" based upon their own expectations of what they will find as they travel around. They may even have other adventures, fighting minions and winning (no one ever expects to lose, after all).

A good touch would be for the referee to "end" the adventure with the PCs "safe at home" and begin another adventure at the next regular gaming session. Let the group get a little bit into the "next adventure" and then spring a little surprise on them.

MEETING VIRGINIA DARE (AGAIN)

If they have been particularly unobservant, the PCs' first clue that something is wrong may be the day that a Croatan colonist shows up on their "Earth" doorstep, frightened and very, very confused.

Virginia Dare followed the PCs when they "left," for whatever reason. Perhaps she is curious as to the actual origin of the PCs (since they are obviously not an advance-group for Governor White's men); perhaps she has become infatuated with one of them; perhaps she has another reason (her motivation is the referee's choice). In any case, Virginia followed them into the woods as they left Croatan. She trailed them, and saw the world change around the PCs, as they stood entranced by their "dimension walk." Frightened by the strange vision, she ran back to the colony.

Even though she was badly frightened by the experience, she remained curious about the PCs and what she had seen. It has taken days, but she has gathered up her courage again, and come into the modern" city to look for her mysterious friends.

Virginia will explain to the PCs that she simply walked through the forest until she came to their city. She experienced nothing that could be described as dimension travel.

Naturally, when the PCs check her story, they will discover that she is right. Now that their skepticism is engaged, they will be able to walk out of their "Earth" and back into the forest outside the Croatan colony.

VIRGINIA DARE



If Virginia Dare has become infatuated with one of the group, and the referee is willing, there is no reason why she should not accompany the group back to the real Earth. She will, of course, have problems adjusting to the new and different worlds she finds there.

At first, it might seem that a 20-year-old woman from the 16th century might have little to contribute to the fight against the Darklings, and could serve no purpose other than comic relief or a romantic plot device. Consider, however, that Virginia has lived her entire life in a primeval wilderness (well, in a place that acted like the colonists expected a primeval wilderness to act), and has acquired skills suitable to her environment. These might include Climbing, Observation, Stalking, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking, perhaps even Archery and Thrown Weapon. Also, Virginia is very intelligent and extremely curious. With the right training, she might turn into a very effective minion hunter (and one of the more unusual NPCs a referee could ask for—consider the reaction when she applies for a driver's license and puts her date of birth as "August 18th, 1587").

PARANOIA STRIKES BACK

Under the circumstances, the PCs will probably have little doubt that they are the subjects of some insidious Darkling experiment. As before, whatever Dark Race they blame for their situation should put in an appearance. After all, the PCs now expect that, with the secret out, the Darklings have no further reason to remain hidden.

The referee should hit the party again, and hit them hard—they expect it, after all. This time, however, the referee should make sure that the Darkling forces do exactly what the PCs expect them to. Every idea that the players have about their enemies' tactics and goals should be played out. If a player expresses an alternative idea, he or she should see

it immediately begin to take place, even if that totally invalidates the Darkling's previous actions and motives.

In short, this encounter is the referee's last chance to point out that the "Darklings" are just part of the nature of Croatan, just extensions of the Croatan-entity, and not real Darklings at all.

And since they are not real, they will not have any real empathic powers, another clue to the true nature of the proto- dimension.

GETTING OUT (FOR REAL)

Once the PCs have discovered the whole truth about Croatan, they will become suspicious of anything that seems too predictable—too much like their reasonable expectations. The referee should allow the players time to "enjoy" the fruits of their recursive paranoia before letting them escape Croatan for real. The ideal outcome of this adventure is to leave the players some faint doubt whether their characters have really escaped, even weeks afterward. If the players remain paranoid about the reality of their surroundings for the next adventuring session or two, the referee can consider the time adventuring in Croatan well spent.

GOING BACK

A proto-dimension which is used for only one adventure seems like a waste of valuable resources. An entire proto-dimension should contain the seeds of several gaming sessions. So, how can the referee induce the PCs to return to Croatan? There is nothing of value there that is trustworthy—the PCs will probably never be able to firmly believe in the actual existence of anything they find in Croatan ever again. The only things that really exist there are the English settlers, a few of their original goods, and the Croatan-entity. There simply is nothing else. None of the plants, animals, birds, or Indians are real—not even the gold is real. It is all just part of the Croatan-entity. So why bother?

One reason to return is the colonists themselves—the "Citie of Ralegh" could be helpful allies of the PCs, in some circumstances. Croatan is one of the few proto-dimensions which can support human life for long periods of time. If the PCs have taken care to stay on friendly terms with the settlement, they will have a safe refuge in times of trouble.

Another point—objects and creatures from proto-dimensions maintain their extra-dimensional nature even in the Earth's dimension, until they are assimilated by Earth's physical laws. If it were possible to bring a piece of the Croatan life form to Earth, it would remain mutable and responsive to the expectations of the creatures around it, at least for a while. Such a thing might be useful to the PCs at some point. Of course, it might also be useful to Dark Minions...

DELTA SEVEN

The proto-dimension known as Delta Seven is a fairly small and innocuous place which has remained untouched by the Darkling blight. This does not mean that it is a safe place for minion hunters to visit, just that the dangers they will face there will be more mundane than those found in other proto-dimensions. Delta Seven has a discontinuity of 1, but it is a hardened proto-dimension, so all attempts to enter it will be one level more difficult than normal. Referees using the flowchart method should have Delta Seven accessible only from Earth. Referees using the limited access method should make Delta Seven accessible only from a single, very small area (preferably near where the PC group spends most of its adventuring time).



Name: Delta Seven
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 1 (Hardened)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

CONDITIONS

Delta Seven is only about 50 kilometers across and has curved edge effects (that is, walking 50 kilometers in any given direction will bring you back to where you started). It has no physics shift from Earth normal. The atmosphere and gravity here are well within human tolerances and while the weather is not particularly pleasant, it is not hazardous either. The sun (or what passes for a sun in this proto-dimension) is almost constantly obscured by clouds. The temperature never gets much above 10 Celsius (50 Fahrenheit), and if it isn't drizzling it has just stopped or is getting ready to do so.

The terrain in Delta Seven is unspoiled wilderness. The high lands are covered with pristine coniferous forests which resemble those of the Pacific northwest. The lowlands are a muddy swamp with occasional islands of waist-high grass and brush.

There are no particularly dangerous life forms indigenous to Delta Seven. The analogs of small mammals, birds, and insects are the only fauna that adventurers will notice. No predator larger than an earth fox (8-10 kilos) has evolved here. The plants there are equally harmless. Of course, the life forms in Delta Seven are entirely unlike those of Earth and will not look quite like anything the PCs have ever seen before. The plant and animal life will seem to be oddly colored and shaped—vaguely familiar-looking, but demonstrably not Earthly in origin.

Nothing in Delta Seven is poisonous, and many animals and plants are edible, but nothing is very palatable. PCs who manage to capture some of the small animals they find will lose their appetite while dressing their prey—they do not smell wholesome. The plants somewhat resemble edible Earthly fare, but are no more appetizing than the animals. Characters who insist on eating materials native to this proto-dimension will be slightly queasy for several hours afterward, but there will be no other ill-effects.

There is, in fact, only one major danger in all of Delta Seven. It is a danger that has faced the human race for centuries before the release of the Dark Ones by the ETs—other human beings.

HISTORY

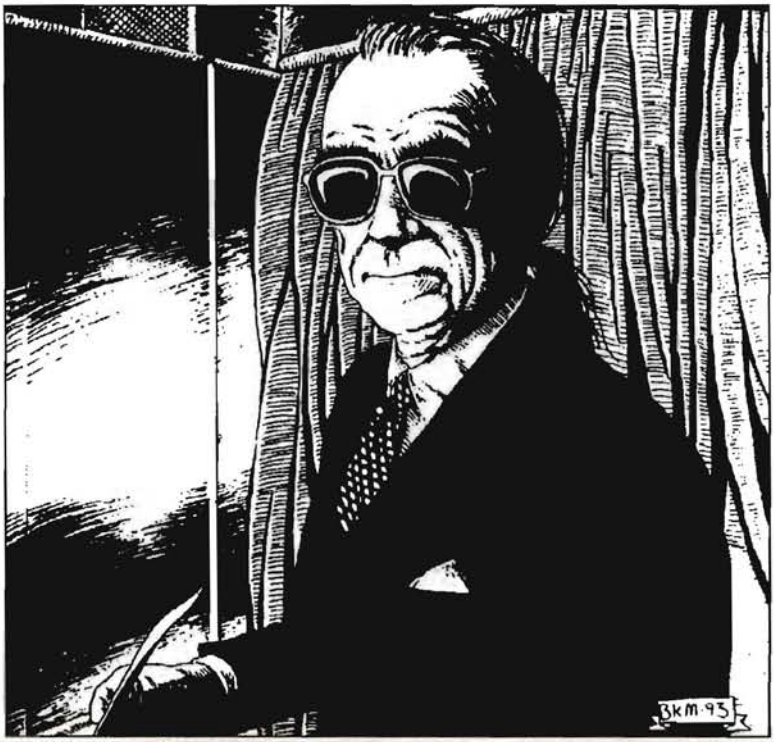
While working to recruit sleeper agents in Europe, a CIA operative named Robert Siebel stumbled upon the encroachments of the Dark Masters. He managed to foil the Darkling plot which he discovered and escaped from the experience with a dose of terror unlike any he had known before, but relatively little physical harm. Assuming his ordeal was over, Siebel informed his superior of what he had discovered. This act near-

ly resulted in Siebel's death. Unbeknownst to Siebel, his control was an "Igor" serving a Dark Lord—Dark Lord who was not amused by Siebel's discovery.

Fortunately for Siebel, his encounter with the Darklings awoke the latent empathic abilities which he possessed and, with the aid of these new neuropathic powers, he managed to kill his control with a trap that the control had laid in hopes of eliminating Siebel himself. In a debriefing, Siebel, now aware of the extent of the Darkling invasion, never mentioned his encounter with the Darklings and, using a story he made up, managed to convince the CIA that his control's death was the work of foreign agents who had penetrated his cover. Eventually Siebel was reassigned to field duty in another part of the world, an event which brought him some time.

He used this time to learn more about the new menace threatening humanity and to develop his empathic powers. After the ordeal with his former control, he was very circumspect about his encounter with the Darklings. While he could never be sure who served the Dark Lords, he knew he must find people who would help with the battle he knew was coming. Using the CIA's techniques for recruiting sleeper agents, Siebel began to slowly, painstakingly build a cadre of dedicated individuals, primarily empaths, that he was sure could be trusted.

Ultimately, Siebel was promoted to an administrative position. This put him in charge of a number of special operations. Siebel always did his duty, but felt torn. He knew that his country—and his world—were in grave danger, but he also knew that the moment he spoke up about it he would either end up in a coffin or a straightjacket. He was never sure who he could trust. His boss? His boss' boss? The Director of Central Intelligence? The President? Anyone?



ECHO WISDOM

Eventually Siebel devised a plan. Since he couldn't be sure who in the system he could trust, he would trust no one. Siebel decided that he would become his own branch of the government, a branch dedicated to stopping the Dark Ones. Siebel began to add additional accounts to his operations, and to divert funds and resources. In an organization which was governed by secrecy, it was easy. Money and material began to flow into Siebel's private project, a project that was, as far as Siebel was concerned, much more important than anything the CIA had ever done before. A UV spotlight here, some ammunition there, a crate of grenades from somewhere else. Siebel soon managed to assemble a team of minion hunters and ensure that they would remain well supplied. He called his strike force Echo Wisdom, the code name of the mission he was on when he first learned of the Dark Ones.

These forces did manage to foil several Darkling plots, but for Siebel it was not enough. He felt that he had fielded a street gang to fight a problem that needed an army to defeat. He decided to build that army—1,000 well trained, well-equipped empathic soldiers that would crush any Darkling activity that they could find.

Siebel did what he could to arrange the recruiting and funding of his army, and he did quite well. Unfortunately, the Dark Ones had their own agents, one of the whom managed to slip into Siebel's organization. In the end, this error cost Siebel and many of his followers their lives. The remaining members of Siebel's army went into hiding. Thanks to Siebel, they had the funding, equipment. and skills that they would need to continue their fight. Unfortunately, they lacked the manpower and, more importantly, a good leader.

Enter Robert Corbin, an ex-Reno detective, missing and presumed dead by the Reno, Nevada police department. Corbin had been recruited by Siebel after Echo Wisdom saved him from an insectoid ET brood chamber. He gathered up every member of Echo Wisdom who had survived the Darkling attack and began to plan the group's recovery.

Corbin proved himself to be an effective leader, and under his command, Echo Wisdom began to rebuild itself. It was decided that building a specialized army to fight the Darklings, as Siebel had attempted, was not a practical idea. To create a large group, recruiting had to be accomplished quickly, which would limit the amount of screening that could be done on each recruit—the flaw in Siebel's plan that ultimately led to his death.

Instead, their focus would turn away from the idea of attacking the Dark Ones as a large, organized force and, instead, act as a clearing house for information and an academy of sorts for minion hunter cadres. Under this plan,. a few of the members of Echo Wisdom would stay with the core group to screen and instruct new recruits, but the majority would use the resources that Siebel had made available to the organization to create new identities for themselves, and then form small groups of minion hunters on their own. There would be ways they could communicate with other graduates of Echo Wisdom, but only in the most dire of circumstances would they ever meet with other graduates or with Corbin himself. Echo Wisdom would serve as a clearing house for information, intelligence gathering, and training.

This plan worked well, but the group still had problems. In the age of satellite surveillance, a group as large as Echo Wisdom cannot hope to hide in a remote area, and fading into the neighborhoods of a big city would not work much better. Corbin reasoned that the group would not be safe anywhere on Earth and decided to move the headquarters of Echo Wisdom into one of the proto-dimensions. Several possible proto-dimensions were scouted and ultimately the one labeled Delta Seven was chosen as the central site.

THE PRESENT

Today there are about 75 active "graduates" of the Echo Wisdom training program, each of which is fighting the Darklings, either as a lone wolf, or with a small group of non-Echo Wisdom-trained compatriots. Thanks to the groundwork laid by Siebel, these graduates have access to a large number of secret data services, high networking ratings in many communities, and (when necessary) access to the Intelligence & Analysis Unit.

Delta Seven itself now serves two main functions:

- First, it serves as a safe haven for high-risk individuals. The most important of these is Dr. Marilyn Donnov.
- Second, it serves as a secure headquarters for Echo Wisdom. Strategic meetings and planning sessions can be held in total safety. Intelligence can be examined, analyzed, and interpreted without having to worry about Darkling spies or saboteurs. Scientific study of interdimensional travel can be undertaken in relative safety.

Corbin has proven himself to be an able administrator. While he lacks the patriotism that drove Siebel, he makes up for it with a grim hatred for the Darklings. His experiences as a detective have left him highly suspicious and a bit cynical. The survivors of the Echo Wisdom massacre in which Siebel was killed consider him to be thorough and cautious, but most of the more recent Echo Wisdom recruits consider him a little paranoid. Anyone whom Corbin distrusted would probably think that the man was more than a little paranoid, perhaps even delusional.

The Darklings remain unaware of the existence of Delta Seven. Likewise, no character who is not a member of the Echo Wisdom force will know about it, and many members of Echo Wisdom have never been there. This is a reflection of how careful the group has been. It is, of course, still possible to arrive in the proto-dimension accidentally as a result of a Dimension Walk Catastrophic Failure.

To keep the secret of Delta Seven, a number of very stringent provisions are strictly enforced. No one may be brought to Delta Seven without a thorough background check and personal approval by Corbin himself. People with Dimension Walk skill are scrutinized especially closely. The only real way to keep Delta Seven a secret is to restrict the number of dimension walkers who know how to get there (a daunting task, but not a completely impossible one). No folder pod or other piece of DarkTek that might get an empathic "fix" on Delta Seven's location can be allowed to leave. No captured Darkling or ET can be allowed in Delta Seven, and any that show up must be "neutralized."

THE CITADEL

The only building in Delta Seven, the Echo Wisdom Citadel, is a large underground structure which was designed to be very difficult to detect from the surface. Although its capacity is somewhat larger, it presently houses 147 people: 46 security specialists (33 Veterans, 13 Elite), 74 administrative staff (12 Elite, 9 Veteran, 20 Experienced and 33 Novice NPCs), and 27 scientific and technical staff (all Novices).

The building was constructed by non-empathic contract workers who were told they were working on a secret government project in British Columbia, and brought to the site by various ruses calculated to conceal their true destination. The building contains living quarters, classrooms, briefing rooms, power generation facilities, workshops, and countless other facilities found at secret bases everywhere. The most important part of the Citadel, however, is the gigantic bank of computers and data processing equipment that forms the central brain of Echo Wisdom's Intelligence & Analysis Unit.

Every snippet of information Echo Wisdom gathers on the Darklings is sent to I&A, which confirms, collates, classifies, cross-compares, and analyzes it all. Headless cattle in Montana? Agriglyphs in Kansas? Strange lights at sea off Miami? What causes these things, and how do they relate to the epidemic of bloodless corpses in Indiana? The I&A Unit can provide answers.

DR. MARILYN DONNOV

Dr. Donnov was brought to Delta Seven immediately after she left the hospital in Texas. The distinguished-looking woman who visited her there was an agent of Echo Wisdom, sent to convince the doctor of the grave danger she was in.

This woman managed to convince Dr. Donnov that her only hope for survival was to allow Echo Wisdom to hide her, and Dr. Donnov agreed. A CIA-trained operative took her place and laid a false trail to Arizona, where one of the Echo Wisdom-led anti-Darkling groups stands ready to deal with any Dark Minion seeking the doctor.

From Delta Seven, Dr. Marilyn Donnov now heads a small research team exploring the details of trans-dimensional physics. The team conducts numerous experiments, but always under the strictest security, and always in proto-dimensions other than Delta Seven (Dr. Donnov knows only too well what can happen when something goes wrong). The team is aware of the work being done in this field by Drs. Tover and Sonoda, but their own conclusions are kept secret.

VISITING DELTA SEVEN

If a group of PCs enters Delta Seven, the personnel at the Citadel will be aware of the intrusion almost immediately—virtually all of the proto-dimension is blanketed by a state-of-the-art electronic surveillance network ("liberated" from a Tojicorp facility in Europe). A reconnaissance group will be sent out from the Citadel to scout the intruders. If necessary, reinforcements will be dispatched. In either case, the party will move as quickly as possible to capture every intruder. The members of the recon group and any reinforcements are equipped with chameleon suits, optilinks, stun grenades, tear gas grenades, and tranq guns and autoinjectors (as well as conventional firearms). They will attack in a very organized and professional manner, attempting to pick off the rearmost members of the group before the forward members are even aware that they are under attack.

Once captured, the prisoners will be sedated and taken as quickly as possible to another proto-dimension controlled by Echo Wisdom for questioning. All weapons and any DarkTek in the group's possession will be confiscated. If the group has a folder pod, it will be destroyed with very large demolition charges (after the group has been taken away). The purpose will be to prevent anyone (or anything) from getting a good fix on Delta Seven.

Once the PCs have revived, they will be intensively questioned about their background and their reasons for being where they are. Depending upon the appearance of the PCs and their weapons and equipment, the questioning may be low-key and friendly, or intensive and hostile depending upon how much of a threat the interrogation team believes the PCs represent. The presence of ET, rogue android or cyborg escapee characters will be taken as strong evidence that the PCs are nothing more than a party of Igors. As far as the Echo Wisdom forces are concerned, the PCs are guilty until proven innocent and have no rights—of course, given the decrepit state of the justice system back on Earth, that may not seem so out of the ordinary to them. Echo Wisdom's interrogators are not above using drugs, or even torture if they think that the PCs are lying to them or are holding out. In most cases, what will happen is that the PCs will be held captive until a thorough background check can be done on them; then, depending on what course of action seems best to Corbin, the party will either be executed, debriefed (have their memories of the events altered with a combination of drugs and psionic projections) and released, or be recruited for membership in Echo Wisdom if their record is good. Remember that Corbin has access to many information networks, and if the group has been active as minion hunters, he will probably be able to find it out. All he asks in exchange for access to Echo Wisdom's network is that the group keep his secret—the location of Delta Seven.

ECHO WISDOM

Goals: Trainers and Information Brokers
Methods: Shadow
Empathic Philosophy: Psionic
Organization: Dictatorial
Assets: Superior
Size: 200+ members
Level of Activity: High

Relations with ETs: The members of Echo Wisdom understand exactly what has happened to the ETs and see them as victims. However, they do not see that as a good reason to take unnecessary chances. While individual members might help renegade ETs, the location of Delta Seven will never be revealed to one, nor will any be taken there.

Relations with Other Cells: Echo Wisdom cells do not always realize they are Echo Wisdom cells—many times only one or two key members of a cell will be Echo Wisdom-trained. Cell with a good record will be given information, but Siebel's original "trust no one" principle operates here as well.

Headquarters: Delta Seven proto-dimension.

GENERATING ECHO WISDOM CHARACTERS

Referees may decide to allow players to create characters who are graduates of the Echo Wisdom training academy. They should be very cautious about doing this, however. The organization is very careful to not choose anyone who cannot be trusted to act with discretion and would not be above "eliminating" graduates who have gone rogue. Echo Wisdom characters may not identify themselves as such to anyone other than another member of Echo Wisdom. Depending on the referee and the individual players, the referee might wish to take the individual player aside and generate the character in private.

To get into the Echo Wisdom program, the PC must pass the entry requirements *and* roll a foreign contact while in one of the following careers (this represents being contacted by Echo Wisdom): National Military Academy, Astronaut, Federal Law Enforcement, Government Agent, Psychic Test Subject, State/Local Law Enforcement, Underground Empath, or Empathic Study (Psionic). Characters who have spent one or more terms as a Criminal, Cyborg Escapee, Gambler, Prisoner, Rogue Android and/or any of the Renegade ET careers will not be allowed in the organization. After graduating from Echo Wisdom, the Cyborg Escapee career is no longer an option—Echo Wisdom graduates are expected to kill themselves before allowing themselves to be captured by the Dark Ones.

Note that being an Echo Wisdom graduate does not mean that the character knows the location of Delta Seven (indeed, once they develop Dimension Walk skill, it is very unlikely they will ever be taken there).

Entry: Intelligence 5+, Empathy 2+.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills during the first term with Echo Wisdom: Small Arms 2, Demolitions 1, Observation 1, Stealth 2, Psionic Telepathy 1.

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of any seven levels from any one or a combination of the following: Any psionic skill, Small Arms, Demolitions, Disguise, Interrogation, Medical, Observation, Stealth, Tracking, Willpower.

Contacts: Graduates get no contacts during their terms with Echo Wisdom. However they may add 2 to any networking die roll they make.

Special: Echo Wisdom recruits are not allowed any secondary activities. Graduates of Echo Wisdom do not get any starting money but can occasionally raise large sums of cash quickly. This ability will disappear if it is abused.

GEHENNA: THE DOMAIN OF FLAME

Gehenna is the proto-dimensional reflection of fire. In its confines eternal fires rage. Rivers of lava, fountains of flame, and deserts of embers are a regular natural phenomenon here. When the local equivalent to weather gets bad, firestorms (hot enough in their cores to fuse glass) whip across the land. Fire in Gehenna is either unhindered by a need for fuel or else it burns the atmosphere itself. While this would seem to indicate that there is some sort of physics shift operating in Gehenna, it does not seem to effect Earthly flames. A match lit in Gehenna flares up and eventually burns out. Whatever physics shift takes place in Gehenna, it does not seem to be fatal—assimilated humans take no damage (from the physics shift, anyway).

Gehenna is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2. Of the proto-dimensions a PC might want to travel to, Gehenna is certainly the least hospitable. While not as deadly as the fragmentary proto-dimensions of raw elemental fire which sorcerers tap into to perform their various empathic feats, survival for any length of time in the furnaces of Gehenna is virtually impossible.



Name: Gehenna
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

The first thing that any PC in Gehenna will notice is the oppressive heat. The coolest it gets anywhere in Gehenna is 150° Fahrenheit (66° Celsius), a little cooler than in an Earthly sauna. In most regions, however, the temperature is higher. Characters who do not take precautions to protect themselves from the heat will, after 15 minutes in Gehenna, begin to suffer its effects. Every 15 minutes, characters must pass a Difficult: Constitution task. If they succeed, they take 1D6 points of damage to the chest and their Constitution is temporarily reduced by 1 point. If they fail, they, they will collapse and begin to lose 1 point of Constitution per minute until they die or something is done to remove them from the heat. Lost Constitution is recovered at a rate of 1 point per hour whenever character is in a cool place. Having a steady supply of water (at least one liter for every half hour) will make the Constitution test one level easier. Some sort of artificial environment will eliminate the effects of the heat, but there are limitations to the utility of such techniques.

Next, the smell of the place will assault their senses. While the atmosphere in Gehenna is oxygen rich (a fact which seems to help support the eternal fires here), It is not, by any means, pleasant. Instead, it is filled with smoke, bits of ash, and the stench of sulfur dioxide. This will cause the characters eyes to sting and water, making their vision a little blurry. Wearing some sort of eye protection to keep the smoke out will reduce the effect, but after the characters start to sweat—and they will sweat in Gehenna—they will begin to have trouble with condensation on the lenses. Because of this, any character who is not in a full environment suit will suffer some vision penalties. Any task which requires clear vision, such as firing a weapon at a distant target or reading a small display on an instrument, will either be one level more difficult or, in the case of tasks which are not hit/miss, will take twice as long as normal.

After the heat and the smoke, other aspects of Gehenna will become apparent. The sky is overcast and dark and will remind the characters of Earthly skies just prior to a terrible storm.

The difference is that while stormy skies on Earth are a deep blue, these skies are an oppressive gray without a hint of any other color. If there is a sun shining on the other side of that blanket of smoke and haze, it cannot be seen from the ground.

The ground doesn't look any more pleasant than the sky. It appears as an endless plain of dark colored, jagged rocks, broken up by flows of lava and walls of flame. The ground is made of ash and cinders mixed with bits of shattered pumice, too large to be thought of as sand, too small to be called stones. This material is insidious and pervasive. It will cause mechanical devices exposed to it (especially those with lots of moving parts) to eventually malfunction or break down. Vehicles with rubber tires will not get very far in it, and characters who are not wearing some sort of high-topped boot or shoe will find the stuff getting into their footwear with annoying regularity. Outcroppings of cracked and jagged granite regularly break through this charred terrain and pose an additional hazard to vehicular travel.

TERRAIN AND OBSTACLES

In addition to the gritty plains of ash and cinder, there are other items of terrain regularly found in Gehenna.

Rivers: Every so often the fields of Gehenna are split by rivers of lava. Sometimes these are wide and lazy, other times they are fairly narrow and fast-moving. In either case, these rivers are very hot, and any unprotected characters near them will take damage. Characters standing within 10 meters of the banks of these rivers will take damage as if they were within the primary burst radius of a WP explosion, and should refer to the rule on WP fragments in the *Player's Handbook*.

It is virtually impossible to cross these rivers without some sort of special preparation. Steel will melt after a minute or two in contact with the lava, and the skirts of a hovercraft will be destroyed by the heat after a short time. Falling into such a river would be certain death. Any character who falls into a river of lava should take 5D6 points of damage every second to every body part. Normal armor will not prevent this effect, although sealed suits will protect the user for 1 D6/2 seconds before being destroyed.

Going around a river of lava is not impossible. They usually spew out of the ground at a fiery spring and either re-enter the terrain or fade to a trickle after a few kilometers.

Fountains: Another common feature found in Gehenna are geysers or fountains of fire. These blazes are usually small (a meter or so in diameter) gouts of flame that burst out of the ground, bum intensely for a few minutes, and then fade out almost as quickly as they appear.

The fountains are not targeted in any way, but are instead a completely natural phenomenon. Still, there is a one in six chance per hour that a group of PCs will have a fountain of fire erupt near them. If this occurs, referees should pick a point near the center of the party, roll 1D10 to determine the distance from that point that the fountain will erupt from, and then roll a second D10 to determine the direction. Being caught in the fountain is equivalent to being covered by burning gasoline, and being within a meter of one does 1D6 points of damage per five seconds.

Even if the initial die roll indicates that no fountain of fire appears near the characters, referees should periodically inform the players that they can see a fountain erupt

nearby.

Referees should use their imaginations to add other terrain features representative of the extreme heat (such as pools of molten metal or steaming cracks in the ground) to any description of Gehenna.

Wall of Flame: These conflagrations are the tracks left behind by the hellfires which wander throughout the proto-dimension. Crossing the walls is not too difficult. They are usually two meters wide, although there is some variation in this figure. Crossing through a wall of fire does the same type of damage as being in a burning building or grass fire. The walls seem to burn out after a while and will be completely gone after 2D10 minutes, so PCs who are not in a hurry can wait them out.



Besides the danger of the flames, there are two other hazards involved with a wall of fire. First, it is difficult to see through one. A careless character could walk straight off of a cliff or into a river of lava. Attempts to peer through a wall of fire require a Formidable: Observation roll. If the character is passing through the wall, there is less flame that he or she must look through and the task becomes Difficult unless the character is moving at top speed, in which case it is still Formidable.

The second danger is that at one end of a wall of flame, there is a hellfire...

LIFE IN GEHENNA

Periodically there are small tufts of plant life growing out of the ground. The plants do not possess leaves as such and are of an ashen gray color. The wood from these plants is exceedingly strong, so harvesting a piece for experimentation is a little difficult. The wood will not burn independently, but in the flame of a cutting torch it will be reduced to ash. How these plants survive in Gehenna (indeed, how any life survives in Gehenna) is a mystery.

Gehenna is home to the creatures known as hellfires. Whether the crea-

tures originated here or were put there by one of the Dark Lords is unknown. Perhaps Gehenna was once a green and vibrant world before they made it the scorched and blasted inferno that it is today.

Hellfires: Unlike hellfires encountered on Earth, the hellfires found in Gehenna do not have to worry about an immediate demise. Fire can burn on forever in this strange proto-dimension. This makes fighting a hellfire even more unpleasant than on Earth for two reasons:

First, firefighting equipment only does half the damage in Gehenna that it would do to them on Earth.

Second, since hellfires do not have to concern themselves with finding additional fuel to sustain their existence, they can afford to be much more cavalier in their cat-and-mouse games with their victims. If a hellfire is reasonably sure that the characters it is fighting cannot seriously harm it, it will never quite move in for the kill, but rather chase the characters.

The only effective weapons against the hellfires in Gehenna are the empathic abilities described in chapter 3 - *Dark Races*, the sorcerous Change Environment (Special) ability (which does damage to the hellfires in the same way it does other targets), and the psionic power of Cryokinesis. Of these methods of attack, Cryokinesis is certainly the most effective. Basic Success causes the hellfire considerable pain and will repel it. Stage Two success will do 1D6 points of damage. Stage Three will do 2D6. Stage Four will do 4D6. Stage Five does 8D6, and Stage Six will kill the creature instantaneously.

Change Environment (Special) damages the hellfire by hurling a blast of extreme cold (instead of fire or lightning). Like Cryokinesis, Basic Success causes the hellfire considerable pain and will repel it; Stage Two does 1D6, and so on.

Because of the danger that Cyrokinesis and Change Environment (Special) spells pose to them, hellfires will always do their best to kill any character who exhibits either ability.

Obsidian People: Besides the hellfires, there is another race of creatures who live in Gehenna. They appear as completely hairless, obsidian black humanoids. They are usually dressed in simple clothing which looks as if it were made from some sort of metallic fiber. Their statistics are similar to those of the dark elves, but instead of Dimension Walk skill, they possess the Pyrokinesis skill. These humanoids do not seem to be affected by the intense heat of Gehenna at all, and will not be injured by such weapons as flamethrowers or thermite grenades.

Little is known about these creatures, as they will seek to avoid encounters with the PCs. If the PCs force the issue, they will attack. In combat they will either use Pyrokinesis or fight with jagged knives and a weapon which resembles the DarkTek Bolter. If characters get a chance to inspect this weapon closely, it will look more like a weapon of human design that has become half-melted than a piece of semi-organic DarkTek. It is an Average: Intelligence task for human PCs to fire this weapon, but it is impossible for humans to reload it once its five-round magazine is empty. The Obsidian people certainly know how to reload it, but they aren't telling.

It is virtually impossible to get information from the Obsidian people. They seem to prefer suicide to surrender and will flee if they feel outnumbered. Because of this, it is unknown whether they are masters, servants, allies, or enemies of the hellfires.



OBSIDIAN PEOPLE

Strength: 6
Constitution: 4
Intelligence: 5
Education: 4
Charisma: 4
Initiative: 4
Move: 3/10/20/35
Skill/Dam.: 7/4
 # Appear: 2D6
Special: Pyrokinesis

EQUIPMENT

Equipment designed to function in normal Earthly environments will not last long in Gehenna. Electronics and internal combustion engines and other devices (such as the ice box) which can be affected by temperature will overheat and cease to operate after 1D6 hours unless they have been specially modified (a Difficult task versus Mechanic, Electronics, or whatever the referee thinks relevant depending upon the equipment involved).

In addition to this, the all-pervasive grit and ash that makes up the ground is highly abrasive and will get into any device that isn't somehow shielded. The effects of this are variable, but the more precise a piece of equipment is and the more exposed its moving parts, the quicker it will break down. An internal combustion engine will have its air filter clogged in about an hour, but will only last about 10 minutes if it is operated without an air filter. Referees may wish to implement a jamming roll each time an automatic or semiautomatic is fired to represent this grit clogging the action. Referees should not be overly harsh with this effect, but should make sure that characters remain aware



of the problem.

Name: Gothic
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2 (Sticky)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

GOTHIC

Gothic is a proto-dimensional reflection of the ideal of a castle from a Gothic romance novel, hence the nickname. It is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2, although it is important to note that it is a more difficult task to leave Gothic than to enter it (see "The Way Out," below). At first, characters who come to Gothic might consider it to be a haven, or even a potential base. Gradually, however, their opinions will change.

The characters' first view of Gothic will be deceptively placid. So much so that it might be in the referee's interest to emphasize the abundant luxuries there in order to make the PCs' discovery of the flaw in Gothic's storybook atmosphere seem all the worse.

When the PCs arrive in Gothic, they will appear in a large feast hall, something right out of a movie or a novel by Sir Walter Scott. Enormous tables are loaded with food of every description—great platters of roasts, steaks, chops, cutlets, serving trays heaped with roast chickens, ducks, and geese, bowls of vegetables (cooked and raw), huge tureens of soups, stews, gravies, platters piled high with bread of every description, pots of butter, jam, jelly, and marmalade in a hundred colors and flavors, fruit pies, meat pies, pastries, ice cream (perpetually cold, of course), complex confections made out of marzipan; you name it, it's there on the table, looking (and smelling) as appetizing as imaginable.

There are places set, along each side of the tables, and the dining hall could easily hold 100 revelers or more. Wine has been poured, portions of food served, and a fire crackles merrily in a fireplace big enough to roast an ox. The room is brightly lit by dozens of thick white-wax candles in candelabra on the tables and in a huge brass chandelier overhead. Everything seems in readiness for a feast, but there is not a soul about.

If the PCs examine the place settings more closely, they will discover two interesting facts: First, some of the plates have been used; there are half-eaten servings of meat and crusts of bread, and the occasional stained napkin. Second, the food is still warm. Obviously, wherever the diners went, they could not have left very long ago. In actuality, there are no other living things here, nor have there ever been. There is only the giant castle, the uninhabited rooms, and the empty suits of armor which stand in niches along the walls.

EXPLORATIONS

The architecture is what one would expect from a medieval castle found on Earth (again, as imagined by movies and novels)—pointed archways, heavy wooden doors,

and thick, iron-bound shutters over the high, narrow windows. Swords, shields, and heraldic banners decorate the walls of the feast hall, and two suits of ornate plate armor repose in small alcoves on either side of the enormous fireplace, one holding a seven foot-long halberd, the other holding a huge two-handed axe.

If the PCs open the main doors, they will see a torch-lit hallway that extends for hundreds of yards, lined with more suits of armor, each in a narrow niche in the granite block walls. At the far end of the corridor is a broad, circular room, hung with tapestries, weapons, and the heads of stags and boar. A vast, dark staircase spirals up from this room, and further heavy doors open onto other shadowy rooms of the castle. Sconces every few meters along the walls hold torches that provide illumination instead of candles.

The PCs can explore in this manner for a while, before discovering the most interesting thing about this castle: It has no exits. Every single door the characters find leads into another room or a corridor. If the PCs open one of the shuttered windows, it will not open onto the outside, but only into another room. The entire proto-dimension is castle; there is no "outside" there.

The rooms and hallways of Gothic extend (seemingly) forever in every direction. In fact, the very space of the proto-dimension is coiled in upon itself. Rooms can and do "overlap," and if an attempt is made to map the castle in the normal three-dimensional fashion, however, it will become very obvious to the mapper that something is terribly wrong. Feast halls, throne rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, studies, trophy rooms, dungeon cells, secret passages—each chamber and hallway in Gothic is, in actuality, a separate "thread" of real three-dimensional space "balled up" in a multidimensional matrix. In a few places, the closure is frighteningly close: It is possible to climb out a window on one side of a room, only to be found climbing in through a window on the opposite side of the same room.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

During the party's stay in Gothic, at 15-minute intervals, a bell will clang with a deep resonating tone, as if a nearby clock tower were striking the quarter-hour (think of Big Ben). No matter where the PCs go, or how diligently they search, they will never be able to find the clock. The chime is a natural effect of Gothic, and looking for it will be about as profitable as looking for the mechanism that makes the sun rise in the east.

Every hour, on the hour, the disembodied clock will strike 12 (no matter what time it really is). As the twelfth chime sounds, the suits of armor which line the walls will come to life.

Slowly and haltingly, the suits of armor will creak and clank to life, like sleepers awakening from a deep slumber. Suits will step forward, and empty helms will turn slowly, scanning the passageways and rooms with unfathomable senses. Gradually, they will determine that something is not right. There are intruders here. Intruders which must be destroyed...

The armors will move randomly at first, but after a few minutes, the ones nearest the PCs will have located them. The armors are inimical to any intruder and will try to destroy anything which is not native to Gothic—a category which the PCs neatly fit into. Once a few suits have engaged the adventurers in combat, others will be drawn by the commotion. The armors are slow, but they are very strong. They will not seem very bright individually, nor will they seem well organized.

The armor will stay active for 15 minutes, until the bell rings out the first quarter

past the hour. At this time, the armors will, all at the same moment, break off their attack and docilely fall back a few yards, at which point they will shimmer and vanish. If the PCs are near an alcove, it will be filled before their eyes by a materializing suit of armor, now immobile again.

Damaged or "wounded" armors, and pieces lying on the floor will vanish, and reassemble themselves in the nearest alcove.

A MAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE

Making even a temporary base in this proto-dimension is problematical at best. Food and drink are easily available, and shelter isn't a consideration in Gothic—there is no weather to need shelter from. The real problem is that the animate armors will seek to kill all outsiders for 15 minutes out of every hour. This will certainly interrupt any plans the PCs may have concerning the R&R potential of Gothic.

Attempts to disable the suits of armor will work; but only for a limited time. Bolting the armor to the stone walls of Gothic will hold them still, but after a few minutes, they will begin to use their swords, halberds, and axes to cut themselves free. This process may take two or even three activation periods, but the armors are relentless, and they have all the time in the world. Temporary protection can be had by bracing the feast hall tables across doorways in a dead-end room. The oak planks are heavy and hard, and it will certainly take more than 15 minutes for an armor to chop through. However, tables do not heal, and the next time the armors come, the PCs had better have another plan ready.



Even PCs who are prepared for what awaits them in Gothic will eventually run into trouble. An inch-thick steel plate will stop the armors for hundreds of activation periods, but the armors do not get frustrated, just more and more cunning. Given time, they will think of a new way to get to the PCs—sliding down the chimneys, climbing up the shaft within a garderobe, even using battering rams to break down the walls between adjacent rooms. They are without feeling, without any sense of self-preservation, and they will never stop the continuous cycle of attack/dormancy.

THE DARK SECRET

The suits of armor are possessed by creatures which are very much like the entropic gremlins (see Chapter 3 - *Dark Races*), although there are several differences between the two. While entropic gremlins seek to feed and usually only attack if they or their continued food source is threatened, the armors automatically attack to kill no matter what the PCs have done. Likewise, the periods of dormancy, the fact that they will only possess the suits of armor, and that these suits never seem to be damaged by the gremlins' habitation are all at odds with the entropic gremlins' usual behavior. If taken to another proto- dimension, these factors evaporate and the armors will start to behave as Earthly suits of armor which have been possessed by entropic gremlins. Soon there will be nothing left of them but rust and their inhabitants will have found new, albeit temporary, homes.

This implies that the armors are not a different type of beastie from the entropic gremlins, but rather that the suits are possessed by entropic gremlins which are, somehow, affected by some sort of physics shift. The exact nature of this shift is unknown, though, and it does not seem to effect humans, or anything else which is not native to Gothic. Apparently the gremlins never ruin the armor for the same reason that the food on the tables never spoils, or even gets cold. Entropy is flexible, flowing first one way, and then another for the inhabitants of this proto-dimension. Like the feast tables for humans in Gothic, the suits of armor provide an inexhaustible banquet for the entropic gremlins.

The reasons for the dematerialization/rematerialization, and the 15-minute/45-minute cycle remain a mystery, but since neither occurs when an armor is removed from Gothic, it is clear that both are linked to Gothic in some way.

ARMORS

Strength: 15
Constitution: 10
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 6
Education: 3
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 5
Initiative: 2
Move: 6/6
 # Appear: 1D6**
Hits: 15/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6+STR (halberd, sword, or two-handed axe)

* Animate armors have an armor value of 1 to all hit locations.

** Within 100 meters of any point in Gothic, there will only be 1D6 of the niches which house the suits of armors during their rest phase, many more of them will be seeking out any invading life forms in Gothic while they are active.

THE WAY OUT

If the PCs arrived by folder pod, they are in trouble. Folder pods, as well as any other semi-organic DarkTek, will eventually be recognized as a living creature by the armors, and will be attacked by them after an activation period or two has passed. Although folder pods have some combat ability, they will be no match for a concentrated attack by a group of armors. If the folder pod is destroyed, the PCs may have no method of escape left to them. If the PCs are traveling empathically, they will not have to worry about their mode of transport being killed by the armors—well, at least not as much...

In either case, if a group of PCs actually becomes trapped in Gothic, only a miracle will save them. Perhaps Darklings come to Gothic occasionally to harvest entropic gremlins. Maybe a group of dark elves come here to steal the beautiful armor, furniture or artworks to decorate their own decadent citadels. Alternatively, another group of minion hunters might arrive just in time, and rescue the PCs. Conversely, the second group of minion hunters might just as easily be rescued by the PCs if they are unaware of the unique properties of Gothic.

Escape from Gothic is more difficult than entering the proto- dimension. This is because Gothic is what some dimension walkers call a "sticky" proto-dimension. Entering it is only as difficult as entering a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2, but leaving it is a much harder task. It is always one level more difficult for humans to leave Gothic than the Dimension Walk Difficulty Table indicates.

For example, if Cassandra wanted to travel from Gothic to Earth, which would normally be a Difficult: Dimension Walk task, she would find it a Formidable task instead. Entering Gothic from Earth would still be an Impossible task.

Once the PCs have been to Gothic, they will suffer a few lingering effects. Any character who has been to Gothic will be subject to nightmares involving pursuit for a number of days equal to 1D10 minus the character's Willpower. Characters with the Dimension Walk skill who fail an Average test of Empathy will be drawn back to Gothic by these dreams some time during this period of nightmares.

ADVENTURES USING GOTHIC

In terms of its purpose in a campaign setting, Gothic is a trap waiting to be sprung. It is an ideal "encounter" proto-dimension, for those times when a PC wants to dimension walk and the referee has no particular plans for that activity, or in those cases where a Catastrophic Failure with dimension walk has sent the PCs somewhere other than to their target dimension. A visit with the animate armors will convince neophyte PCs that interdimensional travel should not be undertaken lightly.

Having once escaped from the trap, what could induce PCs to return to it? The reasons against using Gothic as a sanctuary or base should be readily apparent. The tangled nature of three-dimensional space in Gothic is interesting, but it is hardly useful to minion hunters. Gothic has little to offer, apart from an unending supply of food, in the way of material resources, unless the PCs can find a way to train entropic gremlins. The furniture, wall-hangings, curtains, candlesticks, and the countless other accouterments of Gothic are real, and will continue to exist if removed, but the PC will not be able to make much money selling them: While in Gothic they appear luxurious and finely crafted, they will turn cheap and shoddy if transported elsewhere. Gold candlesticks will turn out to be brass-plated tin, swords and battle-axes will turn out to be pot-metal, and the fine furniture, nothing but cheap veneer and fiber-board. The food will turn into edible

(and nourishing), but appallingly unappetizing fare.

Gothic will most likely make repeat appearances in a campaign in one of two ways—as a prison, or as a refuge. Just because the PCs will not return to Gothic on their own does not mean that they will never wind up there again. Darklings with the ability to dimension walk might decide to strand the PCs in Gothic, counting on the armors to eliminate them as a threat.

Although the PCs will not consider Gothic to be any sort of refuge, a Dark Minion might. Any Darkling capable of resisting the animate armors might decide to set up shop in Gothic, finding it an ideal place to hide from prying humans. A Darkling who could control and direct the armors might find Gothic to be the perfect lair from which to launch its evil machinations. Safe in the labyrinth of this twisted proto-dimension, isolated by the armors from any organic intruders, it could direct an endless supply of entropic gremlins toward Earth, to cause havoc.

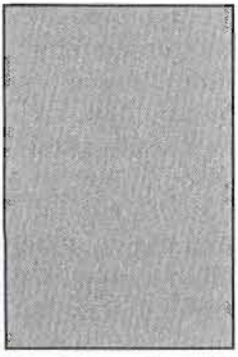
If the PCs have had previous encounters with Gothic and hear of an upsurge in the entropic gremlin population, they will probably have a suspicion of where the things are coming from, and know that only they, with their knowledge and experience, have a chance of stopping the spreading evil.

GRAY: A LAND OF SHADOWS

The instant the PCs arrive in Gray, they will notice the most significant difference between the proto-dimension and Earth-everything here is a shade of the same cold, flat gray. A bright gray sun shines the gray sky. Gray trees grow in a gray park. A gray dog barks while gray children play catch with a gray ball in a field of gray grass. A gray ice cream man hawks his gray wares.

The effect is not just a surface condition. A book found in Gray will hold page after page of indecipherable gray printing barely visible on the gray paper pages within its gray cover. A gray fried egg has two distinctly separate parts, just like an Earthly fried egg, but both of them are gray. Inhabitants of Gray are identical to human beings in every aspect except they are entirely gray-their skin, their hair, their eyes. If they are injured, they will bleed gray blood.

After the initial shock, the PCs will discover other anomalies. The gray world is silent. Not the silence of a peaceful woods or serene mountain top, but complete and absolute silence. The only noise the PCs will hear in gray is the noise they themselves make. The characters will notice that their sense of smell still works properly and Gray garbage will smell just as rank as the garbage of Earth. The sense of taste would also work here, were it not for another feature of Gray.



Name: Gray
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 1
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

STRANGERS IN A VERY STRANGE LAND

While the PCs will see the locals of Gray as animated gray forms, none of them will seem to notice the PCs, no matter what they do to attract attention to themselves. Speaking to one of the greys or waving a hand right in front of their face will elicit no effect. The PCs aren't merely being ignored—the grays simply cannot see them.

Insubstantiality: Trying to gently tap one of the gray people on the back will reveal that the effect goes beyond effects of vision. Any PCs who try will find their hand moving effortlessly though the Gray human's body. There will be no apparent ill effect caused by this action, either for the PC or for the Gray human. In fact, they will find it difficult to touch anything. If they bend down to pick a gray rock off the ground, it slips through their fingers, or more accurately, their fingers slip through it. Like a sorcerer who is using the Phase skill, a PC in Gray may walk through walls but is barred by stairs and elevators. Presumably, the ground in Gray supports them for the same reason that phasing sorcerers do not sink into the Earth, but no one can say for sure. In any case, PCs on Gray will be frustrated at their inability to walk anywhere but the first floor. In a Gray city, they will find themselves up to their ankles in sidewalk, and when they walk through a wall to enter a building, they will find themselves up to their knees in the building's foundation (assuming the building doesn't have a basement).



If characters do a little experimentation, they will notice an odd effect of their insubstantiality. While they can pass their hand through a solid object, like a brick wall, they will notice a slight sensation of drag, as if moving it through liquid mud. If they swing their arm at the tree as fast as they can, it will be almost like punching the real thing. A little experimentation (a Difficult: Observation test if none of the players is picking up on the phenomenon) reveals that the more force in a movement, the more substantial the gray object it connects with feels. To a crawling character, a gray brick wall is not an obstacle. To a walking character, it will feel like walking through mud, and perceptibly slow the char-

acter's movement. To a running character, it will hit hard enough to cause bruises. By running in place, a character can stay on top of dense substances like concrete, but this can be very tiring after a while. Standing still will result in the character sinking to ground level. This can be a shock in buildings with a basement—the character will slip through the floor, then fall normally to the ground, hitting hard enough to do damage.

What this ultimately means is that it is impossible to be subtle in Gray. Opening a book which is laying on a table is impossible, but knocking it to the floor can easily be done. Do anything short of assaulting one of Gray's inhabitants and he is as insubstantial as a phantom. A punch or kick will hit the Gray person with the force of a solid blow. Try to leave an Earthly coin on a Gray table and it falls to the floor (actually, through the floor to the ground). Hurling an Earthly coin at a table with all your might will cause it to bounce off, and firing a .45 caliber slug at the table will leave a small hole with bits of gray sawdust on the floor.

The Gray inhabitants experience the same effects when dealing with creatures from dimensions other than Gray. A child of Gray could walk right through a PC and never notice the collision. A Gray person driving a car at interstate speeds will notice the collision, probably even stop and get out of the car to look around, but will never notice the crumpled form of the adventurer laying on the ground.

Because of this, damage from fire combat and falls remains unchanged. Melee combat damage is reduced by half (round fractions down).

Empathy in Gray: Most empathic skills function perfectly well in Gray, but certain ones will not function at all, or only with a limited success if they are targeted at something which is native to Gray. Empathic skills which directly effect a material object (such as Pyrokinesis or Telekinesis) will work, but at two levels below whatever stage of success the referee rolled for the attempt. If a Basic Success or Stage Two was rolled, there is no effect to the target at all. Empathic tasks which involve directly affecting the mind of one of Gray's inhabitants will automatically fail. For example, it is impossible to use Project Thought to inform a Gray human of a Earth human's presence, although it would be possible for two Earth humans to maintain empathic contact.

It should be noted that while it is impossible to influence the minds of the people of Gray, it is no more difficult to use the Human Empathy skill to read their minds than it would to read another PC's mind. Likewise, Gray empaths cannot directly effect a PC or Darkling's mind but they could read them—that is if they had some reason to scan what appears as an empty space to them.

ESTABLISHING CONTACT

If an empathic adventurer can manage to convince an empath of Gray to read his or her thoughts, a crude form of communication can be established. It should be noted that each participant in such an exchange must continually manage a Stage Four success for effective communication to be maintained. Stage Two and Three successes may get basic ideas across, but there is a great deal of possibility for misunderstanding. Also, since there does not seem to be an organized community of empaths in the Gray proto-dimension, most Gray empaths do not have very high skill levels, or even a clear idea of the skills they possess. They are as likely to believe they are going insane as to believe they are mentally communicating with a person from another dimension.

Since legends of ghosts exist in the Gray proto-dimension, characters should be careful of how they decide to attract local attention. They could find themselves being exorcised by a local priest (an entirely futile gesture thanks to the limitations of empathic interaction between humans and Gray's inhabitants) instead of achieving a successful parley.

If a party brings something from Gray back to Earth (an impressive feat, since it is virtually impossible to handle anything from Gray), it will find that its behavior on Earth is exactly like the behavior of Earthly material in Gray. It will remain intangible except if handled in the roughest way and will fade from sight during the interdimensional transfer. If a Gray human were to come to Earth, his or her experiences would exactly mimic an Earth human's experience in Gray.

DARKLINGS IN GRAY

The Darklings are not very active in Gray. While it is easy to attack and even kill the inhabitants, most Darklings find it to lack the satisfaction which their games with humans on Earth provide. Since most creatures from other dimensions cannot touch the inhabitants of Gray, Darklings who feed on human flesh are almost never encountered here—they certainly can't consume the Greys. The Darklings which feed empathically also have difficulties in gaining any sustenance from the locals, although there are some which can circumvent the limitations of the proto-dimensions.

The most common type of Darkling to be found in Gray is the Boogey Man. This creature operates in Gray in almost exactly the same way as it would on Earth, repeatedly causing fear in its victims until they are emotionally drained, then killing them.

There are two unusual things about the Boogey Man's behavior in Gray. Its empathic abilities do not seem at all hampered by the effects which limit human empathic abilities—it can use its Telekinesis as well in Gray as it can on Earth. Also, its corporeal and incorporeal states are reversed for Gray humans and Earth humans. For example, if an Earth human, a Gray human, and a Boogey Man are all in the same room, the Boogey Man will always appear as a corporeal entity to one of the other two. If it appeared corporeal to the Earth human, but then shifted to its incorporeal form, it would then appear corporeal to the Gray human.

Because of this limitation, humans have a great advantage at hunting a Boogey Man in Gray. The creature cannot run around in its incorporeal form to avoid the humans since that would expose it to attack from the inhabitants of Gray. As a result, a Boogey Man will always seek to kill any human it encounters in Gray.

Assimilation: There is no damage associated with assimilation to Gray. At the referee's option, a form of complete assimilation could take place, whereto PCs and their equipment assimilate to Gray and lose their color. Anything or anyone assimilated in this way, of course, would be unable to interact with an unassimilated human, but would suddenly find themselves able to be seen, heard, and felt normally by the inhabitants of Gray. They would, of course, not understand the language, and will soon be classified as mentally deficient.

HADES: LAND OF THE FORGETFUL DEAD

Hades is a halfland with a discontinuity of 1 and a rather unusual physics shift. There is no assimilation damage associated with Hades, but there are other very dangerous effects as will be explained shortly.



Name: Hades
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 1
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

ARRIVALS

The first time the PCs arrive in Hades, they will be ankle-deep in water facing what appears to be a giant tropical island. Warm seawater laps around their ankles, and the air is full of rich, sweet smells. It is slightly warm, but a gentle breeze constantly blows so that, rather than feeling muggy, it is very comfortable. Birds can be heard in the distance, both out over the water and from inside the light jungle that starts a few dozen meters up the warm, white, sandy beach.

Far off, three snow-covered mountain tops can be seen reaching up into the sky. Between these and the coast are a series of smaller and smaller hills, clearly wooded. Several streams and rivers carry the melt water from these peaks to the sea.

It always seems to be late afternoon in Hades. The sun hangs low in the western sky, about 20-degree above the horizon, not yet ready to set, but with most of its fierce brightness diminished. The full moon sits at about the same altitude in the east. Thanks to the fixed positions of these two bodies, it is virtually impossible to get lost on the island that is Hades.

MEETING THE LOCALS

Not too long after arriving on the island of Hades, the PCs will be greeted by one of the locals. He is a tall, deeply tanned human male who is dressed in denim jeans, an Osaka Swallows baseball cap, and a pair of Serengeti Vermilion sunglasses. He will get well within earshot of the characters, pause for a second to look them over, and finally, in a thin, lyrical voice, say, "Welcome to paradise."

The man will stand there for a second or two, then turn around and begin to walk off. If the PCs are not following him he will say, "Come on, you need to meet the others." This NPC (we will refer to him as Osaka) will not reveal his name or answer any questions in any but the most procrastinatory manner. "There'll be time enough for that later," he will say. "I want you to meet the others. Besides, it will almost be time for dinner by the time we get to the camp." It is an Average: Observation task to notice that Osaka tends to speak as if he had just awakened, or was under the influence of some sort

of drug. PCs who succeed at a Formidable: Observation test will, however, notice that he does not exhibit any of the secondary characteristics of a person who would fit in either category.

Osaka will lead the characters down a path through the jungle, which is comfortable and inviting, not swelteringly humid. At one point he will come to a fork in the trail and pause as if uncertain which branch of the trail he should take. To any character with Tracking skill, the left branch of the trail will seem much more traveled than the right one. If this is pointed out to Osaka, he will say, "Huh...oh yeah, that's right." If not, he will chose the left branch after about 10 seconds. Either way he will eventually lead the PCs down the left branch in the trail.

Eventually, a savory cooking smell and the vague odor of wood smoke will assault the characters' noses. Presently, the PCs will arrive in what must be Osaka's camp—a large clearing at the intersection of several trails, next to a stream. There are three other NPCs here—two other men, one who sports a long blond ponytail (Tail), another who wears a small, well-trimmed beard (Beard), and a woman who is wearing a pair of surplus military trousers cut off into shorts and a black button-down shirt which she has modified into a makeshift crop top (Bikini). The campsite is littered with clothing and equipment, scattered haphazardly as if each item had been dropped wherever the owner got tired of it. From the nature of the equipment (including three MP-7 submachineguns, an M16, a Remington 870 pump shotgun, a well-used looking demolitions kit, a large first aid kit, and an ultraviolet spotlight) the profession of the group should be obvious to the adventurers—they are minion hunters, just like the PCs.

When the characters first arrive in the encampment, Beard will be stirring a pot over the fire (the air will be rich with a mouth-watering smell of cooking seafood), Bikini will be sitting cross-legged, peering intently at the full moon, and Tail will be lay-



ing in a make-shift hammock, half singing, half humming a widely known children's song (referee's choice, something common like *Old MacDonald* or *Pop Goes the Weasel*) while he tries to weave something unrecognizable out of palm fronds. When Osaka arrives in the clearing he will ask "Where's... uh?" Bikini will respond, 'I think she said she was going to take a swim and then get some mangos," but not look away from her moon-gazing. It will take a few minutes for any of the NPCs to notice the characters. When they do they will say hello and echo Osaka's "Welcome to paradise" sentiments.

