

DEGENERESIS

PRIMAL PUNK ROLEPLAYING

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ENGLISH EDITION BY
POSTHUMAN STUDIOS

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DISCLAIMER

Degenesis encourages tolerance and communication between all people. The world of *Degenesis* is based on today’s world, but distorted into a fantastic future. Conflicts within the game world do not correspond naturally to reality—nor are they desired in reality—but serve to create tension for game play. None of the cultures introduced in *Degenesis* is better than any other. We have consciously avoided the use of terms like “race” because we find them arbitrary and discriminating—we reject racism. Illustrations featuring violence are not meant to encourage violent acts, they

simply depict a cruel world and the means often required to get by in it. Culture and civilization—in some ways, the “goal” of *Degenesis*—are accompanied by hope. Nevertheless, we realize that this game contains a number of mature themes and illustrations, so we recommend it only for those who are 16-years old or older.

WEB SUPPORT

News, downloads, information, and other resources are available at degenisrpg.com (english) and degenis.de (german)

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Book 1:
Primal Punk

SUMMER

“Don’t do that to me.” Nebe’s eyes were wet with tears. She clasped Nik’s hands, her fingers so pale and fragile around his weathered mitts, the strong hands of a young man driven by a higher calling. He yearned to grasp a sword and shield, not a pitchfork and scythe, his fist held high in the air as he stood before the corpses of vanquished foes. From his throat a victory cry would bellow forth. Hundreds . . . no, *thousands* of comrades would join in. The world would bow before him!

The two lovers sat on the ground, stubbly yellow grass pressed flat around them from their sitting. They came here often. Days ago, the northwest wind had dragged red ash from the Borca crater here, dusting the ruins and the land. Now, the dust trickled away from broken window sills and cracked bastions with every gust. Nik and Nebe loved this place—each in their own way. For Nik, it was a snapshot of time. The rows of ruins climbing the hillside, finally swallowed by the dark pines, were a glimpse into the past. His forefathers had once lived here. For Nebe, this was a retreat from the community in which she could give in to her melancholy without being berated as foolish by the fossilized old ladies at the village well. And, it was the place where, two winters ago, she had confessed her love to Nik.

“Nik . . . you’re not listening to me.”

“You’ve got nothing to say. None of it is important.”

“And what you’re saying is more important?”

Nik responded with silence. She wanted to protest, but was again pressed to retreat.

“But why . . .” she paused and clawed her fingers into his palm, so hard that it hurt even her. Physical pain was much easier to withstand than the anguish in her soul. “Why did you take that step with me? The engagement?”

“I was blind then.”

Nebe was low in the hierarchy of the village. Against all obstacles they had come together and asserted themselves. Her life consisted of conflicts.

Nik gave Nebe a stern look before continuing. “Everything here bores me.”

They both turned their attention to the lands stretched out before them. A small path snaked its way from the hills into the valley, cutting its way across an eroded tar road. The road came from nowhere and into nowhere it disappeared. Black smoke rose from the chimneys of the humble huts below. From this height, they looked like upside-down baskets of bast fiber; a little basket for every family. On the edges of the valley, the stone creations of their ancestors obtruded: massive blocks, brown and sunken, creased with age, as though the creator had personally pressed them back into the soft earth. The overseer, living up there with his following of dumb bruisers, had a good view of his folk in the vale below. Nik asked himself what lay beyond this valley and the next. Were there other realms larger than that of their own?

Their community counted over seventy souls with fifty men and women trained in combat. Up until two days ago, a larger army was unimaginable to Nik. His glance wandered through the valley until it reached Sun Pass. Every morning, the sun began its daily march there, greeting its subjects with the first rays of morning from between the dark boulders. Below the pass, the valley widened into a large depression as though gathering strength before cutting a path through the massif like a blunt spade. There, dozens of campfires billowed dark black smoke into the sky—wet wood, Nik deduced. The mighty pines that days ago covered the hillsides, thick and bushy, had been pushed back. Sad stumps remained. From Nik and Nebe’s vantage point, it was impossible to recognize the men and women at the fires—only that they were numerous. An entire company of Anabaptists.