There are several interesting things about the encampment that the PCs may notice in time. It is an Average: Observation task to notice that all of the other NPCs share Osaka's half-conscious state. It is a Difficult: Observation task to notice that the weapons and equipment are all covered with a very light coating of dust and sand, as if they have spent a few days in the weather without any maintenance. Finally, it is a Formidable: Observation task to deduce that the reason Tall is reduced to humming his song is because he has forgotten most of the lyrics.

After a while, the missing female NPC will arrive, still wet from her swim, bearing an armload of plump, delicious-looking bananas. She wears her hair cut very short and so will be referred to as Crew.

While the NPCs are eating, they will begin to share "war" stories with the PCs. The islanders' stories will be severely lacking on details. They will, however, cling to the details of any story the PCs choose to tell them. At one point Beard will say something to the PCs like, "This is great, not like that one place where Osaka got hurt, huh?" If one of the PCs point out that they have no idea of what he is talking about he will say, "Huh.. oh, yeah..." and trail off.

The NPCs will reveal a couple of clues about the land they are in, including the fact that they only discovered it a little more than a week ago. Osaka will mention that he hasn't had to shave or take a shower all week and yet he still looks (and amazingly smells) freshly groomed. Crew may say something about never really feeling hungry, but everything tasting so good that eating just seems like the thing to do. None of the NPCs will ever call another by their name or give their own name—they have essentially forgotten these trivial pieces of information.

If asked how they found out about this proto-dimension, the islanders will explain that they captured a folder pod in which the dimension was recorded. Beard opened a portal with his Dimension Walk skill for the others to come through, and Crew brought the gear in the folder pod. If asked about the pod's location the group will explain that they destroyed it to prevent the Darklings from learning the location of such an idyllic place.

If the PCs remain long enough, they may notice that the NPCs become increasingly scatterbrained, uninhibited, and carefree, willing to do nothing other than eat, sleep, and play in their tropical paradise.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HADES

Every moment spent in Hades erodes memory and willpower. Referees should roll for assimilation normally. However, instead of informing characters of the effects of assimilation as they occur, they should note (in secret) what has happened to each character.

Once assimilation has reached completion, characters should loose a point of Willpower. After that, for every four hours spent in Hades, characters will lose 1 additional point of Willpower. If characters do not have any Willpower or it has been reduced to 0, then their empathic skills will begin to "vanish." Every four hours, 1 point should be subtracted from a randomly chosen Empathy skill.

In addition to this, 1D6 of other skills will evaporate after one full day is spent in Hades. These, like the empathic skills, should be chosen in some random fashion by the referee. This effect is cumulative and occurs every day the characters spend in Hades. Characters also lose one solid contact or 1D6 points of networking every day they spend in Hades. At the end of a week, the characters will have certainly lost all of their Willpower and Empathy, up to 42 points of skills, and the names of virtually everyone they know. Attributes, fortunately, are not effected by Hades, and basic knowledge like how to walk, talk, eat, and so on will remain.

Normal equipment is not affected by Hades. A computer will still retain all data which has been stored in it (although characters may not remember how to use it). Any DarkTek, especially Darkling bio-computers and other Darkling equipment which contains an organic brain of some sort, will suffer malfunctions and ultimately cease to function.

Characters must succeed at a Difficult: Willpower test any time they wish to leave Hades. If a character has suffered more than 10 points of skill reduction (including Empathy and Willpower) and their Willpower has been reduced to 0, the roll remains at Difficult despite the fact that this is, technically, an unskilled test. The reason for this is that characters will, somewhere in the back of their minds, realize that something is desperately wrong even if they can't quite figure out what it is. Darklings, while affected by the memory drain of Hades, are exempt from this Willpower check since the environment of Hades is not particularly appealing to them.

A character with no Dimension Walk skill may attempt to force another character to open a portal back to Earth. This is a Difficult task and may be accomplished with either the Bargain or Persuasion skill. Empaths who have been thus bribed or coerced need not make a Willpower roll to escape Hades.

The effects of Hades are recovered slowly over time. Every day the characters will gain back 1 point of Willpower or an Empathy skill. Also, every day characters should attempt an Average test of Intelligence. If they succeed, they may either regain 2 points of skill, 2 points of networking ability, or two contacts. If they have an Outstanding Success, they may do two of the above. Eventually, all memories and skills will be recovered.

ENCOUNTERS IN HADES

Darklings seldom come here (except for sport, as noted below). There are no dangerous animals in Hades, and no reason to have an encounter table. Characters in the jungle will constantly be flushing game birds (including incongruous, non-tropical ones like quail, pheasant, duck, and so on) as well as parrots, macaws, cockatoos, and other tropical birds. Also, from time to time, walkers will encounter small groups of chattering monkeys whose only purpose seems to be comic relief. None of the snakes or reptiles are poisonous, and the insects are uniformly decorative... not a stinging or biting or pesky variety can be found.

THE DARKLINGS IN-HADES

The Darklings are well aware of Hades' existence and its true nature. It is one of their favorite proto-dimensions. Not for actually traveling to themselves, but to get rid of particularly tiresome minion hunters.

The Darkling technique for this is very simple and efficient. They arrange for the minion hunters to learn of the proto-dimension's existence in one way or another, usually from a "captured" folder pod, a dimension walk device, or a Darkling prisoner. The minion hunters travel to the place, and decide to stay for a short time. Sometimes the victims die by accident (they forget that they can't swim, or that jumping off the top of a palm tree is dangerous). Sometimes the Darklings send hunting expeditions to Hades, but this is for the sport of it ... there is enough room in Hades to accommodate a legion of trapped minion hunters.

The memory drain of Hades is a natural phenomenon, like any other physics shift. The tropical paradise environment is, however, mostly the work of the ETs who genetically engineered plants and animals which would be easy to collect and would taste good. The numerous tropical islands and the temperate climate are natural features of the proto-dimension as well.

The Willpower check which is required to leave Hades is the result of technology similar to the empathic viruses. It is a special virus which has been loosed in Hades which produces neurochemicals that cause a euphoric effect. Human immune systems make quick work of the virus, but the PCs are constantly reinfected by remaining in Hades.

Instead of the scenario described above, referees may want to put the PCs in the islanders' shoes and send them to Hades without an advanced group to serve as a demonstration of what is to come. It should be noted, however, that without such an example the only way characters will notice what is going on is that they will begin to fail more and more task rolls.

MECHANIACA: THE MACHINE WORLD

Mechaniaca is a splinterland with a discontinuity of 1. As the Dark Ones secure their control of this proto-dimension, it will shift upward to 2. Mechaniaca has no major physics shift, so its assimilation damage is 0, but its environment is extremely hostile to unprotected humans. In campaigns where the referee is using the limited access method to run the proto-dimensions, Mechaniaca should correspond to industrial regions such as the American upper midwest, or industrial cities such as Gary, Indiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; or Birmingham, England.



Name: Mechaniaca
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 1
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

HISTORY

Prior to the Io event where the ETs accidentally released the Dark Ones into the universe, the proto-dimension now known as Mechaniaca was a desolate and lifeless rock nestled in a proto-dimension just big enough for itself and its atmosphere. When the tentacular ETs (who often visit the proto-dimensions via their dimension walk devices) first discovered it, they decided that it would be of little value toward their conquest of Earth. Later, however, they returned with a grim project in mind.

The tentacular ETs, at least the ones which have succumbed to the control of the Dark Ones, have a severe problem. They seek to dominate the Earth, but they are far too few in number to actually achieve world domination. Fortunately for them, their technicians developed a plan: They would find a proto-dimension and use it as a proving ground for a series of robots. These robots would build industries, power plants, equipment, and most importantly, additional robots for use in the conquest and domination of Earth.

This would be no small feat. The robots would have to be capable of functioning independently for extended missions. They also needed to be able to work with the materials available on Earth. The tentacular ET scientists came to Mechaniaca to invent and perfect their self-replicating machines.

Their science proved equal to the task, and soon they had working prototypes of their new servants. These prototypes were set to constructing others of their kind from available materials. One experiment gave a prototype unrefined metal, another prototype was given various organic chemicals, yet another was given the remains of various life forms, and so on. To the scientists' glee, all the prototypes succeeded in successfully utilizing their limited resources to augment themselves and to produce additional robots. To their amazement, they discovered that life form remains were utilized more swiftly and efficiently than any other material, a triumph of their bio-mechanical science.

The second phase of the experiment was to allow the new machines to replicate enough of themselves to begin their other tasks. The machines built mines and refineries to provide more raw material and more machines. Aside from the living quarters and laboratories of the tentacular people, these were the first buildings in Mechaniaca. Soon, assembly lines poured out machines by the thousands.

Phase Three was then put into motion. The legions of machines started building the equipment that would be required for the task of enslaving the Earth, and then modifying it to be more to the tentacular ETs' liking. More and more ores were extracted until massive mine shafts plunged deep into the bowels of the planetoid. The machines constructed industries which would be used to produce the vehicles and equipment that the tentacular ETs would need to rule the Earth, all according to their inventors' plans.

Then came the downfall. The machines, following their programming with a single-minded fervor, deduced that in order to supply enough metal for the industries, shortcuts would have to be taken in the production of new units. These shortcuts caused some of the new units to have incomplete instructions. In itself this was not a tremendous problem—the robots' instructions were highly redundant and they could usually cope with missing data, but there was another problem: Some of the machines had experienced data-transfer failures during replication. These failures, too, were extremely minor by themselves. However, in the cases where no redundant instructions existed,

these errors could not be corrected. What's more, unlike genetic defects in organic life, these programming failures did riot usually kill the faulty machine. The failures grew worse with each succeeding generation and the faulty machines were producing a new generation every day.

One strain of the faulty robots, following some line of twisted machine logic, began to disassemble their cohorts for spare parts to make new machines. Still others began to take apart the equipment with which the tentacular ETs had planned to invade the Earth.

There were too many rogue robots to fight physically, so the ETs in Mechaniaca decided to instruct their creations to use their information exchange functions (that would have allowed robot soldiers to communicate with each other during the invasion of the Earth) to check their fellows' programming and, in cases where errors were found, repair those errors. The plan worked well enough at first, but errors still crept in. Instead of 10% of the robots being 50% unpredictable, 50% of the robots were 10% unpredictable.

Realizing that if their creations ever made it to the Earth in any numbers there would be little left to conquer, the tentacular ETs appealed to other ETs for help. The humanoid ETs assessed the situation, and created a plan for destroying the new mechanical menace. They cleverly inserted new instructions into the rogue machines' programming. Their core programming was too strong, too basic, to be modified into a suicidal directive, but their subroutines for industrial construction proved quite vulnerable to modification. The machines built new industries and soon new robo-form machines began to roll off the line, different from the robots the tentacular ETs created. When their numbers reached a predetermined quantity, these new machines began the wholesale destruction of the original type.

At first, the humanoid ETs' plan worked. The original machines (nicknamed *Symbiods*) fell prey to the new machines' (nicknamed Steriloids) attack. The Steriloids moved through the Symbiods like wolves through a herd of sheep, mowing them down and destroying them with impunity. Then the humanoid ETs discovered a problem with Symbiod programming that they hadn't counted on: The Symbiods responded to the slaughter by following their basic programming and assembling more Symbiods to replace their fallen comrades, often from the wreckage of those fallen comrades. The Steriloids could only destroy so many of the Symbiods before an equilibrium was established. In response, the humanoid ETs directed the Steriloid factory brains, the controllers of the Steriloid army, to produce deadlier Steriloids.

The equilibrium shifted even more into the Steriloids' favor. But then, with new generations available every day, the Symbiods evolved a new quirk: They ceased perceiving the Steriloids as finished products and began to consider them resources, materials from which to make more Symbiods. They began attacking en masse, overwhelming Steriloids and cannibalizing them. The Symbiods, began to recover from their beatings. In response, the humanoid ETs gave the Steriloid master computers more analytical and decision-making capabilities, in order for them to cope with this and other new developments that might arise. The Steriloid response was to build machines that were better at defending themselves from close combat attacks and that were more intelligent and innovative so they could formulate battlefield strategy without waiting for a solution from the master brains.

The Steriloids began to win again, as newer and even more powerful models rumbled from the Steriloid assembly lines. And they were needed, for the Symbiods had developed an evolutionary line toward sentience. Each day's generation displayed behavior that was more complex than the previous generation had. Ambushes, decoy ploys, and using the environment as a weapon all became standard strategies of the Symbiod horde.

The final, devastating development came when one Symbiod, observing the destruction of a Steriloid via the power lines which circled the world, built itself a spark-projector that could disrupt electrical pathways, confusing or destroying the brains of the Steriloids. This Symbiod survived to build more, incorporating this weapon into its "offspring." The weapon's effects ranged beyond the mere disabling of individual machines. In addition to erasing, the pulse sometimes only garbled Steriloid programming, mutating them in unknown ways. Ultimately, the master brains at several of the Steriloid factories were changed, and began to mutate randomly on their own.

The humanoid ETs lost contact with their creations as a result of these errors. Because of this, they did not know that one of the programs that had been changed was the Steriloids' main program. Its directive went from "Destroy the bio-mechanical units," specifically the Symbiods, to "Destroy the bio-units." The Steriloids took this to mean all life forms, and acted accordingly. It became virtually impossible for anything living to enter the proto-dimension without being attacked.

The tentacular and humanoid ETs pooled their resources in hopes of coming up with a plan of action. While they could be content to share the plundering of the Earth between themselves, they could not allow the hordes of robo-forms they had created to reach their prize—there would be nothing left of the Earth if they did.

They decided to install a device that would put the proto-dimension into a large version of the pocket dimension. This would effectively remove it from the meta-verse, sealing it off forever (or so they hoped) from the Earth and the other proto-dimensions. Cut off in a tiny pocket of space-time, the machines would eventually destroy each other, and the original plan could begin again. A colossal generator was constructed and moved into the proto-dimension. After it was activated, the ETs found their dimension walk devices unable to take them back to Mechaniaca and so they assumed that they had effectively sealed the proto-dimension. By the time they discovered that this was not the case, it would be too late.

THE MACHINE LORDS

Unknown to the ETs, another Dark Master other than their own was observing the project. In fact, this other Dark Master, weaker than most of its peers, was in some ways responsible for the situation on Mechaniaca. It ordered its slaves, weak humanoid creatures, to open a gateway to the dreadful place, so that it might inspect the prospects therein. The gate was soon discovered by the Symbiods, and a number of them attempted to pass through it but the humanoid slaves were ordered to defended the gateway and, with their superior numbers, repulsed the attack.

Then the Steriloids discovered the gateway. Armored, heavily armed robot warriors assaulted the gate, bent on destruction of all life. They annihilated the slaves which had been ordered to hold the gateway. The Dark Master was pleased. Here were the tools to create misery on a vast, if brutal, scale. However, rather than spring them on humanity

too swiftly (and risk loosing its chance to dominate the Earth) it ordered its slaves to seal the gate and wall off the mechanicals once again.

The machines, soulless and utterly lacking in the empathy necessary for Dark control, would require guidance and development to make them into the instruments of terror the Dark Master desired. Because of this, the Dark Master commanded its humanoid slaves to build two robo-forms, extensions of its will with mechanical bodies and organic brains, brains which had already been given to the service of the Dark Master. These new servants were to be given great power by the Dark Master, and sent into Mechaniaca to do its bidding. Their mission is to direct and guide the evolution of the machines toward the Master's purposes.

The first of these Machine Lords, Edison (an evil joke... the Dark Master names its new Lords after Earthly inventors, has already been on Mechaniaca for a year (local time—see below). One of her (Edison was once a powerful Indian mystic, a devotee of Kali, the Destroyer) first tasks was to open a gateway to Gehenna, the proto-dimension of fire, and to instruct the Symbiods to construct power exchangers around them. She is now shepherding the Symbiods' evolution toward the development of a sub-species of empathic Symbiods.

The second Machine Lord, Ford, will go among the Steriloids, to educate them on the conditions on Earth and to train them to channel their destructive natures down certain pathways.

These Machine Lords have been given the prowess and abilities to survive in the mechano-Darwinian hell of Mechaniaca. They are fearsome indeed, by human standards.



DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENT

The first thing that is noticed about Mechaniaca is its dimness. The sky overhead is a uniform dim gray, unmarked by any celestial phenomena. The ambient light is at about the level of late twilight, where things are hard to see and details fade into the gray. This is due to the fact that about 100 kilometers above the surface there is an opaque, unbreakable gray dome of time displacement that surrounds the planetoid. The sky would be totally black, but it refracts and reflects the light provided by the light sources on the planetoid's surface, and glows dimly. Occasional bright lights stab through the semi-darkness, projected from buildings or moving machines, probing through the haze that is Mechaniaca's atmosphere.

Humans will have a moment to contemplate the dimness, but as soon as they take their first breath they will find other concerns. If you need to breathe air, you will not be very happy in the toxic miasma that Mechaniaca calls an atmosphere. The stuff isn't just unbreathable, it's actively hostile to life. A mixture of carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane with a healthy dose of sulfur and phosphorus compounds, and traces of freon, solvent vapors, and acid fumes, it will kill a human in short order. Smoky and smoggish, it also contributes to the difficulty of seeing anything at a distance, and attacks unguarded eyes. Unprotected eyes will water and burn rendering their owner blind until they are protected.

Aside from being unbreathable, Mechaniaca is hot. A great deal of heat gets trapped inside the time displacement bubble, and doesn't disperse too quickly. The world would have overheated some time ago, but great coolant systems were created, shunting the excess heat into other proto-dimensions (part of the Machine Lord's experiments). This takes energy, but Mechaniaca has lots (as you will read later). The temperature is usually about 380 Celsius (101 0 Fahrenheit), but it can fluctuate either way.

Characters might decide that they are thirsty, but they will have trouble finding any water on Mechaniaca. The only liquids available are the sludges heavy with industrial wastes and poisons, flowing through pipes and open aqueducts. Drinking this is almost instantly fatal, and applying it to exposed skin will burn like a mild acid.

The terrain is best typified as heavy industry gone mad. The ground is either bare rock, artificial fused rock resembling concrete, or metal plating. On every side, towering buildings loom overhead, connected by metal gantries and catwalks, sometimes divided by deep pits in the ground. The buildings usually have few windows or openings, and what openings there are stand unblocked by glass, plastic, or metal. Everywhere you look there are wide, arrow-straight boulevards lined with monolithic structures, some belching smoke from geometrically precise stacks, others apparently dormant. Lights shine into the gloom from odd angles, positioned on eaves, at windows and doors, on smokestacks, or suspended from catwalks. Cave-like tunnel mouths yawn, suggesting a way to get to the subsurface levels of this mechanical anthill of a world.

The sound of machinery is ubiquitous. The insides of the deserted buildings are filled with it. Some machines are still and quiet, others work away madly, automatically producing strange machinery or refined materials. Ambulatory forms do not seem to be present (a fact for which you should be thankful), the machinery is equipped with fixed grippers and waldos to allow manipulation. Finished products and materials are taken by suspended cranes and stacked for storage, but the stacks always seem to be recent, not the vast piles that you would expect from such manic manufacturing. Where

do the finished products go? Who takes them? Uneasy questions, with even less welcome answers.

Power is not a problem here. Power lines and conduits festoon the world. No matter where you look, there's an active power source. Sometimes too active-many of the lines and conduits haven't been constructed with safety in mind, and they spark and snap in the still, corrosive air. Anyone approaching within two meters of these lines runs a real hazard of closing the circuit for a 10D6 spark, against which conventional armor is no protection. Also, electrical devices close to these lines (within 10-50 meters) are affected-radios crackle with static, delicate equipment overloads, and high-energy devices malfunction. Other power lines run underground.

In one region of Mechaniaca, a reddish glow can be seen in the sky. If characters move toward it, they will eventually come upon a vast furnace, a seemingly endless pit filled with roaring fire. Green sulfurous clouds roll from the pit and flames leap into the sky. The sides of the pit are lined with some sort of black material, and huge power coils and transformers cluster around it, heedless of the heat. This pit is a direct gateway to one of Gehenna's lakes of lava. Its black lining is a bank of heat exchangers, converting the untamed energy into endless power for this hellhole of a world.

Uncomfortably, the environment of Mechaniaca is just slightly worse than what the Earth will likely become if the current pattern of ecological destruction and over-industrialization is continued. Characters who have spent a career term or more as factory workers will be somehow familiar with the horrid conditions and twisted industrial logic of Mechaniaca.

ADVENTURING IN MECHANIACA

Before actually venturing into the machine world, a few elementary precautions need to be taken unless the characters intend on closing their eyes and holding their breath the entire time they are there.

The first priority is to sustain life in a hostile environment. The dangers and difficulties of Mehcaniaca's environment are as follows:

Air: Mechaniaca's atmosphere is largely an accident. Most of it is the result of waste gasses from the various industrial operations on the planetoid. Although there is oxygen in the atmosphere, Mechaniacan air is primarily a mixture of carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane with a healthy dose of sulfur and phosphorus compounds, and traces of freon, solvent vapors and acid fumes. Any roughly terrestrial life form breathing in the stuff takes 3D6 points of damage to the chest every combat turn (30 seconds) until breathable air is provided and the poisonous murk native to the planetoid is screened out.

Exposed skin burns here. Every hit location will take 1 point of damage every four hours it is exposed to Mechaniaca's atmosphere. Eyes, which are more sensitive, suffer even more. Characters who have no eye protection will not be able to see at all. If they remain in this state for eight hours, they will suffer permanent damage to their eyes. This causes a loss of visual acuity, and blindness after 24 hours of exposure.

Because of the relative dimness of this proto-dimension and the atmosphere's murkiness, Observation rolls to see objects that are over 50 meters away are one level of difficulty higher. Firing at targets over 50 meters away is also one level of difficulty higher.

Water: Water is a misnomer. Although the free-flowing sludges on the planetoid's surface contain some water, they also contain enough toxic liquids that they are invariably lethal. Drinking any of these liquids causes death within 1D6 combat turns. Applying them to exposed skin will bum for 1D6/2 points of damage per combat turn (30 seconds) until they are cleaned off. A single application will only bum for five turns (2.5 minutes), but a character who is unlucky enough to fall into such mixtures will continue to take damage until completely dissolved.

Heat: Characters who do not take precautions to protect themselves from the heat will, after 30 minutes in Mechaniaca, begin to suffer its effects. Every 30 minutes, characters must pass an Average: Constitution task. If they succeed, they take 1D6 points of damage to the chest and their Constitution is temporarily reduced by 1 point. If they fail, they will collapse and begin to take 1 point of damage per combat turn (30 seconds) until they die or something is done to remove them from the heat. Lost Constitution is recovered at a rate of 1 point per hour whenever the character is in a cool place.

Equipment: Minion hunters who plan to adventure in Mechaniaca need complete protection from the atmosphere, as well as a supply of breathable air. Military chemical warfare gear ($1000, —/C, 8 kg) with the addition of an aqualung or rebreather would suffice. So would a set of CES IIb or ExoSkel armor, when fitted with an aqualung or rebreather. Spacesuits provide the longest duration of activity, but are extremely cumbersome, with double the listed effects (spacesuits are made for zero or low gravity, Mechaniaca's is about 0.82 Earth gravities). Since Mechaniaca is so hot, some sort of cooling system is necessary, or a human will soon die of heat prostration (sealed suits don't breath at all). An Ice Box would do fine. The best way to journey through Mechaniaca would be to take a sealed vehicle with its own life support systems, such as a Big Foot or a Travelmaster. An NBC-rated military vehicle with life support systems added could be used, too. Any vehicle taken into Mechaniaca must have an oxygen supply for its engine if it is powered by internal combustion.

Supplies: Water and food are important if the minion hunters want to stay for an extended time.

AN UNEXPECTED BOON

There are "oases" of life-support on Mechaniaca. These are the abandoned but still-functional laboratories of the tentacular ET experimenters, scattered around the planetoid in small groups. The ETs built scores of these clusters, in order to allow them to travel from one to another and supervise or oversee operations everywhere on the planetoid. These building clusters are easily definable from the other structures: They're short (no more than three stories tall) and rounded, not brutally geometric like the mechanicals' buildings. Inside, the rooms are mostly stripped of their scientific gear (the scavenging Symbiods at work), but the life-support systems are usually still working. Apparently, the life support equipment registers as finished products to the Symbiods, probably because it is integral with the walls. The atmosphere produced is damp and humid, with an average temperature of 30-degree Celsius (86 Fahrenheit), but it is breathable (and a little higher on the oxygen content—about 23%). The air smells like terminal mildew—apparently the ETs liked it that way. Of course, after recycled air and the pervasive stench of Mechaniaca's natural atmosphere, the smell of mildew should be almost pleasurable.

These oases of life also provide water, wrenched from the very rock of the planetoid by the ETs' sophisticated technology. It's smelly, just the way the tentacular ETs liked it, but it's naturally smelly, and perfectly safe to drink.

Each set of buildings has an air lock for an entry. This is because when they were built, Mechaniaca didn't have any atmosphere at all. They're a bit difficult to operate, primarily because their controls were built for tentacles, not hands. The first time a PC tries to open one of these air locks, it will be a Difficult: Agility task. After the first time, however, the task will be reduced to Average difficulty. Nontentacular renegade ETs never have to make such a task roll since they are somewhat familiar with the technology involved. Renegade tentacular ETs can work these air locks as easily as a human could work a door knob.



MEETING THE INHABITANTS

Be warned—the inhabitants of Mechaniaca will virtually always be inimical. The Symbiods will interpret PCs as new raw materials, and the Steriloids will see them as life forms which must be destroyed, period. The only other mobile forms on Mechaniaca are the Machine Lords, and they probably will not react well to interlopers either.

The mechanicals move according to their own plans and programs. Symbiods either cruise like sharks, looking for something non-vital to convert into other Symbiods, or else they carry on their original mission of building and supplying manufacturing industries. Small Steriloids creep and spy, seeking Symbiod targets. Single Symbiods are attacked immediately, while large concentrations are observed until larger Steriloids can arrive for the slaughter. The big Steriloids occasionally cruise down the boulevards, wasting the odd Symbiod and looking for trouble. The Machine Lords are rarely, if ever, encountered, but they are off doing their own mischief among the mechanicals.

ENCOUNTERS ON MECHANIACA

There are three basic types of areas on Mechaniaca: the streets, the factories, and the underground. The tentacular ET labs are so rare that they do not rate an encounter chart of their own. Each type of area has an encounter chart below. It is up to the referee to mandate where and when encounters will occur. The referee may choose an encounter from the table below, or roll for it randomly.

Street Encounters

D6 Roll	*Encounter*
1	**Symbiod:** Single Symbiod without a body looking for spare parts. Adventurers would make dandy "spare parts."
2	**Symbiod:** Several (1D6/2) Symbiods with mechanical bodies carrying odd pieces of equipment (they are doing the construction work for which they were designed). They will drop their burdens to attack adventurers.
3	**Trap:** Symbiod trap for big Steriloids. It could be an ambush, a covered pit in the street, a catwalk rigged to fall on the Steriloid, etc. The Symbiods will only spring it on a big item, like a vehicle or a Mark III or larger Steriloid. If adventurers are on foot, 1D6/2 bodiless Symbiods will break off to follow them. The Symbiods are well hidden, and spotting them in time to avoid the trap is a Difficult: Observation task.
4	**Tail:** A Mark I Steriloid begins trailing the adventurers, waiting for a chance to easily kill them. It will also alert other Steriloids to the adventurers' location. In 2D10 minutes, 1D6 more Mark I Steriloids led by one Mark II Steriloid will show up.
5	**Street Gang:** A number of Symbiods (2D6) with mechanical bodies walking in the street. They are in formation to attract Steriloids. If they meet up with a Mark I, II, or III, they will attack it en masse. If they meet a Mark IV or V, they scatter into the buildings. The assemblage is usually tracked by a Mark I Steriloid, which vectors more Steriloids in for the kill. This gang will attack PCs and their vehicles if there are no Steriloids about.

6	**Street Fight:** As above, but the Steriloids have arrived and the battle has begun. The Steriloid forces include 1D6 Mark I Steriloids and 1D6/2 Mark II Steriloids. There is a 50% chance of the group being led by a Mark III Steriloid. These forces will always attack one another before attacking the PCs, unless the PCs become involved in the battle. At that point, the mechanicals assign them a target priority number based upon the danger they represent and will attack them the moment their number comes up.

Factory Encounters

D6 Roll	*Encounter*
1-3	**Symbiods:** A group of 2D6 Symbiods with metallic bodies going about their preprogrammed duties in the factory. They are building, repairing, or modifying the machinery, or carrying in raw materials/carrying out manufactured materials. They will break off from work if the PCs are encountered.
4	**Calm Before the Storm:** As 1-3, but there is a Mark I Steriloid watching. In 1D10 minutes, 1D6 Mark I Steriloids and 1D6/2 Mark II Steriloids will show up to destroy the Symbiods.
5	**Birthplace:** A innocent looking assembly line is actually producing Steriloids. In 1D10 minutes a fully functional Mark III Steriloid will roll off the line, lock onto and attack the party. Destroying the assembly line will not be very difficult, but it will not greatly reduce the reserve of Steriloids on Mechaniaca. The line will be repaired in a few days.
6	**R&R:** A row of oblong tanks are actually maintenance booths for Steriloids. In 1D10 minutes, 1D6 of them will open, releasing an assortment of Mark I and Mark II Steriloids.

UNDERGROUND ENCOUNTERS

D6 Roll	*Encounter*
1-2	**Miners:** A group of 1D6 Symbiods with metallic bodies going about their preprogrammed duties. They are mining ores from the cavern walls. They will break off from work if the PCs are encountered.
3	**Spare Parts:** 1D6/2 Symbiods engaged in making more Symbiods. They will immediately attack adventurers—they need the parts.
4	**Trap:** Symbiod trap for a Mark I or II Steriloid (Mark III, IV, and V Steriloid won't fit into the tunnel). the Symbiods will collapse a section of the tunnel roof onto their target. This will result in the target being hit by 1D6 rocks, each doing 1D10 points of damage. The Symbiods will also spring this trap on human adventurers (parts is parts).
5	**Scout:** A Mark I Steriloid begins trailing the adventurers, waiting for a chance to easily kill them. It will also alert other Steriloids to the adventurers' location. In 2D10 minutes, 1D6/2 more Mark I Steriloids with two Mark II Steriloids will show up.
6	**Hunters:** A Steriloid hunting party (1D6 Mark II Steriloids) spots the adventurers and immediately attacks.

USING MECHANIACA

Mechaniaca is a proto-dimension which lends itself well to multiple visits in an ongoing campaign.

Why would anyone voluntarily go to Mechaniaca? Well, perhaps while there on one misguided trip, a character stumbles onto a strange artifact lying on the ground. It resembles a power tool of some sort, and in fact, it turns out to be one: a drill that uses disintegrator technology. It will punch a 25-centimeter-deep, five-millimeter-wide hole in any material. After a few seconds it will be recharged and ready to "fire" again.

A very short trip through some of Mechaniaca's factories would show that this is but one example of the advanced technology present, just waiting to be discovered, explored, analyzed, and exploited. Ever want to be rich? It's not as if the mechanicals are going to sue for patent infringement, so it is quite possible that the lure of money and/or high-tech goodies could motivate someone to spend some time in the land of homicidal machines.

Another scenario possibility involves the PCs loosing a number of Mechaniaca's murderous machines into one of the proto-dimensions used by a group of Darklings as a base of operations.

PLAGUELANDS: THE PARASITIC REALMS

The Plaguelands are a splinterland overrun by parasites and disease, a direct result of incursions by the Dark Ones. The parasites have run out of natural prey, and are now forced to seek out sustenance from other sources—like the human race.

The Plaguelands have a discontinuity of 2. The topography is strangely curved.



Name: Plaguelands
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The sky is gray, perpetually overcast with the threat of a storm. There is no noon or midnight, no sun, moon, or stars...only the constant gloom of perpetual twilight. The wind blows sporadically, carrying dust and grit; and the humidity leaves you so sweaty that the grit clings to your skin.

Few leaves are left on the trees. Their emptiness reminds one of early winter, a direct contrast to the sultry heat. The barren branches are gnarled and foreboding. Malevolent vines twist through the undergrowth. Scrub-like bushes, brown and fragile, scratch at the legs of passersby. Fungus festoons the few green plants, their stems decayed by disease. Debris is constantly underfoot; like a forest floor of twigs and dead

leaves. There are small creatures there too, misshapen insects, lizards, and small snakes. The ground moves and crackles with every step taken.

Characters arriving in the Plaguelands always end up in a region with the same type of terrain: flat. Vast expanses of scrub foliage and tumbleweeds fleck the treeless expanses. Gravel, dead grass, and blown leaves obscure the ground, hiding small parasites. Visibility here is as good as it gets in the shadows of the Plaguelands.

As the PCs progress "inward," the terrain becomes wooded. Heavy undergrowth surrounds large stands of twisted, misshapen growths that were once trees. Their tangled branches have few leaves and are encrusted with creepers, moss, and fungi. The tree trunks break up the fields of view, and vines hang down to worsen the visibility. The debris that is constantly underfoot conceals many hazards.

Further inward, the terrain gives way to swamps or to jungle. In the case of swamp, the ground becomes increasingly wet and the debris increasingly rotten. Eventually all that is left are moors and bogs filled with filthy stagnant water. The vines in this swamp are much more verdant than those in the woodlands. Footing is treacherous and everywhere there are pools of slime and decay camouflaged by fungi, algae, and rot—it seems that almost every step releases a cloud of marsh gas, reeking of decay. Dense fog banks seclude a few islands that are covered with riotous vegetation. The going gets worse the further one progresses into the swamp, so consequently, no one knows what lies on the far side of this quagmire.

The jungle is almost worse than the swamps. The impenetrable thicket is dark and threatening, and the tangled mass of brushwood teems with creatures of all descriptions. Animals have the edge here, and invading humans are taking their lives into their own hands. Trails twist through the jungle, but who, or what, made them is unknown. Following them for any distance is to invite an ambush or attack. Like the swamps, the going gets slower and more hazardous the further one progresses into the jungle.

THE HISTORY OF THE PLAGUELANDS

The Plaguelands are not just one proto-dimension, but are a triad of three interconnected proto-dimensions. The one which characters arrive in is the central proto-dimension (only after experiencing the other two can PCs dimension walk directly to them). If mapped on a two-dimensional surface, it would appear as a large circular plain surrounded by a ring of woodlands.

The other two are the swamp and the jungle. Each of these proto-dimensions borders the first with a vast naturally occurring gateway, but neither touches on the other. The topology of the three dimensions is indescribably skewed so that unless one exactly follows a path that has already been explored (not an easy task, see below), it is impossible to know whether a particular route will end in the swamp or in the jungle.

The first Dark Lord to come to the Plaguelands set itself up in the jungle proto-dimension and proceeded to modify and make thralls of a race of semi-sentient empathic creatures that lived there. Ultimately, these creatures became the race known as the skullworms. Next, the Dark Lord began to enslave a race of primitive, muscular humanoids which lived in the center proto-dimension of the triad to serve as cattle to be used by its skullworm servants.

At about this time, another Dark Lord began its own machinations in the proto-dimensional swamp on the other "side" of the Plaguelands. It too saw the

humanoids as a useful resource, but not to feed its minions. Instead, it decided to make the humanoids into a servitor race of its own. What it created were the Incubi, a race of powerful empathic servants.

This Dark One also began to create an army of diseases. While it had taken steps to ensure absolute loyalty in its Incubi servants. It knew the troubles the somewhat rebellious skullworm army was causing its foe. Viruses and bacteria, it decided, could always be trusted. The bacterium called *Yersinia pestis* by Earth scholars was known as the Black Death in the 14th century and killed a quarter of the population of the world at that time. The Great Plague in London in 1664-65 killed over 70,000 out of a population of 460,000. A later outbreak in Canton and Hong Kong in 1894 killed 100,000 and ultimately resulted in over 10 million deaths. HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the "Black Death" of the late 20th century, killed millions more, and was only a prelude to the dreaded retro- viruses of the early 21st century. Where did these catastrophic diseases originate? Why were they so deadly? The Dark Lord of the swamps and his Incubi know some of the answers.

Today, the two Dark Lords do battle (or rather send their servants to do battle) to decide who will ultimately control the Plaguelands. Their weapons are simple—the lord of the skullworms wielding an army of parasites and the lord of the Incubi spreading disease.

The war has spilled over into the Earth with ghastly results.

DARKLING AND BEASTIES

Among the life forms in the Plaguelands, the parasite is king, with disease a close second. A few sturdy, non-parasitic life forms serve as the basis of the food chain. Nearly everything else survives by preying parasitically on them, or upon another type of parasite (hyperparasitism).

The chief of the parasites are the skullworms: intelligent, empathic creatures that dwell within the brains of other life forms. However, as the strife between the two Dark Lords who vie for control of the Plaguelands has grown, other types of Dark Minions have appeared. Most notable among these are the Incubi, powerful empathic humanoids who are immune to the skullworm's attacks.

PLAGUELANDS BEASTIE ENCOUNTER TABLES

Encounters occur at referee's mandate. Referees may roll on the table below, or pick a beastie of their choice.

D6	*Flat*	*Woodlands*	*Jungle*	*Swamp*
1	Shamblers	Shamblers	Shamblers	Shamblers
2	Air Mites	Trapleeches	Gluerocks	Face Biters
3	Baby Stealers	Walkabouts	Face Biters	Gluerocks
4	Walkabouts	Face Biters	Creepers	Trapleeches
5	Giant Roaches*	Creepers	Walkabouts	Sharks*
6	Blood Vultures*	Army Ants*	Giant Slugs*	Bloats*

* Found in *Dark Races* chapter.

SKULLWORMS

Skullworms go through three stages in their growth from larvae to adult. In the hatchling stage, the worm resembles a tiny leech, about one centimeter long, three millimeters thick, shiny and black. In this form, it burrows into the skull of its intended host and settles itself in the center of the creature's brain.

After the skullworm implants itself in a host, there is a brief period of pain, but then the worm secretes a fluid into the host's bloodstream, putting the victim into a euphoric state. The host no longer feels pain, and physical damage heals three times faster than the normal rate.

Once it has established itself in a host's brain, the worm begins its transformation to the sedentary cerebral form. It extrudes thousands of fine tendrils into the surrounding brain tissue, taking control of its host. The worm remains in this stage for five to seven years.

As it nears time for the worm to reproduce, the final stage begins. Some of the tendrils shorten and thicken to become legs, and the worm begins to develop an exoskeleton to protect itself once outside of the host. At this point, it begins to resemble an immense centipede, up to 30 centimeters long and five centimeters in diameter.



When it is time for the skullworm to breed, it will find another skullworm-infected creature and the two will burrow out of their hosts' brains, normally by eating their way out the *foramen magnum*, the great hole in the base of the skull through which the spinal cord enters the cranium (an act that is gruesomely fatal to the host). Then they proceed to mate (hermaphroditically) and lay a clutch of two or three eggs each. The adults place these eggs in a protected location near a source of new hosts. As each egg hatches, the newborn skullworm begins its quest for a host. If the parent chose a good location for the eggs, the larva may only have to wait for a host to come near. If the location was poor, the larva may have to undergo a laborious trek to find a host. Since the larva are not very robust, such a trek often ends in their death.

During the sedentary second stage, the skullworms are intelligent and empathic beings. The hosts remain alive and conscious, but they have decreasing control over their bodies. While the hosts do not perceive the worm itself (they realize that something is taking control of their bodies), the skullworm perceives the mental activity of its host, including thoughts and memories. With this knowledge, skullworms mimic their hosts' normal behavior. However, the worms do not understand human emotions and are unable to mimic them properly. What this usually this means that the skullworms try to avoid any emotional responses. Their hosts may say normal and believable things, but they generally do so in a wooden, emotionless fashion. Questions are answered in a deadpan fashion lacking any enthusiasm.

If empathic characters try to read the thoughts of a skullworm host, they receive a clear impression of a split personality. One personality is that of the host and the other is the skullworm. The host seems normal, but frightened and off-balance. The skullworm strikes them as both malevolent and arrogant. Such a reading can determine that one personality is a parasite living within the other.

The only outward, physical evidence of skullworm infestation is a small, circular mass of scar tissue about the size of a nickel where the larvae entered the body. Exploratory surgery or examination by X-ray, CAT scan, or MRI will reveal the skullworm lodged between the hemispheres of the brain, its tendrils woven throughout surrounding tissue. Removing the skullworm without killing the host is almost impossible (a fully equipped operating room and an Impossible test of Medical skill is required). Once removed, the skullworm will quickly die in the open air and light.

SKULLWORM: CENTIPEDAL (ADULT)

Strength: 1
Constitution: 2
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 4
Education: 0
Charisma: 0
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 6
Move: 3/6/12
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 5/8
 # Appear: 1

Special: Adult skullworms devote all their energies to breeding and finding a suitable location to lay their eggs. The host is killed as the skullworm burrows out of its brain. Centipedal skullworms will not fight unless cornered.

SKULLWORM: CEREBRAL (SEDENTARY)

Strength: 0
Constitution: 1
Agility: 0
Intelligence: 8
Education: 1+*
Charisma: 0
Empathy: 4+*
Initiative: 1
Move: None
Skill/Dam.: None
Hits: 1
 # Appear: 1

* = Host's statistic

Skills: Empathic Stun, Human Empathy, Dimension Walk.

Special: Cerebral skullworms are only encountered if the host's skull is opened. For all other encounters, use the host's statistics for everything but Intelligence, Education, and Empathy. Damage to the host is healed at three times the normal rate.

Empathic Stun: After establishing an empathic link with the target, a roll is made versus Empathic Stun skill. Use this power level as stun damage to incapacitate the target. Empathic Stun damage does not do physical damage, and is only used to stun the victim into unconsciousness.

SKULLWORM: HATCHLING (LARVA)

Strength: 0
Constitution: 0
Agility: 0
Intelligence: 8
Education: 1
Charisma: 0
Empathy: 4
Initiative: 1
Move: 1
Skill/Dam.: None
Hits: 1
 # Appear: 1D6+2

Special: Hatchling skullworms are one level more difficult to hit in melee combat and two levels more difficult to hit in fire combat because of their small size. If a hatchling skullworm lands on exposed skin, an Average: Agility test must be made to brush it off before it attaches. A separate roll must be made for each worm (one attempt per phase).

Once a hatchling skullworm attaches, it begins to burrow into the target's flesh, doing 1 point of damage to the body location per combat phase. Pulling it off, requiring a Difficult: Agility check, does 1 point of damage as well. When a worm has done damage equal to one-half the target's Constitution, it has burrowed beneath the skin and can only be removed surgically.

The worm then begins tunneling toward the victim's brain. One minute per point of the victim's Constitution is required to move from its starting location to the brain. No significant damage is done while burrowing, as the worm is working its way through connective tissue. Once the worm reaches the skull, it requires 12 hours to extrude filaments into the brain and take control of the host.

Strong-willed hosts can regain control for short periods. Referees should allow PCs to make a Formidable: Willpower test to regain control once per week. If successful, the character will have control of his or her body again for 1 D6 hours. NPCs will often use the time gained to destroy themselves.

INCUBI

Strength: 12
Constitution: 10
Agility: 8
Intelligence: 3
Education: 3
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 12
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/8/16/32
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 20/40
 # Appear: 1

Special: Dimension Walk, Darkling Empathy, Human Empathy, Persuasion, Project Emotion, and Project Thought. Incubi transmit an empathic viral mutator as well as other diseases. They are completely immune to all disease except for an empathic viral assassin which they themselves carry.

These minions were created to defend their Dark Master against its foe and do battle with the skullworms to keep the parasites from overrunning the entire proto-dimension. Dabbling with the genetics of the humanoids that lived in the Plaguelands, the Dark Lord created the Incubi (Incubi is the generic plural; Incubus for male singular and Succubus for female).

With the aid of a viral mutator, the already powerful humanoids of the swamp were endowed with increased strength and skills. As the humanoid population of the Plaguelands began to dwindle under the depredations of the skullworms, the Dark Lord gave them empathic abilities and access to the empathic mutator virus used in their creation in order to ensure their survival. In addition, to keep its new servants loyal, the Dark One included a second mode to the mutator so that it could also act as an empathic viral assassin. This assassin mode can be activated by the Dark One on a whim and will result in the instantaneous and extremely gruesome death of the Incubi.

The Incubi now spread the empathic virus among humanity, in order to propagate their species. In fact, there are very few Incubi of the original Plaguelands humanoid stock left. The infection time is one month, as the virus spreads throughout the victim's DNA. During this period, the infected victim gradually develops schizophrenic behavioral traits, including violent outbursts and uncontrollable rages. This caused observers in ancient times to believe that such victims had been visited by demons.


DARK DIMENSIONS

GLUEROCK

 # Appear: 1
Attack: Special
Move: None
Initiative: 1
Strength: 1
Constitution: 2
Agility: 1
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6p1
Hits: 20/40

A complex form of fungus, the gluerock is up to one meter in diameter and about 20 centimeter tall. Irregularly shaped and colored like a rock formation, an adhesive secretion coats the top side of the fungus and traps its prey. Spotting a gluerock is Formidable: Observation because of its deceptive shape and coloration (this becomes Average: Observation after the first encounter). Generally, it is a struggling victim stuck on the gluerock that alerts passersby that something is unusual.

If the gluerock is not spotted, the character steps on it, rests a hand on it, or worse, sits on it and adheres to the fungus surface. An Average: Agility check is needed to avoid falling down and miring another extremity (another foot or hand) in the sticky adhesive. It is a Formidable test of Strength for the victim to free his or her own limbs, one attempt per mired body part. Anyone assisting pulls a single body part loose with a Difficult: Strength test. If an item of clothing (a boot, shirt, or glove, for example) or equipment is between the skin and the gluerock, the victim may make the escape attempt one level easier by discarding the item, leaving it attached to the gluerock.

The gluerock extends needlelike penetration tubes to pierce the victim's skin on its Initiative phase. These spines inject poison to kill the prey. When the victim has stopped struggling, the gluerock absorbs nutrients in the corpse by oozing digestive juices.

CREEPERS

 # Appear: 1
Attack: 50%
Move: 4/8
Initiative: 1
Strength: 10
Constitution: 8
Agility: 5
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 15/30

Looking much like an ordinary vine, creepers have a diameter of three centimeters and a length which varies from one to six meters. Along the length of the plant are small budding structures used for locomotion. They detect their prey via the vibrations caused by movement—even movements as slight as simple breathing can attract a creeper.

Creepers are plant parasites that have evolved to attack non-moving victims. When an animal organism is at rest, the creeper slowly twines around its victim. A sleeping human target is not awakened by the creeper's lethargic, deliberate entrapment. After 1D6 turns of snaking its way into position, the creeper makes a strangling attack. Unlike

normal strangling attacks, armor has no effect (unless sealed, close assault armor is worn) because the creeper slithers through gaps to reach the throat. Human victims who are awake become aware of the creeper in 1D3 turns (1D6/2, round fractions up), and may fight back with grappling.

Once the creeper subdues its target into unconsciousness, the strangling attack stops, and the attacker snakes about the host's body to place itself in contact with skin. Then the parasite secretes a substance which bonds the host's skin to the creeper's outer surface by dissolving its bud-like crawling appendages. This bonding process takes 3D6 minutes. The layers of tissue on both parasite and host slowly dissolve and merge until, after 24 hours, circulatory and nervous systems become intertwined. If the creeper is allowed to remain in this symbiotic relationship, the host becomes withdrawn, uncommunicative, and degenerates into complete catalepsy after several months.

The creeper secretes drug-like chemicals into the host, inducing a feeling of euphoria. A Difficult: Willpower test is required for the host to go along with plans to remove the parasite. If only the skin is bonded, a Difficult: Medical test removes the creeper surgically, doing another 1D6 points of damage each to 1D6 random hit locations. If circulatory and nervous systems have become entwined, the process is like the separation of Siamese twins. This can only be attempted by a surgeon in a fully equipped operating theater, and requires several successive Formidable tests against Medical skill (the exact number is up to the referee).

FACE BITER

 # Appear: 1D6
Attack: 100%
Move: None
Initiative: 2
Strength: 5
Constitution: 12
Agility: 1
Skill/Dam.: 10/1D6
Hits: 20/40

Special: 1 point of woody armor to vital areas (roll on "Quadruped" table; armor is on "Head" and "Chest" locations).

The face biters of the Plaguelands are large plant specimens, standing as tall as one meter. Similar in appearance to the terrestrial yucca plant, they have a stalk supported by a large strand of long, pointed leaves. Atop this woody stalk rests a flower that normally remains folded, slightly larger than a man's fist. When a possible victim comes within one meter of the plant, this flower dramatically opens wide, displaying a beautiful bloom large as a human head, like a lovely orchid, with colors tending toward blue and purple.

In addition to the attraction of this sudden beauty in the horror of the Plaguelands, an invisible cloud of microscopic spores is released. These spores carry a powerful nerve agent which can be inhaled or simply absorbed through the skin. The nerve agent produces a powerful euphoric state, and so the usual reaction is to move closer, where the cloud is denser and the pleasant feeling more pronounced.

As the victim comes closer, the stalk springs forth, striking powerfully at the head (treat as an aimed, unarmed melee attack) and razor-sharp spines cut deep into flesh, biting off a chunk of tissue. A lump can be seen moving down the stalk as the plant swallows its meal. Often, the plant gets only one bite as the victim usually runs away. However, the face biter is able to store its meal and use the nutrients over a long period.

BOMBER BUGS

 # Appear: 1D6
Attack: 70%
Move: 15/30/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 2
Constitution: 6
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 3/3D6
Hits: 5/10

Special: Bomber bugs produce knockout gas in a large chamber in their lower abdomen, which can be emitted once per day to render their victims helpless.

A flying creature of the Plaguelands, the bomber bug has a wingspan of almost one meter. It appears to be a cross between a beetle and a wasp, with a large, distended lower thorax. These insects have two means of attack. One is simply a swarm attack, and the other involves laying in wait in an ambush.

The swarm attack is conducted by several bomber bugs, flying rapidly toward the target. During their approach and attack, the insects are one level more difficult to hit in melee or fire combat due to their speed. They swarm in circles, discharging knockout gas explosively from their abdomens. The gas is white in color and obscures vision. A Difficult: Constitution roll is required to avoid being overcome by the knockout gas and falling unconscious for 1D10 turns. Characters who are wearing gas masks will be immune to the knockout effect.

The size of the cloud is six meters radius per bug attacking, and characters passing their Constitution roll may attempt to escape the cloud. If they try to trot or run, an Average: Agility roll is needed to avoid falling due to poor visibility. Characters with infrared or ultraviolet vision gear may trot or run without an Agility check.

Once incapacitated, the victims are attacked by the bomber bugs. The insects land on their prey and poke them with their beak-like mouth parts, tearing off bits of flesh. They will rip off bits of clothing or armor, even hats or helmets, to attack anywhere (roll hit location randomly for each attack).

The other form of attack is used when a swarm of bomber bugs are ready to lay eggs. The creatures are hermaphrodites, and all produce eggs at the same time. Using the natural camouflage provided by their coloration and hiding beneath their wings, the insects lay completely still, waiting for an oncoming victim. When the quarry gets within a few meters, the insects fire off their knockout gas. The unconscious victim is pounced upon by the bomber bugs, each extending an ovipositor which implants a half-dozen eggs in the body. This requires a single attack roll and does the regular damage due to the ghastly puncture wound. After the implantation, the bugs leave.

In addition to the pain from the wound, the awakening character feels the presence of the hard, pea-sized eggs implanted beneath the skin. Removal of the eggs is a Difficult: Medical task, and cannot be attempted without at least a doctor's medical kit. If the eggs are not removed, they are nourished by the warmth and protection of the host until they burst forth as baby bomber bugs (about 10 days later), about two centimeters long. The newborn bugs eat their way out of the host, a painful, but not necessarily fatal process (each bug causes 2D6 damage).

GIANT TICKS

 # Appear: 2D6
Attack: 40%
Move: 12/24/48
Initiative: 4
Strength: 4
Constitution: 4
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
Hits: 7/14

Special: The giant tick's chitinous exoskeleton has an armor value of 1.

The Dark One selectively bred and genetically engineered Terran arachnids to produce this deadly parasite. Huge, savage relatives of the common tick, the giant ticks of the Plaguelands are the size of large dogs. They are fast, tough, and vicious.

Wary of a fair fight, a horde of giant ticks flees if the attack roll is not made. Bright lights also frighten them away, but loud noises have no effect, as their hearing is virtually nonexistent.

A giant tick attack consists of a grapple attempt with its raspy claws, doing 2D6 controlling damage per phase. When the victim is overpowered, the giant tick begins sucking blood. Blood loss gives 2D6 points of damage to a hit location selected at random, with damage taken during the attacking insect's normal Initiative phase. All blood sucking is done to a single location, and when that location is completely emptied of hit points, the bloated giant tick drops off to scuttle away and digest its new meal. Giant ticks always carry some form of disease (referee's option).

WALKABOUTS

It sounded like banging, something metal being hit. We decided it must be an animal, because it was intermittent. As we approached the clearing, we saw a small figure sitting in the sparse grass. It looked like a girl, a human girl. Her long black hair was matted and filthy like a rat's nest. An oversized sweatshirt was her only clothing. Something she was holding in *her lap had her full attention, and we could hear her mumbling.*

Suddenly, she stood up, not completely upright, but crouched, like an animal. She backed away and gathered up her prize—a chrome, RetroTek electric toaster. The banging noises were her attempts to get the appliance to work. An upraised left hand held us at bay. Several large bulges like tumors were on her face and bloated growths were on her limbs.

She looked us over with a steadied, wary gaze. After a long pause, she said, "You can help with this." The voice rasped in her throat, and the words were expressionless. Something crawled out of her ear and fell on the ground. We knew this pitiful creature could communicate, so we decided to help her. We hadn't met anything intelligent in the Plaguelands, so we didn't expect a trap. When she led us out of the clearing into the woods, the larvae fell out of the trees on us like rain.

WALKABOUTS

Strength: 3
Constitution: 5
Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1 (2)
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 1 (5)
Initiative: 2
Move: 1/4/8/16
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: 8/16
 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Numbers in parentheses include skullworm parasite additions.

"Walkabout" is an Australian term describing a solitary sabbatical taken by an aborigine, and the primitive humanoids of the Plaguelands had a similar practice. Wandering alone, these travelers were easy prey for the skullworms many centuries ago. Some returned to their tribe to spread the worm infestation, and others came to the Plaguelands for breeding. Walkabouts are mobile transport for the worms and other kinds of parasites. A skullworm can use its Intelligence and Skills, while controlling a walkabout host, but sensory abilities (like Observation, Tracking, and Willpower) are limited to the host's Intelligence.

Humanoid in form, walkabouts hunch in a primitive posture. Movement is slow and deliberate. These humanoids are infested with all kinds of parasites. Their hair is matted and filled with crawling creatures. Fungi growing in the lymph nodes produce distended tumors. Creepers twine up and down their limbs. Occasionally, minor body parts like fingers or ears are missing, eaten away by disease or predators.

Used as hosts for skullworms, the walkabouts travel to our dimension to observe human behavior. The skullworms train their hosts to function like humans to lure victims to the Plaguelands. Walkabouts wear mismatched scraps of clothing and carry some kind of object. Often a weapon or tool, occasionally a misguided walkabout clutches feverishly to a radio or lamp. The prestige of a skullworm is determined by the apparel and equipment of its walkabout, and enhanced by human-like behavior and conversation.

BABY STEALERS

Strength: 5
Constitution: 8
Agility: 6
Intelligence: 4
Education: 1
Charisma: 3
Empathy: 6
Initiative: 5
Move: 2/8/16
Skill/Dam.: 4/2D6
Hits: 11/22
 # Appear: 1

Special: Empathic Replication, Project Emotion, Human Empathy, Dimension Walk.

Generally human-like in form, baby stealers are lanky creatures, about two meters tall, with fleshy, baby-like skin and thick, stubby fingers and toes. Their faces are grotesque caricatures of human infant features, with large eyes, tiny noses, and puffy cheeks. They move with a speed unexpected with their gangly frame. Possessed of little intelligence, they communicate by whining and crying.

Baby stealers reproduce asexually once a year using a reproduction chamber similar to a human womb. An embryo grows there, looking outwardly much like a human baby. However, its development is arrested at an early age, and it remains in a state of limbo for months. The parent soon begins a search for a humanoid baby. This will be either the child of the native primates of the Plaguelands, the walkabouts, or a human baby that the stealer has found during a dimension walk.

The pregnant baby stealer then uses its unique Empathic Replication skill to observe the shape, size, and coloration of the child. The embryo of the baby stealers empathically imprinted with the appearance of the intended victim. Some 10 to 15 hours later, the baby stealer will retire to seclusion to give "birth" to its own "child." The success of the Empathic Replication roll produces a difficulty level to detect the counterfeit child with Observation skill: Basic Success and Stage Two are Easy; Stage Three, Average; Stage Four, Difficult; Stage Five Formidable; and Stage Six, impossible.

Returning to the location of the victim infant, the baby stealer will exchange its own newborn with the other. Human Empathy and Project Emotion skills are used to keep the quarry quiet, and to ensure that the real parents do not try to stop the kidnapping. Once the baby stealer retires to a place of safety, the victim is eaten.

The false infant moves and appears to be similar to the real baby it replaced, but something seems mysteriously different. The difficulty level for detection goes down one level each day, and the fake child lives for 1D6 days. If the parents have detected the switch before this time is up, a medical examination produces an unusual, rumbling sound on a stethoscope. X-rays reveal several hundred larvae squirming around inside the simulated baby carcass. If the parents do not detect the switch before the time is up, the "baby" bursts and the larva escape. Many of the larvae die in the struggle to bury themselves in warm ground, but usually several survive to begin the baby stealer life cycle all over again.

SHAMBLERS

The Dark One opened several gateways between our dimensions and the Plaguelands. Some were open for years at a time. The surrounding Demonground in our dimension became a stalking ground for skullworms. The parasites transported their new hosts back to their proto- dimension. Although these doorways opened and closed irregularly throughout the centuries, many types of terrestrial creatures still exist in the Plaguelands. The larger species naturally survive longer, functioning as mobile hosts for dozens of parasites alone. The skullworms call them shamblers.