Nebe lowered her eyes and released her grip on Nik’s hands. She passed her hand over her eyes, smudging dust and tears into a warlike streak.

“You will lose me,” she said.

"I will not." His voice contained no emotion. She was already now a part of his past, a footnote to his life. "My decision stands."

Love no longer stoked the fires of his heart. It bored him. He needed more: blood on his hands, the cries of the dying, torsos speared on his lance. Fame! A blazing torch of passion, kindled by the strongest wind, inextinguishable. It was a lust for intensity that could only be satiated in the unknown. The orgiasts of the Anabaptists taught him this the night before.

"Nik, the Anabaptists are lost souls. Their words are false." Her voice quivered. "They're mixed up. Their God is a monster, sending them from war to war. Everywhere they see only the evil!"

Nik stood up and met Nebe's angry face. She was beautiful, even in such a moment. Her lips, though pressed together, were still full, her dirty cheeks and her denying eyes had something impish to them.

"I will return." It was a weak attempt; even though it was what they both wanted to hear, it was far from satisfying.

"You'll be snubbed out!" she screamed at him. "They're sending you to the east! They want to go against the voivods. Old Semka told me. You know the stories! Skinned cadavers impaled on posts! I didn't want to believe that one of us would join up with this insanity. What do you want there? We have everything we need here!" Nik took her by the forearms and pushed her from him. His nostrils flared. Anger rose in him. If the orgiasts saw him like this ...

He gazed momentarily down at the plain. He could see their banners fluttering in the wind, towering high above the darkened thrones. War banners.

"There," she stabbed her finger at the campfires. "With them there is only war, war, war! The entire land is a damned battlefield!"

"That's exactly why I want to go."

In a single moment her strength left her. Her eyes became sullen, her youthful face suddenly appeared ancient. She looked

past him into the distance. He searched her gaze, but saw nothing but hollowness. Two people, two worlds. He backed a few steps away from her and took in every detail. She wore a dress of light-colored linen, worn only on special occasions, mainly for weddings. He noted the bright bands on her wrists—a display of his devotion and love. She wore the jewelry of her mother, the polished stones, half concealed, glimmering over the seam of their setting. The woman who stood before him was not the farm girl who toiled the earth daily or carried the water up from the springs. This was supposed to be a special day for her.

He turned and went. The way down into the valley was steep and rocky, and he felt every stone through the leather soles of his sandals. The banners were waiting for him. The orgiasts would take him in, pat him on the shoulder, call him a brother; they would understand.

Nik paused, taking one look back up the hill, but she was gone, slipped away into the ruins where two winters ago they had first professed their love. The circle was closed; the beginning was now the end. Nik closed his eyes, pivoted, and reopened them upon the campfires of the Anabaptists below.

WHAT IS DEGENESIS?

Eschaton. The End. Yesterday high culture; today the stone age. Fire rained from the sky, burning the land and the people. The Earth trembled, breaking apart in anguish, steaming with fever. But the planet did not perish. It changed.

History vanished, taking with it ten thousand years of culture and wisdom. Scattered survivors fought like rabid animals for food and clean water. With empty eyes, they wandered aimlessly through the crumbling edifices of their ancestors. The ruins of a once mighty civilization were stripped completely away with time, like a snake slipping from its dead skin. Freed from morality and ethics, and naïve as children, the survivors gazed upon destroyed Europe—lands tormented by the forces of nature, poisonous forbidden zones—and knew only that they must assert themselves against this environment or perish with it.

Time went on. The smoke over the large craters subsided, and the people built a new culture around their lives. Yet it was shaky, with few nails to hold it together. Now and then a community collapsed in the din—but its raw materials found use in other places. Civilization was a patchwork of scavenged detritus, but nonetheless new life emerged after years of descent.