Like the walkabouts, these pathetic beasts are covered with creeping, bulging growths. Many are missing limbs and can barely move under their own power. Shamblers wander aimlessly throughout the Plaguelands, crashing through the undergrowth. The parasites, along for the ride, leave just enough nutrient behind to extend their host's nightmarish existence. The shamblers attack almost anything, enraged by the pain of their infestations.

The exact type of shamblers encountered can be determined by referee mandate, or by rolling according to the table. Use the statistics from the *Beasties* chapter for these creatures, but add 30% to the chance of attack and delete any running speeds.

SHAMBLERS ENCOUNTER TABLE

D10	*Shambler*
1	Bears, Common
2	Bears, Grizzly or Polar
3	Camels
4	Cats, Large
5	Cattle
6	Elephants
7	Horses
8	Rhinos
9	Tigers
10	Wolves

AIR MITES

 # Appear: 2D6
Attack: 100%
Move: 1 (crawl)
Initiative: 6
Strength: 0
Constitution: 0
Agility: 0
Skill/Dam.: 6/Disease
Hits: 1

Air mites, tiny creatures the size of a small insect, are carriers of disease. They are carried by a gust of wind and can appear in any terrain, virtually out of nowhere. Each character will be hit by 2D6 air mites. Feeling at first like grit or dust, they will quickly begin crawling around (movement of 1). Attempts to brush them off are Average: Agility, and each successful attempt brushes off 1D6 mites. If the mites roll a successful attack, they have contacted the character's skin, either by initial landing or by crawling into sleeves or collars. The character will then roll to avoid infection.

DISEASE

Contact with disease is a constant threat in the Plaguelands. All of the flora and fauna, from the tiniest to the largest carry some sort of disease, and the Incubi often spread them deliberately. Some diseases are transmitted just by being nearby, spread through the air. Others can be picked up through virtually any kind of physical contact, voluntary or otherwise. Injury by any denizen of this proto-dimension is sure to carry some nasty micro-organisms which were along for the ride.

Plaguelands diseases originate in a dimension different from terrestrial medicine. A few of them respond well to conventional medical treatment, but most do not. The Dark One has made sure that these diseases thrive on organisms from Earth, despite their alien origin. Once carried to our planet they can swell to epidemic proportions overnight.

Noticing the presence of a disease is Difficult: Medical or Biology roll. This task is more difficult than usual because of the alien morphology of most creatures in the Plaguelands, and the constant presence of parasites which may appear to be diseases. Contact can be avoided or minimized once a disease is detected.

If the disease is not noticed and contact is made, a roll of Average: Constitution must be made to avoid infection. The infection number of the disease is subtracted from the character's Constitution before the roll.

After the incubation period has passed, the referee informs the character of the symptoms. Diagnosis of the disease may then be attempted, a task which is Difficult Medical. Plaguelands diseases cannot actually be identified with a diagnosis, as they are all unknown to our medicine. However, a successful diagnosis roll will enable effective treatment. For the purposes of these rules, treatment requires someone with Medical skill using a doctor's medical kit and access to drugs (a neighborhood pharmacy will carry most of these, but as prescription medicines are controlled substances, an appropriate contact will be required unless one of the character is a doctor). A personal medical kit is for first aid and will not help in treating disease.

To recover from a disease, a character must roll greater than the disease's base recovery number. This roll is increased by the Medical skill of the person administering treatment and the Constitution of the diseased character. If treatment is begun upon the onset of symptoms, roll for recovery after another number of days equal to the incubation period. If no treatment is administered, or if initial treatment has not resulted in recovery, roll for recovery again after another block of days equal to the incubation period.

In all of these attempts at recovery have failed, the character has a chance of dying equal to the death probability (a D10 roll for the indicated number or less). If the character does not die, he or she recovers, but the referee should reduce Constitution permanently by 1-3 points (1D6/2). Plaguelands diseases attempt to reduce the victim's disease-fighting mechanisms to enable further attacks.

There are thousands of diseases in the Plaguelands. The exact characteristics of a disease can be determined randomly with the following procedure. Some diseases should be specific to certain flora and fauna, and players should have it easier on a second encounter.

RANDOM PLAGUELANDS DISEASE GENERATION

Roll the indicated dice to determine the characteristics of a disease at random.

Infection Number: 1D6

Incubation Period: 2D10 days

Base Recovery Number: 3D10

Death Probability: 1D10

Possible Symptoms (choose your favorites): Abdominal pain, chest pain, chills, cough, diarrhea, discoloration, fever, fluid-filled lungs, general body pain, headache, malaise, rash, and vomiting.

PLAGUELANDS DISEASE EXAMPLE

A swarm of air mites attacks Turlough (a gust of wind carried some tiny grit that crawled, and he tried to brush it away, but he didn't get it all), and one of the mites succeeds in its attack roll.

The referee has previously decided that this group of air mites carries a disease with an Infection Number of 2, an Incubation Period of six days, a Base Recovery Number of 13, and a Failed Recovery Death Probability of 3.

Turlough has Medical 4, but fails his attempt to notice the disease on the mites (made in secret by the referee). Turlough's Constitution is 7. Subtracting the Infection Number of 2 equals 5. A D10 roll of 6 by the referee means that Turlough is infected.

After the Incubation Period of six days (by which time the group is back on Earth), the referee informs Turlough's player that his character is suffering from diarrhea, fever, and a wet, hacking cough. He attempts to diagnose with his Medical 4 skill, and the referee rolls a 2 so he completes the Difficult task.

Treatment begins, and after six days, a recovery attempt is made. Looking for a roll of 13 or more, Turlough adds his Medical skill of 4, his Constitution of 7, and his (lousy) die roll of 1 to get a total of 12 (a failure).

He gets another chance after six more days and another 1 is rolled, which means Turlough has not recovered. The Failed Recovery Death Probability is 3, and he makes one last fateful die roll, scoring a 4. Turlough has avoided death and his system has finally beaten the disease, but he loses 1 point to his Constitution (a 1D6 roll of 2, divided by 2).

GETTING LOST

Direction-finding in the Plaguelands is almost impossible. There is no sun, moon, or stars, no night or day, and there are no magnetic fields to operate a compass. All Navigation tasks become one level more difficult in the Plaguelands.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The Plaguelands are a treacherous place, with danger coming from many unusual types of attacks. A flak vest and an automatic weapon are not much protection against creeping insects and disease-carrying micro-organisms. Flamethrowers are popular weapons, killing not only the target but also any incidental parasites and diseases.

Gas masks are helpful, and a well-supplied doctor is a must. Those who really dress for the Plaguelands wear the CES IIb Combat Environment Suit or ExoSkel high-threat powered armor, if they can get them.

Enhanced vision devices help cut through the gloom, so infrared and ultraviolet gear is useful. Binoculars don't do much good due to the constant haze. Starlight scopes will have some utility as well, but there is little natural illumination to amplify. Illumination rounds give a brief impersonation of daylight, doubling visibility in flat terrain. As an added benefit, most unintelligent beasties are frightened away by such light. Solar-powered devices do not operate due to the lack of sufficient light to power them.

The importance of radios for communication and navigation has already been discussed. Vehicles are a great bonus to mobility, but they need a good off-road speed to be of much utility. There are few paths and no roads, so the going is always rough.

The environment is dirty and humid, with detrimental effects on all kinds of machinery. For any Catastrophic Failure using a firearm, consider this to be a jam, not just a misfire. The gun will be useless until it can be stripped and cleaned, a task requiring no die roll but one that must be performed in a non-combat situation. Other skills involving the operation of machinery. such as Vehicle or Vessel Use, Mechanic, Electronics, or Computer Operation, have similar difficulties.

If characters have had access to DarkTek equipment (always a "double-edged-sword"), then an Antidoter, Rejuvenator or Doc-in-the-Box will prove highly useful. These alien devices handle the Plaguelands diseases better than any terrestrial diagnosis. Still, give them a reduction of one level for Medical skill tests. Another handy DarkTek item for use in Incubi encounters is Virophage.

ADVENTURES WITH THE PLAGUELANDS

The Plaguelands are an environment with a great deal of adventure potential. Here are some suggestions and possible scenario-starters.



"Will You Help Our Village?"

Strange, unidentifiable deaths abound in a tiny, remote town. The local authorities are at a loss to explain. Victims are getting their faces chewed off (face biters) or even their heads blown up from the inside (skullworms). Clearly, something has recently opened a connection to the Plaguelands, and immediate action needs to be taken to close it off before a major disaster happens.

"Runaway Animal On The Loose!"

For shoot-'em-up player groups, this may be the best introduction to the Plaguelands. A remote farming community is harassed by random attacks from a large, unusual animal, like an elephant, rhino, or tiger (a shambler, driven to attack by the constant pain of its parasites). No one knows why this animal keeps attacking humans. A nearby patch of Demonground (with all kinds of nasty encounters), or a dark elf playing a trick, explain how the animal got here. The PCs will probably arrive loaded for bear (literally), giving them an edge of some kind.

"All I Need is a Small Specimen..."

A field botanist for a famous university has found a very unusual plant on the edge of the jungle, where the local guides won't go. He believes it holds a cure for some nasty disease, and with a little more research...

If the PCs will escort him into the interior, he will pick up some more botanical specimens, and they get paid very well. Also, perhaps they'll find more than just plant life leaking through from the Plaguelands.

"Nirvana"

A band of Cultists have found their ticket to paradise. Just travel to this one place in the woods, and spend the night—the next morning, all your troubles will be solved. They lure weak-willed searchers for Shangri-La to become fodder for skullworms. Perhaps local law enforcers contact the PCs, or even a Cultist who wants to recruit them.

"None Of Those Foolish Humans Will Find Me Here!"

A good referee will have given the PCs a nemesis, a recurring type of Dark Minion, or perhaps a specific character, that is constantly menacing them. Give them a hot lead on this bad guy, and supply some rumors about the Plaguelands. Their enemy thinks this is a great place to hide, because it's so hostile to human life. Let the PCs prove him wrong... or maybe prove him right.

PYRE: THE EXOTHERMIC PROTO-DIMENSION

Pyre is a splinterland with a discontinuity of 2, and appears reasonably normal to humans who arrive there. The sky has a bit of an orange hue and the air has a peculiar bleach-like smell, but with the state of the environment back on Earth, these conditions will not seem too serious. The weather does not seem unnaturally violent or calm, and the sun appears at the same height in the sky that it was back on Earth. It was almost as if Pyre were nothing more than a parallel Earth where humans never evolved.

The fact is that there is a considerable difference between Pyre and Earth, but the PCs won't be able to tell what it is until they have spent sometime there. Pyre has a very serious physics shift from Earth. In Pyre, every exothermic chemical reaction produces much more energy that it would on Earth, and reactions that are perfectly safe on Earth become fatal there.



Name: Pyre
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 30

ASSIMILATION WITH PYRE

The assimilation damage caused by Pyre's high energy physics is 30. The damage is partially a result of temperature effects, heat exhaustion, and so on, but is more a result of the effects that high temperatures have on vital enzymes in the characters' bodies. A autopsy of someone who died from the effects of Pyre would indicate that the cause of death was hyperthermia (an extremely high fever), although no indication of infection would be found.

A lone character who did not know about Pyre's unusual physics and who was beginning to assimilate would notice that it was getting warmer but would probably disregard the temperature rise as a weather effect. As further assimilation occurred, the nature of the characters condition would become obvious. Things which do not produce heat on their own, the handle of a tool for example, would feel much cooler to an assimilating character.

The nature of the effect would be much more obvious to two characters who were not assimilating at the same rate. To the character who had managed to resist assimilation, the assimilated character would feel very warm to the touch, while the assimilated character would find the non-assimilated character to feel unnaturally cool.

As characters assimilate, their bodies will reflexively do everything possible to reduce their body temperature—they will begin to perspire profusely and eventually pant in an effort to cool down. There are a few things which can be done to help this process along, but effectively reducing the body temperature of a character who has begun to assimilate is virtually impossible. Placing the character in cool water will reduce assimilation damage by 1D6 for half an hour or so. Adding a large amount of ice to the water will reduce the damage by 2D6 but will also do 1D6 damage divided up among the character's limbs by causing frostbite to the fingers and toes. Cryokinesis can be used to reduce damage as well. Each stage of success removes 1D6 points of assimilation damage. Characters in clothing that does not breathe, especially things like combat armor, receive 2D6 additional damage from assimilation with Pyre.

OTHER EFFECTS OF PYRE'S PHYSICS

Referees should keep in mind that not every heat source is of chemical origin. The heat of friction from rubbing ones hands together, even when fully assimilated, is not any greater in Pyre than it is on Earth (but reactions initiated by friction, such as striking a match, become easier to start). The sun in the sky (if it truly is a star and not some sort of extra-dimensional simulation) is powered by fusion and, as a result, does not burn any brighter or hotter than the sun in Earth's sky does.

Interestingly, while the energy liberated in chemical reactions comes from the interatomic bonds which hold the substances involved together, materials found in Pyre do

not seem unusually hard or strong. It is much more difficult to freeze liquids in Pyre, though. Striking an assimilated match in pyre is like holding onto a weak firecracker as it explodes. An incendiary bomb would seem much more powerful in Pyre.

Burning Damage: Damage that is done by burning substances that are assimilated with Pyre's physics is much higher. Thermite or white phosphorus does 8D6 points of damage per second when it is fully assimilated. Likewise, assimilated gasoline will do 4D6 damage per second per body part in contact with the flames. There are no structures to burn in Pyre, but grass fires there will do 2D6 damage per body part in proximity to the flames. Diesel fuel becomes as explosive as gasoline, gasoline becomes as explosive as C-4.

Explosives: Explosives which are allowed to assimilate with the physics of Pyre will be much more powerful (but also more unstable). Treat any explosive which is fully assimilated as if its number of damage points were quadrupled. Then determine the explosion's concussion from the equations on page 191 or on th page 193 of the DC Player's Handbook 2nd edition. This technique would be very useful to characters who



had a big demolitions job to do but only had access to a limited amount of explosives. The danger is that assimilated explosives will tend to be more sensitive, and the chance of a mishap would be greater. Demolitions detonated with a standard demolitions kit normally do not roll for mishaps, but with assimilated explosives, a mishap occurs on a 1D10 roll of 8+. With improvised detonation equipment, a mishap occurs on a 1D10 roll of 6+. Unlike conventional mishaps, mishaps with assimilated explosives are always a premature detonation (timing up to the referee).

Heavy Weapons: The same effects that increase the power of explosives also increase the damage done by anti-tank rockets, rifle grenades, or incendiary rounds. Unfortunately, the shell's propellant would also be increased in power and, as a result, the weapon would explode when it was fired. For most weapons that PCs will be carrying, this will cause 1D6 damage to the arm with which the weapon was held and 2D6 damage to be applied to two randomly chosen locations. Firing an assimilated flamethrower, or a grenade or rocket launcher will be almost universally fatal. Loading an assimilated slug or warhead onto an unassimilated round is a possibility, but in most cases it would not be possible to assimilate the warhead, re-assemble it, and then get into position to use it before it had become re-assimilated with the Earth (inanimate objects assimilate within an hour).

Firearms: In the case of shotguns, battle rifles, automatic rifles, and machineguns, this damage is 1D6 each to the head, arm in which the weapon was carried and the chest, plus 3D6 damage to be applied to three randomly chosen locations.

Manufacturing specially loaded shells with less propellant is possible, but requires a Difficult: Engineer task to determine how much propellant is needed. Creating a gunpowder or smokeless powder that would function while assimilated with Pyre is an Impossible: Chemistry task. Failure either yields a powder which does not propel the slug at all or has the same explosive limitations as regular powder. A powder that would work equally well in both Pyre and Earth cannot be made.

Other Items: Assimilated matches and lighters are dangerous if treated improperly. Standard friction (a.k.a. strike-anywhere) matches can ignite in the box if shaken or roughly handled. Safety matches (book matches) are immune from this effect, but still explode when struck. Lighters turn into mini-flamethrowers, shooting a gout of flame almost a meter when ignited and sparking at the slightest touch. Flashbulbs will burst like small firecrackers. Dark elves are fond of using assimilated materials such as these for their fatal "jokes" on Earth.

Other equipment which depends on an exothermic chemical reaction will either overheat, burst into flame, or run some risk of explosion. Internal combustion engines, even diesels, are particularly vulnerable in this regard. Any internal combustion engine which is run with assimilated fuel will be destroyed after 1D6 turns of operation.

Batteries, which normally produce a small amount of heat, will get very hot after extended operation while assimilated with Pyre. For every 20 turns (10 minutes), a battery-powered device is operated, it must be switched off for 10 turns (five minutes) to cool down. If it isn't, there is a one in 10 chance per turn of the device breaking down. Devices which utilize very small batteries and only draw small amounts of power (watches and calculators) are exempt because they can radiate the increased heat as fast as they accumulate it. Likewise, devices which only occasionally draw from their batteries (automobiles for example) are not hindered by this limitation. Solar cells do not produce any chemical heat and, so, are unaffected by the physics of Pyre, but many

devices which feature solar cells also contain storage batteries which are hardwired into the circuitry.

Designing a battery which would function in Pyre is a Difficult: Chemistry task. For every point rolled above the target number, these improved batteries will operate one additional turn before requiring a 10-turn cooldown. If an Outstanding Success is rolled, batteries which never need to be cooled are created. If a Catastrophic Failure is rolled, the batteries ruin the device 1D20 turns after the device is switched on.

LIFE IN PYRE

The plants and animals found in Pyre are completely alien to anything found on Earth (they have to be to deal with the proto-dimension's physics). Even the cold-blooded creatures of Earth would produce a lethal amount of heat just digesting a meal on Pyre. This alienness will protect a character from being attacked by most of the local life forms—nothing that is out looking for food will not want to be near anything that smells as alien as the characters, much less try a taste.

The reverse is also true. All native plants and animals have a very peculiar smell, and taste like economy-brand brass polish. If the taste doesn't convince a PC that the life in Pyre is not edible, the 2D6 points of damage to the chest that comes about five minutes after swallowing some piece of the local biota probably will.

Animals taken from Pyre to Earth die after assimilation (and vice versa). Likewise, the wood analog that plants in Pyre are made from will burn while assimilated with their home dimension, but if assimilated with the Earth, will not produce enough heat to sustain a flame.

ENCOUNTERS IN PYRE

The only Darkling race that seems to have any particular affinity for Pyre are the pale. While a pale is in Pyre, it is divorced from its need to feed on the body heat of warm-blooded creatures. This might imply that Pyre was the pale's home proto-dimension, but no indication of a pale civilization exists there, and the pale do not seem to take in any other sort of sustenance while there.

Some minion hunters theorize that perhaps the pale have an underground civilization based in Pyre, since the other classic limitation of the pale, their hatred of the daylight, remains in effect. Others believe that a pale who is in Pyre is, essentially, doing the same thing as a human who drinks a glass of water to alleviate hunger pangs—merely putting off the necessity of feeding for a short time.

SLIDE: THE SLIPPERY DOMAIN

Slide is a physics-shifted splinterland with a discontinuity of 2. In Slide, frictional coefficients are greatly reduced so that a rubber shoe sole on sand behaves more like greased Teflon on glare ice.



Name: Slide
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 20

COPING WITH THE PHYSICS OF SLIDE

When characters first arrive in Slide they will be amazed at how normal it appears. The sky is almost exactly like the sky on Earth. The sun shines. Healthy looking green trees grow here. Sure, they are taller and broader than the trees on Earth, but compared to the environment of many of the proto-dimensions, Slide will seem more suitable for a picnic than an adventure. Then the PCs will take their first steps. After that, things will start to go downhill—literally.

Walking in Slide is not easy. Characters who are walking must make an Average: Agility roll once every 10 minutes to avoid taking a fall. If they are trotting or running, the task becomes, respectively, Difficult or Formidable and, likewise, becomes one level easier if they are only crawling. This assumes that characters are wearing sneakers, hiking boots, or other such footwear. If they are in some sort of slick shoes (leather-soled dress shoes for example), the task is one level more difficult, and it is one level easier if they are wearing some sort of spiked footwear like golf shoes, athletic cleats, or mountain climbers' crampons.

Navigating hills in Slide is an even greater challenge. What would be a gentle slope on Earth is one level more difficult to walk on in Slide. Steep slopes are even more difficult to climb, but it is only slightly easier to pile up dirt in Slide than it is to stack marbles on Earth and, consequently, steep slopes are very rare.

Characters who fall down will find themselves sliding along in whatever direction they were traveling for a considerable distance. In the phase after falling, their speed will be reduced by four meters per phase. This will continue until their speed is reduced to one meter or less per phase, at which point they will be able to stop themselves. That is, unless they are traveling downhill. In the case of gentle slopes, the speed reduction is only two meters per phase, and on steep grades it is only one meter per phase. This means that a running character who falls on a steep slope will coast over 450 meters before finally coming to a stop. Of course, it is likely that the slope will level off before that distance is traveled.

As if things weren't already bad enough, simple travel becomes one level more difficult, and speed reductions are halved for characters who are partially assimilated. Characters who are fully assimilated must deal with walking at two levels of increased difficulty and quartered speed reduction.

For example, Turlough is trotting through Slide in a pair of baseball cleats. He needs to make an Average: Agility roll to avoid slipping (it would be Easy thanks to the cleats, but it is Average due to his speed). He rolls a 1D20 and gets a 14—since his Agility is 6, he finds himself flat on his back, sliding along the ground. He was moving 15 meters per phase and, as a result, will slow to 11 meters during the next phase, seven the phase after that, to three the phase after that, and will finally manage to stop himself four phases after he fell, having slid for a total of 21 meters.

Besides the difficulty involved in simple locomotion, any manual task that is performed in Slide is one level more difficult if the character and the items being worked with are not assimilated, two levels more difficult if one or the other is, and three levels if both are assimilated with the low friction physics of slide.

LIFE IN SLIDE

There are many species found in Slide, but the characters need only concern themselves with one. These creatures are a small but lightning-quick species of predators called "skaters" by those who have seen their graceful means of locomotion.

Skaters

 # Appear: 2D6
Attack: 40%
Move: 10/50/100
Initiative: 6
Strength: 3
Constitution: 2
Agility: 9
Skill/Dam.: 8/1D6
Hits: 4/8

Skaters are dog-like creatures which prey on the other animals found in Slide. They have two modes of locomotion, one they use for traveling slowly for short distances which involves their sinking their wicked looking claws into the ground. The other mode utilizes long bony ridges on the animal's lower legs in much the same way ice skaters use the blades of their skates—hence their name.

In combat, a pack of skaters will move at their top speed and travel in a large circle (approximately 50 meters in radius) around their target. Then, the individuals will curve into the center of the circle to make attack passes, attempting to bite the target as they go by. If a skater connects, it will either drag its target along, in the case of small animals, or in the case of humans, it will have its movement reduced to 10. It will take two phases for a skater to get back up to its top speed after a successful attack, but during that time, another skater will begin to spiral in for its attack, drawing attention away from its fellow.

When humans are struck by a skater, they must make a Difficult test of Agility to avoid being knocked down. Hit location should be determined as if they were prone, and being attacked from the rear. Once the target is prone, the location is determined normally.

The jaws and necks of skaters are incredibly sturdily constructed in order for them to deal with the tremendous stress of striking a target at high speed. Because of this, treat skaters as if they had an armor value of 1 on their head and forequarters.

Skaters will never attack if their numbers are three or less and will always break off attack if there are only three left.

EQUIPMENT AND EQUIPMENT FAILURE

Many pieces of equipment will not function properly once they become attuned to the physics of Slide. This is particularly true of wheeled vehicles which use friction (between the wheel and the ground) to provide locomotion (and brakes, which use friction to stop locomotion). Keep in mind that adhesion and similar effects still work (albeit not as well as on Earth), and that no matter how slippery something is, it will not fit through a hole which is smaller than it is without something deforming.

For these reasons, high-adhesion duct tape and Superglue will work almost as well in Slide as they would on Earth, while nails, screws, bolts, and knotted ropes (which rely on friction) are virtually useless. Bullets which have been assimilated will behave as if their penetration value has been decreased by 1, even if brought back to Earth (until Earth re-assimilates them). Nil penetration becomes 3 (weapons with only a Nil penetration value become 3-Nil), so a weapon with a penetration of 2-3-Nil would change to 1-2-3 until its ammunition reassimilated.

A note: Friction is the only thing that holds most bullets and primers in a cartridge case. Players who leave ammunition in Slide to assimilate the additional penetration will find that the bullets tend to slip out of the cartridge case at inopportune moments (such as when slammed into the chamber by a breechblock) causing a misfire or worse. Roll 1D10 per shot; a misfire will occur on a 1, jamming the weapon.

Some minion hunters use cross-country skis to travel in Slide. This is a very effective mode of travel. Characters should use their Acrobatics skill as their proficiency with skis. Traveling in relatively straight lines at speeds of 8 or less requires no task roll. Higher speeds and complicated maneuvers will require occasional rolls, however.

Matches and cigarette lighters don't work when assimilated, as these items rely upon friction for ignition.

THE DARKLINGS IN SLIDE

Most of the Darklings avoid Slide as a useless (to them) proto- dimension. There are a few exceptions though:

The dark elves often use materials from Slide in their little games of murder and mayhem. Knives which have assimilated with Slide will easily penetrate many things that they normally would not. Likewise, the dark elves' brethren, the dwarf gremlins, often use Slide-assimilated materials to wreak havoc. If the crank case of an engine were filled with mud from Slide, it would continue to work—that is until the mud became assimilated with the Earth's physics, at which point violent failure would be imminent. The Dwarf Gremlins find this type of sabotage especially amusing when perpetrated on aircraft. Of course, the timing has to be just right so that the craft will go down minutes after takeoff and not simply stall out on the ground.

ASSIMILATION DAMAGE

The assimilation damage caused by Slide's low friction physics is 20. As damage is taken, red blood cells begin to slip through pores in the blood vessels causing bruises, contusions, and tissue damage. Additionally, there is a chance (1 on 1D10) for a

shoulder or hip (choose an applicable limb randomly) to slide out of joint whenever an assimilated character attempts a task requiring some physical strain (running, lifting a heavy object, and so forth). These injuries do 1D6 points of damage to the limb and render it useless until it is popped back into joint. This is an Average: Medical task. If unsuccessful, another 1D6 points of damage is done to that location. Even after being put back into socket, all tasks involving that limb are one level of difficulty higher for the next eight hours due to the extreme pain such jarring causes. This effect is above and beyond any modifiers due to the regular injury rules.

TARTARUS: THE REALM OF REVERSION

Tartarus is a halfland with a discontinuity of 3 and a very extreme and unusual physics shift.

A LAND OF LEGEND

There are two types of terrain in Tartarus. The highlands, which are made up of row after row of jagged, rocky hills filled with crevasses, small caves, and grottoes; and the lowlands, which are chiefly made up of a broad, almost completely treeless plain. Through the center of the lowlands runs a broad river of water which is heavily laden with clay, and in the center of that river is a small rocky island with a rather unusual feature.

In Greek and Roman mythology, Tartarus was the place of imprisonment for Tityus for his crime of insulting Latona, the mother of Apollo and Diana. The amount of truth in this story is uncertain, but there is at least a grain of truth to it. Tartarus is a proto-dimension in which a powerful creature (perhaps a Dark Lord who has fallen from the grace of his malevolent master, perhaps something else) is imprisoned.

As the legend states, this being (which we shall refer to as Tityus in deference to the Roman version of the tale) is chained to a high rock and is under constant siege by a vast force of bronze-colored automatons which resemble vultures. These machine-creatures spend their days tearing at the entrails of the unfortunate Tityus, and their nights perched in the trees that are sprinkled throughout the lowlands. During the day, Tartarus echoes with Tityus' screams of pain. At night, Tityus bellows what seems to be curses in a language unknown to the PCs.

Tartarus' boundaries are curved (characters may travel about 50 kilometers before coming back to their starting point), and the central river connects with itself.



Name: Tartarus
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 3
Assimilation Effect Value: Special

TARTARUS' PHYSICS

There are three main features of Tartarus' physics shift.

"Healing": Tityus' torture would have certainly ended with his death long ago were it not for Tartarus' odd "cause-and-effect detachment" that erases (heals would be a misnomer) Tityus' wounds each day.

This effect can be of great utility to PCs. Horrible wounds, even those that are automatically fatal, can be mended in Tartarus. At the same time, years of a character's life can be erased, and the ravages of age done away with.

Tartarus has disadvantages, however, the greatest being that practically every Dark Minion also knows of Tartarus' peculiar physical laws. Some come to Tartarus to recover. Others come to Tartarus in search of wounded foes to torment (to beings that feed on suffering, a place where the tortured feel all of the pain but cannot die is paradise).

Time: Time passes more swiftly in Tartarus than on Earth. The time ratio between Earth and Tartarus is about 24:1, which means that one day on Tartarus is equal to one hour on Earth.

Devices: Mechanical devices simply do not work once they have been assimilated. All electronic equipment (including radios, AutoNavs, dimension walk devices, and gateways), weapons more complex than clubs or bayonets, and any mechanical device more complicated than a belt buckle will not function. Explosives explode with full effect, but they cannot be detonated electrically; gasoline burns, but a flamethrower will not work at all. Matches work, but cigarette lighters to not. Organic DarkTek (such as folder pods) will work. Why the vultures work is a mystery... perhaps it is because they are native to Tartarus.

The Vultures

 # Appear: 1D6
Attack: 100%
Move: 10/20/80*
Initiative: 4
Strength: 4
Constitution: 4
Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: 3/1D6
Hits: 5/10

The vulture-things which torment Tityus are mechanical versions of predatory birds. If one is carefully examined after it is "killed," it will be found to contain a network of wires, pulleys, springs, and primitive clockwork gears. The vultures contain nothing organic, nothing electronic, and nothing that gives a hint how they actually work. There are enough of these creatures in Tartarus to provide an essentially endlessly supply.

The vultures will always attack any creature which dares to step onto the lowlands of Tartarus, but will generally leave those in the highlands alone. Characters in the highlands will encounter vultures only by referee mandate, and, if vultures are encountered in the highlands, their Attack possibility is reduced to 50%.

The movement for vultures represents Walk/Trot/Fly, not Walk/Trot/Run.

ASSIMILATION

Assimilation is immediate for living beings. Inanimate objects follow the normal assimilation rules. This means that mortally wounded characters need not wait an hour before the stabilizing physics shift takes hold on them. It also means that weapons and complex equipment will function for a short time.

DAMAGE AND DAMAGE ERASURE

While in Tartarus, no injury, no matter how severe, will push a character across the brink to death. Even characters who have suffered critical head wounds may live if brought to Tartarus within 60 minutes of their injury. Likewise, characters who have suffered other critical wounds will live if taken to Tartarus within the same time. Characters who are dead when brought to Tartarus may not be healed. however.

Tartarus can neutralize any damage that is caused by infection or disease, but it will not remove the infection itself (bacteria and viruses cannot die in Tartarus either). A character who was about to die of some disease born in the Plaguelands could be kept alive indefinitely in Tartarus, and would recover from the physical damage after a long enough stay. Upon leaving, however, the disease will again begin to take its course.

Characters suffer all of the pain and crippling effects of their wounds, they just don't die from them. A character with a serious wound in the right arm cannot use that arm until it is healed; a character with a critical head wound cannot move or speak, etc.

Dark Conspiracy characters have seven hit locations, each of which may be wounded. The number and seriousness of such wounds determines a character's chances of healing due to Tartarus' physics. Referees should consult the table below and total the recovery numbers for each injury:

Type and Degree of Injury	*Recovery Number*
Critical Head Wound	5
Other Critical Wounds	3
Serious Wounds	2
Slight Wounds	1/2

After determining the recovery number, the referee rolls 1D10. If the number rolled is less than the character's recovery total, then that character may reduce a number of wounds equal to the difference between the die roll and their recovery total.

Injuries must be healed in their order of seriousness. A critical head wound is reduced to serious before any other wound can be affected. All other critical wounds are then reduced before any serious wound can be affected, and so on. A wound may be reduced only one level per day (critical wounds may not be reduced to slight, etc.). A character may always heal one slight wound per day, without making a die roll.

For example, Reynard got shot up pretty badly during a Darkling ambush. He suffers a critical wound to the abdomen, serious wounds to his head and right arm, and a slight wound in the chest. Although Renyard is unconscious, his companions take him to Tartarus, where they protect him from the vultures and other visitors. The referee determines his recovery number as follows: Since he is still suffering from one critical

wound (3), two serious wounds (2 each for 4 total), and one slight wound (1/2), his recovery total is 7 1/2 (3+4+ 1/2) which rounds down to 7. Reynard's player rolls a 1 D 10 and gets a 4, which means Reynard gets to heal three injuries. Since the wound to his abdomen is the only critical wound Reynard has, that wound is reduced to serious first. Now Reynard may choose to either reduce two of the three serious wounds he has to slight wounds. His player decides to reduce the abdomen and head wounds.

If Reynard spent another day in Tartarus, he would have a wound recovery number of 3.5 (A serious wound to his right arm for 2 and slight wounds to his head, chest, and abdomen for 1/2 each, 2+ 1/2+1/2+1/2=3 1/2), which would round down to 3. At best, Reynard could heal two wound levels, but it is more likely that there will be no effect. Reynard's player cannot choose to forego the die roll and automatically heal one of Renyard's slight wounds, as the serious wound must be dealt with first.

AGE

For reasons not completely understood, Tartarus' anti-causality can also erase the effects of age. For each 24 hours spent in Tartarus (Tartarus time), each character should subtract 1D6/2 months from his or her current age. If a character's age is reduced below a point where aging effects were incurred, then those aging effects are also removed. A few months in Tartarus can make a character young again, but there is (as always) a catch: Characters risk losing their memories along with their debilities.

Any character who spends more than one day in Tartarus loses all unspent experience points. Further, characters risk losing a part of their memories. For each day a character spends in Tartarus, the character must make a Difficult: Empathy check to avoid losing a memory. Unconscious characters may not make this check, and automatically lose a memory.

The particular memory lost is determined by the referee, but it should be one of the following:

- the PC's most recent contact.
- the PC's most recent skill or Initiative advance due to experience points.
- an important fact recently learned, such as an empathic impression of a proto-dimension or an operating pattern for a dimension walk device.

ENCOUNTERS

The referee may mandate encounters with any Darkling, or any creature of their choice. Dark elves and other Darklings who feed on pain and suffering are particularly fond of bringing victims to Tartarus for purposes of torture, since the victims cannot die no matter how horrible the treatment. The possibility of memory loss from remaining too long, however, keeps most Darklings from taking up permanent residence.

Organic life in Tartarus becomes younger and younger with each passing day, eventually ceasing to exist, which helps to keep the population down, but creatures of every type find themselves in Tartarus from time to time.

FREEING TITYUS

Freeing Tityus from the stone to which he is chained is not possible. First, while the vulture-things which torment him will not attack PCs who are in the highlands, they have no such compunctions about those who venture into the lowlands. Any PCs who stray into the lowlands will be set upon by 1D6 of the mechanical birds. Whenever the characters managed to destroy one of them, another will arrive in 1D6 30-second combat turns later to take its place.

If the characters did manage to reach the bier, they would have additional problems. The chains which bind Tityus are not made of mere steel (Tityus' strength is to an ogre what an ogre's strength is to an average human; he could snap steel chains like bits of string). While he cannot break the chains that bind him, he has managed to rip one free of the rock to which it was fused. He uses this chain to kill the bird things that settle on his abdomen, but it is impossible to prevent them all from attacking and there are always more of the mechanical creatures.

Finally, Tityus' punishment has driven him quite mad. He will automatically lash out at anything which gets close to him, including potential rescuers. His unearthly chain, coupled with his tremendous strength, will automatically do critical damage to whatever they strike. Fortunately, in Tartarus, critical injuries are only crippling and excruciatingly painful.

If this is not enough to dissuade the PCs, the referee should come up with something else that will.



DISCONTINUITY NUMBERS

The following table gives the discontinuity values for the home dimensions of selected Darklings.

Darkling	*Discontinuity*
Bhuta	2
Bloodkin	3
Boogey Man	1
Brain Eater	2
Charon	0
Charon's Servant	0
Child Monster	1
Cobra People	1
Daemon	3
Dark Elf	1
Dread Sidhe	1
Dream Master	1
Dreamweaver	2
ET	0
Gargoyle, Lesser	1
Gargoyle, Mediterranean	2
Gargoyle, Rock	2
Gargoyle, Subterranean	2
Glimmering	5
Gremlin, Dwarf	2
Gremlin, Torgol's	2
Harpy	1
Hellfire	2
Khar'lanki	1
Lesser Vampire	0
Lilutu	2
Marterkind	0
Medusa	2
Mesmer	0
Morlock	1
Nukid	0
Ogre	1
Pale	2
Penannglan	3
Plagueling	1
Ptero-Raven	1
Ravager	2
Reaver	3
Stalker	1
Storm Wraith	3
Super Rat	0
Toxic Mother	0
Tulpa	0
Wailer	1
Wendigo	2

THE SCIENTISTS OF TRANS-DIMENSIONAL PHYSICS

A solid, scientific understanding of the proto-dimensions eludes the vast majority of the people in the empathic underground. Even sorcerers, with their specialization in Dimension Walk and its cascades, are mostly unaware of the fundamental underpinnings of the proto-dimensions. At present, there are only three people on Earth who can really be said to understand the proto-dimensions in a scientific manner. They are Dr. Andrew Tover of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Yoshimari Sonada of the Nozomi Institute in Osaka, and Dr. Marilyn Donnov, formerly a research fellow at the National Superconducting Super Collider (current whereabouts unknown).

DR. ANDREW TOVER



Of the three, it is Dr. Tover who has the greatest knowledge of what the proto-dimensions are like. Tover, son of a wealthy New England financier, was orphaned at an early age by an automobile accident that killed his parents and confined him to a wheelchair. Tover turned to intellectual pursuits, and ultimately received several doctorates, one of them in physics. Dr. Tover took a research chair at MIT and spent the next few years studying string theory and the shadow matter whose existence it implied. According to the theory, there could exist a type of matter which did not interact with our universe in any other way but gravitically—this intrigued Dr. Tover because it could explain where some of the universe's missing mass had gotten to.

Ultimately, Dr. Tover managed to disprove the shadow matter hypothesis, but not before generating dozens of new questions to which he turned his attentions. Dr. Tover's work did not appear in any of the scientific journals again for several years, but the eventual publication of his findings caused an incredible stir. While most of the people who read Tover's article could not begin to understand any of its implications, the final paragraph explained its shocking conclusion in terms which any layperson could comprehend:

It has not escaped my observation that these calculations indicate the existence of other universes which exist parallel to our own, but are displaced in space-time by means of some as-yet unknown mechanism. There is, in addition, the implication of another fundamental force or forces besides the four known to modern physics. There is, at present, no way to access or study these parallel universes, and their nature must remain a matter for speculation.

—*Annual of the International Institute for High-Energy Physics,* Vol. XIV, July 2013

It was this article which put Dr. Tover in the scientific limelight. His period of fame was short-lived though, and he returned to his research work after a brief lecture tour and a couple of appearances on talk shows. It was not long after that that Dr. Tover had his first encounter with the Darklings.

Dr. Tover would have simply disappeared like so many others who knew too much and talked about it if it were not for Nightwatch, a large organization of minion hunters who operate on the east coast. The leaders of Nightwatch were certain that Tover's openness would move the Darklings to eliminate him, and had assigned several of their cells to keep him under constant protective guard (without Dr. Tover's knowledge).

Nightwatch rescued Dr. Tover (the details remain sketchy, and neither he nor anyone else in Nightwatch will talk about it), revealing to him the extent of the Darkling menace to Earth. In gratitude, Tover decided to devote his genius and his family fortune to fighting the invaders, and joined Nightwatch.

While he cannot participate in the sort of fieldwork that Nightwatch usually engages in, his tremendous scientific skills and sizable fortune make him a primary source of high-tech equipment for Nightwatch operatives.

Tover's current research involves developing a device like the distorter but which will be powerful enough to shield the entire Earth from extradimensional invasion. He is certain that such a device could be built, but he has made little progress on the project. This is partially because he is constantly distracted by more urgent duties (usually designing and building equipment for Nightwatch), but mostly due to the incredible leaps in technology which construction of the device will require.

When not lecturing at MIT (his position there does not require teaching, but Tover insists on giving a number of highly technical seminars each year), Tover can be found on the family estate in Massachusetts, where he has constructed a large private laboratory (he seldom uses the office provided him by MIT). This laboratory is currently under an around-the-clock guard by members of Nightwatch (primarily ex-military servicemembers). In addition to this protection, Tover has a distorter operating around the clock in his home and in his lab. Tover dislikes firearms, but carries an S&W .38 special revolver with him at all times (for which he has all requisite permits and licenses as an honorary member of the Massachusetts Bureau of Investigation).

DR. YOSHIMARI SONADA



Dr. Sonada's knowledge of the proto-dimensions stems from research into the world of subatomic particles. He hoped to describe the forces at work within the atomic nucleus with far more accuracy than any current model. If successful, his work would be a quantum leap in atomic physics and would put his name beside such notables as Bohr, Heisenberg, Pauli, and Millikan.

That was Dr. Sonada's hope, but the atoms were not cooperating. His results continually displayed large fluctuations for which he could not account. After painstakingly checking and re-checking each of his instruments, he began to wonder if, perhaps, his results were correct. Working under that assumption, he carefully analyzed his data and found that there was a definite pattern emerging.

Further assessment of his data sent Dr. Sonada back into the lab. The only way his data could be correct was if he was somehow removing matter and energy from the universe, an act which the laws of thermodynamics expressly forbade. Dr. Sonada's frustration grew as he continued to get the same impossible results.

Dr. Sonada shelved this research project and moved on to other experiments. Being unable to explain the errors frustrated him, but the Institute's facilities were needed by other scientists and he did not want to waste more time on a scientific dead end. Then one day, months later, Dr. Sonada came across the missing piece to his puzzle. A journal which he was reading just happened to contain an abstract of Dr. Tover's article, the one discussing the possibility of alternate dimensions. Sonada obtained a complete text of the article, and after reading it, a question occurred to him: What if the missing mass and energy was being moved into one of Dr. Tover's alternate dimensions?

Using the results from his former work, plus ideas he gleaned from communications with Dr. Tover, Dr. Sonada began work on a device that could move matter and energy into other dimensions. At present, he has managed to move small amounts of matter, no more than a few hundred atoms per trial, using his device. What he has in fact built is a dimension walk device, albeit one that is much less efficient than those used by the ETs. Dr. Sonada will be able to improve it in time—if he lives that long.

Dr. Sonada has not publicized his work, but its general direction is common knowledge in the international scientific community. Nightwatch (and Dr. Tover personally) have attempted to warn Dr. Sonada of the grave personal danger his experiments place him in, but he refuses to believe them. Tover and Nightwatch have contacted anti-Darkling groups in Japan, but it is not known whether any sort of protective force has assembled around Sonada.

DR. MARILYN DONNOV



Dr. Marilyn Donnov left her position with the SSC (Superconducting Super Collider) in Waxahachie, Texas after an accident which occurred during the testing of special magnetic field generators she had helped to develop. She and her co-workers at SSC hoped that this new technology would facilitate the vast improvement of existing particle accelerators.

The complete details of the accident were never made public. A spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, shortly after the accident, said that preliminary police investigations concentrated on two possibilities: terrorist bombing or an explosion caused by a ruptured natural gas line underneath the building, and that all evidence pointed toward the latter explanation. The final report indicated that fire alarms in the building were tripped at 1:27 in the afternoon, and that the first unit to respond (a county sheriffs deputy) found the building engulfed in flames at 1:32. Additional police, fire, and ambulance units arrived over the next few minutes, but by that time the building was burning out of control. The report went on to say that all of the researchers in the building at the time of the accident were killed immediately, with the exception of Dr. Donnov, whose survival is attributed to the fact that she was blown through a window by the force of the blast, and thus escaped the bulk of the fire that destroyed the building. The building and all equipment within it was completely destroyed.

There was, however, a report of a videotape of the building, taken by SSC security employees a few minutes after the alarm sounded, which showed a different picture. The *Dallas Pre-Dawn Leftist*, an underground hackers' newsletter devoted to Fortean research, distributed a digital copy of the video several months after the accident. This shows two security guards approaching and entering the intact (taped by the automatic video camera in their patrol car) at 1:32. The tape shows no motion for 30 seconds, and then the two bodies of the security guards are clearly seen to fly out of the buildings' windows, as if they were rag dolls hurled by a petulant child. The building then begins to glow with an actinic blue-white light, originating inside the lab, and then begins to burn. Dr. Donnov is shown staggering through the door of the building just ahead of the flames, obviously injured. No one in a position of authority in the state of Texas will comment on this video, other than to declare it an obvious forgery.

Dr. Donnov survived the catastrophe, but was hospitalized with severe bums, contusions, and a mild concussion. In an interview given shortly after she was admitted (before she was moved into intensive care and reporters denied all access), Dr. Donnov stated the opinion that the fields which were created by the new generators weakened the fabric of the universe somehow, and tapped into an alternate reality. Something reached through she said, something big that destroyed all it touched. When it touched the generators, they exploded, and ejected the monstrosity back through the hole in reality.

Dr. Donnov was eventually released from intensive care and transferred to a regular hospital room, where she gave an interview rescinding her earlier statement. "I was injured, and clearly delusional," she said, "and I have no clear memory of the accident. That is all I have to say on the subject, as I would prefer to put this horrible affair behind me and get on with my life."

The next day, Dr. Donnov checked herself out of the hospital, resigned her position and vanished. The only forwarding address she left was a post office box in Dallas (which turned out to be a mail-drop). Nurses at the hospital, when questioned, told of how Dr. Donnov received a visitor on her last day in the hospital, a distinguished-looking woman who met with her for almost three hours before leaving. Rumor among the empathic underground is that this woman was an empath, a recruiter for an anti-Darkling group in Arizona. Dr. Donnov's present whereabouts are unknown, although it is rumored she is living somewhere in Arizona, researching the effects her generators had on the interdimensional fabric and training to develop her empathic potential.

GLOSSARY

Anchor: A dimensional anchor (less commonly known as a physical portal) is a complicated device that acts as the entry point for an interdimensional gateway. One anchor is required at each end of the gateway, connected by the transdimensional portal.

Assimilation: The process by which an object or being adapts to the physical laws of a different proto-dimension is called assimilation. In some cases, no harm is done; in some cases, the change is harmful. An alternate form of assimilation takes place at the referee's option, where an object or being changes into a corresponding object or being from the new proto-dimension.

Astral Proto-Dimension: The astral plane is functionally equivalent to the Interstices. (See the "Interstices" section.)

Correspondence: The principle of correspondence dictates that every point in a proto-dimension corresponds to a specific point in another proto-dimension, just as every location on the first floor of a building has a corresponding location on the other floors.

Curvature: The extent to which a given proto-dimension curves back upon itself is known as its curvature. This curvature is not part of the terrain, in the way that the Earth is curved, but is a part of the time/space fabric of the proto-dimension instead.

Dimension: The word "dimension" is not, technically, interchangeable with the word "proto-dimension." There are significant differences between a true dimension and a proto-dimension. The only time the word "dimension" should be used is when both the **Dark Conspiracy** universe (a true dimension) and the proto-dimensions are being discussed together. For example, it might be said that the Dimension Walk skill allows its users to travel within the dimensions.

At this point, no interdimensional traveler, human or Darkling, has made its way into another true dimension (this includes astral travelers as well). The anti-dimension, which is mentioned in Glimmering, may in fact be a true dimension, but this is only a matter of speculation.

Discontinuity: Discontinuity is a relative rating of the "weirdness" of a given proto-dimension, compared to Earth. Simply because two creatures share the same discontinuity does not mean that they are alike, merely that they are more or less equally strange compared to an Earthly norm.

Fragmentary Proto-Dimension: The most surreal of proto-dimensions, usually very small, and dominated by one or two singular features.

Gate, Gateway: An interdimensional gateway (sometimes called gate for short) is a device which directly connects two proto-dimensions (or two spots in the same proto-dimension). Gates use a transdimensional tunnel identical to that created by empaths for interdimensional travel, but the tunnel created is more or less permanent as long as power is supplied to the dimensional anchors (q.v.) at both ends. Gateways do not require Empathy to use.

Halfland: Halflands are a better simulation of reality than fragmentary proto-dimensions, but will never be mistaken for a complete world.

Hardened Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is more difficult to enter than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate.

Interstices: The interstices are that portion of the meta-verse which fills the spaces between the other parts. The interstices connect, permeate, and surround the universe of Earth, and the proto-dimensions. The interstices is functionally equivalent to the astral plane.

Magnetic Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is easier to enter than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate.

Meta-Physics: The basic operating principles of the metaverse, which remain constant in all proto-dimensions.

Meta-Universe, Meta-Verse: The meta-universe (meta-verse for short) is composed of three parts: the interstices, the universe (of Earth), and the proto-dimensions. Another name for meta-verse is true dimension or complete dimension, but meta-verse is used in **Dark Conspiracy** because it is less confusing.

Pocket Proto-Dimension: A pocket proto-dimension is a subset of the fragmentary proto-dimensions, usually no more than two or three cubic meters in size. These "bubbles" of proto-dimensional space can only be created by extremely potent empathic or technological powers, and can normally be entered only from a single location.

Portal: A transdimensional tunnel, either opened by an empath using Dimension Walk or connecting two anchors as part of an interdimensional gateway.

Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension is a quasi-reality, a parallel world or (more often) worldlet existing as a part of the overall meta-verse.

Quantum Proto-Dimension: A special variety of proto-dimension, a subclass where time or distance may be stretched or compressed.

Right-Angle Travel: In right-angle travel, a dimension walker moves from a given point in one proto-dimension to a point in another proto-dimension corresponding to that point.

Shadow Proto-Dimension, Shadow Dimension: A less common term used by some authorities to refer to halflands.

Skew: In skewed travel, a dimension walker intentionally deviates from strict right angle travel to arrive at non- corresponding point in another proto-dimension.

Softened Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is easier to leave than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate. Softened proto-dimensions are rare.

Splinterland: Splinteriands are proto-dimensions which most closely resemble the universe of Earth. Instead of being defined by their environment only, as the other types of proto-dimensions tend to be, the splinterlands are primarily defined by the events that have occurred there.

Sticky Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is more difficult to leave than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate.

Universe: The English language is sorely lacking in terms for discussing other universes or differentiating one from another. The only name we have for our universe is "the universe." There is no clear precedent for the naming of parallel universes at all, apart from science fiction and comic books where they usually receive a terse nickname or perhaps just a number. Nazi World, Confederate World, Counter-Earth, and Earth-if are a handful of examples.

Here, the terms "the universe," "reality," and "Earth" will all apply to the universe of **Dark Conspiracy**. This means that "Earth" will not always be used as an exclusive term referring to the third planet out from Sol. Statements like "...although it contradicts the physics of Earth" include not only the Earth, but the rest of the universe in which our Earth is found.

Vertical Offset: Vertical offset is where a dimension walker intentionally attempts to arrive in a proto-dimension at a point at a different altitude than the corresponding point in the source proto-dimension. This is used to travel to the upper floors of a tall building, for example.

X-Y-Z-Gamma Axis: A coordinate system incorporating the three conventional axes (X-Y-Z) and a fourth called gamma. Just as the three X-Y-Z axes are at right angles to each other, the gamma axis is at right angles to the X-Y-Z axes.

CHAPTER FIVE
Dark-Tek

Like everything else about the Dark Minions, Darkling technology (or DarkTek) ought to be mysterious to the player characters. In fact, it ought to seem almost magical, so that the PCs can never be quite certain what the Dark Minions are capable of, and so that humans cannot learn to mass produce Darkling devices. Here, we discuss in detail many of the most important technological devices the Dark Minions possess.

THE NATURE OF DARKTEK

The Dark Ones perceive the universe "organically," without empirical dissection of it. They are not analytical—they are empathic. Ideas and epistemological philosophies such as logical positivism are absolute anathema to them. The Dark Ones see things in wholes, as integrated cause-effect chains, a sort of black zen. They "feel" the laws of probability, but would recoil from the human discipline most dedicated to it: statistics. Consequently, the Dark Ones are not really machine-oriented creatures. Their minions are the technical artificers. The Dark Ones find such tasks to be impossibly boring.

While characters will no doubt want to get their hands on DarkTek (for curiosity's sake, if nothing else), referees are reminded that much, if not most, DarkTek is best used to enhance the mood of mystery and horror that surrounds the Dark Minions. The devices are often more hideous than their makers, being comprised of various animal parts and organs gleaned from a dozen different dimensions. If PCs do decide to hazard using DarkTek, the referee *must* apply the full user costs of the device. To do otherwise would be to make the DarkTek effective without drawback, and this would undercut its major purpose, which is to face the PCs with difficult choices. Some will want to use DarkTek because it is effective. Others will shun it because of its nature, particularly if it invades the user's being.

Still others will struggle with indecision. The world of **Dark Conspiracy** is intentionally a world of dichotomies, paradox, difficult choices, and imperfect alternatives; that's the environment the Dark Ones are looking to create. And while their "technology" is certainly intended to help their own minions, it is also intended as bait for humans, as a temptation to corruption. To the Dark Ones, a single corrupted human is worth 100 dead ones, and the use of DarkTek—unless carefully controlled—is one of the primary means whereby people may begin to veer down the shadowy path that leads to Darkling enslavement.

TECHNICAL IMAGERY

Most Darkling devices look quasi-organic, as if they were exuded from a living organism, rather than built mechanically. (Actually, most of them are!) Machine casings look like insect carapaces or mollusk shells. Cables and wires are bumpy and unevenly sized, like vines or strands of web. Some look like veins, carrying current through an internal fluid. The internal workings are dotted with opaque capsules, like insect eggs,

and containing sludgy fluids. Where cables connect, globs of hardened mucous serve as solder. Exterior controls are either jointed, limb-like extensions that are operated by movement, or they are blister-like lumps that are activated by touch. Instead of dials and gauges, the devices have color-changing windows (black and red being prevalent) through which disturbing shapes can be dimly viewed, or flexible sheets of material with raised spots that move about, as if a finger were pressing outward from the other side.

The major exception to all of this is equipment used by the humanoid ETs. Their machinery tends to be smooth and featureless geometric shapes made from silvery metals or grown from crystals. Some have pastel lights glowing dimly inside. There are no visible controls: The ETs merely touch the machinery's surfaces to activate it. This makes the devices very difficult for humans to operate, because the touch points are not obvious.

Also, what little machinery the morlocks and dark elves use tends to be closer to the norm for humans, because it is usually stolen from humans or copied from their designs. It is not uncommon to find that equipment linked to items borrowed or stolen from one or another of the ET races, as well.

Referees are encouraged to let their imaginations run wild when describing Darkling devices. After all, the PCs are never going to be able to figure out all of a device's functions—what is most important is imagery.

DARKTEK PRICES AND AVAILABILITY

Many DarkTek items are simply not available to PCs for purchase. The price listing and availability code for such items are given as "N/A" (not applicable). The only way PCs can come into possession of such items is if they are bold (or foolish) enough to grab them away from their original owners.

Much (if not most) DarkTek is designed for use by Dark Minions, since the Dark Ones themselves have little or no use for such primitive implements. Therefore, many of these implements have certain "costs" connected with their usage or possession. One of the more horrific of these costs is that users may find themselves more involved with the Dark Ones as a result of using such a device. The Dark Ones crave control over their lessers; therefore, they promote the use of devices that, while empowering their minions with enhanced abilities, also assure their continued obedience and deepening dependency.

Four basic types of cost are associated with the use of DarkTek: Feed, Control, Detection, and Recharge.

FEED

Some DarkTek equipment operates by draining the user's own life energy, causing an intense craving for meat to restore the energy that has been lost. The Feed rating of such an item indicates the kilograms of fresh, raw meat (dead less than two hours) that the user is compelled to consume for each minute (or fraction thereof) the item is used. The total feeding requirement is found by multiplying the Feed rating by the number of combat turns (30-second periods) the DarkTek device was used. This result equals the number of kilograms of normal meat that must be consumed before the device is sated and the user is free of the feeding compulsion.

Dark Minions who use such devices tend not to be picky about where they acquire the meat; the first living creature that comes their way will do, provided that it is big enough to satisfy the craving. As a rule of thumb, the amount of usable meat to be found

on a creature is equal to half its estimated body weight. Heart, liver, kidneys, and brain count as 10 times their actual weight for purposes of determining their Feed value, and the referee can estimate the total weight of these organs as 10 percent that of the other meat.

For instance, a 600-kilogram cow would yield 300 kilograms of meat, plus 30 kilograms of key organs, which—in terms of Feed value—would be the equivalent of 300 kilograms of regular meat.

Feeding (this is not anything nearly so pleasant and genteel as eating, much less dining) can take place at a rate of up to one kilogram per combat turn. A creature may only consume up to 10 percent of its own mass before having to cease feeding for at least one hour. Note that this feeding rate is quite extraordinary, not only in terms of aggregate food capacity (close to twice the norm), but also in terms of speed. This reflects the body's preternatural need for the food and the accelerated processing of the nutrients. To a bystander, such creatures will seem quite bestial, since they are devouring more food than they should be capable of holding within their stomachs at one time.

Note that once the user has ceased using the device, feeding should take place immediately. If no feeding has been undertaken within an hour, the feeding requirement doubles. At the end of each hour thereafter, if there has still been no feeding, the requirement doubles again. Furthermore, for every hour in which the total feeding requirement (in kilograms) exceeds the user's CONx3, the user will suffer physical damage, reflecting the fact that the user's body is suffering damage. One point of damage is applied to the chest for each point by which the feeding requirement exceeds CONx3 (and the feeding requirement is reduced by a like amount).

All devices with a Feed cost graft themselves to the user and can only be removed surgically (see "Removing DarkTek," below). Unfortunately, there is no way for a character to know in advance which DarkTek devices confer a Feed cost.

CONTROL

A device with this user cost makes the user more susceptible to Dark Minion empathic attacks by acting as a negative modifier to the individual's Willpower. This modifier does not apply to *all* cases in which the user is under empathic attack, only those involving Dark Minions. This means, for instance, that the reduction does not apply when the user is confronting normal humans, even those who are servitors of the Dark Minions. By definition, however, a human who has learned *any* Darkling empathic talents is no longer a "normal human" and thereby causes the user to have the stated Willpower reduction.

It is a Difficult test of Empathy for a non-Darkling empath to discern the user's increased susceptibility. For Dark Minions, the test is Average difficulty.

DETECTION

A device with this user cost makes the user more empathically "visible." First, it makes users who are normally detectable only to Human Empathy detectable to Darkling Empathy, as well. Second, it enhances the distance at which the user may be empathically perceived. The device's Detection rating operates as a basic radius (in meters) at which the user is automatically perceivable. For each stage of power level beyond the first that an empathic searcher scores with either Human or Darkling Empathy, the device's radius is doubled. Searchers who have both skills may roll each and use the one which scores the higher power level.

For example, imagine that a morlock is empathically searching an area in which a

human with a device that has a Detection rating of 100 is hiding, and that the morlock scores a Stage Two with Human Empathy and a Stage Three with Darkling Empathy. The Stage Three is the higher of the two and allows the morlock to double the Detection rating twice, for a final result of 400 meters.

RECHARGE

Two types of Recharge costs are possible. One is a watt per minute charge (represented as "W/Min"). The other is a life force charge.

The W/Min charge indicates the number of watts per minute for each usage the device consumes. For instance, a user cost of 10,000 would indicate that the device could be recharged *for one use* by hooking it up to a one-watt source for 10,000 minutes, or a 10-kilowatt source for one minute. Such W/Min devices are generally easy to recharge because instead of having a fixed-size receptacle, most have a clear membrane which becomes penetrable in the presence of an electric current. The lead from any electrical source can be advanced through the membrane into a conductive biogelatin. Upon reaching full charge, the biomechanism releases a chemical into the gel that renders it nonconductive, thereby ending the recharge session. Typically, a small bioluminescent indicator shows the current level of charge.

The life force charge requirement is much less pleasant. The device draws energy directly from the user. The energy drain is represented as lost hit points, which are to be subtracted from randomly determined body locations. Recovery of these lost hit points is per the normal healing rules.

REMOVING DARKTEK

Some DarkTek devices can be as easily discarded as any normal human devices. Others (including all devices with a Feed cost) graft themselves to the user and can only be removed by surgery. Surgically removing such a device is equivalent to attempting to reduce a critical wound to serious. If the surgery is successful, the device has been removed and the patient is considered to have a serious wound to the appropriate body location—the result of the surgery itself. If the surgery fails, the device is still attached and the patient suffers a serious wound

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF DARKTEK

Player characters are the investigators of the plots and perfidies of the Dark Minions and as such will be seeing people, places, and things that 99 percent of the everyday populace never suspects, much less experiences. Much of the truly DarkTek looks like black magic. Many of the government's ultra-high-tech toys look like props from a science-fiction film. Whether of human or Darkling origin, the items are new, different, compelling, and—quite possibly—fraught with danger. Which is, after all, what gives them their appeal. These devices are the jarring splashes of color which contrast with the otherwise graying, decaying world of **Dark Conspiracy.** The unusual bits of high—or Darkling—technology provided here remind PCs that there are two worlds and that the real battle is not being fought in the one that everyone can see. These devices are primarily culled from that unseen battlefield which the PCs are moving into more deeply—and irrevocably—with each passing adventure.

Furthermore, while each of these devices can be used as an indirect method of

informing PCs of what is really going on in the world, each device can (and should) initially come to the PCs' attention as a puzzlement. What was that strange, car-like vehicle that jumped straight up into the air? How did those Dark Minions know that their lair had been found, even when they were miles away at the time? By inspiring such questions, each of these items can be the beginning of a mystery in which finding the answer is the greatest reward. After all, such knowledge distinguishes the seasoned professionals from the neophytes. And investigators with that level of knowledge are more likely to receive the trust of government agents, empaths, and others who are working against the Dark Ones. Consequently, referees might want to consider each item as the inspiration for a new adventure. Pursuant to this, many of the item descriptions contain tidbits of information that can suggest such a plot: rumors about the item, who's making it, who wants to know about it, and the like.

A NOTE CONCERNING ORGANIZATION

The following is divided into sections primarily according to the function of the devices. Within each section, items are alphabetized for easiest reference.

BIOLOGICAL DEVICES

Antidoter

Given a host organisms' tissue and blood, as well as a little analysis time, this biomechanism can produce antidotes to virtually any toxins. The antidoter is an insectoid creature that is approximately the size and color of a large cockroach. It is intended to be affixed to its user and worn continually as an automatic defense against poisons. The device attaches to its host with a ring of small barbs and invasive tendrils (the latter are used to collect samples and inject antidotes).

Within its chitinous shell, the antidoter contains a number of small organisms and glands from a variety of creatures, all integrated into a tiny chemical laboratory that is capable of both determining when a toxin has entered the host organism and determining an antidote. The antidoter then synthesizes that antidote and releases it into the host's bloodstream until the toxin is fully counteracted.

The time required to devise an antidote is based on the number of poison dice inflicted by the toxin: One combat phase is required per poison die. As soon as the antidote is determined, the antidoter begins to secrete it, and further poison damage to the host is diminished by one die each phase until the poison has been completely neutralized.

For example, suppose that a character had been stung three times in one phase by a medusa, which has a poison rating of 1. The antidoter would require one phase to devise an antidote (because of the poison rating of 1). During the second phase, the poison would begin to take effect, normally doing 3D6 damage because of the three hits. But the antidoter will have reduced this damage to 2D6 (it has had one phase to secrete the antidote). On the next phase, the character will suffer only 1D6 damage from the poison. After that, the level of antidote in the character's blood stream will completely negate any further damage. If the character continues to be stung by the medusa in the same combat phase, each additional dice of damage will require a phase to be neutralized, but the antidoter will not need a phase in which to identify the poison. On the other

hand, if the character is stung in a later phase, the antidoter will have to start over again, first identifying the poison and then neutralizing it.

Referees may decide that some poisons are so rare as to be more difficult to analyze, in which case the antidoter may require more than one phase to identify the toxin and produce an antidote before any poison dice can be neutralized.

User Cost: Feed: 2
Wt: 0.01 kg
Price: $250,000 (—/R)

Biocomputer

One of the most hideous of the Darkling devices is the computers used primarily by insectoid and tentacular ETs. On the outside, these look like other Darkling devices, but inside, suspended in a greenish nutrient bath, are row after row of paper-thin slices of human and animal brain tissue, serving as circuit boards for the computers' operation.

Every day, thousands of terran creatures are killed to supply the parts for these machines (many of them terminal patients in corporate-owned hospitals and clinics). Their brains are then sliced thin, and the pieces are laminated in an organic sheathing. These pieces are then tested and sorted by type of function (no two brain slices have their neurons "wired" quite the same), before being assembled into complete computers.

The unique nature of each brain slice not only means that each must be sorted by function, but also that many "circuits" in each slice are entirely unused. All too often, these extraneous circuits house memories and instincts that wander about the computer circuitry as "data ghosts." Sometimes, if enough slices from a particular brain are incorporated into one computer, or if several computers with brain tissue in common communicate jointly, a partial personality is reconstructed of the creature from which the brain was taken. Often, when such a thing happens, the ETs are forced to destroy the computer to prevent it from shaking off their control.

On the other hand, the ETs have begun to incorporate some of these extraneous bits of memory and instinct into program constructs that serve as internal guards, hard-wired into the computers. For example, some empathic ability and memories from a human might be tied to a shark's hunger instinct and an electronic attack program, to create an electronic guard that recognizes empathic intrusion and attacks it ferociously.

Computer Empathy and Biocomputers: Even with the deleterious effects of the Dark Minion-spawned Greater Depression, humanity has continued to increase its dependence upon computers and computer networks. At the same time, Computer Empathy has begun to manifest itself in a small portion of the population (although most such "gifted" individuals tend to keep their abilities secret). The result is nowhere near being the electronic otherworld predicted in cyberpunk literature, but some interface of mind and machine is possible.

If you run adventures with computer empathic characters, keep in mind that they cannot directly affect the operation of computers. Computer Empathy is a receptive sense only. What they can do, however, is perceive information within the computer world much faster than someone watching a monitor, and they perceive more of that information at one time than does a normal operator. With this enhanced information, computer empathic characters can operate a computer much more easily than can nor-

mal operators. They can also assist someone who is operating a computer, by orally describing to the operator what they sense. (You might let a successful computer empathic character adjust the computer operator's skill by one point, two if an outstanding success is rolled.)

Most computers and networks such characters encounter will be normal, terran devices. Some may be larger and faster than others, more difficult to access, perhaps, but they will still be just machines. Occasionally, however, a computer empathic character may encounter another empathic character within a computer network. When this happens, the two characters can communicate empathically with each other, using the computer link as a sort of carrier wave. The resultant communication is extremely rapid, as if the two were sitting in the same room and using Human Empathy and Project Thought to communicate telepathically.

Even less frequently, computer empathic characters may encounter a Dark Minion computer within a network (if they perform a computer search into the heart of a major corporation, for example). In such a case, they are in for quite a shock when they begin to perceive the jumble of organic memories swirling there. But as well, the machine itself may be able to sense such characters with its organic parts (if one or more of its "donors" had the Computer Empathy skill themselves) and attack them empathically. On the other hand, with its electronic abilities, it might react to the computer the character is "riding." It could cut off that computer's access to the network, for example, or perhaps invade it with a virus. It might even take control of the character's computer and purge it of all programming not specifically hard-wired in.

As referee, you should decide the specific results based upon your perception of the relative power of the two computers and the quality of task rolls by each of the combatants. (You will need to assign a Computer Operation skill and Empathy rating to the Dark Minion computer.) Computer combat is not intended to be handled in the same detail as normal combat, however; after all, it is a completely different environment. Also, two important things to keep in mind are that Dark Minion computers can meld empathic skills and Computer Operation in ways not possible for a human or Dark Minion, and any encounter with them ought to be horrifying for the character involved. Finally, you need to describe computer interaction at the level you are familiar with. As always, the important thing to convey is story. Don't think you have to mention every switching point along the way a character's goal. Instead, you should have the player make skill tests and base your descriptions of the action upon the quality of those rolls.

Let's consider an example of computer interaction and combat. Dolph, a PC with a Computer Operation skill of 6 and a Computer Empathy skill of 8, is attempting to access the Tojicorp computer system by modem and call up a personnel file secured within it. What he does not know is that the file is held within an organic computer that has developed its own limited sentience. The referee decides to have him make a Computer Operation test first, at Difficult level because the Tojicorp system is well protected. Rolling, the player succeeds, and a roll for power level reveals a basic success, which the referee translates as having accessed the system's opening menu and finding an entry for personnel records, but discovering nothing important after doing a quick search of what is available under that heading. Convinced that the record he seeks is hidden there somewhere, the player states that Dolph is going to attempt Computer Empathy to feel for pathways hidden under undisclosed menu headings. The referee

agrees, again setting the task at Difficult. A Stage Two is rolled, which the referee translates as having accessed the line leading to the sentient computer. Another Computer Operation check, this one at Average difficulty, is called for to search that computer's files. At the same time, the referee rolls for the computer itself to empathically recognize the intrusion, deciding to set the computer's Empathy rating at 4 and the task at Easy. Dolph's player rolls an outstanding success, which the referee translates as Dolph having found the file he wanted at the top of the menu and copying it to his computer's memory almost instantly. The Dark Minion computer's skill check results in a Stage Two success, and the referee tells the player that Dolph hears a mental voice asking "Who's there?" then finds himself in empathic contact with another mind. He sees images of a dozen different people's lives, plus others from the minds of lesser creatures, all jumbled together in a horrifying muddle, and overlaid with an agonizing sense of loneliness and confusion. The character must make an Average Willpower check to pull free, or he will be sucked helplessly into the nightmare. The player rolls and fails. But the referee is feeling generous, so he has a friend come by Dolph's apartment a few hours later, find Dolph frozen in front of his computer with tears streaming down his face, and turn the computer off, breaking the connection. He puts Dolph to bed, and by morning the character has recovered enough to function once again.

As a final note concerning Dark Minion computers, it should be mentioned that these computers can sometimes link with others to produce a combined sentience. If these sentiences are talented enough, and lucky enough, they can escape the notice of the Dark Minions until they have gained enough power to protect themselves from shutdown. They then become self-determined creatures dwelling within the computer networks. Similarly, there are some disembodied creatures, things like ghosts and animator spirits, that take up residence within the electronic flow of the computer networks. Generally, all such sentiences are hostile to computer empathic humans they encounter in the networks. But once in a while, when working against the Dark Minions, PCs may find themselves being aided by such a being if it bears a grudge against the invaders itself.

Body Bag

This euphemism for the Darkling answer to the all-environment suit is indeed apt: When a user first slides into this oozing sheath, it resembles nothing more than a living bag. However, immediately after the user gets inside, the bag starts providing the occupant with a safe environment. Small probes enter the occupant's body in order to determine atmospheric, barometric, and thermal needs. The bag immediately begins to alter itself to meet those needs, hardening its exterior for protection, and creating a biochemical environment that generates the occupant's needs via a reprocessing of its wastes (which is handled by a self-emplacing catheter system that causes no small amount of alarm in many first-time wearers).

The bag can withstand up to 20 atmospheres of pressure, as well as total vacuum. It can protect its user from outside temperatures ranging from -100 to +100 Celsius, with a +/- range of 50 Celsius at double the listed user cost.

When characters first encounter a Darkling body bag, they will have no way of

knowing what it does by simply looking at it. Its appearance resembles nothing so much as a recently emptied stomach about the size of a sleeping roll.

User Cost: Recharge, Life Force: 2 (per day)
Wt: 20 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

Cloner

The cloner is a very rare device which is an extension and extrapolation of the "rejuvenator." The cloner creates beings that are genetically identical to whatever biosample is placed inside it. Cloners are very complex, very easily damaged, and extremely dangerous to the future of humanity since the creatures produced by them have an effective Willpower rating of 0 when attempting to resist the empathic influence of Dark Minions. Consequently, cloners represent the ultimate achievement in Dark Minion infiltration strategy.

Like the rejuvenator, the cloner looks like a weird cross between a peapod and a casket. It contains a number of mechanical interfaces, including a power connection (since it runs on electricity).

Clones can be created at any biological age, from infant to elderly. They have no memories or knowledge that belonged to the parent organism, but some Darkling computers can be programmed to empathically store the thoughts and memories of an individual, making it possible for these to be imprinted upon a clone. It is therefore possible for individuals to make a younger version of themselves and then to have their consciousness replaced into the new body. This gives Dark Minions the ability to offer select humans effective immortality.

Cloners also allow Dark Minions to create physical duplicates of any human from whom they can get a living tissue sample, making agents that, while not having the knowledge of the original person, are physically indistinguishable from them. These duplicates will pass any security test that does not require informational questioning.

Rumors of these devices have begun to filter through to the very highest levels of governments and megacorporations, creating something of a clone-panic amongst the highest-placed officials. A few of the boldest have spoken of trying to seize a cloner and modify it so as to eliminate or at least reduce the terrible Control cost of the device.

User Cost: Control: 10
Wt.: 900kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

Cyborgs

Some of the Dark Minions use cyborgs as guards and assassins, enhancing their bodies and controlling their minds. This is just what PC cyborg escapees were intended for. And this, then, is what the special note for that career refers to as "unpleasant consequences." That is, if PC cyborgs meet up with the Dark Minions who modified them, they may be taken over once again. The referee should play this possibility for its story value. If the PCs are soundly thrashing a group of Dark Minions, for example, the referee might decide to have these be the creatures that created the PC cyborg in the group, and those creatures might suddenly pull out a control box or speak a command word to cause the cyborg to join their side of the battle. Alternately, you might just have them

cause the cyborg to freeze up. Of course, you don't have to wait until a battle to have a group of Dark Minions attempt to regain control of the PC cyborg. That attempt could be the core to an entire adventure, with the Dark Minions remotely commanding the cyborg to do their bidding and the PCs trying to break that control. Or perhaps the cyborg suddenly realizes that he or she has a self-destruct mechanism ticking away inside and the PCs have to find the Dark Minions responsible, in order to obtain the defusing device.

Don't be hesitant to use and abuse PC cyborgs in such ways. After all, their players were warned about possible "unpleasant consequences" of choosing the career.

Empathic Beacon

An empathic beacon (sometimes called a *dog whistle*) summons Dark Ones and Minions if activated. Activation can be conditionally determined, or the device can be set to operate constantly (creating a permanent spot of black upon the empathic brightness of the normal universe). The beacon is a simple device, often used as a "bug" planted upon creatures to be tracked, or as an alarm or an emergency signal. Examples of conditional activation include situations when a particular door is opened, someone picks the beacon up, an occupant of a room leaves or is killed, and the like.

The beacon is a small, immobile creature with a shiny black carapace. It is smaller than a dime and has no visible appendages. The beacon is quite stupid and must be given its instructions with Thought Projection (although it also responds to more direct stimuli, such as when it is struck).

While it might seem that there are no immediately wonderful PC uses for such a device, a little thought might provide some interesting possibilities. For instance, if one could be captured and given new instructions (an Easy test of Darkling Empathy and Thought Projection), it could be secreted on an individual suspected of being an agent of the Dark Minions. If the bug's instructions were to activate when it next sensed the use of Darkling Empathy in its vicinity, the device could lead PCs to the agent's master.

User Cost: Detection: 100 (at all times)/10,000 (when activated)
Wt: 0.01 kg
Price: $210,000 (—/R)

Erector

The erector is a growing, fibroid lattice that creates quick, structural frames for Darkling buildings (the walls of which can then be "fleshed out" with a viner—see later). The device exemplifies the Dark Minions' disdain for productive work; they are raiders and hunters by nature, not builders or creators. Therefore, when they cannot have human slaves do such work for them, they use an erector.

An erector must be given its pattern instructions via Darkling Empathy and Thought Projection. It is a very primitive life form that patterns easily. Once given instructions, it needs only to be fed in order for it to start growing into the specified pattern. Feeding is a bit gruesome, however. The erector creates a fibroid web around its victims in 60 seconds, during which time a Difficult test of Strength will allow a victim to free itself or be freed by someone else. After securing its victims, it invades their bodies with tendrils and slowly begins to convert their flesh into nutrients for its own growth, leaving only withered husks over skeletons. Bodies are reduced at the rate of 1

point of Strength per hour until Strength reaches 0, followed by 1 point of Constitution per hour until that attribute reaches 0 as well, at which point death occurs. (if a character is somehow rescued before dying, surgery can remove the invading tendrils, and lost Strength and Constitution points can be restored by hospitalization and intensive physical therapy at a rate of 1 point each per month.)

The amount of space that an erector can grow to enclose is dependent upon the amount of body mass it consumes. For every point of attribute absorbed, the erector can construct enough framework for one cubic meter of internal building space. So 70 kilograms of living flesh would enable the erector to create a fibroid matrix that would be a sufficient framework for a building with an internal volume of 70 cubic meters.

Wt: 3.2 kg (beginning mass)

Price: N/A (—/—)



Esperlink

The Esperlink does just what the name indicates: It links minds via empathic power, allowing the joined parties to share visual and aural experiences, along with thought exchange. Transmission of tactile and olfactory perceptions is also possible, but less precise.

The Esperlink is another of the Dark Minions' patchwork biomachines. This one provides the user with a slightly altered form of Thought Projection at a practical skill level of 20. This particular variety of Thought Projection allows an absolute sharing of sensory information and thoughts, but does not enable the user to plant suggestions or imperatives in the linked being's mind. Nor can the user send (or receive) falsified data; the sensory link is absolute. Note that neither the user nor the contacted creature will be directly affected by the sensory experiences of the other. The user might experience tremendous, incapacitating pain, but the contacted creature would not suffer also; it would merely be aware of the pain, its intensity, nature, etc.

The Esper link connects directly, physically, to the user, and must do so at a point that is fairly close to the user's brain (within 10 centimeters). If it is not attached directly over the brain itself, it will extend a tendril (up to 12 centimeters in length) to lay along that region. Note that by using these tendrils, the Esperlink can also be interfaced

with a spectral eye, thereby making that individual the ultimate living recon drone.

In the event that a human begins using an Esperlink, there is a strong possibility that the use will be detected. If the use is detected, it requires an Average test of Human or Darkling Empathy for a Minion to "eavesdrop" on the "conversation," or a Difficult test of Thought Projection for the Minion to "jam" the transmission.

User Cost: Detection: 3000, Control: 2, Feed: 0.5

Wt: 0.05 kg

Price: $450,000 (—/R)

Facedancer

The facedancer is a bioconstruct that overlays a user's face and melds with the tissue there, creating the equivalent of a living mask. This mask can mimic the features of other individual with considerable ease and startling accuracy.

The facedancer appears as a fleshy, veined pancake, somewhat sticky to the touch. A user places it on his or her face, then stimulates it with a mild electric charge in order to activate the device. While the charge is applied, the facedancer will attempt to mimic the features of the nearest face in view. The time required for the device to reconfigure itself varies with the amount of visual data is has to work with, as indicated below:

Object to Mimic	*Minutes Requires*
1 photo	30
2 photos (different views)	25
3 photos (different views)	20
"Flat" hologram (less than 360-degree)	15
Multiple/rotational views	10
Rotational hologram	5

The facedancer is able to perfectly mimic virtually any face belonging to the same species as the user, including alterations of cheekbones, nose, lips, etc. However, alien races with radically different cranial or facial structures are likely to diminish the effectiveness of the device.

Applying the facedancer is a spooky process, since it can be felt moving about on the user's face, exuding bonding gelatins, and so on (sort of like wearing an octopus).

User Cost: Recharge, Life Force: 1 for every 30 minutes the device is worn

Wt: 0.3 kg

Price: $350,000 (—/R)

Graftables

Graftables are body parts that adapt to the biology/physiology of the recipient organism, replacing lost body parts and/or giving the user improved capabilities, such as enhanced strength, wide-spectrum vision, etc. However, they also tend to increase the recipient's susceptibility to Dark Minion control and detection.

Graftables are actually symbiotic organisms that revise their shape and function to replace a part lost by a host organism. This includes limbs, viscera, and sensory organs, but not the brain. But they can also be designed to allow for "customized" replacements: arms that are stronger or more dexterous than the user's original, hands that have a

"feel" for surgery or weapons, etc. They can also be encoded with other fixed values, such as gender, race, and—on odd occasion—species. For example, an otherwise normal human being could be invested with the arm of a tiger. With inhuman graftables such as these, it is completely possible to exceed human norms for Strength, Agility, damage resistance, and the like. (On the other hand, a human with the arm of a tiger would still not have all the Strength, Agility, and mass of a tiger, nor would that character do the damage of a tiger in unarmed combat.)

As should be obvious, the tremendous diversity that is possible with such items precludes any easy listing of attributes specific to each. Instead, referees should consider the statistics for the creature whose extremity the graftable is emulating and modify those statistics as seems reasonable. In the example above, let us assume that the human has a normal Strength of 6 and a Melee Combat (Unarmed) skill of 7. For the purposes of attacks from the tiger arm, the referee might average the character's Strength and Melee Combat (Unarmed) skill with a tiger's Strength and Skill ratings: 18 and 8. Strengths 6 and 18 average to 12; Skills 7 and 8 average to 7. Unarmed Combat Damage rating for the limb would be 8 (Skill 7 times Strength 12, the result divided by 10). The referee might decide to toss in a 1D6 roll for the claws, as well. Note that the arm would have increased hit points due to its higher Strength and Constitution. We have figured its effective Strength as 12. If the user has a normal Constitution of 5 and we average that with a tiger's Constitution of 18, we come up with a Constitution of 11 for the limb. That gives the limb a total of 46 hit points, compared to a 22 for the completely human limbs.

Of course, there would be other side effects of having such a limb. For one thing, any skills that require two hands to complete would be more difficult, due to the fact that the tiger paw has no thumb. On the other hand (literally), the user might have an insectoid graftable that would be considered to have a natural armor of 1, but that still had opposable digits to allow for fine manipulation.

Prices for graftables vary according to the exact effects of the devices. As a general rule, the referee should consider a graftable to cost the base price below, multiplied by the number of points by which the device exceeds the user's norms in Strength, Constitution, Agility, and/or armor value.

User Cost: Control: 1, Detection: 200 (multiply each by the number of graftables)
Wt: Varies
Price: $20,000 base (—/V)

Inhabitor

The inhabitor is another modification of the brain/computer technology of the Dark Ones. This small pseudo-organism has a proto-sentience, along with the ability to insinuate itself into electronic and mechanical systems by a combination of biological and mechanical processes. Once insinuated (like a parasite) it can operate the machine. In effect, the inhabitor becomes the machine.

Inhabitors are programmed either when they are constructed or, more frequently, when they are activated for purposes of insinuation. In general, the nature of the programming/instructions will be highly dependent upon what kind of device they take over. Note that the device need not be electronic to come under the control of an inhabitor; tendrils insinuate into mechanisms without difficulty, allowing the pseudocreature

full physical control over any device. The larger and more complex the device invaded, the more time it takes to gain full control. In general, each kilogram of device requires 10 minutes to gain control of. This is modified by the following cumulative factors:

Device	*Time Required Multiplier*
Electronic	2
Computer-Assisted	5
Computer	10
Aerospace	10
Active when invaded	2

Even if a device has no on-board sensors, the inhabitor always has visual and aural capacities roughly equivalent to those of an average human being. Common missions for inhabitors include guard duty, assassinations, or surveillance/tailing. Although in many ways an inhabitor is like an animator, there are two important distinctions. For one thing, inhabitors are not empathic: They have no telekinetic powers and cannot make something move that has no power plant or means of moving. They could not, for instance, make a knife attack, but *could* keep cocking and firing a loaded gun (although once the bullets were used, they would have no way of reloading). Second, inhabitors are intelligent, and last much longer than and can coordinate many more activities/mechanical options than an animator can.

Prior to insinuation, the inhabitor appears as a cluster of tendrils and filaments all growing out of a biomechanical baseplate.

Wt: 0.5 kg

Price: N/A (—/—)

Obedience Bug

This small insect is used by the insectoid ETs to link individuals into their hive mind and thereby control their actions. The obedience bug is insinuated into the host/slave's ear. From there it makes its way to the cerebral cortex, where it can combat the host's Willpower, send and receive information to its masters, and—if necessary—inflict blinding pain upon the host as punishment for disobedience.

The bug has an Empathy rating of 20 and a communication-only version of Thought Projection. Any insectoid ETs who are aware (via Darkling Empathy) of the presence of the bug can communicate with it and give it instructions, which are then passed along to the host. If the host manages to resist the commands (see the user cost, below), the bug will attempt to use pain as a persuader. For each phase that the bug does so, the subject must make a Difficult test of Willpower to keep from complying, and a Difficult test of Constitution to keep from passing out as a result of the pain. Since the bug can simultaneously attempt to use empathic control and pain, it is very likely that obedience or unconsciousness will occur within the first phase. It has limited use to PCs, other than as a means of threat (possibly to the insectoid ETs' Dark Minion rivals).

User (Slave) Cost: Control: 6, Detection: 500

Wt: Negligible

Price: N/A (—/—)



Rejuvenator

The rejuvenator is a biotechnological healing/rebuilding unit that looks like a weird cross between a peapod and a casket (like a cloner, but shorter and stubbier). The device has a drawback, however: In rebuilding a damaged individual, it also increases the character's susceptibility to Darkling control.

The rejuvenator itself requires the same kind of power that people do: food. Its needs are fairly modest, considering the healing miracles it is capable of. This is largely due to the fact that it mostly serves to accelerate the body's own healing process; special rebuilding help is provided only where necessary.

The effects of a rejuvenator are as follows:

- It automatically stabilizes critical wounds;
- It reduces by 50 percent the amount of time needed for a wound to heal under medical care (i.e., scratch and slight wounds take 12 hours, serious wounds take one day, and critical wounds take two and a half days);
- It can stabilize a critical wound for 20 minutes after it has been inflicted, rather than the normal 10;
- If a body part has been completely destroyed (referee determination), the rejuvenator can cause a replacement to grow in its place.

The rejuvenator requires 800 calories per hour of operation (roughly the equivalent of a full meal for an average human male). If it runs out of energy, it will offer the users (both external and internal) the option to either end the remaking session and release the subject, or to go into a "hold" mode that will maintain the wounded individual in stasis for up to one week, with a significantly reduced metabolism. If the rejuvenator is fed 2,400 calories a day, this task can be maintained indefinitely.

For each 12-hour period that a patient spends in a rebuilder, that character suffers a user cost of Control: 1. Such rebuilding penalties are cumulative in the event that a character uses a rebuilder several times. There is no limit to how high the final total may run (the more of you that has been rejuvenated by DarkTek, the more of you they "own").

User Cost: Control: 1 per 12 hours of treatment
Wt: 320 kg
Price: N/A (-/-)

Running Box

This small, block-like biomechanism can dramatically boost the physical attributes of the wearer/host organism. The running box (so named because of the marathon sprints that users can accomplish when fleeing from something) is actually a symbiotic organism that attaches to its host, determines what chemicals allow that host to boost its own (predominantly) physical capabilities, then sets about producing these chemicals. Consequently, the wearer/host of the running box is able to voluntarily summon a surge of adrenaline and other chemicals, some of which are predominantly mental-affective neurohumors.

Each time a user decides to draw on this "boost," the controlling player must first state how many "points" of boost he wants to draw, up to a maximum of five. Any physical attribute, and all skills the character has that are based upon that physical attribute, are then increased by the "boosted" number for a period of one minute (two full combat turns). If a nonphysical attribute is chosen instead, the attribute and its associated skills are only increased by one-half this amount (rounding fractions down). Note that only one boost may be in effect at a time; no new boost may be initiated until the effects of the previous one are exhausted.

While the device may sound very desirable, it must also be noted that it exacts an extreme price-with highly disturbing social overtones. The method of attachment is also somewhat unnerving; when placed next to bare flesh for a minute, the running box extrudes a score of grappling pincers, and pushes (none too gently) invasive filaments and tubules into the host body.

Running boxes work best (and are generally least conspicuous and most easily worn) when they are attached at the base of the spine.

User Cost: Feed: 1 per point of boost used (e.g., a boost of 2 followed by a boost of 3 would produce a total Feed cost of 5)

Wt: 0.375 kg

Price: $950,000 (—/R)

Sleeper

The sleeper ties a sound amplifier to an organism, and defends itself by finding the most quiescent brainwave state of a threatening organism and then produces an aural pattern most likely to lull the organism into a state of lassitude. It has a 25-meter area of effect. Resisting its effects requires an Average test of Willpower. If this roll results in an outstanding success, the character is completely unaffected. A normal success means the character suffers a -1 to Initiative, and all tasks become one level difficulty greater than normal. A catastrophic failure results in the character being unable to undertake any activities successfully—but don't tell this to the players! Their characters should be allowed to try things, only to find themselves forgetting what it was they meant to do, nodding off as they try to reload a gun, etc.

The amplifier portion of a sleeper is powered by an internal battery capable of holding enough charge for two minutes of continuous operation. The biologic portion is carnivorous. In appearance, the joint device is a pale, spongy disk 75 centimeters in diameter, with a 50-centimeter metallic cone flaring upward from its center.

User Cost: Recharge, W/Min: 25 (per phase)

Wt: 3.2 kg

Price: N/A (—/—)

Sniffer

The sniffer is one of the simpler DarkTek biomechanisms. It can tell if someone is frightened, amorous, fearful, or asleep simply by the scent mixture exuded by the individual. The organism which forms the primary basis of the sniffer is also one of the major components of the tracker (see later).

The sniffer has an effective short range of 20 meters. Within that range, an Easy test versus the device's olfactory detection skill rating of 4 will reveal the target's state. For each 10 meters beyond that range, the test's difficulty increases one level. Referees should also consider variables affecting scent transmission when determining range. These variables include difficulties of discerning a single being's olfactory traces in a crowded environment, upwind/downwind position, etc.

User Cost: Recharge, W/Min: 10
Wt: 1.65 kg
Price: $225,000 (—/R)

Spectral Eye

The spectral eye is a biomechanical sensor which has full-range sensitivity to the entirety of the electromagnetic spectrum. It analyzes these emissions by intensity, frequency, wavelength, and vector. The spectral eye is a ghastly looking item, comprised of a melange of sensory organs. It can be hand-held or clipped (more like "stuck") on the user's shoulder or wrist. However, it must be able to make direct flesh-to- flesh contact with the user since it transmits its findings via a very simple form of Thought Projection.

Although the eye can report the smallest trace emissions, this is generally not a useful setting, since the world is pervaded by emissions of every frequency and wavelength, and the resulting image is a confusing welter of information. Instead, users can select certain wavelengths (radio, visual light, gamma ray, etc.) or can opt to see strong signatures only. The latter setting will produce a visual representation of the surrounding area (differentiated by color), as well as any other emissions that are "strong" (i.e., significantly above the anticipated background level of emissions at that wavelength).

The eye superimposes its results directly over the user's own visual perceptions-sort of a heads-up display within the brain. While the range of the eye is actually mostly dependent upon the strength of the emissions, referees can use the following rule of thumb: The higher the frequency of the emission, the closer the eye must be to detect it. Therefore (for instance), gamma rays could be detected at 100 meters, visible light at one kilometer, and radio waves at 10 kilometers. Referees must, of course, temper this rule of thumb with considerations of the strength of the source (walkie-talkies will still pale in comparison to a melt-down in progress).

User Cost: Feed: 3
Wt: 0.8 kg
Price: N/A

Viner

The viner is the natural complement to the erector. In its original form, it looks like a smallish smear of melted, black-brown plastic, but as it grows, it leaves behind resinous strands that can be used to form solid surfaces (walls, floors, roofs) of consid-

erable durability and resilience. It is therefore used along with erectors to create Dark Minion "buildings." The viner tends to stretch itself across open spaces and eventually close them off. If it follows a framework in an undesired fashion, users need only crack away the errant growth once or twice, and the viner learns to avoid that area. The viner is also used to seal passages, mend breaches, encyst prisoners, etc. Its secretions are the most frequently encountered form of "solder" used by the Dark Minions in the construction of their various items.

The viner's feeding habits are identical to those of the erector. For every point of Strength or Constitution consumed, a viner is able to construct one square meter of "sheeting." This material has an armor value of 1.

Wt: 2.7 kg (beginning)
Price: N/A (—/—)

Virophage

Virophage is a new bio-engineered drug (influenced by humanoid ET science) that is a no-fail antidote to all empathic viruses and a general immunobooster of extraordinary power. Virophage is the first example of a new generation of "smart drugs" that vary in operation, depending upon genetic and chemical information they receive once injected into a body.

Virophage is, as the name suggests, related to viruses. However, whereas other viruses look to exploit the body, Virophage is a beneficial symbiot that functions much like a versatile defensive pharmaceutical laboratory within the bloodstream. If the host is attacked by viruses, Virophage analyzes the attackers, designs a "tailor-made" phage with which to defeat them, and then stimulates the host's own immune system to produce and release those phages into the bloodstream. In the event of radiation poisoning, Virophage supercharges the leukocytic factors of the immune system, and promotes accelerated healing of crucial organs and tissues. Consequently, Virophage can ensure almost 100-percent survival rates in individuals who have been exposed to doses of up to 250 rem of radiation.

Virophage is produced only in secure laboratories and is available only to—or from—authorized government agents. A single treatment (which is typically all that is required) is about 15-18 ccs, depending upon the patient's condition and weight.

Wt: 20-cc vials
Price: $50,000 per vial (—/R)

Virus, Empathic

An empathic virus is actually a community organism which has an empathic link with an individual Dark One or Dark Minion. The nature of that link is such that it increases the range at which the Dark One or Dark Minion can exert an empathic influence over an infected individual.

But this heading actually covers a whole family of viruses, all of which are activated upon empathic command. The viruses are differentiated not only in terms of their pathogenic structure (although all are clearly related), but also in their effects upon host organisms. Some of these viruses simply make the host ill, whereas others kill, incapacitate, subjugate, or even mutate the organism.

Empathic Viruses are not contagious: They must be purposely introduced into the

host body in considerable quantity and over a very short period of time; otherwise, the host's leukocytic defenses are able to get rid of the invading pathogens. Therefore, the most common method of insinuating the empathic virus into the host is by injection, preferably intravenous, although intramuscular will also work.

Once invested with the required dose (see individual stats on the following pages), the host organism is sure to become infected. However, the virus will lay dormant until its specific master activates it empathically (with Thought Projection). Blood tests will not detect the virus since it has a very small presence in the bloodstream (less than one part per billion). Instead, most of the virus encysts itself in the cell walls of muscle tissue. Upon activation, it cracks out of the cysts and invades the bloodstream and lymphatic system. Note that the viral cysts are both submicroscopic and well dispersed, and are therefore *extremely* unlikely to be discovered by a random biopsy.

There are a few ways to cure infected hosts. The easiest method is a complete blood transfusion before the infection time has expired (i.e., change the blood of the host before the virus has completely taken root). If this is achieved, then the body's own defenses can take care of the rest. The other method is to find a dose of Virophage serum (see above), which will eliminate any empathic virus almost immediately. Once the host is injected with Virophage serum, the master of the empathic virus can no longer activate it.

Note that no host can withstand infection by two empathic viruses at the same time. The entry of a second strain will cause the two to "go to war" for possession of the host, thereby killing the hapless creature. The manner of death resembles a sudden, violent case of anaphylactic shock. Once a strain has been fully activated, the host is no longer susceptible to further empathic virus infections (until and unless he is cured).

Each virus is rated for infection time, activation time, and host (user) cost, in addition to normal ratings. Infection time measures the time it takes for the virus to fully invest itself into the host organism and be ready for activation. Activation time indicates how long it takes for the virus to achieve its full effect, after it has been activated. Host cost is identical to user cost, although the Detection rating applies only to the Dark One or Dark Minion which created this virus and has imprinted its mastership upon the pathogen. Five frequently encountered strains are presented below:

Empathic Viral Assassin: This is one of the simpler strains, with a very straightforward action. From the moment it is activated, the individual is effectively incapacitated. When the virus bursts through its encystation, it immediately begins tricking the white blood cells and other phagocytes into believing that every other cell in the body—particularly neurons—are hostile. The manner of death resembles an extended demise via cyanide—not at all pretty.

Infection Time: 1 day
Activation Time: 30 seconds
Host Cost: Detection: 100
Wt: 0.03 (30ccs)
Price: $125,000 (—/R)

Empathic Viral Incapacitator: An empathic viral incapacitator is basically just a particularly vicious case of Montezuma's revenge, the Asian flu, and several other such lovelies, all rolled into one, big, miserable mess. The virus causes its host to begin feeling faint immediately upon its activation. Within one minute malaise sets in. As a result, the host finds that all task attempts, whatever the type, are conducted at one level of dif-

ficulty greater than normal, due to difficulty concentrating. After another four minutes, the host performs any task attempts at two levels of difficulty greater than normal. After 10 minutes, the subject becomes almost completely incapacitated due to feverishness, dizziness, vomiting, etc., and remains in that condition for a period of three to six days. On day three, the host will recover on a Difficult test of Constitution. Failing that, the test becomes Average on day four, and it drops to Easy on day five. On day six the victim recovers automatically. (insufficient food and/or water increases the difficulty of each of these tests of Constitution by one level.)

Infection Time: 12 hours
Activation Time: 10 minutes
Host Cost: Detection: 100
Wt: 0.015 (15ccs)
Price: $15,000 (—/S)

Empathic Viral Mutator: Perhaps the most bizarre—and terrifying—of all the strains, the empathic viral mutator does not actually prey upon the host; rather, it *changes* the host into a different organism.

Using a highly advanced form of recombinant viral gene mutation, this strain begins changing the DNA coding of the host, resulting in physical mutation to suit the new coding. The change is both painful to experience and hideous to observe. The process takes place over the course of a full 48 hours, during which time the victim experiences a progressively gruesome distortion in both physiology and psyche. Madness of one form or another is often a side effect.

The final form of the host depends upon the type of DNA that was encoded into the virus. Common mutated forms include cobra people, fuathas, harpies, morlocks, and (particularly) moreau weres (some experts estimate that nearly half of all such weres are the result of an empathic viral mutator).

Once the mutation is complete, the virus dies. It is conceivable, therefore, that mutated individuals could be changed back into human form if they were once again infected with the virus, but this time around the empathic viral mutator must be encoded with the person's original DNA. Acquiring such a version of this strain is certainly a long shot (what Dark Minion would ever cooperate?), but at least the scientific community knows the possibility exists. (Note that it is also theoretically possible to infect an individual with the DNA of another human in this manner, creating some sort of synthesis of the two persons.)

Infection Time: 1 week
Activation Time: 1 day
Host Cost: Detection: 100
Wt: 0.075 (75ccs)
Price: N/A (—/—)

Empathic Viral Ravenizer: This strain creates an almost insatiable need for *very* fresh meat. And this need is *constant*. The infected individual needs 0.1 kilograms of meat per minute, which adds up to six kilograms per hour, or 144 kilograms per day. In short it is unlikely that the individual so infected can survive on normal tissue, but will probably have to resort to the key organs of the heart, brain, and liver.

Many "vampires" and "ghouls" of legend were simply poor unfortunate people who were infected with this particular strain (which borrows some of its heritage from the same organism which forms the basis of the running box).

Infection Time: 1 day
Activation Time: 1 hour
Host Cost: Detection: 100, Feed: 1 (when fully activated)
Wt: 0.03 (30ccs)
Price: N/A (—/—)

Empathic Viral Subjugator: The empathic viral subjugator predominantly affects the brain and central nervous system, making the host highly susceptible to Darkling control by means of projected emotions and/or thoughts.

Any Dark Minion (not necessarily the one who engineered the infection) can take advantage of the host's lowered Willpower level, though humans cannot: This virus changes the mindset of the target so as to optimize it specifically for Dark Minion domination. There are rumors circulating that bloodkin and pale frequently use this virus (when it is available) to keep their "flocks" quiescent.

Infection Time: 3 days
Activation Time: 1 minute
Host Cost: Detection: 100, Control: 4 (when fully activated)
Wt: 0.05 (50ccs)
Price: N/A (—/—)

Other Empathic Viruses

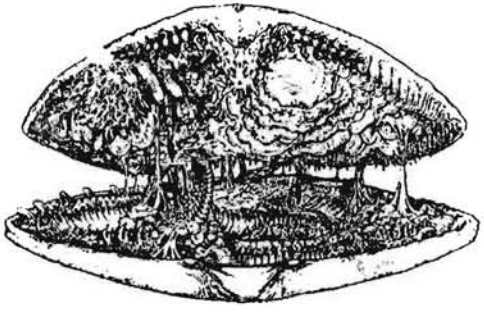
Referees are encouraged to develop more examples of these sorts of viruses as they see fit. After all, it's not as though Dark Minions are buying them from wholesale outlets; the viruses are almost always "individualized" to suit a specific occasion or plot (making them sort of designer hell bug).

DIMENSION WALK DEVICE

In *Dark Races* chapter, we mention an empathic skill known as Dimension Walk. This ability allows access to a proto-dimension with locations that correspond to locations in our own universe, but in which distances between those locations are much shorter. Thus, a Dark Minion can enter a proto-dimension at, say, New York's World Trade Center and exit again at the St. Louis Arch, without crossing the intervening space in our world. But not all Dark Minions have this innate ability to access that proto-dimension. Many—the ETs in particular—must rely upon special devices to provide that ability. One benefit of this is that the devices can be built to open portals for much larger masses. Even the most powerful of the dark elves, for instance, can only open a human-sized portal with the skill (although they might be able to keep that portal open for a relatively long time, depending upon their skillfulness), but Dimension Walk devices can be built to accommodate virtually any size object.

The only problem to be dealt with is the size of the projection device itself. Dimension Walk devices are always cubical, and portals are always twice as wide, tall, and deep as the device that generates them. (They appear as a misty black cube projected from one face of the device.) Therefore, if you want to move an auto into the

proto-dimension, for instance, you have to generate a portal that is as large as the auto's longest dimension, which means you need a device half as long as the car. It can be difficult to keep such a thing hidden. Also, these devices draw a lot of electrical power, which is why Dark Minions like to use megacorporate holdings in large cities to house them.



Folder Pod
 # Appear: 1
Attack: 2
Move: 5/10/20
Initiative: 4
Strength: 25
Constitution: 40
Agility: 5
Skill/Dam.: 6/5D6
Hits: 50/100

An innocuous-looking biomechanism, the folder pod has one important function: It can employ Dimension Walking to carry its users to proto-dimensions. While inside the pod, the occupants can perceive these proto-dimensions through the empathic senses of the pod itself, making it unnecessary for them to have such abilities. The pod can travel to any proto-dimension its inhabitants know of or to any proto-dimension it has been to itself.

Folder pods are the most disgusting method of interdimensional travel, without a doubt. Folder pods are shaped roughly like a four-meter wide, dark-colored clam when closed, but more closely resemble a giant gullet when open. The interior of the pod is filled with dozens of veined and noduled organs and organ-like structures along with a few projections which appear to be made of bone and cartilage. Bits of the interior pulse and undulate; others generate sounds which are reminiscent of a growling stomach. The smell of a pod is primarily musky with an undertone of decay and a faint suggestion of a sharp, acidic aroma.

Adventurers who are using a folder pod for the first time must succeed at an Average: Willpower skill (not asset) test or they will be unable to bring themselves to lay down in what looks like a giant digestive tract. After a few trips in a pod, no Willpower test is required.

When the pod first closes, characters inside will experience perfect silence and perfect darkness, as if they are in a sensory-deprivation tank. After a while, they will begin to receive images of the world outside from the pod's sensory organs. Characters who are claustrophobic will not take this experience well and will automatically behave as if they have Catastrophically Failed a Willpower test. Until they are cured of their claustrophobia, they will be unable to voluntarily enter a folder pod again.

When the pod is given the command to open, the passengers will find themselves covered in a clear slime that tastes bitter and smell likes the pod. The slime will begin to evaporate almost immediately, and there will be almost no trace of it after about 15 minutes. However, dogs and other creatures with a keen sense of smell will react negatively toward the passengers until they have thoroughly washed themselves and their gear. The purpose of this ooze is unknown; some theorize that it is part of the pod's

life-support system. It is interesting to note that this ooze will evaporate from a sealed container as readily as it does in open air.

Folder pods perform in exactly the same way as a human with the Dimension Walk ability (makes you wonder, doesn't it?). They have a Dimension Walk asset of 20 though, a far higher score than most human dimension walkers could ever dream of obtaining. This means that a folder pod can succeed at an Impossible: Dimension Walk task 25% of the time and will always have at least three stages of success to spend on accuracy, skewed movement, and so on. Folder pods may not be used to do interdimensional scanning or to close a gateway.

Commands must be given to a folder pod with the Project Thought empathic ability. Of course this requires that an empathic link be established with the pod. For this purpose Animal Empathy, Human Empathy, and Darkling Empathy will all work equally well. Commands that a folder pod will accept include orders to open and close, as well as to travel to any dimension which the folder pod "knows."

Folder pods can move under their own power by undulating portions of their flexible lower shell, but are slow and clumsy, and only move in response to commands or to maneuver in combat. They may not climb or descend stairs or ladders, and cannot cross obstructions more than 10 centimeters in height. This makes a folder pod less useful than most PCs would prefer. Since the pod weighs 800 kilograms and is four meters long by three meters wide, a flatbed truck—something not readily available in most proto-dimensions—is the most utilitarian method of moving the pod.

Folder pods can also be "taught" new proto-dimensions by any empath who has been there, even if the empath does not have the Dimension Walk skill. This is an Average: Project Thought task and will require a few minutes to properly accomplish. Empaths cannot learn about proto-dimensions from a folder pod, but they can instruct the pod to take them to these proto-dimensions so that they can learn about them for themselves.

It is possible to give a folder pod a series of conditional commands. For example, a pod might be ordered to "Travel to Gray, wait for 10 minutes and then return to this proto-dimension at this spot," by an empath who was about to attack a Darkling base and wanted his ride to be waiting when it was time to flee.

Of course, any order given to a folder pod is subject to the limitations of the Dimension Walk skill. In the example above, the folder pod might return to this dimension 100 meters away from the destination at which it was ordered to arrive.

In addition to travel, Darklings, especially ETs, often use folder pods as a sort of missile. A folder pod could be loaded with a payload of rabid animals and instructed to travel to the center of a prole settlement camp where it would release its unwholesome cargo. Just as easily, it could be loaded with a few ravagers and sent to the meeting place of a team of minion hunters. The ETs sometimes hide slaughterbots among the pod's various organs.

If a folder pod is attacked, it will open and lash out with a sinuous, noduled stalk with sharp, bone-like tip, and move defensively to escape. If the attacks continue and the pod is near death, it will leave the dimension it is in in order to save itself.

Folder pods contain an organ which functions exactly like an empathic beacon. This organ constantly projects a "homing signal" into the astral proto-dimension which can only be detected by means of a Psychic Tracking task attempted by someone (or something) familiar with the pod's specific "frequency." Attempts to "disconnect" this organ will be interpreted as attacks by the pod, and will be met with defensive actions

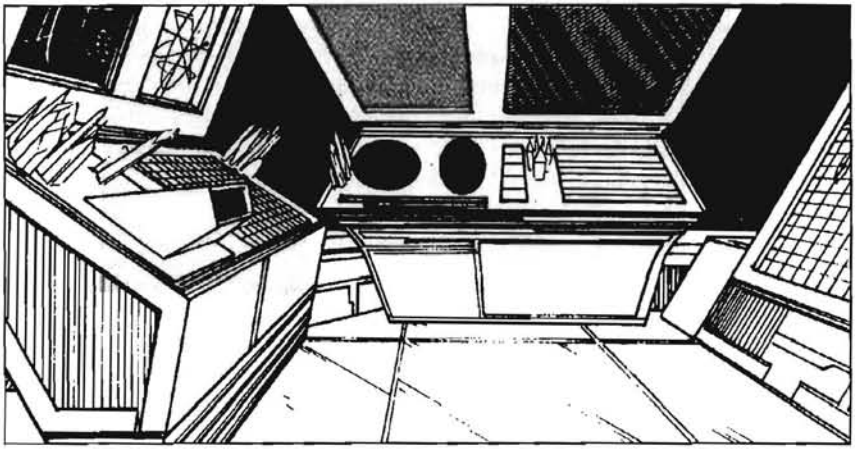
as noted above. Any mystic who has traveled in a pod at least once is familiar enough with that pod's "frequency" to be able to track it.

The Dark Ones will go to extreme lengths to recover a folder pod which has been captured by humans. It is important to remember that with the possibility of conditional programming, humans can never quite be sure whether they have actually captured a folder pod or if it may have captured them.

User Cost: None
Wt: 800 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

This section lists the creation of the humanoid ETs, or is at least partly shaped by their knowledge.



Controller

The controller is one of the most important—and rare—humanoid ET technologies. It is a 100-percent cybernetic (totally electronic; no organic components) artificial intelligence that is capable of single-handedly directing the operations of an almost unlimited number of remote devices. Furthermore, it can plan their activities itself, as long as it is given objectives by an authorized user. This means that it can fully coordinate the activities of various expert-system robots and slave/cyborg units.

The controller is very user-friendly, programming itself in accordance with common language commands. Where it is unsure of an objective, or confused regarding an apparent contradiction or uncertain definition, it will ask the user to clarify. While the machine's interface with organic users is not foolproof, it has been refined to the point where error is very unlikely.

Part of the controller's programming is a sophisticated recognition procedure for confirming user identity before allowing the user access to the system. This requires DNA checks, various scans, and even randomized personal knowledge tests. Therefore, if PCs should stumble across an active controller, they will not be able to commandeer it. Likewise, even a powered-down controller will resist unauthorized control; the data that drives its user recognition programming is crystal encoded as fixed data (not sub-

ject to erasure or loss by power outage) in dozens of hidden "data granules" scattered throughout the system. Therefore, even if power is lost, upon repowering, the controller will have this information immediately dumped into memory. Only by removing all these data granules and then rebooting the system could PCs begin to bring a controller to the point where it might be made to recognize them as authorized users.

Due to its size and unwieldiness, the controller is almost never encountered outside of major ET bases. Most often, controllers are kept aboard ET UFOs, which (due to their mobility, speed, and armament) make formidable targets. This is an important consideration for the humanoid ETs, since both the insectoid and tentacular ETs are quite eager to acquire as many of these controllers as possible.

Referees should note that although the controller is considered an artificial intelligence in terms of its abilities to learn and to adapt to changing situations, it has no true personality. It is, quite simply, an intelligent machine.

Wt: 12 tons (6 cubic meters)

Price: N/A (-/-)

Distorter

This device is a product of joint human and renegade humanoid ET technologies. The distorter creates a tiny time-space disruption, which causes attempts at Dimension Walking to fail automatically. It is also likely (1-7 on 1D10) to disrupt the operation of DarkTek devices which depend upon contact with another dimension or proto-dimension.

The device is powered by a huge electric cell (equivalent in size to a car battery). When activated, it has an effective radius of 20 meters and will cause existing transplanar gateways to close, as well as preventing any Dimension Walking activities.

The distorter is the size of a large suitcase, and is equipped with shoulder and hand-carry straps.

Wt: 9.5 kg

Price: $2,3000,000 (—/—)

Parasite, Expert System, Advanced

The advanced, expert system Parasite is a small, weighty, metal box which is used by ETs to "roboticize" any electronic device that they wish to control, but which isn't set up for cybernetic interface. The AES Parasite accomplishes this by being hooked up to what passes for the primary control circuits of the "host" mechanism. It then analyzes the programming of the device, cracking codes where necessary, or completely substituting its own programming if the indigenous security measures prove too formidable. The "smarter" the system being cracked and the more centralized its control, the easier it is for the Parasite to take over. For example, the most modern cars in **Dark Conspiracy** are very vulnerable to AES Parasites, whereas some of the old American gas-guzzlers of the 1960s—which have no real cybernetic elements—are all but immune to the device.

When activated, the Parasite extrudes a number of tiny manipulators and begins searching for electronic circuitry and probable connection points in the system being infiltrated. It will secure access to circuitry even if it has to burn small holes in protective casing (a small, integral laser is included for this purpose). Once connected, the Parasite's very sophisticated programming kicks in, usurping control of the device, and awaiting instructions from either an on-site or a remote operator.

The most common use of the Parasite is to invest apparently mundane objects with a means of direct control, as well as a limited independent response capability. Cars become sentries and chase vehicles, modern jet fighters become supersonic killer robots, etc. But since all these devices look normal up to the moment they are activated, this allows the ETs to have a number of assets "hidden in plain sight."

Note that if PCs can get their hands on one of these Parasites, a Difficult test of Computer Operation would allow them to reprogram it.

Wt: 4 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

Translator, ET

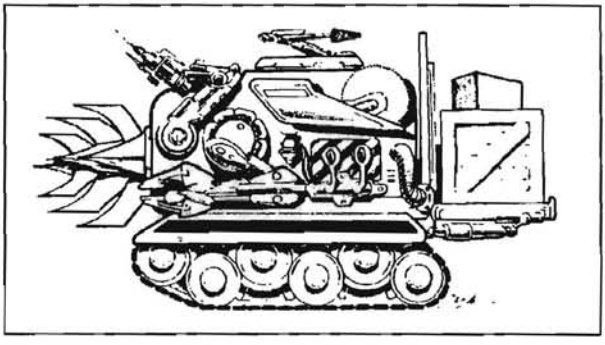
The ET translator is a computerized device that can translate both text and audio with extreme ease since it has a full codex of every known human language (and many others) in its resident database. New written languages take between one and seven days to decode, assuming that at least 2000 words of common use are available for analysis. Twice that time is required when only audio samples are available.

The translator can also analyze other communicative media (light, sign language) if the unit is integrated with a Snoopbot. However, decoding tasks may take considerably longer, depending upon the subtlety of the language.

Wt: 3.2 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

ROBOTS

This section lists the enigmatic constructs—not the conventional types built by humans—that serve the ETs.



Buildbot

The buildbot is a robot used by various ETs for heavy labor and remote construction tasks. Such tasks include tunneling, cargo loading, and assembly of large apparatus. The typical buildbot can work underwater, in atmosphere, or in space. Most are gangly structures composed of multiple modules and capable of being reconfigured for any type of task. The most prevalent modular extremities are manipulator claws and laser welders, but buildbots can also be outfitted with grinders, saws, and other types of interesting (and potentially lethal) hardware.

A buildbot is controlled by a very simple expert system, which allows it to shift back and forth between tasks and handle unexpected problems. However, it has no combat program. Combat use would require direct commands from a remote operator (either an AI system or an ET).

Buildbots are sometimes mounted on large floaters for enhanced mobility. It uses the Quadruped column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Table.

Damage Record

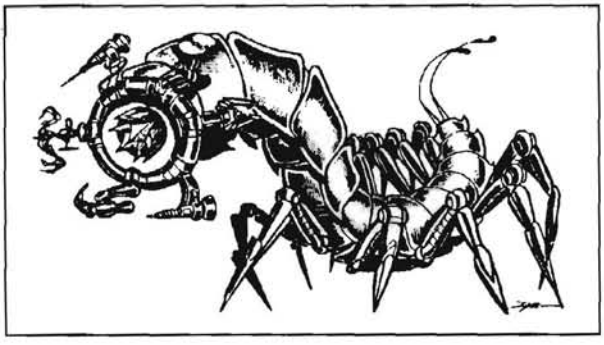
Head: ❑	Chest: ❑❑	Abdomen: ❑❑❑
Right Arm: ❑❑	Right Leg: ❑❑	
Left Arm: ❑❑	Left Leg: ❑❑	

Armor Values

Head: 1
Chest/Abdomen: 1
Arms/Legs: 1

Com Move: 24/12

Initiative: 2
Agility: 4
Strength: 25
Constitution: 3
Skills: Mechanic 5, Unarmed Combat Damage 2
Armament: None
Wt: 1200 kg
Price: N/A
Night Vision: White light spotlight



Craftbot

The ETs' craftbot performs detailed construction and repair tasks, working as the "artisan" to the buildbot's "construction worker." Capable of all forms of electronic work and micro-assembly, the craftbot is a small, multi-segmented machine that can access narrow, twisting spaces. Swarms of them are typically to be found in most

humanoid ET complexes, following predetermined maintenance checks. While they normally move by crawling, these multi-legged devices can also be mounted on a small floater.