Degeneration is the story of mankind's struggle in the wake of Earth's greatest catastrophe: a rain of massive asteroids. Europe and Africa have been cut off from the other continents and battle against each other for control of the known world.

In Europe, the people are finally emerging from a dark age that spanned half a millennium, whereas Africa has become complacent and corrupt after centuries of wealth and splendor. Meanwhile, a new threat to mankind has emerged. With the asteroids came a new and sinister life form that poisons the Earth and its creatures.

The year is now 2585. Europe is splintered into multiple, competing cultures. The people of Borca cling to the rusted relics of the ancients; the Franks cull the lulling words of the Pheromancers; Purgare is a charred land on one side, a fertile plain embroiled in a border war with Balkhan on the other; the Pollener wander in large caravans from oasis to oasis, before these spots of green are devoured by rot; Hybrispania

is burdened with a decades-old fight for freedom. Across the Mediterranean lies the biggest danger for this decaying Europe: an awakened Africa with an extremely powerful merchant cult, the Neolibyans, that prepares for war.

Outlaws, explorers, adventurers, and idealists are drawn to the wilderness in search of the remains of a mysterious past or the promise of an unimaginable future. Others—Chroniclers, Spitalians, Anabaptists, and other adherents to organizations, gangs, and cults—traverse the aching land, searching for knowledge or crusading against the demons of the past.

Seven cultures, thirteen cults. Who will triumph in this age of savagery and forge the future into their own image? Will it be those who conjure the glory of the past? Or those who yearn to construct a new world atop the rubble of human arrogance?

Degeneration deals with hope and despair, with people entangled in the battle between the civilized and the barbaric, questioning how far our species has truly evolved. The world of *Degeneration* mirrors a destroyed Garden of Eden and hints at how life carries within it the mysteries of good and evil, ignorance and enlightenment, culture and barbarism.

Degeneration showcases the events of this world. Players channel the post-apocalyptic citizens of Earth by creating player characters (PCs). These characters strive against the evils of a world gone mad to attain glory, riches, or the death of their enemies. The world of *Degeneration* is shaped by the actions of the bold—whether for good or for evil remains to be seen.

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

Roleplaying games require one or more players and a gamemaster. The players control the main characters of the story. The gamemaster directs the action of the story and controls the opposition (known as non-player characters, or NPCs), the props, the setting, and everything else the player characters may encounter. Players and gamemasters must work together to build an intense and interesting adventure. As a player, you control a player character (PC). During the course of the game, the gamemaster (GM) will describe events or situations to you. The plot given by the game master must, as a consequence, be flexible, as the players can freely choose where their characters will go, with whom they will speak, and how they will act. As you roleplay through some situations, the gamemaster will probably ask you to roll some dice, and the resulting numbers will represent your character's attempted action. The gamemaster uses the rules of the game to interpret the dice rolls and the outcome of your character's action.

The world of *Degeneration* is your world; you create the characters who inhabit it. Using your imagination and the rules system, you guide your characters through the intrigues of the various post-apocalyptic cults and have a hand in shaping the mythologies of the surviving cultures.

WHAT WILL I FIND IN THIS BOOK?

BOOK 1: PRIMAL PUNK

In this section, the reader is introduced to the world of *Degeneration*: the seven known cultures and the thirteen cults that populate the post-apocalyptic landscape. The first chapter gives a short overview of the world, while the following chapters go into detail about the cultures and cults.

BOOK 2: CATHARSYS

This section describes how a character functions using the game mechanics and statistics of the CatharSys game system—what a die role determines, how a battle takes place, and other rules of the game.

BOOK 3: ALMANAC

This section details the equipment characters may use throughout the game—the weapons, armor, and other equipment preferred by each cult.

BOOK 4: FORBIDDEN ZONE

This section lays out a detailed timeline, which holds the key to the true facts surrounding the Eschaton, the fall of mankind. The remaining chapters describe the enemies of *Degeneration*, along with information about roleplaying. Finally, the scenario *Halls of Deceit* is included, which gives new players an exciting introduction into the world of *Degeneration*.