The craftbot is equipped with half a dozen micromanipulators with various attachment options (drill, splicer, laser welder, etc.). Other modular attachments can be included for unusual jobs. As with the buildbot, the expert system that drives the craftbot is limited to task-related activities, but a craftbot can be pressed into combat by an overseeing operator. Given the tendency of these 'bots to pervade ET complexes, it is not unusual for them to start "coming out of the woodwork" once intruders have been detected.

This robot uses the Quadruped column on the Human/ Animal Hit Location Table (with adaptations for the additional legs-the multiple legs are treated as one collective hit location).

Initiative: 2
Agility: 8
Strength: 2
Constitution: 3
Skills: Mechanics 2, Electronics 6, Unarmed Combat Damage 1
Armament: None
Wt: 15 kg
Price: N/A
Night Vision: White light spotlights

Damage Record

Head: ❑❑	Chest: ❑❑	Abdomen: ❑❑
Right Arm: ❑❑	Right Leg: ❑❑	
Left Arm: ❑❑	Left Leg: ❑❑	

Armor Values

Com Move: 20/10
Head: 0
Chest/Abdomen: 0
Arms/Legs: 0

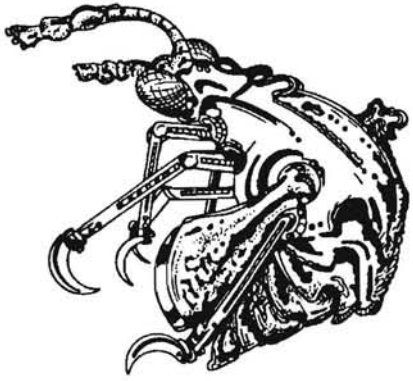
Slaughterbot

A horrific example of ET technology turned fully to evil, the Slaughterbot is a highly specialized robot devoted to terrorization. It is a crablike robot roughly five centimeters long, designed to take control of a human brain and drive that individual to mass homicide. The Slaughterbot has small, mechanical legs on which it can move about in search of prey. It prefers leaping attacks since it needs to latch onto the target's head. Once there, the Slaughterbot maneuvers itself to the rear of the skull, then begins drilling a hole (1 point of damage per round, till a slight wound is created, signifying that the skull is breached), through which it extends a probe and takes control of the brain inside. Obviously, no normal human would sit still for this, so slaughterbots have a tendency to frequent hospitals, nursing homes, places where the homeless gather,

drug-using subcultures, or anywhere else that bodies can be found lying around with their brains mostly disengaged. Once installed, a Slaughterbot can control its victim's behavior completely. In effect, the Slaughterbot becomes the body's new personality.

Slaughterbot-ridden humans are rarely to be found without a hat (which covers up the Slaughterbot itself). But the choice of haberdashery is always something easy to remove, so that if threatened, the Slaughterbot can bail out of the victim's head and flee. However, slaughterbots don't like to be without bodies. Without a human "chassis," their capabilities are severely reduced. Occasionally, slaughterbots will even possess a Dark Minion.

This robot uses the Quadruped column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Table (with adaptations for the additional legs—the multiple legs are treated as one collective hit location).



Initiative: 6
Agility: 4
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Skills: Unarmed Combat Damage 1
Armament: None
Wt: 1.5 kg
Price: N/A

Armor Values
Com Move: 16/12
Head: 1
Chest/Abdomen: 1
Arms/Legs: 0

Damage Record

Head: ❑	Chest: ❑	Abdomen: ❑
Right Arm: ❑	Right Leg: ❑	
Left Arm: ❑	Left Leg: ❑	

Snoopbot

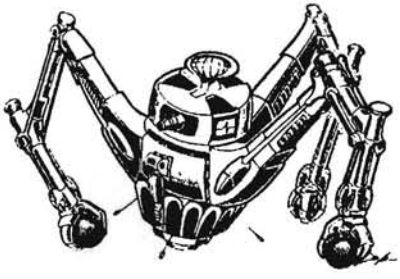
This ET-produced robot incorporates a very advanced, expert system and a complete net of sensors. The primary sensors include active electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) scanning, passive EMS scanning, olfactory analysis, reflective texture analysis, chemical analysis (with gas, liquid, and solid samplers), remote chemical analysis (enabled by laser vaporization and spectroanalysis of the resulting gas), and gravity-measuring devices capable of determining the mass of remote objects and of creating 3- D representations of internal schematics by differentiating material densities. The on-board expert system can measure intensity of an emission and probable range from the source, and can correlate various readings into situational hypotheses, ranked in order of probability.

The Snoopbot is fairly squat, resembling a rounded trash can. It has three retractable legs, evenly spaced at intervals of 120 degrees. Each leg is quite rugged, has large, retractable, multi-jointed pincers for manipulating objects, for walking, or for

"bipoding" (standing on two legs while the third is in use). On the bottom of each leg is a retractable, heavily treaded ball, which the Snoopbot can use for high-speed mobility. The Snoopbot is also capable of changing its external color scheme and IR signature so as to make it a fair chameleon. ETs are fond of using these robots in recon roles and also as remote-contact devices.

While snoopbots do not have full artificial intelligence, their expert programs allow them to deal with most situations in a fairly effective (if straightforward) manner. ETs can control them from up to one light-second away, regardless of apparent obstructions.

Snoopbots can be mounted on small floaters for enhanced mobility. They use the Quadruped column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Table (randomizing arm and leg hits among those available).



Initiative: 3
Agility: 7
Strength: 8
Constitution: 7
Skills: Observation 9
Armament: None
Sensors: EMS scanner, olfactory analysis, reflective texture analysis, chemical analysis (with gas, liquid, and solid samples), and gravity measurer.
Wt: 200 kg
Price: N/A

Armor Values
Com Move: 40/20
Head: 2
Chest/Abdomen: 2
Legs: 1

Damage Record

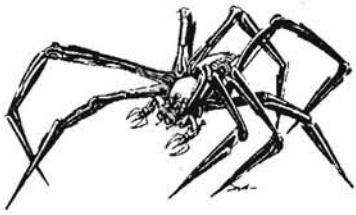
Head: ❑❑	Chest: ❑❑	Abdomen: ❑❑
Right Arm: ❑❑	Right Leg: ❑❑	
Left Arm: ❑❑	Left Leg: ❑❑	

Tracker

The tracker is a fairly small (less than five centimeters long) "cyberspider" designed to track selected targets by olfactory means. Any being—or object—that has a characteristic olfactory signature can be followed by the tracker, but referees should bear in mind two important variables: how strong the olfactory signature is to begin with, and how old or muddled the trail has become. In general, the tracker can follow any human trail that is a day old or less. However, areas with a high level of human traffic will muddle the olfactory trail, particularly if that area contains strong organic odors

(a fish market, gymnasium, coroner's office).

Trackers are typically equipped with empathic beacons, for signaling their masters once the target has been found. They use the Quadruped column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Table.



Initiative: 5
Agility: 6
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Skills: Stealth 8
Armament: None
Sensors: Olfactory, voice/pattern recognition software (audio/video)
Wt: 1.5 kg
Price: N/A
Com Move: 35/17
Armor Values
Head: 0
Chest/Abdomen: 0
Arms/Legs: 0
Damage Record
Head: ❑ *Abdomen:* ❑
Chest: ❑ *Legs:* ❑❑

Warbot

The humanoid ETs are certainly not renowned for their willingness to engage in close combat; they prefer to use mechanical surrogates in such roles. If they want to assassinate a target, they send warbots to do the job.

The warbot is, at first glance, a machine of unprepossessing aspect. It resembles a long, featureless, oval casket mounted on a heavy-duty tripod. Three black sensor strips ring the capsule at top, bottom, and middle. However, when the warbot goes into action, its appearance changes dramatically. Previously unnoticeable panels open all along its length, revealing sensor clusters, firearms, and a trio of metal tentacles with claws and manipulator digits. The tripod is a larger, armored version of the Snoopbot. The warbot is equipped with impressive expert systems that allow it to behave with sophistication and foresight in combat situations. However, unless it has been left as an automated guard, it is most likely that ET remote operators are in direct control of the robot's activities, which makes it even deadlier. For enhanced mobility, warbots are sometimes mounted on large floaters. The warbot uses the Biped column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Table (randomizing arm and leg hits among those available).

Initiative: 6
Agility: 8
Strength: 20

Constituion: 26

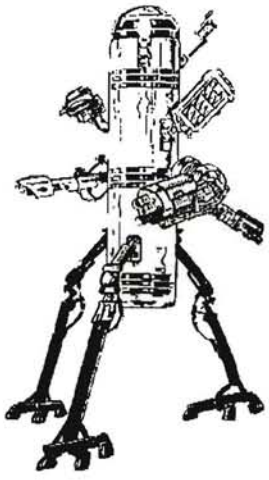
Skills: Observation 12, Small Arms (Rifle) 10, Heavy Weapons 10, Unarmed Combat Damage 3

Armament: Small death ray, ET stun gun

Sensors: IR motion detector, voice/pattern recognition software (audio/video, UV included), ultrasonic and subsonic sound detectors, white light spotligh, IR/UV spotlight, ultrasonic motion detector

Wt: 1000 kg

Price: N/A (—/—)



Armor Values

Head: 6

Chest/Abdomen: 6

Arms/Legs: 4

Com Move: 45/28

Damage Record

Head: ☐☐☐☐☐	*Chest:*☐☐☐☐☐	*Abdomen:* ☐☐☐☐☐
Arm 1: ☐☐	*Arm 2:* ☐☐	*Arm 3:* ☐☐
Leg 1: ☐☐☐	*Leg 2:* ☐☐☐	*Leg 3:* ☐☐☐

VEHICLES

There is nothing on Earth that has not been affected, whether directly or indirectly, by the Dark Minion invasion. This is as true for transportation as anything else.

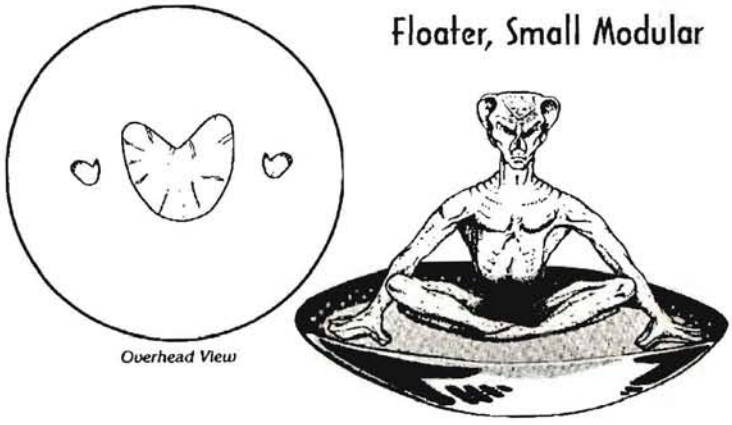
UFOs

If you are to run adventures with ETs, they will need to have some sort of flying vehicle: a UFO. These UFOs are motivated by antigravity engines that allow them to go from a stationary hover to mach speeds nearly instantly. At the same time, those engines generate gravity inside the vessels to negate the effects of such acceleration upon creatures inside, and to avoid weightlessness in orbit. As well, most UFOs have Dimension Walk devices built into them, to allow projection of the vessels into proto-dimensions for even more rapid travel. In combat, a UFO can withstand a direct hit from anything short of a nuclear missile. Fortunately for Earth, there are only a handful of these vessels in existence, and the Dark Minions seem unable to manufacture any more.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about these craft, however, is that they exist in a horror game, not science-fiction. When you use them, always be searching for some way to make them horrific. For example, if one lands, when it takes off once again it should leave behind a scorched circle with the charred bones of some unfortunate animal. The sound it makes when flying should grate painfully on the nerves. If the PCs get close to one, they should feel a queasy sensation, as from some

strange sort of radiation, and it should make Geiger counters go wild. If you work to evoke such details, you will have set the stage for your ETs to be horrifying, as well.

Floater, Small Modular: The small modular floater is a common device among ETs, particularly those of the humanoid variety. It is a small, antigravity device that can provide air mobility to a variety of automated devices, as well as individual ETs. The craft is shaped like a disc. Controlling the floater is accomplished via a fairly simple touchpad arrangement. The right hand controls compass heading; the left governs alti-



tude change and speed. When in operation, the floater emits a high-pitched whine, and the underside gives off a blue-white glow that is slightly radioactive.

Some remotely controlled robots can be mounted on a floater, in which case the remote operators can control the whole as a unified system. In addition, individual humanoid ETs often use small modular floaters as personal transportation devices.

The small floater can carry up to 150 kilograms at maximum performance. Additional weight decreases the craft's performance by 10 percent per 15 kilograms.

Price: N/A (—/—)
Armament: None
Ammo: N/A
Fuel Type: Unknown
Load: 150 kg (-10% speed per additional 15 kg)
Veh Wt: 100 kg
Crew: 1
Night Vision: None
Min. Runway, Takeoff: 0 m
Min. Runway, Land: 0 m

Damage Record
Crewmembers: Pilot ❑
Engine: ❑

Cruise Speed: 105
Com Move: 12
Fuel Cap: N/A
Fuel Cons: N/A

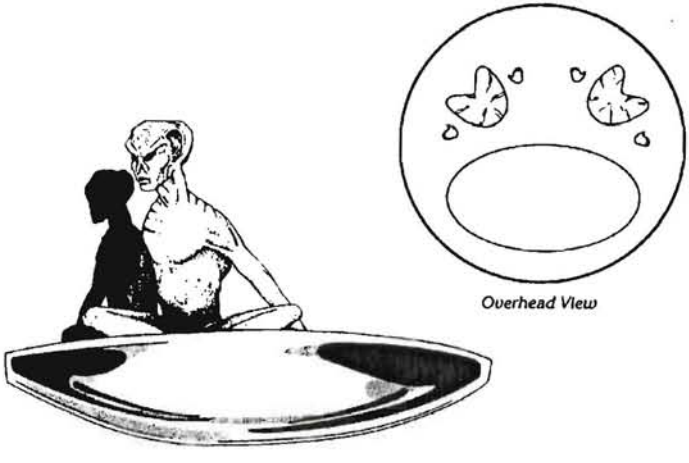
Note: Treat all "wing" hits as "no effect" (failed to penetrate the hull). Also when attacks are from below, a result of "2 passengers" becomes "no effect" (rather than becoming "1 crewmemeber").

Floater, Large Modular: This device is simply a larger version of the small floater. It can accommodate up to 600 kilograms. For every 60 kilograms over this limit, performance drops by 10 percent. The large floater is generally used as the propulsion module for warbots and buildbots. In addition, these floaters can be arranged in 2x2 clusters to create extra-large cargo floaters.

Large floaters come equipped with a very simple, internal, artificial intelligence system which is only useful to provide remote operators with a control link or to program the vehicle to perform very basic (and repetitive) tasks.

Price: N/A (—/—)
Armament: None
Ammo: N/A
Fuel Type: Unknown
Load: 600 kg (-10% speed per additional 60 kg)
Veh Wt: 250 kg
Crew: 2+7
Night Vision: None
Min. Runway, Takeoff: 0 m
Min. Runway, Land: 0 m

Damage Record
Crewmembers: Pilot ❑ Copilot ❑



Overhead View

Passengers: 1❑ 2❑ 3❑ 4❑ 5❑ 6❑ 7❑
Engine: ❑

Cruise Speed: 75
Com Move: 10
Fuel Cap: N/A
Fuel Cons: N/A
Spaceswimmer

The spaceswimmer is a hermetically sealed organism that some Dark Minions use as a small space vehicle. The creature has an extremely rugged exoskeleton about the size of a van, with internal "bays" for six heavy, crab-like "legs," arranged three to a side. In addition, the spaceswimmer has two forward arms, each tipped with six manipulator digits with retractable claws, arranged as three opposable pairs. At the center of each hand is a mouth, which resembles that of a remora.

The spaceswimmer has keen "eyes", endowing it with full electromagnetic spectrum analyses (up through to cosmic rays). Resolution is quite extraordinary (as much as 10,000x), allowing "by eye" navigation. While normally held in a recessed binocular mode, the creature's eyes are actually located on the end of two rugged stalks, which can be extruded to give the creature a wider range of vision. The spaceswimmer has no audio or olfactory senses, but it has a very crude sense of taste.

The internal space of the creature is mostly open area, lined with various organs and collapsible bladders (for retention and release of gases or liquids). The creature can be directed from inside by use of a touch panel. The interior can accommodate a maximum of three human-sized occupants, although various small spaces are available for additional cargo. Entry to the passenger area is achieved through a large, ventral sphincter that opens directly to the outside.

But the spaceswimmer's most important feature is its ability to telekinetically "swim" through space at fantastic rates of speed. Although the creature is barely intelligent, it has an incredibly developed skill at self-telekinesis, allowing it to reach speeds up to 20,000 kph.

Note that operating the spaceswimmer is actually a great deal more simple than operating mechanical craft. Guidance is by eyeball, instructions are by simple touch, and environment is automatically controlled. However, the spaceswimmer is not a particularly good long-range traveler. While it is fine in cis-lunar space (where distances seldom exceed 385,000 kilometers—or about 19 hours of travel time), interplanetary distances are a great deal more daunting. Even nearby Venus is rarely closer than 40 million kilometers—or about 83 days of travel, and Jupiter rarely gets as close as 600 million kilometers, which would be nearly three and one-half years away.

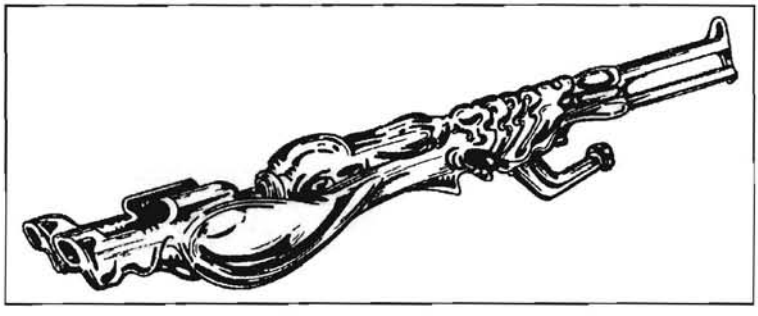
The spaceswimmer "feeds" in a number of ways. One constant source is sunlight, which it converts to thermal energy in its multiple layers of smoky-black chitin, where a process similar to photosynthesis takes place. However, the spaceswimmer is an enthusiastic eater of any and all organic molecules (since even plastic/synthetic spacesuits are petroleum-derived, astronauts might well start calling the spaceswimmer the space*shark*). And if the swimmer cannot find food outside itself, it will certainly make a meal of what is already inside

Type: Combination system
Source: N/A
Price: N/A

Size: 0
Payload: 0.4 kg
Launch: 4
Reentry: 4
Transfer: 2
Crew: 2-3
Duration: Only limitation is food stores
User Cost: Detection: 2000

WEAPONS

An important element of horror is violence. Not so much the straightforward violence of the executioner's axe or the soldier's bullet, but rather the senseless brutality of the madman, the monstrous cruelty of the daemon. In this section, you'll find devices that can do violence. Most have been specifically designed to serve that purpose—and to do so as horrifically as possible.



Bolter

This comparatively new Dark Minion weapon is quite popular among the dark elves. It slaves together two creatures that feed upon electricity and produce chemicals as a byproduct, chemicals that when mixed produce an explosion of flame. Those in the know say that operating the firing mechanism feels more like tugging a finger than squeezing a trigger, and the device gurgles as it operates. The bladders on either side of the "barrel" hold enough material for five shots. Recharging the weapon requires 60 W/Min per shot, and shots must be recharged one at a time.

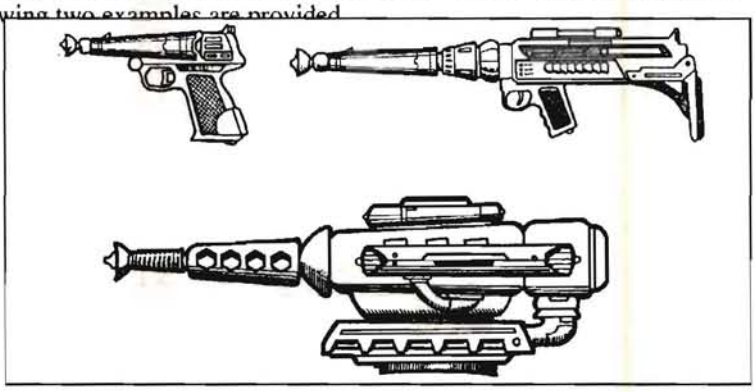
User Cost: Recharge, W/Min: 60
Ammo: Exothermic biochemicals
Wt: 1.7 kg
Mag: 5
Price: N/A (—/—)

						—*Recoil*—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Bolter	SA	6	2-Nil	3	5	1	—	8

Death Rays

We call these weapons, generically, death rays, because virtually any hit by one causes death to any living target. There are two basic sizes for these weapons: hand-portable (pistol-sized to shoulder-mounted), and vehicular (generally mounted on a UFO, and powered by its engines).

Most death rays just burn gaping holes through whatever they hit. Optionally, you can have them electrocute their targets or have the hit location just burst into flames. You might even have it disintegrate entirely or explode. The visual effect is up to you as referee, but the end result is the same in any case. For referees who desire specific statistics, the following two examples are provided.



Hand-Portable

					—Recoil—		
ROF	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
1	20	1	1D10	1D100	—	—	200

Special: These weapons range in bulk from 1 to 10, as determined by a die roll. If a PC captures one, roll percentile dice (secretly) to determine how many shots remain; it cannot be recharged.

Vehicle-Mounted

ROF	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Mag*	*Rng*
1	70	1	—	10,000

Special: Magazine is unlimited, as long as the powering engine remains in operation.

Deliquescer

By using the empathic skill of Dissolution, some Dark Minions can convert themselves to a gelatinous form and then restructure afterward. This device projects that same effect onto a target creature, and can *leave it* in that state or restore it later, at the user's whim. A target can survive Dissolution for a number of phases equal to its Constitution; after that period of time it dies.

The deliquescer incorporates just enough empathic biological elements to operate in tandem with a mechanical powering and targeting system. It is aimed like any other weapon and, when fired, envelops its target in a shimmering empathic field that dissolves the creature one phase later. Because this is a type of empathic attack, living creatures may make an Easy test of Willpower to avoid the effects. If this test is successful, the field dissipates after one phase, without dissolving the target.

Note that once discorporated, only Dark Minions that already have the Dissolution skill can recover.

The size of the field generated by the deliquescer is one-meter in radius (i.e., slightly more than human-sized).

User Cost: Recharge, Life Force: 2 (per shot)

Ammo: See user cost
Wt: 2.1 kg
Mag: Life force converting, cyborg capacitor
Price: N/A (—/—)

						—Recoil—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Deliquescer	1	*	*	N/A	*	—	—	10

* See text description.

Machete, Microfilament

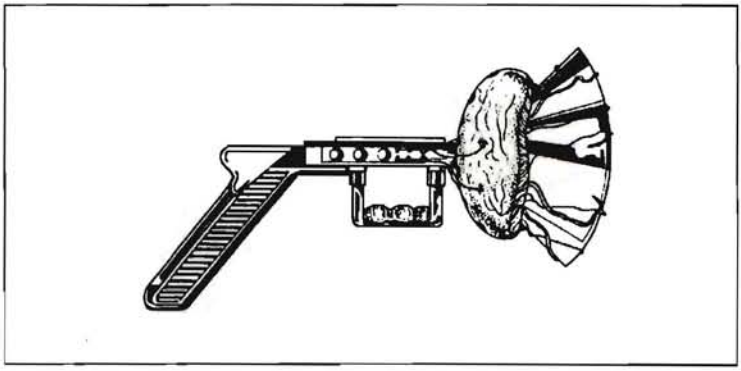
Also erroneously referred to as a monomolecular blade, the microfilament machete—an ET cutting tool—is actually about three to four molecules wide. The machete is one meter in length and is made of a carbon-fiber/advanced plastic compound that holds its shape well even under stress. The blade itself is invisible to the naked eye, and users gauge their swings with a small, spherical, red marker that caps its end. (Some grimly fey users have dubbed the machete the "bouncing ball.")

The machete's incredible thinness not only means that it is terribly sharp, but also that it has very little drag, allowing it to pass through very hard substances with considerable ease. This gives it the capacity to cut even through heavy armor, although this reduces the damage significantly. The machete's one drawback is that a Catastrophic Failure by a user indicates that not only has the blade missed its target, it has also whipped around to hit the user.

Note that a microfilament machete is too light to be used as a blocking weapon in melee combat. Also, it is not at all a piercing weapon; the ball on the end prevents thrusting penetration. Rather, it is a swinging weapon. It could shear through the trunk of a sapling, for instance, but could not cut a flat surface such as a wall (although it could cut a chunk from an edge or corner).

Wt: 0.5 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

Weapon	*Range*	*Hit Mod*	*Damage*
Machete, microfilament	L	+2	9D6



Resonator

This device employs harmonic resonance to shatter inanimate objects (the larger and more rigid, the easier) and to cause neural disorder in biots. The operation of this

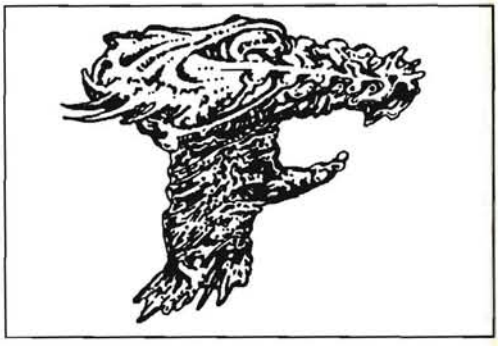
device depends upon a "cyborg" revision of the same creature that makes the sleeper possible. In this case, the Dark Minions use their version of this creature to establish the harmonic resonance and vibratory characteristics of the target objects. This determined, harmonically disruptive sound waves are emitted to shatter or perturb the target.

In the case of rigid objects, this results in an explosive effect. A rigid object is defined as anything which displays minimal or no plasticity (i.e., no imprint can be made by pressure; the material is unyielding. In the case of nonrigid—or essentially plastic—objects, the outcome depends upon the target). Inanimate objects experience a slight increase in molecular activity, but not much. In living creature, however, this can produce an effect similar to an epileptic seizure, due to the disruption and disordering of neural transmissions.

User Cost: Recharge, W/Min: 100 (per shot)
Wt: 1.8 kg
Mag: 10 shots
Price: N/A (—/—)

						—Recoil—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
Resonator	SA			2	10	1	—	18
Rigid target		C:3 B:12	4C					
Plastic target		*	*					

* A living target that is hit by this weapon is rendered helpless and unable to take any actions in its next phase. Each phase in which the target would act thereafter, a Difficult test of Constitution should be rolled, and if successful, the target recovers. Catastrophic failure means the target is rendered unconscious for the duration of combat.



Spectral Gatherer

A bulbous and vaguely pistol-like biomechanism, the spectral gatherer is designed to gather all available energy emissions from any part of the electromagnetic spectrum when activated, then store that energy for later release as a focused beam, usually laser or heat rays. This highly destructive energy release likely forms the basis of many myths that portray human wizards as casting bolts of energy or lightning.

Charging the gatherer initiates a distinctive effect: Intense darkness and cold suddenly pervade its area of operation (six-meter diameter). The humidity content of the air immediately converts to snow, and the dramatic thermal differential causes wind to rush

into the area of effect. Note that the user can easily see out of the sphere, since the visible light is still heading *into* the sphere, but electromagnetic emissions passing out of or through the sphere are dimmed to the point of absolute blackness at the device's primary intake port.

Firing the gatherer releases a destructive beam. The device cannot both charge and fire within the same phase.

The gatherer powers itself with two essential forms of energy: thermal and light. Therefore, its actual performance will depend upon current environmental conditions. Listed at right are a number of sample conditions and the number of charges that a gatherer would draw in from them per five-second phase.

Fortunately for individuals who are proximal to the user, the gatherer does not steal heat directly from their bodies; it can only gather radiant energy. However, the intense cold of the device's area of effect will obviously be felt.

Ammo: Ambient electromagnetic energy.

						—*Recoil*—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
SG	SA			2	10*			
Laser		8	2		1**	—	—	50
Heat bolt		22	3		5**	—	—	20

* Magazine charge capacity—how many charges (maximum) this weapon can store.
** Charges consumed per shot.

Sample Conditions and Charges per Combat Phase

Ambient Light Energy Levels	*Charges Gained per Phase*
High-power spotlight/summer sun	3
Bright/noon	2
Normal interior/late afternoon	1
Dim/dusk	0.5
Dark/night	0

Ambient Thermal Energy Levels	*Charges Gained per Phase*
30 C	2
21-25 C	1.5
10-20 C	1
5-9 C	0.5
0-4 C	0



Stun Gun, ET

This two-barreled gun, which looks like some strange hybrid between a bizarre tail pipe and an enigmatic tool, is a highly efficient stunning weapon. When activated, one barrel fires a small IR laser; the low heat it generates is used both to plasmate the column of air between the weapon and the target, and to act as an aiming beam. Immediately afterward (less than 0.0001 seconds), the second barrel fires a focused bolt of electricity, which follows the plasmated air column to the target (the path of least resistance).

If hit by an ET stun gun, the victim must make a Difficult test of CON to remain conscious. If this is not successful, the target is rendered unconscious for five minutes. Targets who do succeed with the CON roll suffer a -2 to their Initiative and Agility for six phases (30 seconds), unless they make an outstanding success, in which case the reduction is merely -1. If a target who is still suffering the effects of one stun is hit again, a Catastrophic Failure indicates that the individual has gone into cardiac arrest.

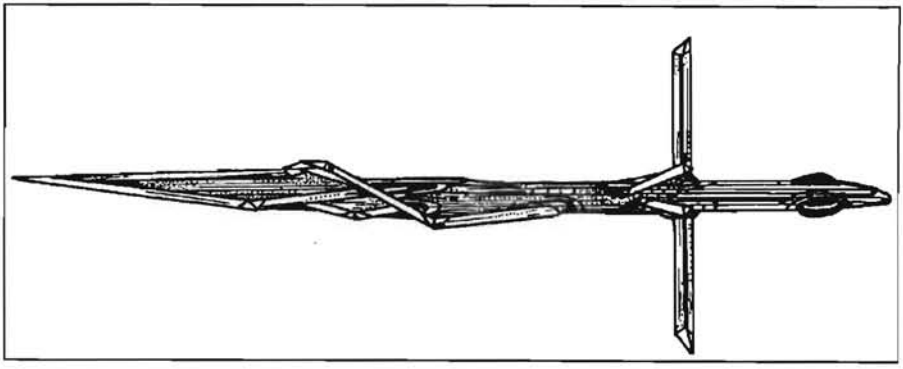
The weapon's accuracy is severely degraded in vacuum, its range being reduced to 10 percent of normal. In water, the weapon creates a globe effect with a radius of 10 meters.

Humanoid ETs make frequent use of stun guns when acquiring live test subjects or conducting missions that require a very low profile. (Stun guns don't leave victims with any evidence of ET involvement; The only mark left on the target looks more like the result of contact with a hot stove than with ETs.)

User Cost: Recharge, W/Min: 1000 (per shot)
Ammo: —
Wt: 2.2 kg
Mag: 40 shots (40,000 W/Min)
Price: N/A (—/—)

						—Recoil—		
Weapon	*ROF*	*Dam*	*Pen*	*Blk*	*Mag*	*SS*	*Brst*	*Rng*
ET stun gun	SA	*	Nil	2	40i	—	—	35

* See text.



Vampiric Sword

Also known as IceBlade or LifeDrinker, the vampiric sword is a favorite melee weapon of the oldest pale. The swords are living entities in their own right, metallic creatures garnered by the pale from some distant dimension and forged into blades by humans kept captive for specifically that purpose.

The sword entity itself survives by absorbing heat from living creatures. In its native dimension, it resembles a porous, metallic "walking stick" insect a meter in length. The creatures feeds by impaling its victim's body with its needle-sharp head, then soaking up heat from the blood that spills over it. Like the pale, these creatures can only feed on heat from living creatures; unlike the pale, they can survive intense environmental heat without damage.

To prepare a vampiric sword, a pale must first capture one of the walking stick creatures (a dangerous proposition) and empathically enslave it. This forms a bond that holds the creature in a state of stasis, keeping it alive during forging. This same bond allows the pale to absorb living heat from the sword after forging, even as the sword draws heat from its victims.

When a vampiric sword strikes a living target, calculate the melee damage normally (i.e., a pale's Strength of 8, plus 1D6). *In addition*, the sword drains from the victim a number of degrees Centigrade equal to one-fourth the melee damage done (or degrees Fahrenheit equal to one-half the damage done) each phase that the sword remains in contact with the victim. (The sword can automatically remain in contact with a prone or helpless victim; active victims automatically break contact.) One half this heat (rounded down) is transmitted to the pale; the remainder feeds the sword.

In appearance, vampiric swords are of one contiguous piece (blade, crossguard, and hilt), in which the lines of the walking stick creature's limb, eyes, and antennae can still be vaguely seen.

Occasionally, creatures other than the pale may capture and wield a vampiric sword. If such wielders succeed at a test of one-fourth their Empathy rating, they can empathically control the sword. As a result, they can prevent the sword from draining their own body heat as they hold it. Otherwise, bare-handed contact with the sword will drain body heat from the wielder at a rate of 1 C (2 F) per phase. (Of course, gloves could be worn to prevent this.) Also, wielders who fail to control the sword will them-

selves suffer a Control cost, representing the fact that whenever they encounter Dark Minions, the sword works empathically to weaken their Willpower.

User Cost: Detection 10, Control 2*, Heat Loss*
Wt: 2.5 kg
Price: N/A (—/—)

* These are special costs that result if the user fails to empathically control the sword.

Weapon	Range	Hit Mod	Damage
Vampiric sword	L	+2	1D6+STR*

* Plus body heat drain.

MISCELLANEOUS DEVICES

Animator Generators

As referee, you have to consider the abilities of your group's PCs and present them with appropriately challenging opponents. For that reason, there is not a lot to be said about animator generators, the machines by which many Dark Races create life force to animate nonliving objects. You just decide how many animating spirits you want your Dark Minions to have the PCs encounter and what their forms and abilities ought to be, then write them down and send them on their way to play whatever part you intend in your nefarious schemes.

If for some reason you decide to allow the PCs to capture an animator generator and puzzle out its operation, there are a couple of guidelines you should follow. First, only allow the machine to make one animator spirit at a time, and have it take several hours to do so. (4D6 hours is a good rule of thumb.) Second, don't tell the players the exact stats of the resultant animator—describe its abilities in broad terms. If they are creating something described in the "Dark Races" chapter or that you have already designed, your job will be easy. But if you allow them to experiment at creating something new, have them describe to you what effect they are working for, then decide for yourself what its stats ought to be. After that, have them make a Difficult Computer Operations, Electronics, or Mechanic roll to operate the machine, and base their success on the quality of that roll. A success should give them an animator that operates as planned, and an outstanding success one that is better than planned in one manner or another. Finally, after the PCs have had the machine for a while, by all means take it away from them again. (You might have the Dark Minions give it a remotely controlled order to destruct, for example.) PCs should not come to rely upon some sort of magic box to do their work for them. Besides, **Dark Conspiracy** is supposed to be a game of constant change.



Chameleon Suit

A popular item among humanoid ETs, the chameleon suit is an extremely effective camouflage outfit. It is a long, poncho-like drape equipped with an incredibly sophisticated visual-processing net. This is integrated with a highly advanced outer sheath which contains a fluid mix that can be electronically stimulated to produce changes in color and pattern. The ET microprocessor that coordinates the effect is mounted on a belt and is linked to the suit by a single power and command cable.

When in motion, chameleoned individuals make all Stealth tests at one level lower difficulty than normal. When motionless, these tests become an additional stage easier. The suit can take 20 points of damage before it is destroyed, but at 5 points its effectiveness drops one stage, and at 10 it is rendered functionless (though repairable).

The suits can be worn over other types of armor or clothing with ease. But users can get tangled in the long folds of this over garment if they are not careful.

Wt: 3.8 kg

Price: N/A (—/—)

CHAPTER SIX

Empathic Underground

Most people of the 21 st century, if asked, would explain the new Dark Age they live in as the result of decades of global mismanagement by their political leaders. They might not put it in exactly such words, but to their minds, skyrocketing global population and rapidly increasing development of, and dependence upon, advanced technologies during the 20th century brought about escalating competition for unreplenishable natural resources. In response, the "haves" of the world entrenched themselves legally, socially, and literally against the "have-nots"—one result being the rise of global corporations as extranational entities, "above the law" of national governments. As the new global structure rigidified, upward mobility became virtually impossible, and the middle class pretty much fell apart as its member families spiraled into poverty. As a result of it all, the world returned to something like a near-feudal state. The hopes of a few, that humanity could establish a new, enlightened world order based upon shared resources, tolerance of all cultures, and individual dignity, were dashed.

What most people of the 21st century do not realize, however, is the part the Dark Invasion played in humanity's current sad state. Secretly seizing control of a few key positions and key figures, the Minions of the Dark worked to thwart all efforts at a united global solution to humanity's problems. When possible, they played upon the darkest side of powerful people, thereby both bringing about their desired results and further corrupting their agents. When necessary, they assassinated those who could not be brought into line, or used their power to drive such people to financial ruin.

But the Dark Minions' hold on the world is still tenuous. Their numbers are limited, and they know that should their existence become common knowledge, humanity would readily forget all its differences and band together to wipe the invaders from the planet. This is a very real danger for the forces of the Dark. For one thing, many of their number are too savage and thick-witted to maintain a low profile, and they serve as a constant source of risk that the Dark Conspiracy will be unmasked. Worse yet, there is a slowly but steadily growing number of humans who have encountered the Dark and have lived to tell about it—some even who have thwarted a Darkling plan or two. These "minion hunters" are beginning to band together and dog the Dark Minions' heels, threatening to bring the Dark Invasion to ruin. In places, they have even created a sort of "empathic underground" dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge and the eventual eradication of the Dark Minions.

DIVERSITY

Some individuals have the impression that the empathic underground is a large, worldwide, organized group. In actuality, the term is intended to represent all cells of resistance to the Dark Invasion. In other words, anyone who fights the Dark Minions can be considered a part of the empathic underground.

Consequently, the empathic underground as a whole is a sort of nebulous web of separate groups scattered across the world, mostly knowing little or nothing of other cells, and having little contact with one another in any case. There is no unified organization, as there is no central command structure to establish a unified front.

An individual cell can vary in size from two to a couple dozen individuals. In most cases, someone within a cell will know at least one person in at least one other cell. This allows information to be communicated to like-minded and concerned individuals in other parts of the country or even to those in other countries.

While most groups will cooperate with one another when the need arises, the different cells are not alike. In fact, the variety that exists among the cells of the underground is almost as great as the variety among the forces arrayed against them. In general though, most cells can be described by a few categories, based upon their goals, means of obtaining their goals, their empathic philosophy, and the organization of the cell. It should be noted that each of these types has disadvantages. In some organizations, the members cause one another more difficulty than the enemy, because they are caught up in group politics or petty personal differences.

HISTORY

The second misconception that needs correcting is that the underground is entirely a recent development in reaction to the Darkling invasion. As a matter of fact, many cells have existed in relative secrecy for thousands of years, although their member, structure, and goals have changed many times. They have evolved as have their goals, but some of the groups have nevertheless been around since before the fall of Rome. There is, for instance, one cell in Tibet that has existed for many centuries. Even the Masons can claim supernatural interests in their origins.

Recently, there has been a profound increase in the number of empathic underground cells because of the Darkling invasion. Few present cells can claim to have existed for more than a couple of years. Nevertheless, there have been many empathic organlzations throught the centuries. Even though some of these may no longer exist, much of what they learned may still be avallable, and some of their actions have had far-reaching effects over the centuries. Knowledge of such things can be used for or against humanity.

MYSTICISM AND THE EMPATHIC UNDERGROUND

For centuries, the empathic underground consisted of the practitioners of mysticism. From the sacred monasteries of the Himalayas to the New Age "pyramid-power" shops of the United States, the truths and secrets of empathic ability were sustained, and even passed on to the public (although usually in mangled, perverted form). The mystics served as the base and the communications system of the loose brotherhood of those who could see the universe within, whether working as religious brothers or purveyors of pseudo-psychic pap. They avoided contact with scientists, knowing that there was no way to scientifically prove their discipline, and not really wishing it to be proved, clinically studied, and scientifically analyzed.

When the Dark Minions arrived, the mystics felt their coming—who could see the universe and miss such things? Galvanized by this, the mystics approached the scientists concerned with the Dark Invasion and offered their assistance. Perhaps the classic

mystic, devoted to peace and tranquility, could not fight the Dark Minions as effectively as other empaths, but the mystics could provide great passive resistance, anchored firmly on their understanding of the cosmos and the universe within.

In the active empathic underground, the mystics serve largely as support rather than as active weapons to destroy the Dark Minions. They are teachers, leading the gifted to understand the meaning of mysticism and teaching them the mysteries of the universe without and within. They are defenders: Whole remote villages and suburbs of mildly empathic mystics screen and shield empathic schools and research facilities from the psychic probes of the Dark Ones. They are sentinels, skilled mystics braving the new terrors that stalk the astral protodimension in order to scout out the intrusions *of* Dark proto-dimensions into Earth's reality, and report back to those who hunt the Dark Ones. Some are even minion hunters, seeking to cleanse the universe of the sores of Dark encroachment. Their aggression pains the elders of the discipline, for the true philosophy holds that the universe changes as it will, without paying attention to the wishes of presumptuous humanity. But the elders cannot deny the youths their fiery determination, knowing that submission to the Dark Ones is unthinkable.

CLASSIFICIATIONS

Empathic underground cells can be generally classified by four different topics: goals, methods, empathic philosophies, and organization.

GOALS

Hunters: These cells see the role of their group to be the extermination of Dark races and their minions. These individuals often walk a thin line between dedicated watchfulness and paranoia/obsession. They are keenly aware of the threat posed by the Dark races and their minions. They feel they are at war, and seek to root out the enemy strongholds and assets. Their methods vary from group to group.

Information Brokers: The main focus of these people is to acquire as much information about the Dark Ones, their minions, and empathic powers as they possibly can. They see information as the one true weapon to be wielded against the Dark Ones and their minions, They may also play an important role in communication between various cells. As long as the majority of humanity is ignorant of the Dark races and empathic abilities, then the Dark Lords can do as they wish with only a minimum of opposition.

Liberators: To many, the empathic underground is much the same as the underground railroad of the 19th century in the United States: people who free and hide individuals from slavery. Such people are devoted to obtaining the release of psychic prisoners from the various institutions which have taken advantage of them. They have a deep respect for individual freedom. The prisoners of these institutions are in many cases treated like slaves; as property to be used or treated as their "owners" see fit. These cells seek out institutions which keep individuals captive in order to utilize their empathic gifts. They then free these individuals. They will also hide individuals from suspicious organizations or help individuals to sneak out of town.

Trainers: These people feel that in order to combat an empathic threat, those individuals with empathic abilities must be better skilled in the uses of their powers. They realize that untrained individuals also make tempting targets for unscrupulous or evil individuals or groups.

METHODS

Gunslingers: Gunslingers achieve their goals through a direct show of force. They carry lots of weapons and know how to use them. They live by the saying: "The best defense is a strong offense." Gunslingers believe that violent force usually results in a permanent solution to problems.

Pencil Commandos: These people try to use the "system" and other nonviolent means to achieve their goals. Their reasons for avoiding violence vary: They may be a group of individuals untrained in combat, or they may have moral objections to the use of violence. Many of these groups feel that to resort to violence lowers one's self to the level of one's enemies. These groups also tend to draw less attention to themselves and so are less prone to retributive strikes from the Dark races.

Shadows: These groups are often among the most successful, but in some cases they are hardly better than those they wish to defeat. They operate in the shadows, either acting clandestinely, or manipulating others to do their work for them (preferably unknowingly). This helps to keep their identities secret from the Dark Lords. By the use of these methods, they prevent their enemies from identifying a target to strike back at.

EMPATHIC PHILOSOPHIES

By the term "empathic philosophy," we refer to what a cell perceives to be the nature of empathic powers. (The following chapters of this book explain the most common of such philosophies.) Because there may be conflicts between individuals from the different schools of empathic philosophy, most groups will have empathic individuals of primarily one type, if not entirely of that type. A neuropath, for instance, is likely to be very distrustful of and perhaps condescending to a sorcerer. The members of a group may not all agree however, so mixed groups can occur. This is actually to the benefit of the group if the students of the different empathic philosophies can learn to work together. Their conception of empathic powers will often influence the nature of the organization.

Mystics: These groups tend be more philosophical and spiritual. They also tend to be the most ethical. The ethics of the group may be based on unusual philosophies or religions, but mysticism is very important to their utilization of empathic powers, and this will in turn influence the image of the group. Mystics believe that true understanding is intuitive. That means that knowledge is realized, not learned; one gradually achieves enlightenment. Those of a more religious bent believe that the source of enlightenment is divine in nature, while those of a more philosophical approach believe that it is the result of becoming more in tune with life and the cosmos.

Psionics: These groups tend to be very analytical. They believe that empathic powers are the result of stimulating neurochemicals in oneself or in a target. The change in neurochemical levels in the target's body results in an actual, physical change. Those of this school of empathy believe that knowledge is achieved through logical, scientific analysis and reason. The members will want quantifiable data. They thrive on factual, measurable, definable details and information.

Sorcerers: Sorcerous philosophy states that the origin of empathic abilities revolves around the ability to move through dimensions, and to tap the energies of these other dimensions. Followers of this philosophy seem the most arcane. These groups suffer from a large amount of skepticism and distrust. To most outsiders, sorcery is a trick;

mere slight of hand. This philosophy reminds many individuals too much of the occult. As a result, sorcerous groups are much more reserved about their abilities and the nature of these abilities. Additionally, in general, sorcerers have much greater offensive capabilities than mystics or psionics, even more than neuropaths. This makes them a greater threat to the Dark Lords. Because of this, sorcerers are constantly being hunted down by the minions of the Dark Ones. And because of this, those groups that are influenced by sorcery tend to be among the most dedicated. They are more likely to choose hunting as the group's goal.

Neuropaths: Because of the natureof neuropaths, these groups tend to be less consistent in their philosophies. In general, neuropathic groups are mistrustful of outsiders, sometimes even other empathic groups. Neuropaths often view sorcerers as especially dangerous because sorcerous activity draws the attention of the Darklings.

Mixed: Such cells have no unifying philosophy concerning empathic powers; individual members are allowed to make up their own mind concerning this issue. Because of their mixed empathic resources, they are often among the most successful groups, assuming the members all respect one anothers abilities and do not resort to petty squabbling.

Indifferent: To these groups, the nature and origin of empathic abilities is irrelevant. For them it is enough that the powers can use them as a means to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, this can be an irresponsible and potentially dangerous attitude to take.



ORGANIZATION

In considering the organizational types described below, it is important to keep two things in mind:

First, while most cells have a primary goal, that does not exclude their involvement in other activities generally associated with the underground. For example, most groups will hide individuals from the Dark Lords or their minions. Nor is a group necessarily prevented from using unusual methods to achieve an objective, if the members feel that the situation requires such. For instance, the primary goal of one group may be to free individuals who are being held against their will as psychic test subjects. The members of this cell tend to be law-abiding individuals who protest the use of violence. They prefer to obtain information about the illegal activities of certain institutions and then go through legal channels to force the release of the individuals being held captive. However, this same group of mild-mannered individuals, upon learning of the location of a group of cobra people, may begin to arm themselves with heavy-caliber weapons like a commando unit, and launch an all-out assault on this location—their logic being that they have reason to doubt that members of the local government will take them seriously. They may even fear that they will be institutionalized or that the government has been infiltrated by "Igors." If they have no one else to turn to, they may feel they have no choice but to resort to violence.

Second, while there may be a consensus among the majority of members of any particular cell, it should be remembered that the cell is made up of individuals and that individuals will each have their own personal opinions and personalities.

Anarchic Group: In such groups, there is no real organization, merely an agreement to help one another out. These groups are usually the least effective of all. They are, however, very common. Often, the members of such a cell refuse to trust one another, or no one in the cell wants to take orders from anyone else. On occasion, various such cells may come together to form a larger group, to face a major threat. This larger group is often formed as little more than an agreement of mutual interests. The group may recognizethe need to cooperate, but in actuality each cell may feel that its own interests will suffer in the face of the interests of the larger group. Or they feel that they cannot trust a group which includes individuals who are strangers to them.

Anonymous Alliance: The members in an anonymous group keep their identities secret even from one another. They communicate via middlemen or computers. These groups are comprised of individuals who feel that the best way to ensure the safety of individual members is to organize the group so the individuals do not know one another. This also means that if any one member is identified, captured, or compromised, the group as a whole can still continue. This is a common arrangement for computer hackers and other types of people who commonly use pseudonyms or "handles."

Anonymous groups have certain disadvantages to balance off the obvious safety advantages. It can be a very awkward form of organization: How do such individuals meet, for example? It is obviously difficult to set up the cell in such a way that the identities of all members are protected. These groups may be plagued by poor communication, due to the necessary safety measures built into the lines of communication. This is even a problem for hacker groups; even though communication from computer to computer through a network is fairly quick, it is only effective if all the concerned individuals are near networked computers. Also, these groups may face difficulties achieving

their goals. If the group believes that a direct show of force is necessary, it will have to bring in outside individuals to accomplish the mission, unless one of the members is up to a solo mission. They obviously can't just meet and storm a cobra people stronghold, for example; there is too much of a risk that their identities will be revealed. And, of course, there are a number of risks involved in contracting outside help. So by default these cells tend to be pencil commandos or shadows. They work best as information gatherers. Members of these cells often become so wrapped up in the need for security that they become paranoid.

Council: The council form is common among larger cells. A small group of respected leaders decide upon the activities of the larger whole. Such cells can be highly effective. There is a variety of opinion from the individual council members, but as long as the council size remains small, they can still come to a decision relatively quickly. Also, different members of the council often have different fields of expertise, yielding a mix which allows the cell to deal with a variety of situations.

Democratic: In some groups, decisions are made by majority vote. Although this form is better than anarchy, it can still be difficult for the group to come to a decision, especially if the cell is large. Factions often form within the cell. When this occurs, petty disputes can prevent the cell from coming to a consensus.

Dictatorial Unit: In such cells, there is one leader for the whole group. This person wields near supreme power over the actions of the group. This is not necessarily a bad form of organization, especially if the leader does a good job, and the amount of power that the cells commander wields can vary from group to group. But there is always the danger of the dictator losing sight of the good of the group or of becoming a megalomaniac. Such leaders may have difficulty taking the advice of others, even when the advisor may know more about the topic in question. They may fear that this shows they cannot make a decision.

Electoral Leader: Such cells choose one individual to make most of the decisions regarding the group. This individual wields varying amounts of power. Again, there can be problems with factions forming, or individuals may become more concerned with acquiring positions than with the goals of the group.

Subverts: This is a special and, unfortunately, all too common type of empathic group. These are groups whose members have been subverted either by some government or institution or by the Dark races. As with any other underground empathic group, there is no such thing as a typical subvert group. The above classifications must still be considered, but there are other things to keep in mind also.

How deeply has the group been subverted? In some instances, only one member of a group has been subverted. This individual then works to pervert or sabotage the efforts to the rest of the group. In other cases, the entire group may be complete and devoted servants of the Dark Ones. In most cases, subverted groups do not believe that they have been subverted. They usually believe that they have made a temporary deal. Due to the cunning of the Dark Ones, the subverted group will probably not be aware of the depth to which they are being manipulated. Instead, they will probably believe that the Dark Ones are serving their means. The Dark Ones often enjoy the irony of these arrangements, almost as much as theyenjoy the moment when they reveal to their arrogant and unsuspecting pawns just who controls whom.

Subverts are perhaps the most dangerous of any group or type of Igor, as their empathic abilities allow them to do things that other Igors may not be able to. Consider that they may have contact with other cells who trust them, not knowing that the cell has been subverted. This allows them to use even nonsubverted cells to serve their masters. As stated above, subverts are all too common. Humans are notorious for their willingness to do almost anything for personal gain, and the Dark Ones can be very seductive; remember that their empathic abilities give them added insight into an individual's character.

RELATIONS WITH ETS

While this has little to do with classifying cells of the empathic underground, this is neverthless an extremely important issue. If a cell has strong relations with ETs, it will have access to special equipment, and perhaps other assets, depending upon the type of ET involved. However, because the majority of ETs have been subjugated by the Dark Ones, most empathic underground cells tend to be suspicious of all ETs. Some groups take this paranoia to an extreme. They feel that any ET could be a Dark Minion trying to infiltrate their organization. In such case, they deprive themselves of a potentially powerful asset. In the most extreme cases, they feel there are only two kinds of ETs: minions and dead ones.

One point that should not be forgotten is that the ETs have their own impressions of the empathic underground. And their impression of the underground will greatly effect how relations between an ET and an empathic underground cell evolve. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

Besides all of the above, one must consider some things which, while having little to do with categorizing a cell, have a great impact on how the cell functions. One such thing is the size of the group. How many individuals belong to it? The next thing to consider is what the resources of the group are. Do they have a lot of money, equipment, and influence? What are their relation with other empathic underground groups? The last thing to consider is how active is the group. What is its level of activity?

Small, close-knit groups are most common, as they allow a higher degree of efficiency because of better understanding of the capabilities of individual members. This size also increases the security of the cell. With less members, there is a reduced likelihood of information or members falling into the wrong hands. However, small groups are limited in the types of operations they can carry out, due to a lack of manpower.

The amount of resources available to the group also defines the capabilities of that cell. A group of wealthy individuals, or individuals with access to high-tech equipment, will have an advantage. Their greater resources will often allow them to to be better prepared to achieve their goals.

There are three types of resources considered here: finances, equipment, and information sources (a resource that is often ovorlooked, but is truly essential). Finanaces are often the most sought after by members, because wealth can usually buy equipment and information. This is not always true, however. Just because a cell has enough wealth to buy an armored attack helicopter doesn't mean it has the proper contacts from which to buy it. Similarly, having enough money to grease a lot of palms doesn't mean one knows

which palms to grease. Information includes contacts and other informants, access to data bases, and access to well-equipped libraries.

Relations among various cells vary greatly. The empathic underground is by no means a happy, like-thinking fraternity. Individual groups will differ greatly in their opinions on the priority of various goals, or the means that should be taken to achieve those goals. A group of pencil commandos may feel that gunslingers are barbarians who have lowered themselves to the level of the enemy. These gunslingers may feel that the pencil commandos are cowards who lack the conviction to do what is necessary. Finally, as each cell is composed of individuals, and individuals will each have their own personality, it is inevitable that there will be personality conflicts. This is perhaps the greatest factor in the war against the Dark Ones. As long as the empathic underground a divided over petty issues and personality conflicts, it will never be able to bring its full resources to bear against the Dark Ones.

Lastly, all cells are not composed of fanatics dedicated to fighting the Dark Ones and their minions. While some groups are highly dedicated, others lack drive. They may agree that there is a problem and something must be done about, but they would rather they didn't have to get involved, that somebody else would solve the problem.

RANDOM CELL GENERATION

As the PCs conduct their own struggle against the **Dark Conspiracy**, they are likely to encounter a number of other minion hunters. Each such is, in effect, a part of the empathic underground, and every group of two or more is technically a cell. (As a matter of fact, the PCs themselves form a cell!)

By considering carefully the above information, a referee should be able to create many different empathic underground cells, each with their own particular character. To keep the game interesting, the referee should strive to prevent the empathic underground from becoming some collection of colorless generic groups. However, if the referee needs to create a cell quickly, the following random generation system is included.

Goals

1d6 Roll	*Result*
1	Hunters
2	Information Brokers
3	Liberators
4	Trainers
5	Subverts
6	Roll twice; ignore any rolls of 5 or 6

Methods

1D6 Roll	*Result*
1-3	Gunslingers
4-5	Pencil Commandos
6	Shadows

Organization

1D6	Result
1	Anarchic Group
2	Anonymous Alliance
3	Council
4	Democratic Cell
5	Dictatorial
6	Electoral Leader

Size

1D10	*Result*
1	1-6 (1D6) members
2	1-10 (1D10) members
3	2-20 (2D10) members
4	6-15 (1D10+5) members
5	11-20 (1D10+10) members
6	16-25 (1D10+15) members
7	3-30 (3D10) members
8	4-40 (4D10) members
9	10-100 (10D10) members
10	>100 members

Resorces

1D6 Roll	Result
1	Minimal resources. The cell has few funds (poverty level) and assets; less than $15,000 in annual assets. The cell probably has little in the way of information sources (1-5 generic contacts, no foreign).
2	Few resources. The group has access to between $15,000 and $20,000 annually in assets and funds. It has access to some information sources, but these are probably not high quality (1-5 solid contacts, no foreign).
3	Adequate resources. The group has access to between $20,000 and $50,000 annually in assets and funds. It has multiple reliable information sources giving it access to some classified or hard-to-obtain information (1-10 contacts including one foreign).
4	Average resources. The group has access to between $50,000 and $100,000 annually in resources. Its information is of high quality (2-20 contacts—mostly solid—including 1 or 2 foreign).
5	Quality resources. The group has access to between $100,000 and $500,000 annually in resources. It is very well informed (3-30 contacts, including 1-3 foreign).
6	Superior resources. The group has access to over $500,000 annually. It has many superior information sources concerning a very wide range of topics (5-50 contacts, including 1-5 foreign).

Level of Activity

1D6	*Result*
1	Low; prefer not to get involved
2-4	Medium; will become involved if the risks are not too great.
5-6	High; highly dedicated, and willing to take great risks.

Next, the referee decides upon the group's relations with ETs, its relations with other empathic underground cells, and where it is headquartered.

EXAMPLES OF CELLS

For the referee's aid, the following random cells are provided.

Dark Pentad

Goals: Advance the aims of the Dark races
Methods: Shadows
Empathic Philosophy: Mixed
Organization: Anonymous alliance
Assets: Superior resources (over $3,000,000)
Size: Five members
Level of Activity: Highly dedicated
Relations with ETs: Sees ETs as tools to be manipulated.
Relations with Other Cells: Good; it has managed to hide its true nature from others. Others know it as Pentad Alliance.
Headquarters: Seacouver
Description: This is a group of subverts. The members have aligned themselves with a Dark One in exchange for increased financial and political strength. They are extremely cautious and even more cunning. The PCs may feel the influence of the Dark Pentad, but its influence should be extremely dfficult to identify.

Champions of Conflict

Goals: Special
Methods: Shadows
Empathic Philosophy: Mystical
Organization: Democracy
Assets: Superior resources (about $1,000,000 annually)
Size: Seven members
Level of Activity: Highly dedicated.
Relations with ETs: It sees ETs as a tool
Relations with Other Cells: It is unknown as a group to any other cell. Individual members may be known, however, to members of other cells.
Headquarters: New Boswash
Description: This group believes that a certain level of conflict presents a challenge that brings out the best in individuals that it stimulates growth and improvement Its members may help or hinder other groups as they see fit. They seek to maintain a certain level of tension, endeavoring to prevent either side from gaining the upper hand. They believe that a strong outside threat will also act to unify humanity. The group usu-

ally uses other groups to achieve its goals. Its members don't believe that they are the "epitome of evolution," however, so they may often be found in the company of a group that they have organized.

HLF (Human Liberation Front)

Goals: Hunters, Liberators

Methods: Gunslingers

Empathic Philosophy: Mostly indifferent, but it strongly distrusts sorcery. "Empathy is a tool."

Organization: Dictatorial Unit

Assets: Average resources (about $50,000 annually)

Size: 15 dedicated members and 37 associated members

Level of Activity: Highly dedicated.

Relations with ETs: The group is very distrustful of all ETs. Its members may react violently to the sight of an ET.

Relations with Other Cells: Members of this group do not feel that most other groups are dedicated enough, but they are careful to maintain strong ties with as many cells as possible. They see each cell as a weapon that can be wielded against the ETs.

Headquarters: Chiwaukee

Description: This group lives by the axiom: "You can never carry too many weapons."



New Dawn's Warriors

Goals: Hunters
Methods: Pencil Commandos
Empathic Philosophy: Indifferent
Organization: Democratic
Assets: Adequate resources ($20,000 but they have Quality information sources)
Size: Four members
Level of Activity: Highly dedicated
Relations with ETs: The group has none; its members are aware the most ETs are controlled, but that there remain some who are free and need help. They see ETs as victims.
Relations with Other Cell: They are willing to share information with almost any other cell, and in turn they are always looking for additional contacts.
Headquarters: Minneapolis
Description: New Dawn's Warriors is comprised of a group of accountants. These accountants track down suspicious groups by examining the companies' books. They then turn this information over to the proper authorities or hire private detectives to acquire additional information.

Defenders of the Future

Goals: Trainers; Liberators
Methods: Pencil Commandos, Gunslingers
Empathic Philosophy: Psionic
Organization: Council
Assets: Adequate
Size: 17 members
Level of Activity: Highly dedicated
Relations with ETs: Cautious, but it is very interested in understanding ETs.
Relations with Other Cells: It is on good relations with most other cells.
Headquarters: Boston
Description: This group tries to train individuals in the use of their empathic powers so that they can join the conflict against the Dark Ones. They also free empathic individuals being kept captive by various institutions. They prefer to use legal means, but if these fail. they are willing to resort to force.

H.D.A.A. (Human Defense Advancement Association)

Goals: Information brokers
Methods: Pencil Commandos
Empathic Philosophy: Psionic
Organization: Democratic
Assets: Adequate
Size: 23 members
Level of Activity: Medium
Relations with ETs: Distrustful
Relations with Other Cells: Open, but it wants to dominate other groups and force all cells into forming one large network.

Headquarters: LA

Description: This group believes there is a need for a national organization to allow for better communication between various cells. Many of the members of H.D.A.A. are graduates of Berkely and consider themselves to be somewhat more thoughtful and insightful than other organizations, and therefore best qualified to form this network. To be fair, they are a bright group. They are very willing to share information with groups they meet or who contact them. When this occurs, they always try to set up some more permanent means of communication. They are careful, however, to exchange information in such a way that the exact location of their headquarters and the identities of their members are well protected.

Lords of Commerce

Goals: Hunters

Methods: Any

Empathic Philosophy: Mixed

Organization: Democracy

Assets: Superior ($15,000,000 annually)

Size: Seven members.

Level of Activity: Highly dedicated

Relations with ETs: Distrustful

Relations with Other Cells: This group tries to dominate other groups it contacts. Otherwise, it tries to establish friendly relations.

Headquarters: Delocalized throughout the US.

Description: This organization is headed by several wealthy corporate leaders. They became involved when they realized that much of the modern chaos was the result of the activities of the Dark Ones. Chaos hurts the economy, so they got involved. All are very patriotic, many with military records, and they see the actions of the Dark Lords as a sort of invasion. Most of the members of this cell are well past their physical prime, but they are experts at organizing and delegating responsibility. Combined with their military experience, this makes them a very effective cell. They use whatever means seem best suited to a particular mission. While cautious in order to protect their own security, they try to be as honest and straightforward as possible with those they employ.

Free Mind Federation Cooperative

Goals: Trainers and Information Brokers

Methods: Pencil Commandos (but see SOL, below)

Empathic Philosophy: Mixed, but primarily mystical

Organization: Dictatorial Unit.

Assets: Superior ($15,000,000 annually)

Size: Unknown, but well over 1000.

Level of Activity: Medium

Relations with ETs: Cautious

Relations with Other Cells: No official contact with other groups.

Headquarters: "Smithtown" (location unknown).

Description: *You are not insane. We have seen what you have seen. Sit with us and*

talk; we have heard before what you will say. All we ask is that you lay and share with us the light of day.

These are the words one hears at the opening of every meeting of the Free Mind Federation Cooperative, at every safe house of the group. They are words that bring comfort and help to those who suffer from hallucinations, bad dreams, feelings of being watched or followed, etc.—people who feel that they are losing their sanity.

Philosophy: The FMFC is the Free Mind Federation Cooperative, but its initials also stand for Father, Mother, Family, Country. These last four words sum up the elements of the philosophy of Winston Smith, the FMFCs founder. To members of the group, *Father* represents the cosmos, the opposite of chaos-god, in whatever form you may choose. *Mother* symbolizes Earth, our planet and our natural order, the concept of one natural state where everything is interrelated. *Family* stands for the human race, all humans, controlled or free. Country represents the environment where you live, not a nation-state or artificial boundary, but rather the area you live in, your community or neighborhood, where you spend your life. Other important aspects of the philosophy include: *The Light*, the combination of emotion, intellect, and physical presence to do right; and *The Dark,* the evil that rots, destroys, and feeds off the terror it breeds in humanity.

Approach: On the surface, the FMFC is a support group similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Its objective is to support individuals who are trying to cope with incidences that they believe to be supernatural; the group tries to help individuals to help themselves. However, below the surface, the FMFC is an important part of the empathic underground.

The FMFC is different from other support groups in several ways. One, it never tries to tell the members of the group, or "family" as they are called, that the problem is their fault. FMFC members are willing to believe that the stories told by the people who come to them for help are true. The group believes in the supernatural and the terror of its darker elements. What its members try to accomplish as a group is to help the individuals in the Family to get over their fear and bring their lives under control. They help one another to help themselves to gain back some normalcy in their lives, to stay on the job and stay with their families.

The telling of each individual's story of terror serves not only the victim of the Dark, but also serves the FMFC as a whole. From these stories, the FMFC gains information concerning the actions of the Dark Ones and their minions. Also, it serves as a recruitment organization. The FMFC puts together a profile for each new member of the Family. Occasionally, an individual comes to the FMFC with the right attitude for a potential minion hunter. These individuals, after being carefully screened, are asked to become more involved in the war against the Dark Ones—they are asked to join the SOL ("Soldiers of Light") special strike teams.

Many doctors and scientists not associated with the FMFC have dismissed these sessions and the therapy they offer. Some have even gone so far as to council against the FMFC, arguing that individuals should work through their problems only with certified and licensed professionals. In some cities, the FMFC has encountered legal resistance when authorities attempt to ban the organization, claiming it was providing medical assistance—practicing medicine—without proper license or authority. Thus far, the FMFC has been able to refute these claims, and has won court cases by using Alcoholics Anonymous as the basis of its claim to being a support group and insisting that it is completely nonmedical in nature.

To begin a new cell, a safe house is set up by a group from the FMFC, and advertising appears in the local media or by leaflets in neighborhoods and areas where Dark activities have been observed or reported. The location of the new FMFC chapter is always kept as secret as possible. The advertisements do not mention the location of the safe house, only a phone number. When potential members call, a brief interview is conducted over the phone, and if individuals seem serious, they are give the location of the local safe house and invited to attend the next meeting. These meetings draw in all types, mostly scared, some curious, some troubled and some trouble-makers. From these meetings, a report of each new member is prepared. Those who fit a carefully prepared profile (and pass a thorough screening process to winnow out Darkling "plants") are asked if they would like to take part in special training to promote the FMFC in other areas. If they accept, they are transported to "Smithtown" for training, but always in such a manner that they should be unaware of the training ground's location. Those that complete their training and serve the FMFC well are later asked if they would like to partake in additional training. In short, they are recruited into the SOL for missions around the country. Training and utilization depends upon the individual. This special training takes place in several possible locations, but is always organized from "Smithtown."

Potential meeting places have to fit a certain kind of feel. Most are houses on the edge of nasty zones, some are warehouses, some are little shops. Houses are best, because it is easier to make those attending feel comfortable and "at home." Also, they give plenty of cover and easily serve multiple purposes. Preferred houses have living space upstairs, solid foundations, and lots of storage space. Windows then have bars added to them. Each chapter is usually on the fringe of an area heavily influenced by the Dark Ones and/or their minions, but not too deep within, as that could leadto secrets and special operations being compromised.

Each chapter is responsible to a state organization committee person who has direct communication with a limited number of chapters (maximum of five) within the state. The SOC chairperson reports to the national organization where the overall organization takes place.

History: The first FMFC "safe" house opened its doors two years ago to help 11 people who gathered together to tell their stories and share their fear. In so doing, they gained new strength in knowing that their problems were shared by others. That initial success convinced the founder, Winston Smith, to extend the group sessions to other parts of the city and to other cities. Now the FMFC builds on each new group in an area.

There are now FMFC safe houses in every major city, as well as in many smaller communities. The actual number of safe houses is unknown.

Winston Smith

The Myth: The following is an excerpt from a biography being written by Dr. H. J. Warren.

"Winston Smith was born in south Florida, near Orlando, in the year 1973. His exact birthdate is unknown, but it was in late October. He was raised by and lived with his mother for most of his life, until her death in 2002. He knew his father, and was told some family history by his mother. Most of this information he keeps to himself. What exactly happened to his father is unknown, as Smith refuses to discuss it. What is known

is that from about the age of 5, Winston was fatherless. He will sometimes talk about his father to close friends, but in a strange, third-person fashion. To my knowledge (and that of others I have interviewed regarding him), he never mentions his father's name, simply referring to him as "my father." Smith holds no such reservations when discussing his mother, Evelyn Smith. He describes her in very colorful and emotional words and phrases, explaining that she taught him about truth, beauty, and humanity. He longs to visit her resting place more often and misses her greatly.

"Smith feels that there is a darkness that feeds off psychic energy. If pressed, he will admit that he cannot prove his theory, but that he feels it quite strongly, and that this is evidence enough. This constant feeling of dread caused him to believe at one time that he was going insane, and so he had himself admitted to a psychiatric hospital. After several months, both he and the medical staff concluded that while he did suffer from a mild case of paranoia, he was not going insane. Smith then left the hospital and moved to New York City, looking for employment. It was there, he says, that he first came face to face with the evil that had been disturbing him—an external evil, and not of his own imagination. Convinced now that the evil was all too real, he was determined to combat it. Smith went to work using his successful food corporation as a cover to create the group that would counteract this conspiracy of Darkness.

"The Free Market Food Corporation is the name of the company Winston Smith created. The idea was to create the corporation so that he would have a substantial income with which to finance his struggle against the Dark Ones. The corporation marketed high impact food products such as Spray-On-Meals®, and Carb-Pump®. This company turned out to be a substantial financial success, so Smith faces very few problems funding his other projects."

The Reality: The name "Winston Smith" is an alias. His real name is Jeremy Mathews, and he was born somewhere in Oregon. His mother's name was actually Evelyn, however. His father's name was not Mathews—that was his mother's maiden name. His father was a humanoid extraterrestrial, one of those rare ETs that had managed to avoid domination by the Dark Lords. He was of the ET race called the Jesda, a race of creatures with the ability to slowly metamorph to suit their surroundings, to fit the expectation of those around them. When "Smith's" father made his desperate escape to our world, his first contact was with a governmental official of the United States of America. Unfortunately for him, these officials from the NSA confined him for interrogation and experimentation, refusing to give credence to his story of a supernatural evil sweeping through the ETs. They imagined that he was part of some alien plot to invade Earth.

Over time, he changed his form to look more human, and was eventually able to escape using his empathic powers. Fleeing across the country, he took shelter one night in the garage of a small country house, where he was eventually discovered by the owner, Evelyn Mathews. Mathews saw in him not an alien monster, but an intelligent creature in need of help. In time, she came to love him and bore him a son which they named Jeremy. Although his appearance had progressively changed, so that he was by now nearly indistinguishable from the humans around him, Jeremy's father was not safe from the hounds of the Dark Lords. Rather than risk his family, he chose to leave them, leading the minions of the Dark Lords away. His current status is unknown even to "Smith." He may still be alive, but in hiding from the Dark Ones.

Early in his youth, Jeremy discovered that he had the ability to sense the weather—the changes in air pressure, mass, and the electromagnetic structure—in short, he knew when it was going to rain. In general, he was in tune with nature. He also had the ability to tell when someone was angry, upset, or happy, abilities he inherited from his father. These very special parents made him into the remarkable person he is. His mother gave him humanity and his father gave him the strength to use it. She taught him what it meant to care, to have unconditional compassion for others. And his father's sacrifice showed him that if one truly cares for the well-being of others, than one must make sacrifices, and must have the courage and strength to make painful decisions in order to care for these people.

As "Smith" grew to be a man, he became aware of an evil menace at work in the world, not just as a vague force described to him by his father, but as something that was almost palpable in the air. He decided to make combating this evil his mission in life, especially after what this evil had done to his father. He could sense that the evil was strong in New York, so he went there. At first, his passion for his purpose was such that it overpowered his common sense, and he made a rather foolish single-handed assault against a Dark One he found in New York. Fortunately, he was rescued by a cell of the empathic underground. The cell's name was Warriors (named after a street gang from an old movie called *The Warriors).* They were impressed by his fervor for the cause. From them, "Smith" learned a great deal about how to fight the Dark Ones and their minions. He in turn, by example, strengthened their dedication to the fight. This cell, however, became a victim of its own success; the Dark Lord could no longer dismiss it as a minor annoyance. He turned his attention toward the Warriors, and the group was destroyed almost to a man. Only "Smith's" empathic powers allowed him to escape the massacre. He left New York and set about forming his own empathic underground.

Soldiers of Light (SOL)

Goals: Hunters, Liberators

Methods: Any

Empathic Philosophy: Mixed, but primarily mystical

Organization: Dictatorial Unit

Assets: Superior ($15 million annually)

Size: Unknown, but over one hundred.

Level of Activity: Highly dedicated

Relations with ETs: Cautious, but willing to help nonsubverted ETs

Relations with Other Cells: They try to dominate other groups they contact. Otherwise, they try to establish friendly relations. If they feel incapable of achieving a particular objective, they may try to hire others to do it.

Headquarters: "Smithtown" (location unknown).

Description: This is a paramilitary group. Strike teams from the SOL have three primary goals: (1) take out the Dark Ones and their minions; (2) retrieve family (rescue prisoners); and (3) acquire information. Operations are carefully prepared in advance by the central command. Mission objectives are spelled out to minimize casualties among the family. SOL strike forces use FMFC chapters to provide them safe starting points and local information, but individuals in FMFC group sessions are not allowed to see or associate with SOL strike force team members. Missions are specifically conducted so

as to achieve maximum success, but with the absolute minimum of casualties among the team.

History: The SOL was founded shortly after the the FMFC. Once several chapters were established, those individuals who fit a specially prepared profile were invited into the Soldiers of Light.

FREE MARKET FOOD CORPORATION

Description: This company is actually a cover for Smith's other groups. It produces seasonings and quick meals for people on the go.

Products: Spray-On-Meals, a flavoring used to enhance the food you serve with the best-seller Garlic Blaster. Also Curry-A-Flavor, and Tex&Mex.

Carb-Pump, a complete breakfast, lunch, or dinner in two minutes, hot or cold. Carb-Pump contains 10 to 20 times your daily needs of everything.

Carb-Pump also serves as MRE (meals ready-to-eat) for SOL teams.

History: After Smith's experiences in New York, he left to form his own underground. He had learned from his time with the Warriors that financing a cell was costly, so he decided to first go into business. Then, once he had a successful financial income, he would form his new underground. Dr. H. J. Warren was recruited while Smith was in New York City. Warren had been loosely associated with the Warriors due to some unusual experiences of his own (the "loose" association saved him from the massacre). Warren had worked for a private medical company (Med-X) which had questionable connections worldwide, and which has been known to work with some unusual customers. He now became the head of Research & Development at the Free Market Food Corporation. While he is only a minor financial partner in the corporation, his opinions carry a lot of weight, due to his associations with Smith.

It took Smith five years to build the Free Market Food Corp., but it is now a very successful corporation. Smith has recently relinquished much of the management of the corporation to senior executive personnel, in order to devote his time more fully to the Free Mind Federation Cooperative and Soldiers of Light.

ETS AND THE EMPATHIC UNDERGROUND

Perhaps the strongest example of American fascination with extraterrestrials occurred in 1939, when one radio show re-enacted H. G. Well's invasion of Earth, and caused a minor panic when some listeners thought it was real. ETs first began to appear in earnest in 1946, after the end of the Second World War. During this period and the years that followed, there were numerous claims of UFO sightings. The US government knew the secret behind these claims, and began public investigations of the sightings.

The government knew of the existence of ETs since July of 1947, when an ET scout saucer crashed near Corona, New Mexico, and extraterrestrial corpses were recovered from the wreckage. Government biologists learned much from the bodies, but government engineers could make little sense of the wreckage. The big secret, however, was "We are not alone." Because of the public hysteria created by the "false alarm" radio broadcast of 1939, and a fanatic desire to secure the superior technology for the US alone, the American government chose to publicly deny the existence of ETs. Highly publicized investigations were launched, always with the same conclusions. The findings they published were that the many reported UFO sightings were the result of mass

hysteria. They alleged that each UFO had a perfectly natural explanation, such as swamp gas, weather balloons and the like. The conclusion that was made was that while life, perhaps even intelligent life, may exist on other planets, there was no evidence that any such intelligent life had ever visited our planet.

Shortly after the crash in 1947, the American government was contacted by the ETs, and a deal worked out that became known as "the arrangement" in government circles: The ETs would provide technological and scientific information to the American government, in return for the American government's assistance in keeping the existence of ETs secret from the populace as a whole.

Many other private citizens and institutions also began to research the question of extraterrestrial contact. The results of their studies were mixed. Some demonstrated that supposed UFO sightings were the result of over-active imaginations or had perfectly natural explanations. Others became firmly convinced that there was intelligent life out there, and they had serious concerns about the motivations of these creatures in visiting our planet.

There are always rumors that ETs visited our planet long ago. Some say that ETs influenced the Egyptians, or even that the Egyptian gods were actually extraterrestrials. Others claim that ETs were involved in the early stages of human evolution. It is possible, but not absolutely certain, that many of the activities or influences attributed to ETs before the 1940s were actually the work of some Dark One or its minions.

Everything continued in a state of relative stability until 1983, however, when an ET scout party accidently opened a portal, and unleased the Dark Invasion.

MODERN RELATIONS

Relations between the empathic underground and ETs can best be described by looking separately at two different categories of ETs. These categories approach human relations from two very different positions, with two very different goals.

Subverted ETs: The subverted ETs serve the whims of one Dark Lord or another, so these particular ETs are usually working toward the eventual subjugation of the human race.

Renegade ETs: These ETs fear for their lives and for their freedom. As escaped members of extraterrestrial races that have been subverted by the Dark Ones, they may have seen friends and loved ones killed or subverted. Now they are hunted. The Dark Ones are not happy controlling only most of the ETs; they want to control them all. Now these renegades must hide not only because capture would mean death or subjugation, but also because they might have to fight a friend or loved one in the process. These renegades know that they only way they will ever be truly free is if the Dark Lords and their minions are defeated. They also know that they are severely outnumbered, and that if they ever wish to see their families and friends free they will need help to destroy the Dark Ones. This means they must seek out allies among the natives of this planet.

They need allies to survive. They will need refuge from enemies, the elements, and from human parasites. They may need assistance in obtaining food and other necessities. The easiest way to get these things is from a human willing to help them. Lastly, it appears that many of them, like humans, need companionship; it is rough enough to be lonely, but to be alone and in terror for your life is a horrible way to exist.

There are those aliens who are scared and in need of help that see all humanity as

potential allies. They view both large institutions and the empathic underground as two major potential sources of assistance. Large institutions (including governments) look promising because they have vast resources, manpower and power to be heard. Unfortunately, many of these institutions have agendas which do not always coincide with the welfare of society. Such institutions may likely try to exploit an ET. Or they may just seek to exterminate the alien, seeing it as a threat. Occasionally, however, an ET gets lucky or is able to research institutions well enough to be able to contact only those which are willing to help. These ETs are extremely lucky, because they may have access to much of such an institution's resources.

Many ETs are afraid to contact large institutions. There are various reasons for this. They may be aware that some human institutions have exploited and killed ETs in the past. Or they may fear that if the organization is powerful enough to help them against the Dark Ones, then the Dark Ones have probably taken steps to gain some control over the institution, or have at least placed spies in it. Even if there are no spies within the institution, there is danger of exposure simply because of the number of people in the institution. The more people there are, the more that are likely to learn of the ETs' existence, and therefore the more likely that, somehow, word of the ETs' location will get back to their enemies. Others will not be so lucky. They may find themselves dead, captured by Dark Ones, or exploited by their "benefactors" (read: captors). Those who manage to escape such a situation will be understandably cautious when next approached by or approaching humans for help.

The next most useful group to contact then would be an empathic underground cell. How these ETs see the empathic underground will depend on what they have heard or learned about it and about humanity, and what interactions (if any) they may have already had with humans. There are certain advantages in contacting an empathic underground cell. Unless the cell has been subverted, the group will already be dedicated to fighting the Dark Ones in some manner. This means that an ET can at least avoid having to demonstrate the existence of the Dark Lords and having to prove that they pose a threat to humanity. Also, because an empathic underground cell is usually a smaller, more closely knit group than a government or corporation, there is less chance of word of such an ET getting spread outside of the group and somehow reaching the ear of a Dark One. Lastly, a cell may have resources that a large institution lacks. Besides shelter, they will have individuals with empathic powers. They will have contacts. And most importantly, they will have information. The usefulness of the information will vary. If nothing else, because of the group's contacts, it can probably put the ET in touch with someone or some group that can help, and they can warn the ET who not to approach.

But there are certain disadvantages in trying to contact a cell of the empathic underground. The most obvious is, how does one find them? As the name implies, most cells are secretive underground. An ETs search for such a group may attract unwanted and perhaps dangerous attention. There are also certain risks involved even if one successfully contacts a cell of the empathic underground. The group members may try to exploit the ET to achieve their goals. Even though they may have nobler intentions than some corporation, and their aim may be to thwart the Dark Ones, it is still exploitation. The referee must remember that everyone and everything that was important to such ETs was most likely taken from them by the Dark Ones. Any friends and family that these ETs may have had have likely been killed or subverted. Those that have been sub-

verted are being exploited. It is from such exploitation that a renegade ET is fleeing. So if the ET can help it, it is very unlikely that she, he, or it will submit to exploitation, no matter how noble the cause.

Also, there is a very real physical danger to contacting the underground. ETs have been given a bad reputation. They have been blamed for almost every imaginable ill: from the death of Elvis to the capture of helpless innocents. So it is not too surprising that their sincere pleas for assistance are sometimes met with disbelief or even violence. Also, as so many of them have been enslaved by the Dark Lords and used to commit very real atrocities, it is likely that any cell will suspect the ET of being an agent of a Dark One. The reaction of underground groups will vary. Its members may refuse assistance and chase such poor hunted creatures away, or they may try to kill them. If an ET is fortunate, the group will be willing to consider the ETs story and give the alien a chance. Those groups that are willing to aid an ET will surely find that they are well rewarded for their open-mindedness.

There is one qualifier which should be considered: Much of the above assumes that such an ET considers humanity to be more or less its equal, and that all must work together in the struggle against the Dark Ones. But some ETs will believe that humans are below them. Such individuals may still associate with humans, but they will endeavor to make the relationship one in which the humans serve the ET. Such ETs may cooperate with humans to combat the Dark Lords, but will treat the humans as cannon fodder. This does not mean that such opinions will be apparent to the humans that associate with such an ET.

EMPATHIC PHILOSOPHIES OF ETS

Like any other group of individuals who use empathic powers, ETs have developed ideas on the nature of empathic powers and theories on how to develop and use them. Their concepts of empathic powers are very similar to ours. It is somewhat surprising, considering our different origins. To those individuals, both ET and human, who are of a more contemplative nature, this is clear evidence that humans and extraterrestrials are less different than many would like to believe. Some of these thoughtful individuals have even proposed that empathy may represent the bridge that will link our societies into a productive communion, that will lead us all into a much brighter and productive future. That is if we do not destroy each other first.

MYSTIC ETS

Humans have a much inflated view of themselves. They view themselves as the pinnacle of evolution. The race is often quite irate when faced with evidence of its own limitations. Humans have often embodied their superiority in their religion. In most popular religions, man is the greatest of nature's creatures, master/steward of all the world. Humans then go to great lengths to base this superiority in some divine order. Imagine such people's surprise when they learn that aliens too have religions and philosophies; that they too have deities. After this, it is not too surprising to learn that some ETs have developed mystical philosophies concerning the nature and use of empathic powers.

While ET religions and philosophies are by their very nature alien to us, they share some common themes with ours. Many ETs believe in a divine purpose to creation.

They often feel that they have a special function in this purpose. Those alien religions that possess deities usually depict their deities as perfect specimens of themselves.

If their religions seem alien, then many of their philosophies are even more foreign. Philosophy is the product of philosopiiers, and as philosophers are individual beings with their own unique histories, each will have experienced life differently. Thus, not too surprisingly, they will interpret it differently, and this is reflected in their philosophies. What is surprising is that there are any similarities at all. In fact, there are a great many.

Spiral Centrism: One fairly common philosophy among ETs is spiral centrism, a philosophy developed by a radically symmetrical—as opposed to the bilateral symmetry of the human body—race called the S'faelith. Where our body has two of most parts—two legs, two arms, two eyes, etc., all set to either side of a midline—these creatures had five arms, five legs, and five eyes. Like life on our planet, life on their home planet (Seris) originally evolved in the sea. Their ancestors, a creature not too dissimilar from a starfish, remained aquatic inhabitants much longer than ours, so that the S'faelith were amphibious. They therefore evolved in a world of constant motion.

Spiral Centrism is based upon the spiral array organization of the Milky Way galaxy. The founder of this philosophy was one Maer'ith. By profession, he was an astronomer, and in the spiral form he saw an analogy for life. This philosophy states that all things are in constant motion, revolving about a single center. He called this center a focus. He saw that where the focus moved, the arms also moved. He also saw that the arms of the spiral originated from the focus. From these observations, he postulated that all things have a common origin and focus, which he called the Great Focus. And he postulated that all things moved to the will of this Great Focus. He then applied this philosophy to everyday life.

Maer'ith said that to be in control of one's life and to take control of those things around one, one must concentrate on peripheries, but grasp the focus. He said that one must focus one's consciousness. Practicioners of this philosophy participate in a great deal of meditation trying to "Grasp the Great Focus." From this philosophical movement, a martial art developed in order to help the students of the movement achieve enlightenment. It was believed that by helping the students to gain greater mastery over their own bodies, this would help them to achieve enlightenment. In its evolution, the philosophical movement is not unlike the evolution of many Eastern philosophies on our planet. And like the masters of these exotic studies on Earth, the masters of spiral centrism are said to be capable of extraordinary feat—feats that others would claim to be impossible. What the students of this philosophy are doing is reaching into the core of their being and into the astral proto-dimension.

The S'faelith are now gone; their entire race disappeared. Some say that the Dark Lords destroyed them. Others say that the entire race moved itself far away. Their teachings, however, have long since spread to other races.

PSIONIC ETS

This category includes those who interpret empathic abilities as having some "natural," "real," scientific, and measurable nature. Those ETs who subscribe to this theory tend to look down on the followers of mysticism and sorcery, to scoff at them. They equate such movements with superstition. In general, ETs tend to be more logical than

humans. They are not only more advanced than humans technologically, but they are also somewhat more advanced sociologically and psychologically; their minds have little use for superstition. They do not see these other movements as separate abilities from psionics. Rather, they see them as a primitive means of using psionics. If faced with the fact that the followers of these other movements are capable of utilizing empathic powers, they will come up with some very logical rationale. For instance, they might state, "It is well known that the use of psionics requires great concentration. The meditations of mystics teach them to concentrate. All the philosophical mumbo-jumbo is irrelevant, or at best a tool to help them focus. At its worst, it prevents them from realizing their true potential." If questioned about the fact that each of the three empathic philosophies tends to excel at different sorts of abilities, they may begin to quote mathematical statistics and spout about differences in neural biochemistry. Most commonly they will say that just because we haven't found an explanation does not mean that there isn't one, that there is no reason to resort to superstitious nonsense.

There will be certain alien neuropaths that will not only look down upon students of the other two schools, but may consider them a threat. The rationale is that the students of the other two schools are using psionics without proper or complete understanding of what they are actually doing, and it is too dangerous for one to be wielding such power improperly.

Some alien scientists and psionics may find students of the other schools as fascinating as their own. They may want to study them. Some of the tests may be somewhat unpleasant for the test subject. But they would be necessary for the advancement of the science of psionics. They would also study individuals with neuropathic abilities, but



they would probably treat such individuals much better. Imagine the pleasure of these scientists when they discovered Earth with its less intelligent life forms. Then they discovered that these humans could also wield empathic powers. To such ETs, there would not be as many ethical qualms about using such individuals as lab animals, as there would be if they were using members of their own races. Many such aliens needed little subversion on the part of the Dark Ones before participating in a conspiracy to enslave humanity.

SORCERY

With the exception of mathematical dimensional transcendentalism, sorcery is far less common among ETs than either mysticism or psionics. Sorcery revolves around the ability to contact and manipulate other dimensions. Here again is an example of parallel development between humans and ETs. Like early humans, primitive ETs had to come to terms with their environment. They often found themselves at the mercy of an environment they couldn't comprehend. They came to the belief that there were forces in nature and spirits of the elements. Early sorcerers learned to utilize these forces and to make pacts with these "spirits." Then, as in our own history, science began to dominate their culture and magic seemed to disappear. The exact historical details vary from race to race, but in general the result is the same: Sorcery seems to disappear, and sorcerers become secretive individuals who pass on their knowledge to a very select few. Over time, the number of sorcerers dwindled, until the present, when there are very few. Like humans sorcerers, these empaths pose the greatest potential threat to the Dark Lords. For this reason, a sorcerer ET would be hunted more than any other ET by far. Unfortunately, use of their power also makes them the easiest to find.

It is possible for a society to embrace both science and magic. Many of the new wave of sorcery on Earth have demonstrated that the two need not be mutually exclusive. However, such a society should be very rare. Early on in the evolution, a species will have to decide whether to follow the path of measurable science or the more ambiguous field of magic. These two concepts will often appear to contradict each other. It is for this reason that very few races or societies would use both with any semblance of equality. Because science is quantifiable, it is easier to grasp and, theoretically, would be preferred by most societies.

MATHEMATICAL DIMENSIONAL TRANSCENDENTALISM

This movement is unique in that it combines elements of all three of the above movements. Human mathematicians and physicists have theorized the possibility of wormholes in space. These can be seen as tunnels from one place to another that transcend the space in between. ETs also theorized the existence of worm holes. One group of empathically inclined ETs saw this as a possible explanation for sorcery. They believed that these wormholes connected not only different points in time and space in our dimension, but also connected points between different dimensions. Suddenly sorcery had a measurable scientific quantity and became somewhat more respectable. The early founders of this, movement felt that this validated the belief that true understanding of reality revolved around math. So like Pathagoreas of ancient Earth and his followers, math took on philosophical and religious aspects for them. Complicated mathematical equations and formulas became their mantras. They recite these theorems and postulates in order to become more in tune with the empathic activities they are undertaking.

REFEREE HINTS FOR ROLEPLAYING ETS

Regardless of an ETs race, there are two characteristics that the referee must consider if he or she wants the ET to seem real to the players. The first is the ETs alienness; the second, its situation as a hunted and frightened individual.

ETs are not just humans with funny colored skin and strange eyes. They may behave surprisingly similar to humans, but they are still alien. Alien means foreign, differing in nature or character. The referee should give the alien certain human-like qualities so the characters can relate to it. But the referee should also try to capture the ET's foreign nature. The creature may not understand human social structures. It may not understand our family structure or might be confused by our laws. While the ET comes from a race technologically more advanced than ours, it may not have some of our inventions, or may not use them in the same ways. In literature, for instance, it is fairly common that an alien does not understand that those things which occur during a TV show or movie are fictitious, and therefore are not an accurate account of human life. This will lead such an ET to believe that everyday people are like those on TV.

Another tool that the referee can use to convey the impression that the ET is an alien is language. Either the ET may not speak any human language or it may speak it differently. If the alien cannot speak our language, the PCs must work to establish some means of communication with it. This provides ample opportunities for role-playing. One variation of this theme that the referee might want to consider is the alien who pretends not to understand our language. If the PCs do not think the alien understands what they are saying, they are likely to react differently and say things they may not say if they think the alien understands them. This gives the alien an opportunity to judge the character of those it has met. It is also enjoyable when the ET springs upon the PCs that it can speak our language, and just how much of what the characters said was understood. These seemingly comic moments may seem inappropriate in such a dark game as **Dark Conspiracy,** but they can also be very tense and challenging to players. And a little humor now and then will accent the terror later.

The other possibility is that the alien may speak a human language, but differently. Here are a couple variations of that theme. The alien may only speak telepathically. This too will be a source of humor and tension, because the alien may "hear" things that the character would rather it didn't. Another is that the alien may speak the language perfectly—meaning, for instance, that the alien speaks textbook English. This will seem strange, as very very few humans speak proper, let alone perfect, English. Such an alien may have great difficulty understanding the vernacular—slang or common speech. Such an alien may also interpret conversations literally. Or on the opposite side, the allen may use slang that is strange to us. It is common in literature that technology and technological jargon supply new slang expressions. One particularly common source of slang in science fiction is computer jargon, a perfect example of something that can be used to play up the ET's alien nature.

The other important aspect to remember is that the ET is hunted. Whatever other things it may be feeling (hate, revulsion, loneliness), it will also (probably first and foremost) feel frightened. Such an individual will always make sure it has an escape route. It will be constantly looking over its shoulder for signs of pursuers. A renegade ET will try to cover its tracks thoroughly whenever it is out and about. It will probably also try to stay in the background. Exactly how much care an ET takes depends on exactly how frightened or threatened it feels.

Yuri kept the van running while Hadyn and I went in to find the girl. I forget exactly why, but we'd all decided the time had come to check out Col. Leeds' country estate. Only problem was, we had just the vaguest idea where to find it. All we knew was that it had a Rural Route 5 address, which mean it was somewhere southwest of the city limits.

That's where the girl came in. She'd told Hadyn over the phone that her boyfriend had given her directions to the place, for the weinie roast where he and all his buddies had disappeared. Fortunately for us, she hadn't gone to the festivities, or she'd be missing, too.

The girl told Hadyn to meet her that evening at a frat house party just off campus. Like I said, Yuri stayed with the van while Hadyn and I went in. The noise was incredible. We heard the stereo thumping from two blocks away. Inside the building it was deafening. People were jammed elbow-to-elbow around the walls to make room for dancers, and still they had to shout for their neighbors to hear them. I took a glance around, decided I wanted to keep my hearing for our trip to the Leeds' place, and signaled Hadyn I'd wait for him outside. He nodded understanding and started pushing his way through the crowd; apparently, he'd spotted the girl.

It was cold outside, felt like it might start spitting snow anytime. I was getting chilly just standing there waiting on Hadyn. We'd bought some bottles of garlic extract for our little mission, and just for something to do, I broke one out and started daubing it on my clothes. But my fingers were stiff, and I ended up spilling most of it down my pant leg. Now I was not only cold and wet, I also stunk to high heaven. I guess I was sort of irritable, too, 'cause when this big, blond guy leaving the party made a remark about me sleeping in a pizzeria, I threw the rest of the bottle on him. He drew back for a punch, and I brought my fists up, squaring for a fight, but then Hadyn came back out and started shoving me toward the van. I hollered at the big guy all the way, which made me feel somewhat better, at least until Yuri started razing me about stinking up the van enough to make his eyes water. We drove out to the Leeds place with the windows down. Of course, I got all the wind in the back seat, while Yuri and Hadyn had the heater blowing on them in the front.

With the girl's directions, it didn't take long to find the farm. It was along a secondary country road, one of those kind that twist and turn every few hundred feet to follow a creek or avoid a pasture, changing randomly from cracked asphalt to thin gravel and back again. We turned a corner, and there on the right was an old rain barrel with a mail box up on top. In the moonlight we could clearly see the name "Leeds" stenciled across the front. A narrow lane led off the road and disappeared into a weedy grove of elms. The whole place was fenced in like it had been used for pasture or something in the old days.

Not wanting to arouse suspicion, we drove right on past and stopped about half a mile down the road. We checked our gear—Yuri had his AKM, I had a pump-action shotgun, and Hadyn carried an Uzi and some infrared goggles—and everybody but me splashed on some garlic extract, then we got out and clambered over the fence. Yuri caught his pants on the line of barbed wire on top and tore his inseam open, scratching his leg in the process. Even in the darkness, I could see a trickle of blood against the paleness of his thigh, but he just grunted and moved on.

We'd gotten about a dozen meters into the woods when Hadyn stopped us with a curse. He said he'd picked up a couple dozen human-sized heat sources approaching through the trees ahead. He and Yuri had a quick consultation and decided we were way outnumbered, that we'd better go back. "Sorry, guys," I whispered, "but that's gonna be kind of tough. We got more company coming up behind." They were close enough to spot even without the goggles.

We couldn't go forward, and we couldn't go back, so the only way to go was sideways, toward the open field that bordered Leeds' land. Yuri and Hadyn squeezed off some bursts of fire to discourage pursuit, and we hightailed it. I could hear screaming, so I knew somebody'd been hit, but Hadyn took one last look with the goggles and swore the rest were right behind us. I discovered I could run even faster than I thought. I swear I vaulted the fence, then I spun to cover my buddies as they climbed it. The grove was full of pale shapes with glistening eyes and teeth. One of the things was right behind Hadyn, and my first shell took it in the head. My second and third caught two more just as they left the trees. After that, Yuri and Hadyn were over, and we started a fighting retreat in the direction of the van. The creatures kept coming, but after we dropped eight or 10 of them, the rest ducked low in the weeds. We couldn't see them, but we could hear them howling to each other as they closed in on us.

My heart was hammering to the beat the band. I remember screaming "Run!" but it was no use. We had only taken a few steps when we discovered that there were more of the things laying in ambush between us and the van. I emptied the shotgun at dim shapes, never certain if I was firing at enemies or at shadows, then pulled my knife and prepared to sell my life dearly.

They came loping at us, screeching like mad men. I remember slashing one across the face, then I was blinded by a spotlight bouncing toward us across the field. My eyes felt like they had been stabbed with ice picks. I could hear an engine racing, and the light kept getting brighter, but I couldn't really see anything. "This is it," I thought. "It's Leeds come to run us down, and I can't even see to get out of the way."

The vehicle stopped just a couple of meters away, and the spotlight swept across the field "Get in, quick." I heard somebody say, and I obeyed. I could just make out that it was a pickup truck, and as I climbed in the back, I saw that it had black lights strapped on all around. Yuri jumped in beside me, then cursed as Hadyn dropped in on top of him. "Hang on!" the driver shouted, and we started jouncing across the field, back toward the road, plowing through whatever got in our way. A few minutes later, we were headed back into town, with a new ally to help us fight the creatures.

And that's the story of how we met Fred Brody.

As we've explained earlier, while the players in a role-playing adventure have only to concentrate on playing a single character, the referee has to play the part of an entire

world of NPCs. In the narrative example above, for instance, while the players concentrate on Hadyn, Yuri, and Marcus (the narrator), the referee must play the part of the girl Hadyn speaks to, the crowd at the frat party, the guy who insults Marcus at the door, the hordes of creatures at the Leeds farm, and the driver of the rescue vehicle. But this narrative provides only a tiny view of the work that is involved. What Marcus sees doesn't reveal the referee's efforts at being true to all the NPCs' motivations, nor the headwork involved in keeping track of the NPCs' positions in the fight and the wounds that individual NPCs suffer.

Of course, considering the multitude of NPCs that appear in most any adventure, it just isn't feasible for everyone of them to be generated in the same detail as are PCs. Nor would it actually be helpful, because the referee would easily become lost in such detail. For this reason, the vast majority of NPCs in Dark Conspiracy are kept track of in a sort of shorthand notation, with the most important ones receiving the most detail. This shorthand notation makes them easiest for the referee to use during the heat of play.

When player characters first meet new acquaintances, the first thing that they should notice about them is their appearance, just as in real life. Then they will come to learn something about their personalities and major abilities, discovering more the longer they know the NPCs. For simplicity's sake, however, let us discuss these things in reverse order, beginning with combat statistics as a framework upon which to hang the rest.

NPCS IN COMBAT

In terms of combat statistics, the majority of NPCs are ranked as one of four levels of experience—Novice, Experienced, Veteran, and Elite—and these experience levels dictate their Initiative, attributes, and combat skills. The table below reveals those stats for each experience level. On this table, Level refers to experience level, Initiative refers to the corresponding Initiative rating, Attributes indicates the average attribute level, Skill refers to the average rating of the NPC's combat skills, and Damage indicates the number of wound points the NPC causes in an unarmed combat attack.

NPC STATS

Level	*Initiative*	*Attributes*	*Skill*	*Damage*
Elite	4	7	6	4
Veteran	3	6	5	3
Experienced	2	5	4	2
Novice	1	5	2	1

Note that while these attribute and skill numbers reflect the average for an NPC of a particular level, referees who desire more detail may choose to raise or lower a statistic for a particular NPC. For instance, an Experienced street gang member has an average combat skill of 4, but actually would likely have a Heavy Weapons skill of 0, and might (if the referee desires) even have an Archery or Melee Combat skill of 5 or 6. Similarly, that gang member has an average attribute level of 5, but might have an Education of 2 and an Agility of 8. The point is that these average stats are intended to help make the referee's job easier, not to lock referees into a fixed set of numbers.

NPC Panic: NPCs use the same panic system as PCs. This means that while PCs can reach an Initiative of 6, in which case they never panic, even Elite NPCs have some chance of panicking.

NPC Hit Capacity: It is entirely too much of a headache to keep track of multiple wounds and their locations on every NPC. For this reason, NPCs, regardless of experience level, are assumed to have a standard, overall hit capacity of 40, divided into two rows of 20. When an NPC first takes a wound, he or she is considered slightly wounded and suffers a -1 to Initiative. Once the first row is filled, excess points are marked off the second row. With the first point marked off the second row, the NPC is considered seriously wounded and takes an additional -2 to Initiative. Seriously wounded NPCs must succeed at a Difficult:Constitution roll every phase, or they become unconscious.

Note that NPC damage is not assigned to specific hit locations, as it is for PCs. However, hit locations should still be rolled for two reasons. First, if an attack on an NPC strikes an armored hit location, the armor takes effect normally. Second, if any attack strikes an NPC in the head, damage for that attack is doubled. This reflects the fact that hits to the head by firearms are especially deadly. Also, it allows PCs to aim melee attacks to the head, trading a more difficult attack for increased damage.

Note also hit points for beasties and dark races are not always divided into equal rows.

OTHER NPC SKILLS

Of course, the combat skills listed above will not be the only skills an NPC has. In fact, for many NPCs (perhaps most), the player characters will never have occasion to know their combat skills. Instead, they will be known for their expertise in some other field. These skill levels should be assigned by the referee, as seems appropriate to the situation.

For example, if the PCs have sought out an expert chemist, that character can be assigned a Chemistry skill of perhaps 8 or 9. If it turns out that the chemist has some cause to use a computer while the PCs are present, the referee can assign the NPC an appropriate amount of Computer skill. Note that these skill levels need not even be decided upon ahead of time, but can be set during play, allowing the referee to create new NPCs at a moment's notice.

Also note that the expert chemist might only be a Novice in terms of combat.

NPC MOTIVATIONS

By NPC motivations, we mean the drives that guide an NPC, giving that character a reason for acting as an individual. In many cases, the motivations of NPCs are either obvious or unimportant. The referee need not work up detailed motivations for a cabbie who merely takes the PCs to an airport, or for every member of a lynch mob. Obviously, the cabbie's motivation is to do a job and make some money, and the lynch mob members all share a common motivation to string someone up. Of course, if the cabbie is actually a Dark Minion stooge who is tracking the NPCs, or if one of the lynch mob members is actually a government agent waiting for an opportunity to free the mob's victim, then these NPCs have slightly more detailed motivations. But even these motivations are fairly straightforward. For most NPCs, then, motivation will depend upon the role the character plays in the adventure.

But some NPCs play such a large part in the player characters' experiences that details of their personalities become very important. In such cases, referees have one of two choices. They can invent the NPC's motivations themselves, based upon what they think the NPC should be like, or they can generate the motivations randomly with a deck of playing cards, using the system described here.

To generate an NPC's motivations, draw two cards from a standard deck of playing cards. The card with the highest value determines the NPC's primary motivation; the lower reveals the secondary motivation. Each card's suit dictates the direction that motivation takes, and its face value determines the motivation's strength or its particular bent.

Aces and face cards indicate special motivations. If a special card is drawn, it is automatically the NPC's primary motivation. If two special cards are drawn, the NPC has two primary motivations competing with each other for dominance.

The various possibilities are summarized in a table and explained below.

NPC MOTIVATION

Spade: Ambition

Card	*Motivation*
Ace	Charismatic
King	Deceitful
Queen	Ruthless
Jack	Pompous
9-10	Very ambitious
5-7	Moderately ambitious
2-4	Somewhat ambitious

Club: Violence

Card	Motivation
Ace	War leader
King	Brutal
Queen	Stubborn
Jack	Murderous
9-10	Very violent
5-7	Moderately violent
2-4	Somewhat violent

Hearts: Sociability

Card	*Motivation*
Ace	Just
King	Honorable
Queen	Loving
Jack	Wise
9-10	Very sociable
5-7	Moderately sociable
2-4	Somewhat sociable

Diamonds: Greed

Card	*Motivation*
Ace	Generous
King	Selfish
Queen	Lustful
Jack	Coward
9-10	Very greedy
5-7	Moderately greedy
2-4	Somewhat greedy

SPADES: AMBITION

These NPCs seek personal power and influence. A "somewhat ambitious" NPC will be inclined toward boastfulness and a desire to impress other people. "Moderately ambitious" NPCs are driven to attain positions of high responsibility. A "very ambitious" NPC will be overwhelmed by a desire to manipulate and control others.

Jack, Pompous: Pompous NPCs are conceited and arrogant in their dealings with others. They consider themselves to be clearly superior to everyone around them, and they make no secret of that conviction.

Queen, Ruthless: This NPC will let nothing stand in the way of achieving any goal and feels no concern for the needs of others. Such NPCs can feign affection, devotion, sincerity, or anything else that serves their purpose, but actually they feel nothing.

King, Deceitful: The NPC has no respect for honesty. Depending upon the referee's decision, deceitful NPCs may be pathological liars, or they may use the truth deceitfully, giving just enough information to guarantee their victims are misled. The actual direction of their deceitfulness will generally depend upon their secondary motivation.

Ace, Charismatic: The NPC is a charismatic leader to whom others are naturally drawn. Often, such NPCs have high empathic skills. Some of these NPCs are honorable and just, others are cruel and manipulative. The referee can decide based upon the adventure situation and/or the particular NPC's secondary motivation.

HEARTS: SOCIABILITY

Such NPCs are highly influenced by their love of people. They tend to be friendly, loyal, and just. A "somewhat sociable" NPC will be amiable, talkative, and cooperative with most everyone. "Moderately sociable" NPCs will have a strong sense of duty and loyalty to their group. A "very sociable" NPC will have a strong commitment to justice and the welfare of all people, and will look for the good qualities in everyone, but will react with anger to injustice and brutality.

Jack, Wise: The NPC is unusually wise, either as a result of years of experience, or simply because of astute observation. Such NPCs almost always exhibit good judgment and, if asked, offer sound advice.

Queen, Loving: This NPC loves some other person devotedly, perhaps a spouse, parent, child, or close friend. Such NPCs would willingly sacrifice themselves for the one they love. Alternatively, the NPC may be loving toward absolutely everyone. The choice is up to the referee.

King, Honorable: Honorable NPCs are scrupulously honest in their dealings with everyone. In many cases this is not so much from any concern for others, but from pride in saying that their word of honor is their bond. Such NPCs will typically carry out their promises and social obligations even if it means facing death. In this, they can be as difficult to deter as a stubborn NPC (Club Queen). Honorable NPCs have utter contempt for liars and oathbreakers.

Ace, Just: This NPC sees justice as the greatest virtue a person can display and the only truly important consideration in deciding upon a course of action. Such characters have no respect for cheats and swindlers, and they will wholeheartedly assist any attempt to right an injustice.

CLUBS: VIOLENCE

These NPCs have a greater likelihood of reacting with violence than do most people. A "somewhat violent" NPC is not frightened or intimidated by threats of violence and will not hesitate to use force if the situation seems to warrant it. A "moderately violent" NPC is aggressive and inclined to view violence as the preferred means of resolving disputes. A "very violent" NPC loves a good fight and either is or wants to be a warrior.

Even a high violence rating does not, however, necessarily indicate that the nonplayer character is brutal or a bully. For example, a "very violent" NPC who was also

"very sociable" could be described as friendly, good-natured, and loyal, but also a good person to have with you in a fight.

Jack, Murderous: This NPC is subject to sudden, uncontrollable, murderous rages. Chances are, such NPCs have already killed at least once in a fit of rage. If not, it certainly will not be long before someone crosses them at the wrong time and dies...

Queen, Stubborn: Such NPCs are so stubborn that once they have made up their minds about something, it is nearly impossible to persuade them differently. They tend to scoff at innovation and insist that the "old ways" of doing things are best.

King, Brutal: These NPCs are sadistic brutes who enjoy causing other people pain and grief. They often serve as tools for the Dark Minions, most of them without ever realizing it. Frequently, they are dupes who find themselves propelled to power, seemingly because of unassailable luck, but actually because of Dark Minion manipulation. Just when they think they are most secure, however, their unseen masters suddenly bring them to ruin, and the victimizer becomes the victim.

Ace, War Leader: The NPC is an unusually good leader in battle, able to inspire confidence in others, and receiving complete obedience from followers. In terms of combat rules, treat such NPCs as having an Initiative of 6 (they never panic), and allow them to predict their opponents' general strategy and be prepared for it.

DIAMONDS: GREED

The NPC wants to be rich. A "somewhat greedy" NPC will be fairly easy to convince to take a particular course of action as long as money is involved. A "moderately greedy" NPC will drive a harder bargain, but will actually be more willing to take larger risks, provided the payment is sufficient. A "very greedy" NPC will do virtually anything for money, but will insist upon very high fees, and will perhaps attempt treachery if it seems that even more money can be gained by doing so.

Jack, Coward: This NPC is a total coward and will run from danger at every opportunity. (You might say such characters are greedy about their own safety.) If escape is impossible, a coward will cower and refuse to fight.

Queen, Lustful: These NPCs are driven by lust for the opposite sex. Depending upon the circumstances, the referee may interpret this as an impersonal lust for all members of that sex or as an obsession for a particular person.

King, Selfish: A selfish NPC never helps without demanding payment and will never give away anything. Such NPCs are convinced that everyone else is just as selfish as they are. As a result, they will demand higher payment than they are due (believing their employers to be holding out on them), and they will jealously guard their own possessions (convinced that everyone else is just waiting for an opportunity to steal them). NPCs this selfish are likely to steal what other people do not guard very closely.

Ace, Generous: In terms of the **Dark Conspiracy** world, these NPCs are extremely generous. Those who have another heart card as a secondary motivation are so generous that they will gladly give away anything they have to others in need, even if this leaves them with nothing. All others will tend to make generous deals and will refuse payment for favors, unless those favors directly relate to their normal line of business.

NPC APPEARANCE

When you describe an NPC's appearance, keep in mind these two main goals: You want to make the NPC seem truly alive, and you want the NPC description to help develop or maintain the mood you've set for the adventure. There are a number of things to be considered in doing this.

First, it will help if you take a moment to build a mental picture of the NPC in your own mind. If you can accomplish that, you probably have already succeeded at pretty much everything else we are about to tell you about NPC appearance. Once you have that mental picture, you need to begin thinking about the most dramatic way to convey it to your players.

Generally, this will mean painting a scene, not merely a description of the NPC. After all, characters have to be somewhere when the PCs encounter them. Now paint the basic of that scene in broad strokes, working in snatches of mood-setting detail. Don't forget to appeal to other senses as well as sight. Sound, smell, touch, and even empathy all add to the impact of a scene. As you continue, work inward from the setting to the NPC, giving details of background before giving details of the character. And add a sense of mystery—something unexplained—to make it obvious that there is more to the character than merely what the PCs sense, that the NPC did not suddenly come into existence just when the player characters arrived, but was living a life long before they came along.

Stereotypes are fine, especially because they serve as a sort of shorthand, getting a lot of information across with a limited number of words. The basis of an NPC's appearance, for instance, will have a lot to do with the NPC's attributes and skills. And once you've appealed to a stereotype in your description, any details that break with that stereotype will become all the more firmly fixed in the players' minds. Along with this, realize that the description you give will do a lot to determine what the players think about that NPC from this point on. Just as in real life, first impressions do make a major difference.

Finally, recognize that knowing when to avoid detail can be as important as knowing when to include it. The players are likely to be much more nervous about a figure that their characters can't quite see than about one they can see clearly, however hideous it is.

STOCK NPCS

As we have mentioned, in describing NPCs it is often helpful to appeal to stereotypes to most quickly sketch out the most important information. As a matter of fact, there are a number of types of NPCs that will be encountered so often that it just does not make sense for referees to envision them from scratch each time. We'll call these NPCs *stock NPCs*. They work something like extras from central casting and include such things as gang members, innocent bystanders, and security guards. Descriptions for a number of these sorts of characters are appended to the end of this chapter. Referees may wish to create standard descriptions for others that they find recurring frequently in their adventures.

MAJOR NPCS

For the vast majority of NPCs, the type of stats, motivations, and descriptions discussed above will be sufficient. Occasionally, however, an NPC will be so important that the referee may wish to create that character in more detail. This is especially true if the NPC is to be one that the player characters encounter in more than one adventure. In such cases, referees can create the NPC using the full player character generation rules.

Note that such major NPCs should be created with as much thought as is devoted to player characters. Motivations, for instance, should arise out of the NPC's history, rather than being chosen at random. Of course, the referee may still wish to use the playing card system above as a sort of personality notation, perhaps even choosing more than two cards to represent the character.

Also, a player may decide to abandon an old PC and design a new one, in which case the referee might wish to have the old PC take on NPC status. Such characters will often become either major NPCs or important contacts.

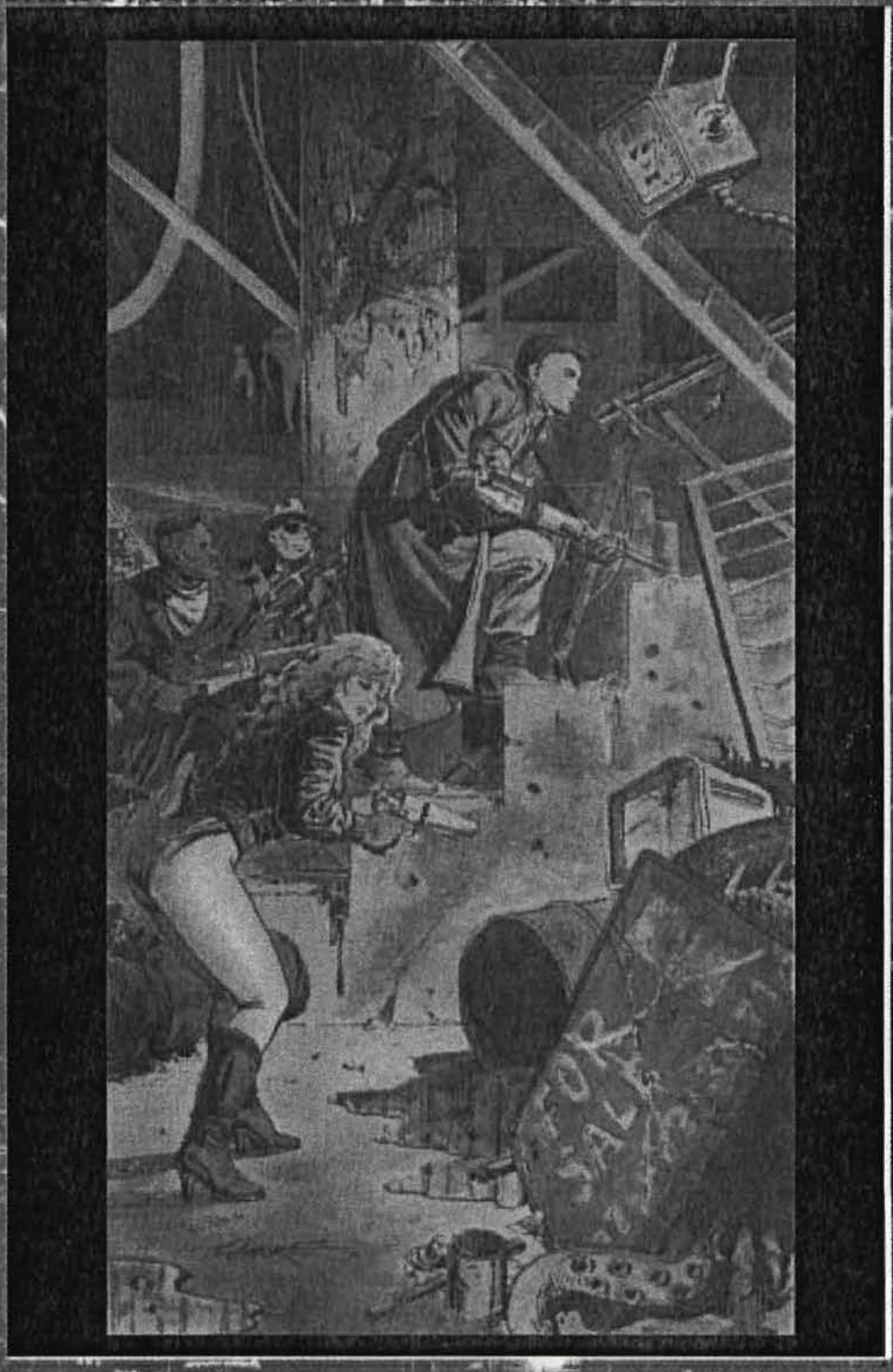
CONTACTS

When generic contacts are converted to solid ones, they can be generated with whatever level of detail the referee desires, just as with other NPCs. In general, though, the more important the contact is to a PC, and the more frequently that contact shows up in the adventure campaign, the more detail will be required for that contact.