V > CHAPTER 1 FORWARD

AT THE BEGINNING STANDS THE END

A fly flitted through the streets of Berlin, zipping past deserted buildings, battering itself uselessly against the boarded-up windows of abandoned office buildings in which no one would ever work again. The city had been abandoned; the sweet springtime breeze was its sole companion. Newspapers and books littered the streets, cars burned, and graffiti covered the walls: “The End Is Here!”

City folk had fled to the country—less chance of fire, they believed. Only the eternal optimists, skeptics, and insane remained in their grim city. They hunkered down, fire axes in hand. The butchered corpses of looters dangled limply from darkened street lamps. The greedy cawing of crows echoed through the city’s abandoned alleys.

Above all of this, a new cluster of stars flickered maddeningly in the mid-day sky. Originally, one could discern them only at night. Their presence grew perceptibly every day. Soon, they sparkled brilliantly even through the daylight hours. In the final hours, no one would forget the immense flaming torches that crashed down from overhead.

Many people rejected technology and looked for salvation in faith. Traditional beliefs experienced a massive resurgence. “End of the World” cults exploded, and people gathered in the churches of the old religions seeking comfort from their impending doom.

Two days before the apocalypse, mass suicides, looting, and vigilantism spread across the Earth. These were the first savage acts that signaled the dehumanization that was to follow the cataclysm. The disintegration of humanity had begun.

With one day left in which to live an entire lifetime, *Homo sapiens* wallowed in their basest emotions: love, hate, lust—and fear. The world exploded in a chaotic maelstrom of passions, irresistible and repugnant in their appeal. Orgies of unbridled violence erupted in the cities and villages around the world. Acts of extreme sacrifice and heartfelt warmth also occurred in these dire times, but they were no more than drops in an ocean of despair and blood.

Alarms blared, broken glass littered the streets, the heat and flame from the asteroid strikes twisted metal and incinerated anyone foolish enough to stay above ground. The end was at hand.

THE DAY AFTER

2073: the year of the apocalypse. The world trembled and shook beneath the blows that fell from outer space. Cultures disintegrated, never to recover. Ten thousand years of civilization were snuffed out in a single day.

Europe was hit especially hard by the asteroid bombardment. Raging fires and electrostatic discharges lit the night. The following days were filled with clouds of smoke, steaming asteroid debris, and dust. The rain was acidic and the air was poisonous. The cities stank of death.

Things were going to get worse. Earthquakes and volcanoes

created new catastrophes for the few survivors. Extreme tectonic tension blasted Mother Earth apart, throwing land masses the size of cities high into the air. Fault lines shifted and magma flowed across the devastated wasteland. Along a curved line of craters that ran from northern Germany through the Alps to the boot of Italy, and as far as the northern coast of Africa, an impassable chasm split the Earth.

In the center of northern Germany, lava bubbled for months, eventually cooling into a gray, slag-covered desert. Villages that barely survived the initial bombardment were crushed by flying debris thrown up from the vicious chasm. Lava poured through the streets, melting cars, filling basements, and burying bunkers. Poisonous gas wafted eastward; the dying had no end.

Red crater dust and volcanic ash drifted in thick endless clouds across the sky, casting the land into twilight. The sun was no more than a distant, glossy marble.

ICE AGE

The years of darkness demanded their tribute. Frigid winds raged across the burned-out ruins. Snow lay thick on the ravaged streets. It was as if the world wished to conceal the horrors of the past under an impenetrable sheet of ice. An unending winter—an ice age—had begun.

The polar caps expanded, stealing the oceans’ water and piling it into towering, monolithic glaciers. Northern Europe suffocated beneath the snow. The water table sank, and the seas receded. The coastal ruins were suddenly kilometers away from the beaches that had once supplied them with so much wealth and affluence.