It is suggested that the referee allow players a strong hand in designing the histories for their contacts. After all, in some ways a contact's history is part of the PC's history. But it is suggested just as strongly that players not be allowed to know exact numbers for the contact's attributes and skills. To a player, the contact should seem like a living personality, not a collection of numbers that can be exploited. Ideally, then, a contact's basic description will be generated by the player whose character has established that contact, and the referee will then create appropriate attributes and skills to match the description.

In designing a contact's history, a player should justify why that contact would have established a tie with the PC. For example, let us assume that Dara Schwartz has gotten herself into a terrible mess in an investigation, and the referee has decided to let Dara's player convert one of her generic contacts into a solid one to help. The player says she'd like to convert Dara's first government contact, from her character's initial career as a public employee. During Dara's generation, the player had decided that public employee meant for Dara working at a federal income tax office in her hometown. The reason for choosing that career was to allow Dara double secondary activities, reflecting her taking adult education courses to prepare for college. After college, Dara went on to law school, and from there to a federal law enforcement career.

With all of this in mind, the player suggests to the referee that her initial government contact was a federal law enforcement agent who came to the income tax office on a case and was very impressed by this young woman who was pushing herself so hard to get a degree and become a federal law enforcement agent herself. He told Dara that if she ever needed a favor, she should give him a call, and eventually, when she finished her degrees, she asked his advice on what federal law enforcement agency to apply to. Ever since that time, he has been keeping tabs on her without mentioning it, letting her develop her skills, but watching to make sure she didn't get in over her head. Now that she is in hot water, he jumps in to help.



Of course, it is the referee who determines just how old this contact is, what his attributes and skills are, and just how much clout he has in his field. If we assume that the NPC was in his mid-20s when Dara first met him, he will now be in his early 40s. That and the fact that he is in a position to keep an eye on her would indicate that he has attained a position of some authority, perhaps even a regional directorship. With this all in mind, we can look down the skill list for appropriate skills, or we can simply define him as a Veteran NPC, making up any necessary skill levels as the need arises during play. It just depends upon how much time and energy the referee wants to spend on the NPC.

SAMPLE STOCK NPCS

Each of these characters has a short description, an experience level that determines attributes and combat skills, and a notation of any special skills or abilities not related to the experience level. The referee should give them whatever equipment seems appropriate for their skills and the current situation.

Beat Cops

With the constant rise in urban populations, local police forces have returned to putting walking patrols back on the streets. Beat cops patrol in pairs, at a minimum, and they live in the neighborhoods they patrol.

These cops do not try to deal with every crime they see. Rather, they think of themselves as something like dampening rods in nuclear reactor, keeping the reaction from running completely out of control. Nonetheless, they are heavily armed and armored, and they are under constant radio surveillance by their headquarters.

Few citizens are foolish or desperate enough to start a battle with their neighborhood cops.

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPCs, plus Leadership 6, Interrogation 4, Observation 6, and Streetwise 6.

Normal Armament: Flak jacket and pistol, with a pump shotgun or assault rifle available in their vehicle (if any).

Bikers

The breakdown of law and order in rural areas has led to an increase in brigandage. Due to the poor state of most rural roads, motorcycles are natural sources of mobility, because of their off-road capability. These gangs, usually including one or two dozen bikers (roll 4D6), are well-armed and murderously violent.

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPCs.

Normal Armament: Knives, pistols, shotguns, and occasional submachineguns.

Cultists

One consequence of the worldwide depression has been the rise of literally millions of street-corner prophets, each teaching their own brand of apocalyptic "truth." As a result, the streets are filled with religious disciples of every stripe. Some few hold to justifiable teachings of tolerance, kindness, and hope. But most just devote themselves to

blindly following a highly charismatic leader, many even to death.

By cultists, we mean the latter type. They tend to be fanatically evangelical, forming barricades across city streets and accosting citizens as they pass by. Generally, they have two messages for their listeners the first is that love and peace can be found in their leader, and the second is that they need money to spread the message.

Unfortunately, their peace and love cannot survive far from the presence of their leader. If these cultists are separated from their group, they tend to become panicked and confused, then despondent or even suicidal.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As per Novice NPCs, plus Persuade 2.

Normal Armament: None.

Derelicts

Derelicts are the unemployed and homeless who have given up any hope of regaining a normal life, but who lead a solitary existence, rather than joining a corporate sanctuary or cultist enclave. They can be of any age; many are alcoholics, drug addicts, or mentally ill.

The main secret of living as a derelict is to know how to avoid trouble. One way of doing this is to avoid drawing attention to oneself. If that fails, then the other method is to move on to somewhere else.

Successful derelicts can be wellsprings of information, if they trust someone enough to tell what they know.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As per Novice NPCs, but additionally with Act/Bluff 4, Luck 6, Observation 7, and Stealth 5. Some also have Foreboding 3.

Normal Armament: Knife or club.



Dobies and Gidgets

In almost every society, there will always be some people who never look outside themselves. They blithely accept whatever they are taught by those in authority, and they never even get a hint that there are other cultures that see things differently.

In earlier times, these people were called "clods," "peasants," or perhaps "good old boys." In the world of **Dark Conspiracy**, such men are called Dobies (after "Dobie Gillis," an American sitcom of the '60s), and such women are called Gidgets (after a series of movies popular during the same time period).

Because of the reduced travel of the Greater Depression and the increased suspicion of outsiders, most villages, towns, and even small cities can be considered to be populated primarily by Dobies and Gidgets.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As per Novice level, plus one career skill (referee's choice) at level 4.

Normal Armament: None.

Eco-Warriors

With any cause, if victories are slow in coming and the general public turns a deaf ear, the people of the cause begin to become militant. Such is the case with eco-warriors.

These people have devoted themselves to halting humanity's ruination of the Earth, with violence if necessary. Of course, as that violence escalates, the eco-warriors find themselves forced to adopt ever more advanced, and more destructive, weapons. Eventually, many of them become so caught up in the battle that they lose sight of what they are fighting for.

Pretty much every city and town in **Dark Conspiracy** has a clandestine group of eco-warriors. In most places, they operate as terrorists, blowing up politically important facilities to pressure local governments to meet their demands. Note that the facilities targeted are not necessarily eco-logically harmful, nor are the ecowarriors' demands always concerned with improving the ecology.

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPCs, plus Demolitions 5, Heavy Weapons 6, Lockpick 4, and Vehicle Use (Wheel Vehicle) 6.

Normal Armament: Pistol and submachinegun. Explosives are often used as well.

Gangers

If anything, street gangs in the **Dark Conspiracy** future are even more widespread than in the present. That only makes sense: the cities are fuller, and a higher percentage of the populace is unemployed and hopeless of a brighter tomorrow. The need to belong to something, and the need to release frustration, give rise to street gangs.

Gangs always have some flashy name, and they usually have a uniform of some sort, even if it is only a colored scarf or an emblazoned jacket. Members are considered "family," like pre-modern clans, and gang wars tend to concern either clan territory or vengeance for clan deaths.

Most of the time, street gangs only battle each other. But sometimes, just for fun, they will terrorize neighborhood citizens who are not gang members.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs, plus Stealth 6 and Streetwise 7.

Normal Armament: Knives, zip guns, revolvers, and occasional submachineguns

or assault rifles.

Gizmoids

Gizmoids are bright people with a natural talent for mechanics, electronics, or biology (choose one), but who, for one reason or another, do not have a steady job in their field of expertise. For some of them, it is because they couldn't get official training. For others, it is because they have some personality quirk that prevented them from keeping a job once they got it. (Possible personality quirks might range from inability to take orders to such brilliance that they are always working on something new instead of finishing the job at hand.)

Most gizmoids satisfy themselves with working at their field of interest as if it were a hobby, supporting it with some menial job, or possibly even selling enough specialty gizmos to keep themselves solvent, if barely. The latter are seldom picky about working on illegal equipment, whether building or repairing.

Gizmoids tend to be careless dressers and social klutzes. They also tend to wear thick glasses.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As a Novice NPC, plus Biology 8, Electronics 8, Mechanic 8, and/or Physics 8. Also generally Business 4.

Normal Armament: None.

Good Samaritans

For Dark Minions, one of the most frustrating things about humans has been that in the very worst of times is when many of them become the most selfless and loving. In every locality, there are people who are open-handedly helpful, just for the sake of making the world a little brighter for others. This is what we mean by the term "Good Samaritans."

Good Samaritans can not only offer player characters material aid toward accomplishing their missions, but they can also offer them hope, reminding them that there are still bright spots in the world and that the Dark Minions have not yet won. As personalities, they tend to be tolerant of others and full of hope.

In terms of adventure pacing, Good Samaritan NPCs serve to relieve PCs from a constant sense of impending doom (which, perversely, can make that sense of doom fresher when the PCs return to it).

Some examples of Good Samaritan NPCs would be the faithful village priest and the warm-hearted old couple who take in strays.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As per Novice NPCs, but often with high empathic and Medical skills, as well.

Normal Armament: None.

Government Agents

Generally well dressed and always coolly impersonal, government agents stalk the streets, constantly seeking information that can be used to shift the balance of power into the hands of their agencies. These NPCs can show up with no prior warning, whether to lend the player characters an unexpected hand in their current mission, or to warn them off. In either case, though, government agents are likely to treat the player characters as rank novices who would screw things up completely without the help they offer.

Government agents tend to have lots of nifty equipment to pass out when the going gets tough, but they are likely to be very picky in their judgment as to when that time has arrived.

Level: Elite.

Skills: As per Elite NPCs, plus Act/Bluff 7, Disguise 6, Forgery 4, Interrogation 7, Observation 8, Stalking 6, and Stealth 7.

Normal Armament: Pistol.

Igors

Igors is the term commonly used among Dark Minion hunters when referring to humans who serve the Dark Minions. These servants can be of nearly any sort, but most are of less-than-outstanding intelligence, although they may be cunning, and are brutal, sadistic, selfish, and completely dishonest, much like their masters.

Igors often work in groups, especially those who are too stupid or cowardly to accomplish much on their own. Every city has its share of Igors lurking in the shadows, just waiting for a chance to do some mischief for their masters.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs.

Normal Armament: Various.



Mother Earthers

Despite the collapse of a widespread farm economy, many people have refused to leave their farms or villages. They remain on the land that their families have owned for generations, raising gardens large enough to support their own needs, and hunting the abandoned fields around them for wildlife. As a result, they have regained a number of skills that had been largely forgotten in the 20th century.

In general, these people have come to be called Mother Earthers. They tend to be wary of strangers, but if convinced of a traveler's harmlessness, they can be very open-handed in sharing what they have. As well, most are more than willing to help out in any sort of task against the corporate farms that financially ruined them.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs, plus Mechanic 3, Medical 2, Navigation 6, Observation 5, Stealth 5, and Tracking 7. Some, at the referee's option, may have moderate empathic skills (average level 3).

Normal Armament: None.

Security Guards

One of the most plentiful occupations in the **Dark Conspiracy** world is that of security guard. For one thing, valuables require much more protection than before. For another, the turnover rate among security guards is high, and not because of retirement—it's a dangerous job.

Like beat cops, security guards are almost always found in pairs, and they tend to be heavily armed and armored. While cops are concerned with maintaining some level of civic peace, however, security guards are concerned only for protecting two things—their posts and their lives. Often, their motto is "If in doubt, shoot it."

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPCs.

Normal Armament: Flak jacket, pistol, and either an assault rifle, shotgun, or submachinegun.



CHAPTER EIGHT
Beasties

It is not quite accurate to call the collection of creatures in this chapter *animals*. While most of them *are* animal, there are also some evil plants and some mechanical creatures included in the mix as well. When referring to all of these creatures collectively, then, we use the term *beasties*.

Beasties can come in handy in several different ways for **Dark Conspiracy** referees. For one thing, true animals can serve as a referee prop to pass warnings along to the PCs. Imagine, for instance, that the PCs are about to enter a Dark Minion-infested area. One of the more empathic PCs might scan the area for animal presence. If that PC senses that there are no native creatures within the area, the PCs will be alerted to be on their guard. Similarly, a pet dog who accompanies the PCs might bristle and growl upon being taken into the area. In either case, the referee has been able to use animals (or the lack of them) to convey important information to the adventurers.

Those same examples demonstrate another important use of beasties in **Dark Conspiracy** adventures, however. That is, they can be used to help set atmosphere. Whatever mood native animals demonstrate is naturally passed on, at least to some degree, to the PCs. In the examples above, the PCs will feel a sense of ominous menace hanging over the area, and that mood will have been communicated much more effectively than the referee had simply said, "You feel a sense of ominous menace."

Of course, another major way of using beasties to convey the foreboding of **Dark Conspiracy** adventures is by using mutated creatures, or alien ones. Alien creatures can portray the sense of otherness desirable in **Dark Conspiracy**. Mutated terran creatures can do not only that, they can also convey a sense of ruination brought about by the Dark Minions. Their warped condition can play upon the PCs' emotions of pity and righteous anger: pity for the despoiled creatures, and righteous anger to thwart the Dark Minions' future plans

Beasties also help bridge the gap between impersonal circumstance and personal enemies. That is, animals can be as implacable as any natural force, but if handled correctly, they can also convey the sense of malevolent personality necessary to make players feel satisfied when their characters have bested them. It all depends upon how the referee portrays them. If the referee tries to get inside a beasty's mind to feel its desires and fears as much as with any other NPC, that referee's portrayal will be much more effective and entertaining than if the creature is merely played mechanically.

That brings us to our next point, which involves the reason for putting beasties' statistics and combat rules here. If the players do not know exactly what abilities and numerical ratings a particular beasty has, they will be much more likely to picture it as a living being than if they know its every secret in game terms. Remember, the more involved players are with story, and the less they're involved with numbers and mechanics, the more the essential sense of mystery is preserved.

Finally, it might be helpful to think of beasties as low-grade NPCs. Generally, they will be easier to best than human or Darkling opponents. Even if the beasties are physically powerful, the NPCs should be able to outsmart them, or at least the PCs will have the advantage of special equipment and firepower. Beastly opponents can give the PCs a chance to develop their skills before taking on more formidable foes.

This chapter includes all sorts of beasty listings, from natural terran animals to entirely otherworldly creatures. From these examples, referees will be able to extrapolate others for their own game worlds, thus keeping those worlds ever fresh and changing. Before looking at those listings, however, let's go over some general rules for using beasties in combat situations.

BEASTY COMBAT

In general, beasty combat follows the same rules as human melee combat, with the following exceptions and clarifications. Note that, as with normal combat, all distances here are calculated in meters.

BEASTY MOVEMENT

Basically, beasties have three different movement rates: walk, trot, or run (although some beasties are not able to run, some swim or fly). The number of meters moved at each rate depends upon the type of creature, and is listed with that creature's statistics in the descriptions below.

MOUNTS IN COMBAT

Riding a draft animal is considered an action in the same manner as driving a vehicle. Horses, mules, camels, and the like may be ridden in combat. A walking animal can be ridden safely by virtually everyone. Riding a trotting animal requires an Easy test of Agility for characters without Horsemanship; those with this skill pass this test automatically. Characters with Horsemanship skill have a maximum safe speed on a horse equal to 20+Horsemanship. For these characters, riding at or under the safe speed is automatically successful. Riding at greater than the safe speed—up to 40 meters per phase (full gallop) is done at the risk of falling off. To avoid a fall requires an Average test of Horsemanship or a Difficult test of Agility, rolled once per phase. Failure results in a fall, 1D6-3 hits being suffered to a randomly rolled hit location. Critical failure results in some serious injury to horse and/or rider, as determined by the referee, based upon the exact situation in which the mishap occurred. Injuries to a horse might include breaking a leg in a chuckhole, tearing a muscle during a leap, or becoming bogged in mud in such a way as to cause injury. As well, it is likely that the rider has fallen and suffered damage as per a normal failure.

BEASTY ATTACKS

In general, beasties attack as if engaging in armed melee combat. This means that a beasty attack cannot be blocked by an unarmed character, but may only be blocked with a melee weapon. Some beasties attack with diving blows, which cannot be blocked but can be dodged. Some beasties have poison attacks (covered in the "Combat & Damage" chapter of the *Player's Handbook*).

BEASTY MORALE

Whenever a beasty first suffers damage from a combat, there is a chance it will flee. Each beasty has a chance of attacking listed with its other statistics. This is the likelihood that the creature will attack when first encountered if the PCs stumble upon it accidentally. (Of course if the referee planted the creature intentionally whether it attacks or not is entirely dependent upon the referee.) That chance of attacking serves also as the likelihood that the beasty will continue to attack even if wounded. By the same token when a beasty is killed or rendered unconscious an equal chance exists that any other beasties in its group will flee. This die roll is made each time a beasty is killed or rendered unconscious.

BEASTY LISTINGS

The listings below give information necessary for running any particular beasty including basic statistics and special rules applicable only to that creature. The creature entries are listed in alphabetical order. The statistic headings are explained as follows:

 # Appear: Some creatures are typically encountered alone, others in groups. The *#Appear* listing gives either a number or a die roll to indicate how many of a particular type of beasty will be together.

Attack: This heading gives referees an indication of what the chances are that the creature(s) will attack if encountered. However, referees should not feel bound by this notation. Specific circumstances may make the creature(s) more or less prone to attack at the referee's option.

The *Attack* number is also the percent chance that the creature(s) will continue to attack after being wounded.

Move: The first number listed under "Move" is the beasty's walking speed followed by its trotting speed and then its running speed (if any).

Initiative: This is the beasty's Initiative number in combat. It operates exactly as do human Initiative ratings.

Strength: Obviously this gives a Strength rating for the beasty. It is useful in determining effects of diving blows etc.

Constitution: Just as obviously this gives a Constitution rating for the beasty which is also useful for determining effects of diving blows as well

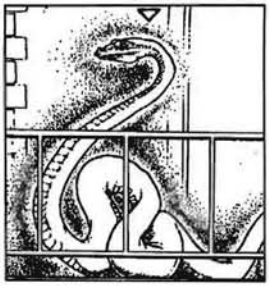
Agility: Again, not surprisingly, this refers to the beasty's Agility rating. It is useful for determining such things as whether or not the creature avoids a diving blow.

Skill: This number represents the beasty's ability to hit an opponent in melee combat.

Dam.: An abbreviation for "Damage," this identifies the amount of harm a beasty does with a successful melee attack. Note that while PCs have a set number for their unarmed combat damage rating, many beasties have a die roll. (Some even have a poison damage notation.)

Hits: Beasty hit points are split into two sections: The first number listed is the first section; the second one is the total number of hit points. Any damage is a slight wound, and once damage has begun on the second section, it becomes a serious wound. When the last point of damage has been crossed off, the beasty is unconscious or dying.

APEPS



Appearing: 2D6
Attacks: 95%
Move: 10/30/60
Initiative: 4
Strength: 6
Constitution: 10
Agility: 10
Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
Hits: 8/16

According to Egyptian legend, apeps were snakelike creatures that exuded pitch darkness and prowled tombs to guard them from robbers. Nowadays, they prowl the mazy, organic corridors of Dark Minion corporate constructs guarding them from intrusion by outsiders.

Apeps are roughly of a size with the largest pythons. They are highly empathic by nature with incredible skillfulness at the use of Human Empathy and Project Emotion. This latter skill is used primarily to project a conviction of blindness, preventing the apeps from being seen, but if an apep elects to forgo a normal action, it can also project panic into its opponents. Targets of these attacks get a save versus Willpower to resist the effects: to save versus panic is an Average test of Willpower and to save versus blindness is a Difficult test of Willpower.

Creatures fighting blind against an apep do so at one level increased difficulty. Aimed fire has no effect (you can't hit what you can't see) but auto fire operates as normal with the exception that range is treated as being one band greater than the actual distance.

ARMY ANTS



Appearing: 3D10
Attacks: 90%
Move: 2
Initiative: 6
Strength: 0
Constitution: 1
Agility: 3
Skill/Dam.: 8/1
Hits: 1

One of the results of global warming has been a poleward migration of equatorial creatures, especially insects. Army ants have been encountered even in some parts of the United States, for example. When these creatures are encountered, they will be on a feeding frenzy eating everything organic in their path.

In combat, the referee should describe them as a carpet of insects that begins at one side of the map and sweeps steadily toward the other. When a character first enters a square containing army ants (or vice versa) that character suffers attack by a number of ants equal to the "# Appear" notation. That many dice are rolled for combat and for each success the character takes one point of damage to a random location. Each phase thereafter, another roll is made for "# Appear" and that number of attack dice are added to the previous total.

Hits on army ants are automatic with the character destroying a number of ants equal to his or her unarmed combat damage rating.

Obviously, fighting army ants is a losing proposition. However, characters can easily outrun them, unless they find themselves trapped somehow.

ASSASSINOIDS



Appearing: 3D6
Attacks: 100%
Move: 12/24/36
Initiative: 4
Strength: 1
Constitution: 2
Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: 5/1p1
Hits: 6/10

Assassinoids are small (hand-sized), multi-legged robot guards programmed to recognize a particular type of creature (typically humans) and attack it. They are created by some undisclosed government agency which uses them primarily to protect top-secret facilities. Very rarely are they encountered anywhere else. The only way to stop an assassinoid, other than physically destroying it, is to deactivate it with a special code word that its electronic brain will recognize. Of course, usually this code word is changed regularly, to enhance security.

In combat, assassinoids attempt to leap onto their victims (treated as a diving blow). Once they succeed, they cling to the victim and try to inject their poison into it. Hit locations can be rolled as normal, representing the assassinoids' clambering over their victims in search of an unprotected location. Once an assassinoid has successfully injected its victim, it drops off and flees.

Most assassinoids are loaded with a standard killing toxin, but occasionally some carry a sleeping drug instead. This drug does no real damage. Rather, the victim must keep a separate account of "wounds" it causes. The effects of the drug are the same as for regular wounds, but the wound level never progresses beyond serious, and sleep drug-induced damage wears off completely after 10 hours.

Generally, if an assassinoid is damaged it is destroyed. However, if it is reduced to exactly 0 hit points, it can be repaired by a Difficult check of Electronics, and it can be reprogrammed to attack a different type of creature or to recognize a different code word if a successful Difficult check of Computer Operation is made. It may be necessary for the creature's injector to be refilled, however (it is a Difficult test of Chemistry or Medical to manufacture more of its toxin).

BATS



Appearing: 3D10
Attacks: 30%
Move: 10/20
Initiative: 6
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 5/1
Hits: special*

* When a bat is hit, roll 1D6. If the damage it received exceeds the result of this roll, the bat is dead; otherwise, no effect.

Bats have a long tradition of involvement with horror plots, and **Dark Conspiracy** adventures are no exception. As insects have proliferated in abandoned rural areas, creatures that feed on them, including bats, have greatly increased in number, as well. Now, bats are as common in the night skies as birds are during the daytime. And occasionally those bats will swarm to attack animals and even humans.

In combat, a flock of bats will swirl around the characters, individually swooping to attack at irregular intervals, (roll ID-1 for each character, to determine how many bats attack the character in that phase) then dodging away. Because of this, it is virtually impossible for the referee to keep track of hits on individual bats. That is why the "Hits" listing for bats has a variable number and a note. As the note says, whenever a bat takes damage, the referee should roll 1D6/2 (round down), and if the damage received is greater than this number, the bat is dead. Otherwise, the bat is injured insufficiently to take note of.

BEARS, COMMON



Appearing: 1D6/2
Attacks: 40%
Move: 10/20/40
Initiative: 4
Strength: 13
Constitution: 13
Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
Hits: 40/80

If the PCs spend any time in rural areas, there is a chance that they may encounter dangerous wildlife: bears, for instance. A bear makes two melee attacks per combat phase: one with its claws and one with its jaws. After the first successful claw attack, later claw attacks become grappling attacks instead (and grappling attacks cannot be blocked.) This grappling attack is special, inflicting not only controlling hits upon its target, but also causing 1D6 points of damage to the target's chest. As well, once controlling hits have completely subdued the target, the bear's jaw attacks hit automatically and do double damage.

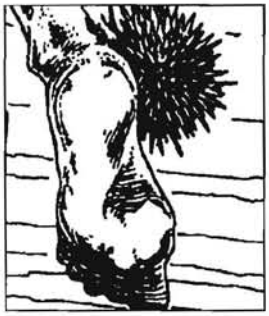
BEARS, GRIZZLY OR POLAR



Appearing: 1
Attacks: 45%
Move: 10/25/50
Initiative: 3
Strength: 27
Constitution: 27
Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: 7/3D6
Hits: 50/100

Brown bears and black bears can be dangerous enough, but characters might also have the misfortune of meeting a grizzly or, if in the arctic, a polar bear. Like normal bears, grizzlies and polar bears make two melee attacks per combat phase—one with their claws and one with their jaws—and after the first successful claw attack, all other claw attacks become grappling attacks. (Remember, grappling attacks cannot be blocked.) This grappling attack is special, however, and inflicts both controlling hits on the target and 2D6 damage points to the target's chest. Once controlling hits have completely subdued the target, the bear's jaw attacks hit automatically, doing double damage. Kodiak bears count as grizzly bears.

BLOATS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 95%
Move: 16/32
Initiative: 2
Strength: 1
Constitution: 3
Agility: 9
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6
Hits: 10/20



Bloats are amphibious creatures about the size of a human fist, housed in a leathery black shell and covered on all sides with tough, barbed spines which are about four centimeters long. First reported in the Great Lakes region of North America, bloats are evidently a form of life new to this planet.

The creatures have no evident external sensory organs, and speculation is that they sense vibrations through their quills. (Among the empathic community, it has been hypothesized that they are at least slightly empathic as well). On land or water, bloats move by rolling across the surface, which they can do quite rapidly. Under water, they move much more slowly (one-quarter the listed speed) by stroking with their spines. The creatures can also leap as much as three meters straight upward by means of flexing those quills.

Bloats get their name from their manner of feeding. Typically, a bloat will attack some small creature, up to twice its size, impaling the victim upon the quills and slowly sucking body fluids from it. After the victim has died, the bloat will remain attached to the decaying carcass, continuing to take sustenance from the bloating corpse while waiting for carrion eaters to arrive. The bloat then attacks those creatures as well, beginning the cycle once more. In the water, it is not uncommon for a bloat and its victim to be swallowed whole by a larger creature, which then finds its life being drained from the inside.

In combat, a bloat attacks by leaping at larger opponents, continuing to do so until it has made a successful hit, which indicates that it has fastened onto its victim. Damage from that point on is automatic until the bloat is destroyed. Any attacks that miss a bloat once it is attached automatically hit the bloat's victim instead. The only time a bloat will not attack creatures that encounter it is when it is attached to a victim that is not yet quite dead.

BLOOD VULTURES



Appearing: 1D6
Attacks: 40%
Move: 20/40/80
Initiative: 4
Strength: 3
Constitution: 4
Agility: 6
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 10/20

The only real difference between blood vultures and regular vultures is that blood vultures do not wait for dead prey. They attack the living, even the unwounded (although 20% is added to the listed chance of attack if the target is already bleeding).

In combat, blood vultures drop upon their prey and buffet it with their wings while pecking at it with their beaks. They are more likely to hit the head and upper torso than the legs, so 1D6 is rolled on the hit location table, rather than 1D10.

CAMELS



Appearing: 1D6
Attacks: 10%
Move: 10/20
Initiative: 3
Strength: 17
Constitution: 18
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 70/130

In desert environments, camels can be indispensable, especially if vehicles are not available or fuel is limited. The creatures can be quite cantankerous, however.

As a beast of burden, a camel can carry loads up to 120 kilograms in weight. Camels seldom attack, but when they do it is a bite attack. It is an Easy test of Horsemanship to calm a biting camel.

CATS, LARGE



Appearing: 1D6+3
Attacks: 40%
Move: 10/30/60
Initiative: 6
Strength: 10
Constitution: 10
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 30/50

The category "large cats" includes such felines as lions, leopards, and cougars, creatures that may be encountered in the wild.

On the first combat phase in which a large cat attacks a target, it makes two simultaneous attacks, one a diving blow and the other a melee attack. (But no more than two large cats can be involved in diving attacks on a single target.) In each phase thereafter, the large cat makes only one attack, that being a melee attack.

CATTLE



Appearing: 3D6
Attacks: 20%
Move: 10/20/25
Initiative: 2
Strength: 20
Constitution: 18
Agility: 5
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D10
Hits: 30/60

This listing represents animals such as the American bison, the African gnu, and the Asian water buffalo. But it also includes domesticated cattle, many of which have reverted to wild. (Cattle that are still domesticated have only a 5% chance of attack.)

In combat, cattle make diving attacks whenever possible. Note that attacking cattle are not knocked down if they miss their target, unless that target scores a critical success on the attempt to avoid the diving blow. In all other cases, the attacking cattle simply turn and attempt another diving blow in their next Initiative phase.

CERBEROIDS



Appearing: 2D6
Attacks: 100%
Move: —
Initiative: 6
Strength: —
Constitution: —
Agility: —
Skill/Dam.: 6/1p1
Hits: —

Like human medusas (see the "Dark Races" chapter), cerberoids are terran creatures that have had independently guided, stinger-tipped tentacles grafted to their heads and shoulders. Cerberoids may have originated as nearly any type of animal, and the referee should use the statistics for that particular creature in combat. However, a cerberoid also makes poison attacks in addition to its normal attacks, with each tentacle striking separately. Note that in the statistics above, "# Appear" refers to the number of tentacles grafted onto each animal, and "—" means "not applicable."

Optionally, the referee may wish to allow damage to a cerberoid's head and/or chest count additionally as a chance that some of the tentacles are destroyed. Each wound should be counted separately, and should be multiplied by 10 for a percentage chance that 1D6/2 tentacles (rounded down) are lost. For instance, a blow that did 3 points of damage to the chest would have a 30% chance of severing tentacles.

CHIMERAS



Appearing: 1D6/2
Attacks: 80%
Move: 15/30/60
Initiative: 4
Strength: 5
Constitution: 4
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6
Hits: 30/60

No one knows what chimeras truly look like. These elusive creatures are highly empathic, with powerful natural skills of Animal Empathy, Human Empathy, and Project Emotion, which they use to stir up animal memories in their opponents' minds. As a result, opponents remember only confused images amalgamated from portions of various creatures. Because chimeras invariably flee after taking half their total hit points in damage, there have been no carcasses left to study, either.

DOGS



Appearing: 1D6
Attacks: 60%
Move: 15/30/60
Initiative: 4
Strength: 3
Constitution: 2
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6
Hits: 8/16

This listing covers quite a bit of ground, including everything from pet Chihuahuas to packs of wild dogs prowling cities or abandoned farms. The statistics above are for a dog of average size and ferocity; the referee may wish to adjust the Strength, Constitution, damage, and hits listings up or down to represent very large or very small dogs.

In the first round in which a dog attacks, it is allowed two simultaneous attacks: one diving blow (representing its leap into combat) and one melee attack (representing its attempts to bite). Due to space restrictions, however, no more than two dogs can make diving attacks on a single character in any combat phase. All other dogs attacking the character make only their melee attack. Note that the diving blow is made only during the first phase in which a dog attacks a character. As long as that dog remains engaged with that character, it may make no further diving blows.

DRAGONS

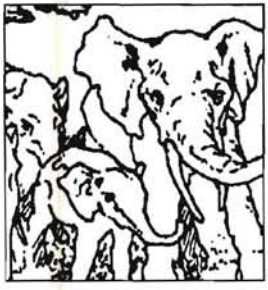


Appearing: 1D6
Attacks: 70%
Move: 5/10/20
Initiative: 4
Strength: 8
Constitution: 9
Agility: 3
Skill/Dam.: 7/2D6
Hits: 24/48

Imagine a desert alligator slightly faster than a human, with a voracious appetite, and you will pretty much know what the beasties called dragons are like. No one is certain whether they are native to the Earth—perhaps at some point in history—or if they have been genetically engineered from existing terran stock. What *is* known is that they are vicious, and that in arid rural regions they are giving the coyotes and wolves some stiff competition.

In combat, a dragon gets two attacks on its first phase (like a dog): one diving blow and one bite attack. On every phase thereafter, it gets only the bite attack. Additionally, no more than two dragons can perform a diving blow on the target creature, because of space limitations.

ELEPHANTS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 20%
Move: 10/15/30
Initiative: 3
Strength: 26
Constitution: 26
Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: 4/5D6
Hits: 60/120



It may seem odd, at first, to have a listing for elephants. However, not only may the characters encounter them in Africa, they might also escape from a local zoo, and tabloid stories occasionally mention elephants being kidnapped by UFOs.

When used as beasts of burden, elephants can carry up to 600 kilograms.

If an elephant becomes involved in combat, its first attack is a charge attack, which is treated as a diving attack for purposes of determining success and damage done. (Note that the elephant does not fall prone if the attack fails, unless the target scores a critical success on the attempt to avoid the attack.) As well, this charge requires a panic check from its target. After the first phase of combat, however, an elephant will usually engage in melee (stomping, and goring with its tusks), using the skill and damage listings above for determining hits. When resolving collisions between elephants and vehicles, treat an elephant's weight as five tons.

HORSES
Appearing: 1D6
Attacks: 10%
Move: 10/30/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 12
Constitution: 11
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 25/50



Sometimes characters may want to use horses rather than vehicles for transportation, especially in rural settings. As well, they may encounter small bands of wild horses in the wilderness. The statistics listed here are adjusted to represent the average equine, and referees may wish to adjust the statistics a bit for larger or smaller creatures, such as Clydesdales or mules.

If used as beasts of burden, horses can carry a number of kilograms equal to 10 times their Strength rating.

MANTICORES



Appearing: 1D6/3
Attacks: 40%
Move: 10/30/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 10
Constitution: 10
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Hits: 30/25
Scorpion Tail
Skill/Dam.: 2/3p4

Manticores are basically large cats that have had a huge scorpion-like tail grafted onto them. The creatures are so rarely encountered that they are generally thought only legendary.

In combat, manticores get two attacks per round: one with claw or tooth at skill level 8 and doing 2D6 damage, and the second at skill level 2 with tail stinger and doing poison damage rated at 3p4. Once a poison attack has hit, however, the secondary stinger attack does only 3 points of puncture damage for the rest of combat

RATS



Appearing: 5D10
Attacks: 45%
Move: 4/8/15
Initiative: 6
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 3/2
Hits: 2/4

With the world's general economic decline, most localities have less money to spend on keeping rat infestation under control. As a natural result, the rat population has boomed, which has led to increased competition for food, which in turn has led to mounting numbers of rat attacks on human beings.

In combat, rats fight in the same square as their targets. On the first phase of combat, each target will be attacked by 1D6 rats, with an additional 1D6 rats joining upon each subsequent phase until all of them have been accounted for. Typically, hit locations on the target will be lower body. To reflect this, roll 1D6+3 on the hit location chart instead of 1D10.

RHINOS



Appearing: 1
Attacks: 30%
Move: 10/15/25
Initiative: 3
Strength: 20
Constitution: 20
Agility: 3
Skill/Dam.: 6/4D6
Hits: 50/100

Like elephants, rhinos can be encountered not only in their native environment, but also as escapees from zoos. Rhinos in combat do little else but make charge attacks. A rhino's charge does require its targets to make a panic check, but for purposes of determining hits and damage, the charge is treated as a diving attack. (The skill and damage listings above are for those rare occasions when the referee determines a rhino may be unable to make a charge.) When a rhino makes a successful attack on a vehicle, damage is calculated as a collision, counting the rhino's weight as three tons.

ROACHES, GIANT



Appearing: 2D6
Attacks: 75%
Move: 15/30/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 2
Constitution: 2
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Hits: 10/20

Giant roaches infest some abandoned buildings and sewers. At just under one meter in length, they are large enough to be extremely dangerous, but small enough to still be creepy.

Giant roaches are fast and voracious, but they scatter quickly when faced with tough opposition. To represent this, while most beasties flee combat if they *fail* a roll versus their attack percentage once one of their number has been killed, giant roaches do just the opposite. That is, they flee combat if they succeed at that roll. Very bright lights, such as floodlights, flares, or automobile headlights, will drive them away as well unless they fail their chance-to-attack roll.

SABER-TOOTHED CAT

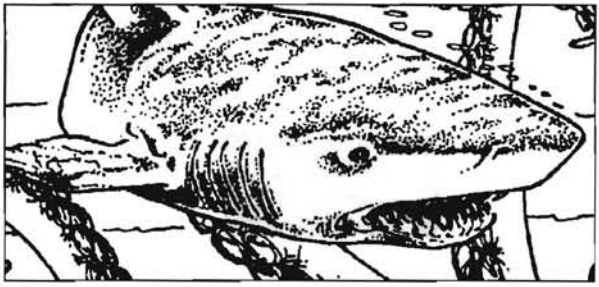


Appearing: 1
Attacks: 60%
Move: 15/25/50
Initiative: 4
Strength: 22
Constitution: 22
Agility: 5
Skill/Dam.: 8/2D10+2
Hits: 50/100

Many Dark Races have visited or inhabited the Earth for uncounted ages, and a few of them, notably the extraterrestrials, have been collecting animal specimens for that entire time, keeping them in suspended animation for later use. So, it is possible for PCs to come face to face with creatures long thought extinct. Such is the case with saber-toothed cats.

Saber-tooths conduct combat in the same way as grizzly bears. However, a saber-tooth's grappling attack does 2D6+2 damage to the target's chest.

SHARKS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 90%
Move: 13/25/50
Initiative: 5
Strength: 7
Constitution: 9
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D10
Hits: 25/50



Because of the effects of water pollution on the world's oceans, the aquatic food chain has been seriously disrupted. Hundreds of salt-water creatures have become completely extinct, with the result that the waters that once teemed with life now seem relatively barren. If the PCs spend any time in the ocean, they have a modest chance of encountering sharks. It is almost guaranteed that those sharks will be hungry enough to attack.

For simplicity's sake, because sharks are native to the water and humans are not, combat can be run as normal for the sharks, but all melee tasks for humans should be at one level higher difficulty than normal. Remember as well that the characters will have to be making Swimming checks.

SLITHERS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 90%
Move: 2/4/8
Initiative: 3
Strength: 30
Constitution: 35
Agility: 3
Skill/Dam.: 3/3D10
Hits: 120/240

No one is quite sure what the subterranean creatures known as slithers really look like. Only the barest glimpses of them have ever been caught, at least by anyone who has survived an encounter. But from the size of the tunnels these creatures leave, it is estimated that they must be at least as large as an elephant. Accounts of attacks by the creatures describe them as having clawed tentacles that erupt from the ground to drag their prey, kicking and screaming, into a cavernous beaked orifice. Some have suggested that slithers are like immense, leathery squids.

Additionally, it is apparent that the creatures exude a strong acid from their skins, as residue from the tentacles has been tested chemically. It is hypothesized that as the creatures push themselves through the soil (apparently by brute force), this acid slime reacts with the soil, compacting it and firming it to create semipermanent tunnels. Typically, when a slither is encountered, it is in an area that has been extensively tunneled, allowing the creature maximum mobility in chasing its quarry. Apparently, slithers are incredibly sensitive to sound vibrations, which is how they track their prey. They have been known to consume creatures ranging in size from house cats to cows.

At least one account claims that while slithers cannot freely travel through rock, they can use their acid to tunnel in it at a very slow pace, perhaps up to 25 centimeters an hour.

In combat, a slither attacks by positioning itself under its victim, either by using existing tunnels to lie in wait for the victim to pass or, if hungry enough, by tunneling through the soil toward the prey (at a maximum speed of four meters per phase). In the latter case, it is an Easy test of Observation to notice the slither approach because the creature tends to burrow along near the surface, causing the ground to rise as it moves. Once the slither is under its target, it raises its mouthed end suddenly, sometimes knocking the victim off its feet (Easy test of Agility to avoid), then launches its tentacles into the air to pin the prey. If its attack is successful, the prey takes the listed damage as a combination of acid burns and crushing. This attack cannot be blocked, but it can be avoided by an Average test of Agility, using one of the dodger's actions for the combat turn. Once the prey has been grabbed, it takes no further damage, but it will be swallowed (instant death) within 1D6 phases, unless the slither takes enough damage in the interim to push it past half its total hits. After taking more than half its total hits, a slither will drop its prey and flee into its deeper tunnels.

SLUGS, GIANT

Appearing: 2D6
Attacks: 90%
Move: 2
Initiative: 1
Strength: 3
Constitution: 6
Agility: 1
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
Hits: 16/32



Like its smaller cousin, the garden slug, the giant slug is a slimy chunk of dark gray-brown flesh, like a snail without a shell (for all practical purposes, it is a snail without a shell). While normal slugs can be found above ground, giant slugs dwell only in sewers and caves. Giant slugs reach a size up to two meters in length. The creatures are terribly slow, but because they feed on refuse, speed is not normally an issue. Also, in the sewer tunnels that they frequent, it is not impossible for a number of them to trap a quicker creature in a dead end and attack it en masse.

In combat, giant slugs suffer no loss of Initiative until they have lost half of their hit points, at which point they can take no action except to attempt to flee. Note that salt serves as a deterrent to the creatures.

SNAKES



Appearing: 1D10
Attacks: 50%
Move: 5/15
Initiative: 4
Strength: 1
Constitution: 1
Agility: 7
Skill/Dam.: 7/1p*
Hits: 4/8

* The number of poison dice rolled is variable: rattlers: 1, asps and cobras: 2, coral snakes: 3

Those snakes represented by this listing include poisonous varieties such as asps, cobras, and rattlers. To reflect the fact that they are quick and elusive, snakes are allowed an Average test of Agility to dodge any melee attack made against them. Like blocking, however, this dodge uses up one of the creature's actions for the combat turn.

Note that some snakes are much more poisonous than others. To reflect this, the notation for number of poisonous damage dice rolled has been made variable. The referee can use the snakes listed above as a guide for rating other varieties.

SPONGIES



Appearing: 4D6
Attacks: 90%
Move: 2/4
Initiative: 2
Strength: 10
Constitution: 12
Agility: 2
Skill/Dam.: 9/2D10
Hits: 70/140

Just as humans use guard dogs to patrol an area and keep it secure, some Dark Minions use creatures commonly called spongies. Spongies are actually animated plants. A spongy is a tall, tripedal, fungoid creature, typically a little over two meters in height, resembling an immense sponge (sorel) mushroom. Its wrinkled gray-brown surface is covered with hundreds of pale tendrils up to 30 centimeters in length, which writhe and twist continually.

Spongies receive their sustenance by feeding off animal life. They "hunt" in packs, surrounding their prey and then closing in upon it, or trapping it in an enclosed area such as a ravine. When used as guard creatures, they typically trap intruders up against a wall or fence. Once the prey is unable to escape, the spongies press themselves against it and begin worming their tendrils gradually into its orifices and under its skin, where they start to drain a victim's vital fluids until only a husk remains.

In terms of **Dark Conspiracy** combat rules, once a spongy has made a successful attack, it need not roll to hit from that point on but continues to do damage every phase (as a special sort of continuous action) until its last hit point is lost. Also, one particularly horrifying thing about spongies is that they apparently have no sense of pain. When one is struck, whole chunks of vegetable matter may fall away, but the creature itself will continue to attack with no adverse effects (i.e., no loss of Initiative) until it is completely destroyed.

Note that spongies will attack 90% of the time when encountered. The other 10% of the time, they are dormant, having feasted to fullness and now preparing to release spores.

SQUIDS, GIANTS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 60%
Move: 8/15/30
Initiative: 2
Strength: 40
Constitution: 25
Agility: 5
Skill/Dam.: 3/4D10
Hits: 150/300

With the decrease in ocean life as a result of water pollution, a number of carnivorous creatures have become increasingly more desperate in their hunt for food. As well, hunters that once prowled only the depths have recently begun to haunt the oceans' surface. One result of this has been a recurrence of sightings of giant squids, some as large as whales.

Generally, a giant squid will not attack a single human figure in the water. It will, however, attack boats up to 50 tons. If there are any human figures on deck, it will attack them as well, more in reflexively closing its tentacles around whatever it encounters than in any deliberate plan.

In combat, then, a giant squid usually gets two attacks per phase. The first is an attack on the boat, treated as having a penetration of 4, and causing hull hits as in a collision. This represents the boat's prow being slowly pulled under water. The second attack is against one human figure on the craft's deck (referee's choice of multiple figures). If this attack hits, a hit location is rolled, and that body area suffers the damage listed above not only in the present phase, but also automatically in every succeeding phase until the creature is killed or driven off. (Once a giant squid has taken damage totaling more than half its hit points, it must make an attack check and will flee if that check is failed.)

After a giant squid has completely submerged a vessel, it will remain in the area for 1D6 minutes, attacking any swimmers. Note that combat by swimmers adds one level of increased difficulty to all skill checks (although this does not apply to skill checks by the squid, which is native to the water).

TIGERS
Appearing: 1
Attacks: 50%
Move: 10/20/40
Initiative: 4
Strength: 18
Constitution: 18
Agility: 6
Skill/Dam.: 8/3D6
Hits: 40/80



Tigers are very rare, but it is remotely possible that PCs may encounter one in the wild in parts of Asia. Also, some NPCs might keep a tiger or two as a high-status watch animal.

In combat, tigers fight in the same way as grizzly bears, above.

WOLVES
Appearing: 2D6
Attacks: 60%
Move: 15/30/60
Initiative: 5
Strength: 4
Constitution: 3
Agility: 8
Skill/Dam.: 6/1D10
Hits: 6/12



With the abandonment of vast tracts of farmland and the resultant increase in wilderness, some animal species such as wolves and coyotes have greatly increased in number. If the PCs are traveling through rural areas, a good chance exists that they will at least hear wolves or encounter their spoor. Given the right circumstances, there is even a fair chance that the PCs might be attacked by them.

Like other canines, a wolf receives two simultaneous attacks during its first phase of combat. One is a diving blow which represents its leaping upon its victim, and the other is a biting melee attack. Because of space restrictions, however, no more than two wolves can perform diving attacks on a single target in any combat phase. If other wolves are also attacking the target, they get only their melee attacks. Note that the diving blow is made only during the first phase in which a wolf attacks a character. As long as that wolf remains engaged with that character, it may make no further diving blows.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN BEASTIES

The beasties listed above ought to be enough to keep player characters busy for some time to come. But after they have become familiar with these listings, it is important that they encounter something new. For that reason, many referees will want to create their own creatures to match myths, legends, and bad dreams from their own experience.

Given the rules and examples above, it is not very difficult for referees to do so. To begin with, the referee should decide upon a general idea of what the creature should be like. For example, is it big, slow, and strong, or is it quick but frail? Then translate these things into game terms, using Constitution and hits to reflect the thing's size; Strength and damage to reflect its forcefulness; and Initiative, skill, and Agility to reflect its speed and accuracy. It may be easiest to do this by using one of the listings above as a starting point, choosing one that is already somewhat close to the desired creature, the adjusting it to fit the new concept.

Remember that Initiative makes quite a difference in terms of combat effectiveness. A low-skill, low-damage creature with a high initiative is often just as deadly as a creature with a high skill and high damage but low Initiative. Referees can balance the deadliness of creatures, then, by lowering skill and/or damage when Initiative is high, or vice versa.

CHAPTER NINE
Robots

Although originally designed to free humans from dangerous or boring occupations, robots have become increasingly common as corporate "employees" due to their unquestioning loyalty and damage resistance. In **Dark Conspiracy**, robots are treated as a special class of NPC, capable of preprogrammed actions and responses to external stimuli. They are not self-aware, although the more sophisticated ones can simulate self-awareness pretty well. Characters will most commonly encounter two classes of robot: guardbots and drudgebots.

Guardbots: These are robots specially designed to perform security functions. Several varieties exist, varying in cost, sophistication, armament, and armor.

Drudgebots: Drudgebots are robot laborers. Some are immobile and work on factory assembly lines; others are multifunctional and completely mobile.

ROBOT BEHAVIOR

Most robots are so strictly designed for a specific task that they are little more interesting than a drill press or a milling machine. Other robots are more wide-ranging in their abilities (butler robots, cleaning robots, etc.), and may seem intelligent, but once a person has experienced their repertoire of programmed responses to various stimuli, any sense of "personality" is lost. There are a few robots, however, whose programming is wide-ranging and flexible enough to make them seem capable of intelligent thought (in the same way that a good computer game can often seem alive). PCs should take care not to attribute human emotions to such constructs, no matter how "alive" they seem. A robot's behavior is dictated by programming, sometimes augmented by remote instruction by radio. Consequently, even the most "friendly" or innocuous robots can suddenly prove deadly, without warning.

COMBAT

For the purposes of combat, robots are divided into two broad categories: vehicular and nonvehicular. The normal combat rules apply to human versus robot and robot versus robot fire combat, except as noted below. Melee combat can only be carried out with nonvehicular robots. Nonvehicular robots are assigned attribute numbers to enable their use in melee combat.

Weapons: The weapons installed in robots are identical in performance to those used by characters, except that the magazine capacities are often larger. Ratings for weapons are included with the individual robot entries.

MELEE COMBAT

Vehicular robots may not engage in melee combat. Nonvehicular robots use the normal melee combat rules, with the following exceptions.

Unarmed Combat: Robots may make strike attacks, escape attempts, or grapple attacks. They may not make diving blows. Unarmed attacks by robots are resolved normally, but using Agility rating instead of Melee Combat skill.

Armed Combat: Only robots which have built-in melee weapons may make armed melee attacks, and they do so with the characteristic of the weapon. Robots with more than one melee weapon can attack with each of them in every phase in which it attacks, unless specifically prohibited by the robot description.

Melee Ratings: For melee combat, robots have the following ratings:

Agility: This is the robot's chance of connecting with a blow or a grapple attempt, and is a measure of the speed and agility of their striking/cutting appendages.

Unarmed Combat Damage: This is the number of hit points inflicted by a blow from an arm or other appendage.

Melee Weapon: Not all robots have melee weapons, but those with drills, screwdrivers, cutting saws, welding torches, and so forth, do. Robots with multiple tools like this may have several weapon listings. If the robot cannot use more than one at a time, this fact is specifically noted. Weapon effects are defined by the following three characteristics:

- *Range:* Either short or long. Long covers things on the end of long servo arms, while short covers things mounted closer to the torso.
- *Hit Modifier:* Some weapons are clumsier than others. Hit modifiers can be -1, -2, +1, and +2.
- *Damage:* This is the amount of damage the weapon does if it hits. (Melee weapons average about 1D6 damage.)

FIRE COMBAT

Fire combat against nonvehicular robots is carried out according to the conventional fire combat rules. Fire combat against vehicular robots is carried according to the vehicular combat rules. Hit procedures are identical to those given in those pages, but battle damage differs, as noted below.

BATTLE DAMAGE (NONVEHICULAR ROBOTS)

Nonvehicular robots sustain damage as if they were people or animals. Each robot's description states which column on the Human/Animal Hit Location Chart is to be used for that robot. Bipedal and quadrupedal should not be taken literally, they simply describe the general orientation of the robot. (Note that the scratch damage category does not apply to robots.)

The specific results for robots are:

Head: This represents the electronic center of the robot, and contains sensor systems and the robot's central processing unit (CPU) or "brain." Slight damage has no effect. Serious damage means one sensor system is destroyed. Critical damage means the robot's CPU is damaged, and the robot is "dead."

Right/Left Arm: If a robot has only one arm, the right/left designation is not needed. If a robot has more than two arms, hits should be assigned to arms randomly, regardless of whether a right or left hit was rolled. Slight damage has no effect other than to cause the limb to make grinding noises; serious damage means the arm loses the use of any tools or attached weapons; and critical damage means the arm has been blown off.

Chest: The chest is where a robot's weapons and ammo (if any) are kept. Slight damage means one weapon (chosen randomly if more than one is present) becomes inoperative for the remainder of the turn. If no weapons are present, the damage has no effect. Serious damage means a weapon (chosen randomly) is put out of action permanently (if no weapon is present, it represents damage to the fuel or batteries in the abdomen, and the robot's speed is halved). Critical damage means that an ammunition explosion has occurred, and the robot is rendered inoperative (dead).

Abdomen: This represents the power plant of a robot. Slight damage means the robot begins to smoke or make grinding noises (but otherwise there is no effect). Serious damage means the robot is reduced to half speed. Critical damage means the fuel has exploded or the batteries have been hit (drenching the insides of the robot with acid), in either case rendering the robot inoperative.

Right/Left Leg: Legs can either mean a literal leg or another means of propulsion such as a track unit or wheel. As in the case of arms, robots may have a number of legs other than two or four, and leg hits should be distributed at random. Slight damage to a leg/track/wheel has no effect other than to cause grinding noises. Serious damage reduces the robot's speed by half (halved again with each successive leg hit causing serious damage). Critical damage means the robot is immobilized (although all other systems may be operational).

BATTLE DAMAGE (VEHICULAR ROBOTS)

With the exception of different specific results, the damage implementation system for vehicular robots is the same as that used in conventional vehicle combat. The specific results for robots are as follows:

Crewmember/Passenger: If as a result of a hull hit, this represents damage to the robot's CPU. Minor damage means that each task the robot attempts to perform (firing one of its weapons, sending a message for help, etc.) becomes two levels more difficult. Major damage puts the robot out of action killing it, in other words. If the result is a turret hit, this represents damage to one of the robot's sensor systems, picked at random. Any damage whatsoever puts this system out of action (the type of damage is significant only when repairs are attempted).

Radio: This represents damage to a robot's communications equipment. This means the robot falls back on its default programming, and can no longer receive instructions or communications from elsewhere.

Engine: This represents damage to the robot's power plant (either electrical or internal combustion). Minor damage means that the robot can only move at half normal speed, and that it cannot move and fire at the same time. Major damage means that the robot may not move, and can only fire one weapon at a time.

Fuel: This represents damage to the robot's power source, either the fuel tank or its rechargeable batteries. Fuel hits are adjudicated as in conventional vehicle combat. Battery hits result in the immobilization of the robot.

Weapon/Ammo: One weapon system is destroyed. If no weapon is present in the location damaged, the hit becomes an ammunition hit. Ammo hits are handled as conventional vehicle combat. If no ammunition is present in the location damaged, the hit has no effect.

BURN DAMAGE

Burn damage against nonvehicular robots is halved, to reflect the fact that machines are harder to damage by heat than are people. Being on fire completely destroys infrared (IR) sensors, however.

TYPICAL DRUDGEBOTS

The following are typical of drudgebots that the PCs may encounter, in the right circumstances. Players should keep in mind that while these robots are usually harmless, there have been instances of them being reprogrammed to attack. Of course, it is theoretically possible that the PCs might do such reprogramming themselves.

Cleaningbot: This is a small, vehicular drudgebot with several arms (ending in various cleaning and polishing attachments), sometimes found towing a wheeled trash bin.

Butlerbot: This nonvehicular robot resembles a small, four-wheeled cart. It is fitted with serving arms, a sensory arm, and a number of compartments to keep food and drinks at the optimum temperature. Butlerbots take on comestibles in the kitchen, transport them to the dining area, and serve them, accompanied by appropriate phrases ("Dinner is served," "More wine?" and "Would you care for some freshly ground pepper?")

Foodbot: A foodbot is a nonvehicular robot designed to take food orders at restaurants. The machine is equipped with voice-recognition software and a limited number of vocal responses such as "Thank you for dining at Zhukov's! May I take your order, please?" "Would you like to speak to my supervisor?" and the ever-popular "Would you like cabbage rolls with that?" Foodbots are similar to butlerbots, except that they have provisions to accept money and make change from an armored "safe" within their body.

Receptionistbot: This nonvehicular robot is programmed to greet anyone who comes within range and ask their business. The sophistication of this robot's voice-recognition software, and the pattern of responses, varies with the particular duties of the robot. The cheapest versions of this robot look like beverage vending machines (and are extremely rugged). More expensive versions are humanoid in basic shape, and deluxe models may even be equipped with very realistic appearing skin and hair (these can easily be told from real humans by their limited movements and precise "machine" speech, as well as their inability to rise from their chair or move from behind their dais). Such models are very delicate, and are reserved for corporate offices and the like.

Repairbot: This is a small, squat, nonvehicular drudgebot with several arms ending in assorted tools, intended to perform preventative maintenance and simple repairs on other machinery, including other robots.

CHAPTER TEN

Encounters

In any role-playing games, the referee is provided with a set of tables from which he generates random encounters by rolling dice. This appropriate to many games, but is less so to **Dark Conspiracy**. The main reason that die roll-generated encounters are not appropriate is that they are too random. Most encounters in **Dark Conspiracy** should be deliberate.

This is so for two reasons. First, the referee should always used encounters to further his own goals, these goals being establishment of mood, advancement of the story, and maintenance of tension. Encounters suit this purpose very well.

Second, players should never know for certain whether the encounter is threatening or not. They should not be certain whether an event is related to the current mystery or not, so that they won't come to assign significance to absolutely everything that happens to them. That's because you don't want them to be hostile to and suspicious of absolutely everyone they meet; not only is that not true to life, it also means that you have no hope of ever fooling them that someone is trustworthy who actually is not. You need to keep your players off balance, if you are to have enough freedom to make the adventure world rich.

So every adventure needs to have a mix of encounters which related to the story being played out as well as a number of others which are not related to the current plot, but which serve to add to the mood and make the players uncertain as to which events are significant. It is best to invent these encounters to suit the circumstances of the particular adventure taking place. But all of us need a spur of creativity now and then, so in this section we provide you with several encounters that you can use to add intricacy to your adventures.

IN THE CITY

The urban metroplexes of Dark Conspiracy embrace an array of different environments, and a wide variety of encounters are possible.

Abduction: Late at night, in an Ant Hill section of town, the characters find themselves near a seemingly deserted section of the city. As they pass by, they hear screams from the rubble and weeds of the abandoned block. Other passersby ignore the screams, and refuse to even look at the area. The vacant area is actually Demonground, and a human victim is being dragged away by Dark Minions.

Bigwigs Take Precedence: One good way to give the PCs a distraction is by having their plans delayed while some high-up mucky-mucks get priority treatment. It may be just that the bigwigs get served before the PCs, or perhaps they take the last hotel room, the last seats on a flight, the last table at a restaurant, or something similar.

Blackout: One minute the city is operating perfectly well (at least as well as normal) and the next the electrical power goes out completely. In blackouts, some people get stranded in elevators, while others use the opportunity to loot storefronts. If the PCs

are headed for some place in a great hurry, a blackout can work wonders to elevate their stress level. Blackout can also refer to a sudden loss of headlights on a winding mountain road, if you like.

Eco-Commandos: You run into a band of eco-commandos preparing to make an assault on a major industrial facility. They are armed and may have a considerable amount of explosives they plan to use to disable the manufacturing complex, or blow up the computer records section. They may try to attack the PCs, thinking that they are a corporate security team, or just to keep them from leaking word of their activities. On the other hand, if the PCs are invading the same corporate stronghold, they may make useful allies.

Gang War: In this encounter, the PCs are minding their own business, when they stumble unexpectedly into a gang battle for a contested turf. That's what comes of not knowing the locale.

Health Alert: Loudspeaker trucks move through the streets announcing emergency anthrax inoculations. Inquiry will reveal that a cloud of biological toxins used in a war in Asia has blown across the Pacific Ocean and threatens infection in certain parts of the United States.

Elaboration of this encounter into a series of continuing background incidents is possible. Once inoculations start, part of the vaccine may prove to be defective, which will lead to some death from adverse reactions. When the defective vaccine has been disposed of, there is not enough left to inoculate the city's entire population. Very soon there will be riots at hospitals and hijacked vaccine shipments will begin to show up in the hands of various city gangs at outrageous prices.

Mugging: If you find a PC alone on the street in a city, why not have that PC get mugged? Muggings can range anywhere from something as serious as a severe drubbing to as little as a purloined wallet. If you are nice, you might even face the PC with a very minor talent, then allow the PC to turn the tables on the mugger. After all, the encounter is really only for entertainment value.

Protest Marchers: There is a lot of civil unrest in the world of **Dark Conspiracy,** and many people act that unrest out by conducting public demonstrations or protest marches. Sometimes these marches turn violent, especially if confronted by gangs hired to break up the marches by politically motivated corporations.

Random Shooting: Someone cracks from daily pressure and machineguns a shopping mail, bazookas a bus, or wires him- or herself with dynamite and threatens to take a restaurant full of people with him. Unfortunately for the PCs, they happen to be in the vicinity at the time.

Robbery: There are few things in life more disturbing than being caught in a dangerous situation entirely by accident. Such is the case of being an innocent bystander at an armed robbery. This encounter can be run when the PCs enter a shop of any kind; but it is especially nice in a bank, where the amount of money to be gained is so much larger and the lives of bystanders seems so much cheaper by comparison.

Rogue Robot: A security robot has gone rogue, either due to mechanical failure or some sort or deliberate tampering with its programming. It begins shooting randomly at pedestrians and vehicles passing by on the street. This could as easily be a servant robot which suddenly drops the parcels it is carrying and attacks its owner.

Security Sweep: A squad of well-armed corporate security goons sweeps through the slum area the PCs are in. They are looking for someone else (probably), but are none

too gentle in their methods or considerate in how they handle the locals. They are also afraid, which makes them especially dangerous.

Shadow: The player characters aren't the only investigators in the world. There are always local talents lurking about, trying to make sense of the world, as well. These include local police, of course, plus private detectives, news reporters, and even neighborhood crime watches. Any and all of these will take an interest in the PCs when they show up and start nosing around. Of course, the PCs are likely to get nervous when they notice that they are being followed, considering the creatures they are themselves tracking.

Solicitation: Someone wants to sell the PCs something, and the PCs don't want it. The something can be anything from drugs, to stolen watches, to cult pamphlets, to beauty products. What is important is that the someone doing the selling is as pushy, obnoxious, and tenacious as possible. This can be a great encounter to foist on the PCs when they are trying to stake out a place surreptitiously.

Street Thugs: These are merely punks waiting on a corner with nothing to do but watch the PCs. Of course, the characters can only assume that their attention is purposeful. If, however, the characters do not panic, the street thugs may actually be a good source of information.

Terrorist Bomb: As the PCs are walking down the street, a vehicle or storefront on the other side of the street suddenly blows up. The destroyed facility could be a travel agency, airline, or information bureau for an unpopular foreign government, a restaurant which caters to the rich and powerful, a bookstore selling books which some group finds objectionable, or it may be without obvious motive.

TRAVEL BY HIGHWAY

Most road travel is via the interstate highway system, which is all that remains in good repair. There are few towns left off of the highway.

Abandoned Vehicles: The characters pass by a stretch of road where there are many abandoned vehicles. Most of them are rusty. Windshields are smashed, upholstery torn or rotted away, tires gone. Many of the vehicles have bullet holes or were burned out.

Army Convoy: A military convoy passes the characters on the highway. It consists of half a dozen to a dozen vehicles traveling at high speed. The core of the convoy is several massive flatbed trucks hauling strangely shaped cargo (covered by tarps). At each end of the convoy are military police pickup trucks with blue lights flashing and loaded with heavily armed soldiers in camouflage fatigues.

Bridge Out: A major highway bridge across a river has collapsed recently, and has not been rebuilt. This will necessitate a long detour.

Detour: A major toxic waste spill has contaminated a length of the highway and the PCs are forced to detour around it. The roadblock will be manned by police and EPA personnel in "moon suits" who will point out a safe route on a road map. The route will carry them well off the normal interstate system, perhaps through parts of the Out-Law.

Ghost Town: A small town along the road appears to be abandoned and collapsing. It may offer shelter for the night to the characters, but other wanderers or creatures may have come to the same conclusion.

Hijacking: The PCs come across one or more trucks pulled over onto the shoulder of the road. The truck drivers have their hands up and are being held at gunpoint by one or more thugs, while half a dozen to a dozen more search through the semi-trailer to inspect or off-load the cargo. Several armed and heavily modified vehicles are parked nearby. If the PCs slow down, the hijackers will fire warning shots to encourage them to keep moving.

Police Roadblock: In this encounter, police officers, or agents of some other official agency, are looking for someone or something, and the PCs just happen to be in the neighborhood. The power of this encounter is in the guilt and fear it generates in your PCs. Of course, to keep that alive, you may actually need to have them arrested for something occasionally.

COUNTRYSIDE

These are possible events the characters might encounter when traveling off the beaten track.

Agricorp Troubleshooters: A small party of armed guards, perhaps escorting an engineer or mechanic, fly over the PCs by helicopter. They may land or just keep going, depending on the mission the referee assigns to them and, perhaps, to their NPC motivation result. If they land they may warn the characters away from agricorp land, attempt to intimidate them, or actually attack.

Animals Flee: Something spooks all animals in the PCs' vicinity and sends them scurrying for safety, or maybe even makes them flee the locale entirely. Only penned creatures remain. You don't have to explain this to the PCs at all—just let them wonder.

Biker Gang: There are virtually no law enforcement agencies patrolling the back roads anymore, and biker gangs roam freely. All of them are armed and willing to defend themselves against other gangs, and many live by extorting food and money from the remaining local residents. A few enjoy robbing and murdering passing travelers.

Cultivator: Cultivators are huge automated mobile farm machines programmed to plow, plant, fertilize, spray, or harvest crops. Most have obstacle-avoidance visual and radar sensors and laser cutters to enable them to remove trees and rocks which might damage their cultivating equipment.

Cultivators will not normally react to the presence of the PCs, but if a cultivator has gone rogue, it will pursue them and attempt to kill them. It is not very fast (16 meters per combat phase) and has a very low Initiative rating. Also, many of its attempts to kill will be misdirected and ineffective. It may, for example, attempt to spray the characters with insecticide, or "weed" them (pick them up and drop them in a mulching chamber, from which the PCs can escape fairly easily).

Local Law: A local sheriff's deputy demands that the PCs stop and submit to a search. He may arrest them on trumped-up charges, attempt to extort a bribe, or simply let them go on their way, depending on his NPC motivation result.

Nomad Tribe: A clan of nomads suddenly appears, or the PCs stumble across their encampment. This can be anything from a Native American tribe living in their original life-style to a '60s-style hippie commune, complete with rusty Volkswagen microbuses and naked children named Moonbeam Love.

Nomads will be suspicious of any outsiders and may react with violence or panic. If their confidence can be gained, however, they may valuable source of information and even assistance.

Road Out: The back road the PCs are traveling simply stops. One of the giant agricorps has decided that it has no need of the road and so has just plowed it under. As the road emerges from a copse of trees, the characters see only miles of muddy, plowed fields stretching out before them. Even a four-wheel-drive truck will have difficulty crossing it.

Toxic Dump: While making their way through a remote area of the countryside, the players come across a secret toxic dump site. This may be very old and abandoned or it may be new and still in use. Perhaps it will form the basis of a new adventure.

Wandering Mystic: A wise (or crazy) man or woman is encountered. He or she lives off the land and leads a solitary existence to better attune him or herself to the land and its natural creatures. The mystic will be very familiar with the area and its dangers.

ANYWHERE

These encounters can be added to any of the above lists.

Dog Pack: Whether in a city or in the country, an attack by a pack of starving animals can be a wonderful way to get the PCs' heart pounding. These need not be dogs—rats and other creatures work nicely, too.

Doldrums: For some unexplained reason, empathic characters find their empathic powers halved, or even negated entirely, for hours or days, as if a wave of mundaneness swept the world. Fortunately for the PCs, the Dark Minions are affected just as strongly.

Freak Accident: A wheel bearing goes out unexpectedly on the PCs' vehicle, or maybe a tire goes flat and throws them toward the ditch. Lightning strikes a tree nearby, or a brick from a chimney falls and almost hits one of them. Storm sewers wash out the sod under a section of road and it collapses under them. A twin-engine plane loses power and crashes into their hotel room. All of these are examples of freak accidents that have actually happened to someone, sometime. Why not have one happen to your PCs? They are certain to believe there is a mastermind behind the event.

Hit Man: An enemy has sent someone to do the PCs in. It need not have anything to do with the PCs' present mission.

Natural Disaster: This is something like "Freak Accident," above, but it involves events of a grander scope, affecting more creatures. Earthquakes, tornadoes, blizzards, hurricanes, forest fires, volcano eruptions, tidal waves, and even meteor strikes are examples. The exact disaster will usually depend upon the PCs' geographical location.

Ozone Hole: Weather forecasts in **Dark Conspiracy** include more than just temperature and precipitation. They also include reports on the Earth's ozone layer. Sometimes the ozone will thin in a particular spot, forming a hole that lets dangerous radiation through for days at a time. When this occurs, citizens are warned to stay indoors for the duration. Long-term exposure to the radiation can not only foster cancer, it can also damage the retinas of eyes, leading to blindness.

Unexpected Ally: Not all random encounters need to be negative. The world contains some helpful people, too. In this encounter, the PCs meet someone who offers them unsolicited help, perhaps just in the nick of time.

Visions: For some unexplained reason, empathic characters find their powers effectively doubled for a period of hours or days. It may be that the Earth is giving its defenders a boost, or that the Dark Minions have weakened the fabric of reality. In the latter case, the PCs won't be the only ones with enhanced powers.

Wild Hunt: If the PCs are having too easy a time of figuring out who is behind the current mystery, throw a wrench in the works by having a completely different Dark Race attack them in a random sweep through their area. Dark elves might be looking for new playthings; ET's might be collecting lab specimens; other creatures might just be hungry.



CHAPTER ELEVEN
Refereeing 101

The referee is the person who is most familiar with the game background, which makes him or her the touchstone for the players' imaginations. That is to say, while each of the players has some mental image of the world in which the PCs live, it is the referee who knows the most about that world, who serves as the shepherd of their collective imaginations.

As such, the referee is responsible for more than just factual information about the game world. Perhaps even more importantly, the referee is also the primary conveyor of atmosphere.

THE STORY

The referee is also, of course, the central force in the individual stories (adventures) that the PCs experience. This is true whether you tend to run tightly paced, episodic adventures or instead just let the players wander where they will. Referees who run pregenerated adventures are certainly the primary force in the story, because they serve to keep the PCs on track with the predetermined plot. But the same centrality is true of referees at the other extreme, who come to an adventure session with next to nothing in terms of notes and run things "by the seat of their pants." In either case, the referee reacts to the PCs' actions, telling the players what their characters see, playing the parts of the NPCs, and just generally being the world that the PCs live in.

THE RULES

In the field of role-playing games, it has long been customary to think of the referee as the final arbiter of the game rules. The earliest role-playing games characterized the referee as an impartial judge, much like the referee of a sports event. (In fact, that's where the widely used role-playing term "referee" comes from.) As a consequence, if the player characters encountered some nasty beast and began combating it, the referee was supposed to serve as an arbiter of the game rules, applying them equably to both the PCs and their opponents, then letting the chips fall where they may. The same thing applied, of course, to other sorts of conflict besides combat.

There are some problems with perceiving the referee in this way, however. First of all, referees could hardly act as dispassionate observers of the battle, considering the fact that they were also responsible for playing the part of (making tactical decisions for) the PCs' opponent. As well, in most cases it was the referee who designed the opponent in the first place and set up the encounter. In other words, while the referee in a sports event is expected to have no part in either team's play, the referee in a role-playing session has traditionally had to adjudicate the rules while at the same time playing as one of the teams.

Another problem with viewing the referee as an impartial arbiter has come about as a result of changes concerning the ways in which people role-play. In early role-playing

games, play was much more like a board game in which the PCs were pawns (being little more than a collection of attributes). But with the passage of time, there has been a growing tendency for roleplayers to think of their characters as personalities. As a consequence, continually more of the action in a role-playing session takes place in the imagination, and less on paper. Less action on paper means fewer hard-and-fast rules, which makes refereeing a less mechanical job.

There is a second important reason why this move toward more fully imagined player characters results in a less impartial referee. That is, the more imagination and emotional energy a player invests in a character, the less easy it is for the player to watch that character die. As long as PCs were little more than numbers with names, a PC death as the result of an unlucky die roll could be accepted pretty easily. But the more fully players identify with their characters, the more painful losing those characters becomes.

This is only natural. Think of it this way: The more fully players imagine their characters, the more role-playing becomes like creating fiction, and no one likes to see the protagonist of a piece of fiction die. PCs are the protagonists of role-playing adventures.

If the referee's function is becoming perceived less as that of an impartial arbiter of hard-and-fast rules, and is now being thought of more as a stage setter and coach, you might suppose that the task has become easier. After all, there are fewer rules to know. But actually, the job of referee has become, in many ways, more demanding. Fewer hard-and-fast rules mean more demands upon imagination, but it is this emphasis upon imagination that also makes the referee's job more satisfying.

THE HOST

Let's face it. Not only is the referee typically the person who buys the game, learns the rules, and puts a group of players together, it is generally also the referee who sets the time and place for the gaming session. If you think of a role-playing session as a social get-together, generally it is the referee who plays host.

We'd like to make a suggestion at this point. We strongly recommend that you, as referee, foist off on someone else in your group the job of hosting your role-playing session. It may be the case that you think it necessary to call the players yourself before a session, to make sure you know who is going to show up. But we urge you to have the session actually held at someone else's home. That way, there will be someone else to answer questions about where the paper cups are, or to point people to the bathroom, allowing you to concentrate on moderating the game.

By the way, getting someone else to take part of the responsibility in this way is a primary step toward establishing a strong sense of community effort in your role-playing sessions. As we will explain in more detail in the next chapters, this community effort can help to enrich the plots of adventures bring NPCs more fully to life translate die mechanics into vivid story elements, and generally make the referee's job much easier while at the same time enhancing enjoyment for everyone.

BEGINNING A CAMPAIGN

When you begin a **Dark Conspiracy** adventure campaign, there are a couple of things you can do to make it run smoothly.

First, find out what your players want out of role-playing. Some people enjoy solving mysteries; others like the chance to act; and still others just want to shoot big holes

in things. As referee, you will have your own preferences as well. By talking with players individually before beginning a campaign, you will be best prepared to make things fun for everyone. You can also use this pregame time to talk about the players' characters. This can help you fit the PCs' histories into the world, allow you to establish PC links to one another, and familiarize you with the PCs' abilities, so that you can design fitting adventures.

RUNNING AN ADVENTURE

There are a few general principles that will help make an adventure session enjoyable for everyone.

Before the Session: Once you have decided upon an adventure, make certain that you are familiar with it and with any special rules it may involve. Also, be sure you have all the materials you will need: from floor diagrams and NPC stats, to pencils, paper, and dice. Ill-prepared referees have trouble running enjoyable sessions.

During the Session: After your group has gathered and everyone has had a few minutes for chitchat, you need to focus their attention upon the adventure at hand. A good way to do this is to have your players recap the last session. This accomplishes several things: (1) It gathers everyone's attention; (2) It reminds everyone of what the PCs have discovered so far; (3) It helps set the scene for the adventure to come; and (4) It allows you, as referee, to learn what aspects of the last adventure the players remember, what they enjoyed, what they thought important, and what significant items they might have missed.

Once everyone is focused, you can begin the adventure itself. During play, be careful to balance the attention you devote to each player. Make certain you keep everyone involved. One way to do this is to consciously rotate your attention around the table, spending only a few minutes at a time on each player. If the PCs have split up for some reason, have your temporarily inactive players suggest events occurring to other PCs (and maybe let them play NPCs their friends meet).

After the Session: When it gets near time to quit, decide upon an appropriate stopping point. Make sure that you leave time for players to wind down after play. Generally, you should give out experience points now, so that before the next session players can think of how those points affect their PCs' abilities.

MAKING ROLE-PLAYING A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Many players have no idea how much labor is involved in refereeing. While they run only one character, you have to run a whole world full, and players expect that world to be both full-fleshed and consistent. At the same time, many players will expect you to be expert with all the rules while they know only those that apply specifically to their own characters (and some not even that much). They may perceive you as a champion of the rules (since you're probably who suggested this game in the first place), expecting you to defend or change rules they dislike (often a spur-of-the-moment dislike as their characters are about to suffer the rule's effects). Finally, some players are so wrapped up in having their own fun that they take little thought of others. In a nutshell, sometimes players work against the referee.

There is a general solution to all of these problems, and that is to train your players to think of role-playing as a shared responsibility. It is surprising just how many things

you can afford to let players take a hand in, from looking up rules, to scene setting, to plot suggestions. The more fully you involve your players, the more satisfying your sessions will be for everyone.

SETTING THE SCENE

As the primary storyteller, the referee is the players' window on the world. Everything the PCs see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or otherwise sense is conveyed by the referee. One of the most important ways of building drama in the game is by carefully playing upon all of these senses, painting a rich word picture that projects your players into the **Dark Conspiracy** world.

When you begin a description, take a moment to picture it clearly in your own mind. Then convey it to the players as it appears to you. Remember to start with their strongest sensory impression. If the first thing the PCs notice upon stepping into a room is the stench of decaying bodies, that is what you will want to tell them first, then fill in their other senses. "There are two bloated corpses lying on a stained drop-cloth in the middle of the floor, illuminated by light from a grimy picture window across from you. You can hear the buzzing of scores of flies. Glancing around, you see that there is no furniture, just a painting on the left wall. Even from the door, you can tell it has been mutilated." If you want to heighten the tension, toy with their two main senses: sight and sound. Sometimes you will want to rob them of those senses; at others, to overload them. And nothing gets players' interest like a hint of danger. Even if there is no immediate threat, you ought to drop a mysterious hint or two just to keep their paranoia high.

Also, save the most important for last, so it has the most impact. Don't make your players wait through the rest of your description before they can ask about that important detail, or they will be distracted from your description, and they will mistake the significance of the scene's details. In the room description above, for instance, players' attention will naturally be drawn to the mutilated painting as being somehow significant, and the importance of the bodies is played down.

HEIGHTENING HORROR

One of a referee's main tasks is to maintain an atmosphere of horror, by which we mean a sense of brooding menace, punctuated by moments of intense fright. There are a number of ways of achieving this.

Striving to be dramatic, as mentioned above, is important part of maintaining horror. Careful setting descriptions and NPC characterizations do wonders for helping to achieve a horrific atmosphere.

Next, remember that while you may not want to kill off player characters right and left, with NPCs you can afford to be ruthless. One way to enhance the PCs' own sense of danger is to have the creature they are investigating kill off lots of NPCs, beginning with strangers and working steadily closer to the PCs. With this sort of a progression, the players will feel the danger growing ever closer, enhancing their horror.

Finally, recognize that we humans are just not constructed to maintain one emotion unrelievedly. We need a change now and then, and when we return to the original emotion, it is fresh once again. Levity makes a good break from the oppressiveness of horror. For example, imagine that a PC named Mark Douglas is at home and hears strange scrabbling noises coming from the next room. Cautiously, he works his way to the door-

way and peeks inside. Suddenly, his little sister leaps up and screams, "Boo!" Mark jumps with fright, maybe gets angry, but when she collapses in laughter, he finally relaxes and starts tickling her to get even. Suddenly she looks over his shoulder and screams horrifically, and Mark turns to find a humongous thing, all muscles and teeth, looming over him. The end result is more terrifying than if the thing, rather than his sister, had startled him in the first place.

MAINTAINING MYSTERY

One of the things that can ruin enjoyment of a role-playing game is for the players to discover all of its secrets. After the PCs have encountered a particular creatures a few times, the players become familiar with its statistics, and it ceases to seem like a living being any longer. Eventually, after all of the creatures have been encountered, all of the PC types have been tried, and all of the standard plots have been spun, the game can begin to seem mechanical. But that doesn't have to happen. As long as the game world seems boundless, as long as the challenges the PCs face are always new, in other words, as long as there remains a powerful sense of mystery, player interest will stay high. Maintaining that sense of mystery isn't really that difficult to do. You just need to stay away from rigid definitions and to avoid tying things off completely.

That is why some things in **Dark Conspiracy** are left only partially defined. For example, somewhere in some other dimensional space the Dark Masters plot humanity's downfall. What are those Dark Masters like? No one knows. They are too elusive, too distant for the PCs to ever actually encounter them. After all, they've been working behind the scenes for millennia; it is unthinkable that any group of investigators would ever fully penetrate their secrets. The Masters, then, are the embodiment of mystery.

But even the Dark Minions are only provisionally defined. Real-world myths and legends reveal a great confusion of details concerning the supernatural. Just because the PCs encounter a vampire, for instance, that doesn't mean their next vampire will be anything like the first. In fact, it is your job to make sure that the next isn't, to maintain the mystery.

PROMOTING PARANOIA

Closely related to this rule of keeping the players guessing, is another of playing on their paranoia. Just as they can never be certain of a Dark Minion's plans or abilities, they cannot guess which of their fellow humans is an "Igor" (from the typical name for demented lab assistants in many "B" movies). But the PCs have many other reasons to be paranoid. For one thing, they are travelers in a world in which locals mistrust outsiders. Often, they will experience as much trouble from locals as they ever would from Dark Minions. Also, because laws vary dramatically from locale to locale, the PCs are almost guaranteed to transgress some of them. Referees can enhance player paranoia by having strange figures follow the PCs when they arrive in a new town. Just mentioning that a man at another table in the same restaurant has looked at them several times can be enough to make the PCs feel suspicious, in which case they will act suspicious, thereby drawing even more attention.

PREPARING ADVENTURES

When you create an adventure, it may help to think in terms of major elements of the task.

Adventure Concept: Generally, the first thing to do in creating a new adventure is to come up with a concept. It may be that you want to do one about a particular creature. Or perhaps you have a basic plot idea in mind. Good sources for either of these are myths, modern fiction, and tabloids. Once you have the basic concept, it is time to begin fleshing it out.

Adventure Location: Next, you need to choose a location for your adventure. Let imagery and familiarity be your primary guides. For instance, once we had set our sights on the vampire adventure, we decided to place it in Dayton, Ohio, partly because Dayton seems so innocuous, and we wanted the bizarre imagery of vampirism in such an unlikely location. But our author also chose it to demonstrate the value of familiarity. Having grown up in the Midwest, he felt most comfortable about using a Midwestern city, especially as this allowed him to extemporize freely during actual play.

Of course, location doesn't only mean geographical. It also includes things much smaller in scope. Perhaps you want to set part of the adventure in a meat-packing plant, or a mental institution. We started ours on Dayton's downtown streets and ended it on a farm outside of the city.

Adventure Plot: Now that you have your basic idea, it is time to develop a basic plot first, you need to come up with a very basic sequence of events. In our vampire adventure, for instance, it was decided that first the PCs would hear rumors of cannibalism in Dayton. Assuming that they followed those rumors, they would most likely stake out the downtown streets, whereupon they would encounter the vampire's followers, precipitating a fight. One of the followers would die, and his uniform would point the PCs to the Wright-Patterson Air Force base northeast of town. That location would turn out to be a red herring, but from it, the PCs would be pointed to the University of Dayton's ROTC program, which would in turn lead them to a private farm, where the vampire was hiding out. Having only encountered the minions, and having bested them easily the PCs were expected to be overconfident about their abilities, but would be rudely awakened by the surprising power of the vampire behind it all. Finally, another investigator would show up with ultraviolet lasers capable of destroying the creature.

Notice that in this synopsis, we have determined how to get the PCs involved at the beginning, what their most likely courses of action are through the middle, and how they can succeed at the end.

Other Things to Consider: When you create an adventure, design it to fit your player characters. Plant exciting equipment in it, for instance, to satisfy players who like to collect such things. In "Ravening Wolves," we have the UV lasers, for example. Similarly, we have included an important battle at the end, to satisfy the shoot 'em-up players. Players who enjoy a good mystery ought to be intrigued by the question of just what these creatures in Dayton are.

Next, referees should recognize that the illusion of great danger serves much better than actual danger. For example, when the PCs first encounter the "cannibals" in the adventure, they are outnumbered about five to one, which ought to make them very tense. The referee knows, of course, that once the first of those creatures falls, the rest of them will flee, so the PCs are actually in little danger, but the players have no way of knowing that.

Also, when you are designing adventures, make certain that the players always feel their characters are fighting a personal enemy, not merely struggling versus an impersonal environment. Suppose, for example, that you want to have them climb a particularly difficult mountain at one point in the adventure. But for the players, besting an abstract thing such as Nature is just no fun, and it is especially disappointing to lose a character to something as impersonal as a rock slide. However, if the PCs are on the mountain because of a personal opponent, then the rock slide takes on significance as a tool of the enemy, and the players will feel proud when their characters survive it.

Another thing to remember is to include things in the adventure that have little or nothing to do with the primary plot, so that your players will not be able to predict precisely what is going to happen, as they could if they knew that everything their characters experienced was completely significant. Plant a red herring or two. Have people show up from previous adventures (a hit man sent by an earlier opponent makes an interesting diversion, for example). If you have other adventures planned out ahead, you can plant the initial hints of them in the present adventure.

Finally, in order to make certain that all of your players are getting equal satisfaction from your adventure sessions, you may wish to design each new adventure to sort of "star" a different PC. In other words, if your group consists of a computer empath, a bounty hunter, a Mexican auto mechanic, and a video star, you could design a first adventure centered on computer work, a second involving the recapture of an escaped convict, and soon. Passing the attention around in this way not only encourages all of your players to feel completely involved in the campaign, it can also give you some adventure ideas you might not have thought of otherwise.

TIME AND MONEY

Remember that in **Dark Conspiracy** the emphasis is on story. We don't intend for you to keep track of every day of the PCs' lives, nor of exactly how much money they earn between adventures, nor of exactly how much they spend on meals and the like during adventures. Instead, we suggest you handle your campaign something like an anthology of stories. During each adventure, you know exactly how many days go by. But between adventures, the characters return to their careers for several months.

When an adventure begins, decide how much money each PC has available (based upon the character's career, and roughly how many months have passed since the last adventure. A good rule of thumb is to divide the career's listed money per term by 30, and then multiply that by the number of months since the last adventure.) But don't nitpick about money during the adventure. You'll want to charge the PCs for major costs, such as hotel rooms, travel expenses, and the like, but don't keep track of the price of every single meal they eat, every stamp they buy, etc. Excessive bookwork slows down the pace of play and kills the drama. Just assume they have enough pocket money to pay for such things. (Of course, in a particular adventure, you might want to strand the PCs somewhere with only a few bucks. In that case, it is perfectly reasonable to make them keep track of every penny they spend, because their momentary poverty is an important part of the adventure situation.)

Character aging can be kept track of in a similar manner. If the PCs are getting in two or three complete adventures per year of their life, for example, then after about nine or 10 adventures, they will have aged one term, which means that someone will

likely have to check for deterioration of attributes. If you prefer not to have them check so often, you can increase the number of adventures that can be fit into one term.

REWARDS AND EXPERIENCE

When your players complete an adventure session, their characters ought to receive suitable rewards. There are lots of things that can serve as rewards, depending upon the circumstances of the session. The PCs might get specialized equipment, or money, or favors, or perhaps they have made new contacts.

Be careful to make the rewards match the PCs' accomplishments. Don't go overboard. Remember, if you give them too much, not only are they going to tend to feel dissatisfied, you will also have more of a problem giving them challenging adventures later on. In general, it is a good idea to start out stingy, because you can always make up for it in later adventures as you gain a feel for how fast the characters are progressing. But if you start out too generous, it is very difficult to take things away later.

Skill Improvement: One of the most significant rewards of an adventure session is a character's increased experience. Among other things, this includes improvement of skills. Skill ratings are increased by use of experience points. In general, you should award one experience point per adventure session to anyone who survives. Bonus experience points can be awarded in one of two ways.

Referee Determination: A bonus point can be awarded for any skill that was used repeatedly or in a particularly dangerous situation. An additional bonus point or two can be awarded to a player who is particularly good at staying in character during the session or who performs a notably heroic deed.

Peer Determination: If you feel uncomfortable with judging your players' performances, you may want to rely upon your players to determine bonus points. To do this, simply have each player secretly write down two or three praiseworthy things that other players did during the session (they cannot vote for themselves). Then collect those notes and read them aloud. Every time an event is mentioned in those notes, that character who performed the action receives a bonus experience point. (Referees have the option to veto any event that they don't believe sufficiently exciting or important to gain an experience point.) This peer determination of bonus points helps make certain that players are rewarded for actions the referee might have forgotten, and it also encourages a shared sense of responsibility in the campaign.

Initiative: Referees should award one Initiative experience point for each session in which there is a life-threatening battle, awarding an extra point for a particularly outstanding shot or a superior feat of hand-to-hand combat.

CHAPTER TWELVE
Adventures

In this chapter, we provide you with sample adventures to get your campaign started. The first one is fully developed. After that, we give you a number of tabloid headlines (from actual tabloids), each with a synopsis of the story it referred to and a capsule description of how to use it for an adventure.

RAVENING WOLVES

In this adventure, the PCs go to Dayton, Ohio, to investigate rumors of cannibalism in that city. Actually, the rumors are due to servants of a bloodkin vampire who controls the head of the University of Dayton's ROTC program. The PCs wend their way through a welter of confusion and danger, finally to confront the bloodkin vampire and end its reign.

Scene One: The Dream

To introduce your PCs to this adventure, have all of them with any empathic rating at all make an Average test of their Empathy attribute. Then take aside the player who succeeds by the greatest margin, and tell that player that his or her character has had a very disturbing dream. (It is, in fact, the dream ascribed to Hadyn in the "Character Generation" chapter of the Player's Handbook.) Ideally, you ought to relate that dream as fresh to the player, telling it in your own words. But in any event, you should make sure that the details and atmosphere of the dream are fresh in that player's mind. (Also, it is probably best if you do not allow the player—or any of the others, for that matter—to reread the dream during play. Make him or her rely upon memory, to simulate the way that dreams slowly fade from the mind over the course of waking hours.)

After you have recounted the dream, let the player assemble the rest of the characters. Encourage the players to act out the phone calls and messages that are exchanged, in order to get them started thinking in terms of story-building and playing roles.

Make certain that at sometime during their discussion and preparation, the PCs catch a news story or two about possible cannibalism in Dayton. They might be radio or TV announcements, or perhaps newsfax accounts. In any case, if the players ask for details, tell them that the stories concern nude bodies of homeless people being found in some of downtown Dayton's alleys. According to the stories, their throats had been torn out and other body parts chewed to expose major blood vessels, but there was very little blood about. Police believed that stray animals had made the wounds and lapped up the blood, but the reporter insisted that the killings were by cannibals, because the wounds indicated blunter teeth, as of humans. Considered together, the murders have all occurred within a three-block radius of Deeds Park, which is located on North Dixie Drive, where the Mad River meets the Aliami River (see the map of Dayton).

Scene Two: The Trip to Dayton

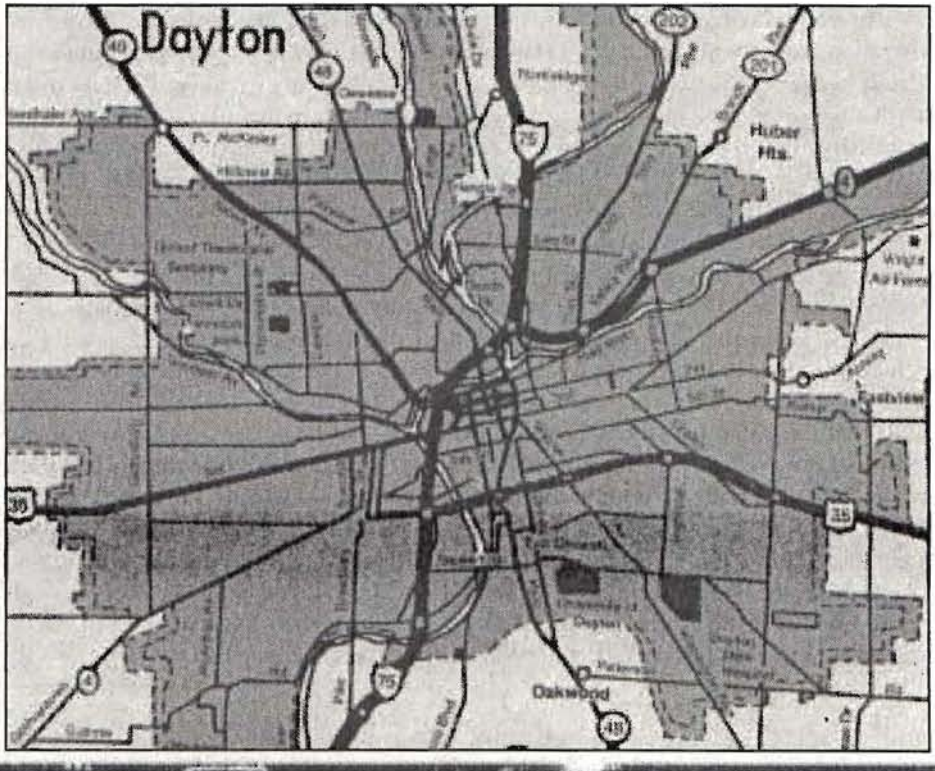
Depending upon what part of the world your PC group works from, the characters may have from a few hours' drive to multiple hours of flight time to travel to Dayton. This is a perfect time to introduce a random encounter. The encounter will help to make the players feel that the world is big—there is a lot going on in it that doesn't directly concern them—but because their investigation has barely begun, the encounter will not disrupt it unduly or confuse them. As always, you should choose something appropriate to the specific circumstances your group is in.

Scene Three: Arrival in Dayton

Once your PCs reach Dayton, have them take care of mundane details such as where they are going to stay, how they are going to get around town, etc. Unless they came from some place very near, they are going to be somewhat weary from their travel, so make sure they take time to eat and sleep before getting into any serious investigation. They can take part of this time to plan their investigation, if they like.

Scene Four: Stalking the Streets

Once your PCs are settled in, they will most likely spend the next few nights patrolling the streets of downtown Dayton, hoping to catch at least a glimpse of the cannibals. This is really their only good option, because they have no other leads at present. But let them try whatever else they might come up with; just have these other options come up pretty much as dead ends. For example, they might decide to question the



reporter who wrote the stories about cannibalism, but when they check, they find that he has disappeared. (He is hot on the trail of the "cannibals" himself, as will be revealed in the final two scenes.)

They could go to the police, of course, if they don't mind drawing official attention to themselves. Because the PCs are out-of-towners, however, the police will be very surly toward them, perhaps even abusive. Eventually, they will throw the PCs out, threatening to lock them up for obstructing justice.

In general, the purpose of this portion of the adventure is both to establish the atmosphere of Dayton and to frustrate the PCs somewhat, so that when the attack in the next scene comes, it will be all the more exciting.

If they continue to stalk the streets at night, on their third evening in town the PCs discover another victim. The first inkling they get is when they spot a bare foot and lower leg protruding from the shadowy mouth of an alley into the moonlight. When they investigate, they find the nude body of a dirty, middle-aged man, his throat torn out and his limbs gnawed horribly. A Difficult test of Observation or Tracking reveals several sets of booted footprints leading deeper into the alley. If the PCs follow them, they find that the prints run all the way to the next street, where the imprint of a heavy tire can be found in a patch of mud in the gutter. From appearances, a group of half a dozen "cannibals" boarded a truck at this spot and drove away.

Scene Five: The Immortals

The next evening after the PCs find the body of the old man, they finally meet up with the creatures behind the killings. As they are patrolling the streets, make an Average test of Observation secretly for each of them. Those who succeed notice that they are being followed by darkly clothed, pale-skinned figures that flit silently from shadow to shadow, just as in the empathic character's dream. They are lesser vampires, and they serve a bloodkin vampire that they know only as The Master, who hides out at a farm outside of the city. The Master always appears to them as an elegant human, and he has convinced them that as he feeds on them, they are becoming immortals just like himself. (Of course, they have been duped in this. Not only are they not immortal, but neither is he.)

From time to time, The Master lets them take a truck into town to hunt, in order to replenish their blood. They always park the truck in Deeds Park, and range from there.

If possible, have these lesser vampires tailing an individual PC. But if the PCs are traveling in groups, just make certain that there are twice as many lesser vampires as PCs, and play up the elusiveness of their movements, so that the PCs cannot be quite certain just how many there really are. Of course, they have no way of knowing just what they are, either. You want to make these creatures seem as threatening as possible, in order to get the players quite worked up before they are attacked.

When that attack comes, however, it turns out to be a fiasco. While the vampires fight ferociously, they are armed only with tooth and nail. Against unarmed street people that has always been sufficient. But against armed PCs, it is another thing entirely. Most likely, your PCs will be carrying at least switchblades and pistols. The vampires believe themselves immune to them, so they do not take the precautions normal opponents would (they don't bother to dodge, for instance). As a consequence, you should treat any successful hit on one of these lesser vampires as fatal.

When the first one falls, the others suddenly lose all faith in their immortality, and they flee, screaming, from the PCs. Panic lends wings to their feet, and they split up in all different directions, so most, if not all, of them should manage to escape. All except the one the PCs killed, that is. When the PCs investigate his body, they find that he is wearing military fatigues with a second lieutenant's bars on the collar and the name "Snyder" on the breast pocket. There is no unit patch on his shoulder. Although the players will have no way of knowing as yet that he was suffering from iron-deficiency porphyria, be certain to describe his physical appearance to them.

After the PCs have had a few minutes to look him over, police car sirens can be heard approaching. Someone in a nearby building heard the vampires screaming and called the police. If the PCs stick with the body, they are certain to be arrested on suspicion of murder, to be released later only upon payment of a bond of $5,000 apiece. If, instead, they flee, they can get back to their hotel room without too much trouble. A few hours later, they will be wakened by a police officer who wants to question them about the body, but he is merely part of a group of police canvassing the entire area and does not suspect the PCs more than anyone else.

Scene Six: Tracing New Clues

The PCs now have an important clue to the identity of the Dayton "cannibals": The fact that at least one of them was a Lieutenant Snyder, apparently an Air Force lieutenant. It is most likely that they will do some sort of computer search of Wright-Patterson's personnel listings, perhaps going to the Air Force base to do so. But this will reveal no listing for Snyder.

If they somehow check the Dayton police files, they will find that the police have identified the victim as Jack Snyder, a sophomore student at the University of Dayton, who has been on the missing persons list for about two weeks. If the PCs think to check for a forensics report, they will learn that Snyder was suffering from iron-deficiency porphyria and also has several sets of paired bite marks on his neck, some more fully healed than others. A search of back issues of newspapers will also reveal the fact that Jack Snyder was listed as a missing person, and it will give the name of his girlfriend—Lori MacNamara—who turned in the missing person report.

If the PCs manage to convince Snyder's girlfriend to talk with them, she will reveal that he disappeared along with a couple of buddies, and that the last place she remembers him going to was an ROTC party at the country home of Major Gerald Leeds, the university's ROTC director. Checking with any other offices on campus will generally result in an answer of "I'm sorry, but we are not authorized to give out that sort of information." If the PCs are especially convincing at one of these offices, they will learn only that Snyder was an above-average student and a member of ROTC. It is easy enough for them to learn that Major Leeds is the director of the ROTC program.

Scene Seven: The Lecher

It is likely that your PCs will go to the ROTC office to interview Major Leeds and that they will try to interview Snyder's girlfriend, Lori MacNamara, as well. If they call Lori's dorm room, a roommate will answer and explain that Lori is at class. She will not give out any other information, but will take a message to have Lori call the PCs when she returns.

MAJOR GERALD LEEDS



Level: Experienced

Skills: Act/Bluff 6, Leadership 5, Instruction 5, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 4, Persuasion 6, Small Arms (Pistol) 4, Willpower 4

Initiative: 3

Physical Description: Major Leeds is a slim man of moderate height, with a thinning gray crewcut and a pencil mustache. He appears to be in his mid-50s. An easy smile is generally upon his lips, but his eyes shift about continuously, as if his mind is constantly working to recognize an advantage to be gained in every situation.

Motivation: *Spade King:* Major Leeds is completely self-centered but highly charismatic. He has obtained his present, quite comfortable, position through careful manipulation of those around him, feigning friendship with those in power and creating scandals about those who have stood in his way. In person, he is quite likable, but he uses people for his own ends. A few months ago, he met a bloodkin vampire who promised him wealth and power if he would serve as a recruiter of "servants" for The Master to feed upon. Leeds has used his position as head of the University of Dayton's ROTC program to lure healthy young students out to his country house, where The Master is hidden.

Diamond Queen: Leeds also has an insatiable lust for young women. In fact, one of the primary reasons that he agreed to shelter The Master and work for him is because he gets his pick of all females that are "recruited." Leeds has quite a harem of young women (whom The Master has drained of their will) locked up in his country house.

Major Leeds is much easier to find. His secretary will make an appointment for the PCs for whatever time they like, provided that it is during normal business hours. Or the PCs can talk to Leeds by phone. Either way, Leeds will tell them that he knows nothing more about Snyder's disappearance. He will say that Snyder did come to the ROTC party at his country house, but he left about midnight, and that Leeds did not see him again after that. If the PCs meet Leeds in person, play him according to the description.

The most important thing for a referee to keep in mind during this scene is that the PCs have to become suspicious that Leeds was somehow involved in Snyder's original disappearance, so that they will want to investigate Leeds' country place. If the PCs do not become suspicious enough after investigating Leeds, you can have Lori MacNamara tip them off. If Lori does not know of their investigation, and therefore cannot call them, you might even have a hint dropped by a police detective who contacts the PCs about Synder's death. One way or another, then, you have to get them pointed toward the country house, in order for the next scene to take place.

Scene Eight: Reconnoiter

Having learned of Leeds' involvement with Snyder's disappearance, the PCs go to Leeds' country house to take a surreptitious look around. The place is located along a secondary road about 20 kilometers southwest of Dayton, an agricultural area that has since been abandoned. The grounds are fenced in and heavily wooded up front; to either side are cattle pastures now gone to waist-high weeds and brush. Beyond the wood lies a cleared area containing the house and barn, and behind that is land that used to be cornfields.

Most likely, the PCs will attempt to sneak onto the property, probably through the cover of the wood, in order to scout the place out. (If, instead, they drive right up the lane to the house, skip this scene and go to the next: The Master Takes Flight.) As they slip through the woods, however, guards are waiting for them. If the PCs make their attempt at night (which is probable), these guards are more lesser vampires who have been convinced that they are immortal and that Snyder's death was because he lost faith in The Master. During the day, the lesser vampires are replaced by new recruits (Novice NPCs) who want to prove their worthiness to become lesser vampires.

In either case, let the PCs work their way to about the middle of the wood, then tell them that they spot multiple figures flitting through the trees ahead of them. As they watch, more and more figures appear, until it is obvious that the PCs are terribly outnumbered. Soon, more figures are visible to their flanks, and as the PCs retreat, the figures try to outrun them, to cut them off from escape. Eventually, the PCs will be forced to fight just to get free. Their attackers are unarmed (human guards have melee weapons), but there are so many of them. The trick is to make the PCs feel outnumbered enough to retreat, without making it seem that there is an entire army based at the farm. You might even want to have some new guards arrive with firearms, if necessary, to make the PCs flee. Also, have the guards move faster than the PCs, especially if the PCs stop occasionally to fire, so that they will be closing on them, and eventually the PCs will be reduced to fighting hand to hand.

Just when things begin to seem hopeless, however, a new factor enters the conflict: The PCs see a pair of headlights rushing headlong across the pasture toward them, as if intent upon running them down (or they hear its motor and suspension buckling as it crosses the pasture, if it's daylight). But as the vehicle gets closer, the PCs' attackers flee from it. Finally, the PCs recognize it as a man in a jeep, with fluorescent black lights strapped to the frame and roll bar. He is firing an Uzi into the air as he approaches, to help drive the creatures away.

Stopping in front of the PCs, the man yells for them to get in, then he drives them back to the road. Along the way, he introduces himself as Fred Brody, writer of the articles about the Dayton cannibals. He and his brother had been investigating the story and had learned that the creatures are actually vampires. Theorizing that they are susceptible to ultraviolet light, his brother, an electronics expert, created two scratch-built UV lasers, but before they could come to the farm with them, Leeds hired some thugs to have his brother killed. Now that the PCs have become involved, Brody hopes that they will join forces with him.

The lasers are in the back of the jeep. Each consists of a bazooka-sized firing mechanism, attached by electrical cables to a backpack rack containing 12 car batteries, a

very heavy contraption. Fred intends to use one, but any of the PCs can use the other, which had been intended for his brother. He explains that they had better decide quickly, because the head vampire is sure to flee the farm any moment now, and he wants to kill it before it can get away.

FRED BRODY



Level: Experienced

Skills: Foreboding 6, Observation 6, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 4, Small Arms (Rifle) 4, Willpower 4

Initiative: 3

Physical Description: Fred Brody is tall and athletic, with clear blue eyes and a shock of red hair. He always wears a preoccupied expression, as if he is puzzling out something new every moment. His age is 32.

Motivation: *Spade 10:* Brody is ambitious, but that ambition takes the form of always digging for the truth, not necessarily just to see his name in print. He is a devoted journalist.

Heart 7: Also, Brody is fairly outgoing, and despite his preoccupied look, he is very good at remembering names and details, which makes people feel that he cares about them. Most of his friends would describe him with the word "trustworthy."

Scene Nine: The Master Takes Flight

Brody presses to make an immediate attack on the farm house, using the vehicles to get down the lane quickly before The Master can escape. If the PCs stall him, within a few minutes they will see a limousine leave the farm in a great hurry. It is The Master and a few loyal servants fleeing to no place in particular, merely away. Immediately thereafter, a van full of other servants follows. If the PCs want to give chase, the referee will have to wing it.

If, however, the PCs agree with Brody, they will arrive at the farm house just as The Master's limo is preparing to leave. The driver is the last to get inside, and the van behind the limo is still being loaded. As the PCs approach, three lesser vampires with Uzis take up position behind the van and fire on them. While the van blocks the lane between the house and barn, the limo prepares to make a swing around the barn, in order to escape past the PCs' vehicles. From this point on, the adventure devolves to a straightforward firefight.

EPILOGUE

After The Master and his servants have been defeated, have the players wind down by describing in brief their plans for returning home. Mention that a few days later new stories surface about some sort of an armed feud on a farm near Dayton, and that the bodies of several students from the University of Dayton were found there, many of them people who had been reported as missing persons. There are no more stories about cannibals in Dayton. (You might, however, want to mention other stories that can lead to the PCs' next adventure, so that they can be puzzling over them until you meet next.)

This adventure should give the PCs a base of about 2 experience points each, perhaps 3. They may earn more than that if, at adventure's end, the referee or their peers decide that they have done something unusually valorous or entertaining. They won't have been paid anything for this adventure, but they might have acquired some more equipment that may be of use in the future

OTHER ADVENTURES

The following are some of the best stories from actual tabloids, stories which can easily be converted into **Dark Conspiracy** adventures. In each case, we give you the actual headline and the tabloid it came from, followed by a synopsis of the story and a general outline of a suggested adventure to be run from it. We also include other interesting headlines from each issue, so that you can obscure the significance of the major story by using the others as red herrings. Following these examples, you can develop adventures from tabloids you find, allowing you to hand the tabloid to your players as their PCs' daily news.

THE DAY JULIO IGLESIAS "DIED"

Synopsis: This front-page headline has a color photo of the corpse in the morgue, and it does, indeed, resemble Julio Iglesias. According to the story, the body is actually that of a criminal who had been shot repeatedly. But an ambulance attendant thought it was Iglesias, and the story spread rapidly, even prompting suicide attempts among Iglesias' fans.

Adventure: What if it really were Julio Iglesias who was killed, and he has been replaced by a changeling? A possible plot might work like this: dark elves kill Iglesias and replace him with a changeling, but someone saw it happen and spread the story, which the dark elves then had to suppress. If the PCs go to Toyaltita, Mexico, where the killing took place, they find themselves the target of attacks by other changelings planted to keep anyone from finding out the truth. Meanwhile, the dark elves are using the false Iglesias to get close to other famous singers and replace them, as well. Their intent is to put together a multi-star concert at Madison Square Garden in New York, which they have booby trapped to collapse into an underground cavern, killing and maiming tens of thousands of spectators. The PCs have to discover the dark elves plot and stop it before it comes to fruition.

Other Interesting Stories in This Issue

Referees may wish to include these as background for the Iglesias story, or perhaps even develop them into adventures as well.

Horror of the Screaming Skull: According to the account, the skull of a man wrongfully hanged for rape on July 3, 1701 has haunted ever since the castle he owned. Each year, on the anniversary of his death, the skull has a screaming fit, threatening doom to everyone within earshot. People who have tried to remove the skull from the table where it rests have all died mysteriously.

Dolphins Trained to Kill Frogmen with Nose Guns: The US Navy is strapping .45-caliber weapons to the noses of dolphins and training them to butt up against swimmers, causing the guns to fire.

Five-Month-Old Baby Charged with Murder: In this story, the aforementioned baby has killed nurses with beams of light from its eyes. It was caught in the act by a hospital security guard watching by remote camera.

Nine-Year-Old Is a Miracle Healer: According to this story, Helena Molinez of Villa Maria, Chile, has even performed surgery with a rusty knife and her patients are

healed. Perhaps the PCs would like to recruit this young empath. Perhaps some secret lab will beat them to it.

CHILD TALKS TO DEAD GRANDPA—ON OLD TELEPHONE

Synopsis: Kristin Leone, a nine-year-old native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, was heartbroken when her maternal grandfather, Ralph Davenport, died of cancer. One Sunday morning after church, about a month after he died, an old phone in the family's attic—a phone that had been disconnected—began ringing, and when the parents answered it, the voice on the other end identified itself as belonging to the dead man. He asked to speak to Kristin, and encouraged her not to lose herself in mourning for him. Now he calls her every Sunday.

Adventure: If we assume that "disconnected" means canceled by the phone company, not physically disconnected, then this story becomes a perfect opportunity for the PCs to make contact with a Dark Minion computer that has slipped free of Dark Minion control. According to this theory, the Dark Minions took Ralph Davenport from the Minneapolis hospital shortly before his death, and removed his brain to slice and use for circuitry in some of their computers.

But Davenport was a stubborn old coot with a high Empathy rating, and his brain tissue soon reintegrated itself into his own personality. Now that brain has the power of a number of Dark Minion computers at its control, and it has used them to manipulate the Minneapolis phone system, in order to reopen the line to the attic phone, so that he could call his family for help. He needs someone to come take the various computers his brain is divided among and hide them from the Dark Minions before they recognize his integration and shut him down.

If the PCs investigate this story, they will have to have someone with Computer Empathy run the phone lines from the attic phone, to discover where Davenport's component computers are located. Then they will have to infiltrate each location and steal the computer there. It won't be an easy task, especially as each time they disconnect a computer to move it, Davenport's personality will fragment. But if they manage to pull it all off, they will have a sentient supercomputer as a life-long friend.

Other Interesting Stories in This Issue

Some of them are strange, but each of these stories can add to the **Dark Conspiracy** atmosphere.

Hitler Captured: Actually, this story got the biggest typeface on the cover. Apparently, the more than 100-year-old Nazi leader was on his way to Iraq, to help Saddam Hussein defeat the American forces there. However, he was captured by South American Nazi hunters.

Hitler is just the sort of bigger-than-life figure who could easily be a Dark Minion himself, thus accounting for his age.

Sky Diver Plunges Two Miles—And Lives!: Mike Butela had quite a fright when his parachute wouldn't open during a skydiving event but miraculously, he survived the fall. Butela says that he blacked out before he hit the ground, and then he doesn't remember anything until he felt himself moving his legs. The story does not state what his injuries were, so you can assume (for purposes of an adventure) that he woke up without any. Perhaps Butela is actually a very advanced empathic healer who fixed himself up without knowing it. Alternatively, he may have been snatched by extraterrestrials while falling, and the memory of the subsequent experiments blacked out. He might be someone interesting for the PCs to make contact with.

Crippled UFO Sends SOS to Earth: Supposedly, scientists have received a mayday message from a passenger UFO blown out of existence by an enemy warship near the Great Cluster of Hercules. The message has taken 25,000 years to get here. Of course, there may actually be a proto-dimension somewhere in which time runs backward or something, so that another UFO could still leave Earth and aid the beleaguered vessel. Or maybe the story is just a hoax perpetrated by the ETs to keep us from realizing that UFOs come from inside the Earth, as an ad in this issue claims.

Six-Foot Lobster Turns Deep-Sea Divers Into Jellyfish: A restaurant owner in Prestwick, Scotland, is offering $15,000 for anyone who will catch it so he can cook it. What if the lobster is just the first evidence of a substance that creates giant creatures as in H. G. Wells' *Food of the Gods*?

WOUNDED CIVIL WAR SOLDIER FOUND IN GEORGIA

Synopsis: Benjamin Couch was found beside a Georgia highway, wearing the uniform of a Confederate private, and with a Yankee musket ball lodged in his left leg. He claims he was fighting in the Battle of Gettysburg, when suddenly he was shot in the leg and began to bleed severely. He blacked out from shock and blood loss, only to find himself in 1990. Historians have found records of his service in the Confederate Army, and psychiatrists have determined that he is quite sane. He is now being held in a government hospital for reeducation, in order to integrate him into our society.

Adventure: Couch's story is exactly true. He is a natural empath of great power, one of the few humans to ever develop the Dimension Walk skill without having been taught it. In the stress of the Battle of Gettysburg, his mind reached out and tapped into a nearby proto-dimensional portal, which somehow launched him into the future. The humanoid ETs want him in order to determine how he did it, so that they can exploit time travel to their own advantage. Elements of the US government want him as a weapon with which to combat the Dark Minion invasion. If the PCs believe the story printed about him, they may want to rescue him, to allow him to live as a free man. But they have to find him first, and both the Dark Minions and the government are going to do everything possible to stop them.

Other Interesting Stories in This Issue

Each of these stories is also ripe for use as the core to an adventure.

Miracle Pooch Comes Back From the Dead!: A puppy owned by 11-year-old Evan Davies, of Builth Wells, Wales, followed a rabbit down a hole and did not return for 36 days. During that time, Davies kept a vigil by the hole, calling the dog's name out repeatedly. Eventually, the dog returned from the hole, in perfect health, and Davies is tickled pink. But what if it is not really his dog, but a morlock device sent to lure Davies, and then other children, into their underground lair?

Escaped Maniac Butchers Beauties—And Eats Them!: Mutilated corpses of beautiful women have been discovered in woods of Portugal, Spain, France, and even Italy. Apparently, the women were killed, then their hearts, lungs, and brains were removed, cooked, and eaten. Authorities are looking for an escaped maniac named Isidro Lopez Cruz, certain that he is responsible. But what if he is actually a dupe for some larger evil?

Runaway Chainsaw Tried to Kill Me!: Breg Waller, of Colombia, South Carolina, nearly had his foot removed by a chainsaw when he dropped it. Waller claims it was a natural accident, because he had disconnected the automatic kill switch. Of course, as **Dark Conspiracy** referees, we know that Colombia has recently been the scene of numerous accidents involving machines that come to life. Waller is merely afraid to admit the truth: The chainsaw had a mind of its own.

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DPI 1010
$30.00
ISBN 1-892886-01-4

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