Things went much better for Africa. Equatorial jet streams pressed the dust clouds away to the north and south; in the midst of global suffocation, the Dark Continent was able to breathe. Climates changed, and cold reigned in Europe and southern Africa. The oppressive heat over north and central Africa dissolved into a Mediterranean clime. Warmer, more humid winds drove rain-filled clouds from the Atlantic over Africa, where it fell upon the still young, subtropical forests. The Sahara bloomed, while the rest of the world was poised to freeze to death.

EVOLUTION

Decades passed after the great catastrophe—decades in which mankind had time to give a name to that terrifying event: *Eschaton*. The knowledge of what really happened passed away, replaced with legends and prophecies. Nothing remained of that horrible time but scribbled descriptions of unimaginable horrors.

Homo sapiens had to adapt to the new world. Anyone too lazy or incompetent to find new methods of survival was quickly plucked from the gene pool. The evolutionary tree was crudely trimmed; only the strongest branches would grow. Those who remained were robust and eager to reform the changed world. Yet still, they huddled in their basements and bunkers, foraging only as far as needed to find nourishment and fuel for their fires. Their time would eventually come.

THAW

The robust planet naturally sought to heal itself after the catastrophe. The dirt and ash blasted high into the atmosphere by the asteroids—the trigger for the new ice age—eventually fell back to earth, trapped in raindrops and absorbed by the oceans. Though red dust clouds still arose frequently in the wastes of Europe, the Earth emerged from its dark shadow. The cold abated and the spell was broken.

The ice had hardly broken before marauders began looting the ruins. They uncovered the technological remains of the ancients, dragging their finds back underground to dissect and admire the mysterious treasures. They no longer understood the meanings and functions of the objects, but these artifacts were their only connection to a lost past.

Mercenaries, prostitutes, slave hunters—the entire range of human sin, malice, and despair—flooded the land without legislation. Across the wastes, clans banded together or battled for food and weapons. Of the few people who survived the Eschaton, most were only concerned with how best to bash in another's skull.

Civilization was a withered plant, yet over and over again new buds formed across the wastelands. Some were snubbed out almost as soon as they formed while others covered the land like tangled weeds. Mankind was not going to give up so easily.

THE DUST

Like a blood-stained shroud, the red asteroid dust billowed across Europe. Wherever the asteroids had landed, the dust created dunes that rippled out from the point of impact. Disease and pestilence followed the dust wherever it blew.

The northern Europeans believed the dust represented the flowing blood of a wounded planet. According to legend, only when the dust is completely blown away or swallowed by the Earth will life again blossom in the wasteland.

CROWS AND LIONS

Europe: never-ending cold, forgotten ruins, suffocating asteroid dust, people as obstinate as the land. Africa: subtropical climate, rich with plant life, a renaissance of technology, spiritual harmony, and wealth.

Land bridges now tie the once-separated continents, and the passage between the two is easier than ever. Though the regions between Africa and

Europe are disputed zones, it's doubtful the Africans could stop the onslaught of an entire continent into the warmth of the south. The Europeans remain on their home soil, however, facing a daily, ferocious battle for survival. Why? Maybe they don't know any better. Maybe they don't believe the reports of the reputed African paradise.

Perhaps the true reason lies buried with the broken testimonials of the ancients: artifacts. One good find can turn a destitute plunderer into an affluent junk collector—or an undefeatable warlord. The fantasy of amazing discoveries inspires an entire continent: it is the fuel, the hope that has burned since man first emerged after the Eschaton. Europe is a continent of adventurers—anyone can become a legend.

Crows and Lions—Europeans and Africans. The crows are scavengers, constantly circling the ruins of the last days. Now and then they arise, dark and greedy, over the lions and dive at them to pick at their eyes—but they are not strong enough. However slow the lion may seem, his savagery and power more than compensate for it. Royal and lofty, he is the king of the savannah. His hackles are raised and he is preparing to leap over the great waters

to stir up the dust in the domain of the crows.

It will be an unequal battle, fought with unequal weapons.

THE MEDITERRANEAN

For centuries, the Africans have struck north across the Mediterranean to wrest the ruined cities their forefathers labored in from the unwitting European tribals. The Europeans dream mostly of African oil. Whether out of curiosity or calculation, they send their troops to secure the black gold—weeks of hardship rarely reward more than a few days worth of oil.

THE FOULNESS

In ancient times, many learned scholars described the Earth as a conscious and living being. They named it *Gaia*. The plants and animals were its neurons; plagues and epidemics were mere reactions to imbalances in Gaia's physiology. Some people were soothed by the idea of belonging to a greater being. Others despaired at the humiliating meaninglessness of life.

Those who believed in the power of Gaia would drum and dance themselves into an ecstatic frenzy to merge with the Earth's consciousness. In those past ages, Gaia was hesitant to bestow her love. Now, she claws at her children, who fearfully try to wrest themselves from her suffocating grasp.

Some claim that Gaia has stolen their souls. Are they simply delusional? Perhaps. The Earth has changed in sinister ways, however, and the sources of these changes are the impact craters left over from the Eschaton. Pestilence flows from the craters—and it has become known as the *Foulness*.

The effects of the Foulness seep into every corner of society—even changing people. Mutant children are born with demonic abilities, ostracized as strange and soulless. The scientific community calls them *psychonauts*. The psychonauts are nothing more than transitory guests in the community of humans; their eyes are as cold as the night sky.

Families of these soulless children are damned as unclean. The thrashing, pale monstrosities, squirming in the arms of their mothers, wake a primitive fear in the hearts of the people. Those brave enough to peek into their cribs receive a shockingly intense and evil stare.

These newborns are different in many other unseemly ways. They aren't affected by heat or cold and feel comfortable in any type of climate. They are solitary and follow their own whims rather than the childish fancies of their peers. They exhibit fierce explosions of rage that shock the community to the point of utter contempt. They rarely survive past adolescence in the villages of humans.

Usually these children are left on the outskirts of their village or flee into the wilderness. Many shelter in caves, along cliffs, or deep in the forests until they finally find other psychonauts—their true family. The psychonauts honor only one parent: Mother Earth—Gaia. Humans were merely the vessels of their arrival.

PRIMER

Some of the more technologically advanced cults, such as the Spitalians, an organization of chaste medics, believe they have discovered the underlying cause of the Foulness and the psychonaut phenomenon. They call it *Primer* and believe it to be a parasitic life form that fell to Earth with the asteroids that destroyed humanity's once-great civilization.

The name Primer is derived from the ancient words *primal* or *primus*, meaning “the first or most primitive.” There is another meaning, however, derived from the English word *primer*, which means “to start.” This substance, like the unstoppable flame of a lit fuse, has started something that threatens to destroy the remnants of humanity; every passing day means new lands conquered by the psychonauts or the Foulness.

Some see the Primer as a sinister version of the Philosopher's Stone, the legendary alchemical achievement that supposedly transmuted lead into gold. Many claim to have achieved its perfection, but how this is accomplished is elusive to even the most astute student. In truth, the Primer is quite different—it is genetic material and new forms of life. No one understands its function, nor can they isolate the Primer itself, but its effects are undeniable.

ADAPTIVE REACTION

The Spitalians see the Foulness as the most prevalent example of the Primer's effect on the environment. The Foulness's spores have been analyzed countless times over the years, and though the Spitalians haven't isolated the Primer, they have witnessed bizarre changes in the genetic structure of whatever material the Foulness encounters.

Many different types of organic material have been mixed with spores from different regions, and the genetic mutations appear to coincide. This leads the Spitalian doctors to the conclusion that whatever the mutagen is, it is consistent across many different regions. At the moment, the leading hypothesis is that this material landed with the asteroids.

Though the spores are the most effective carrier of the Primer, it appears capable of affecting just about any type of organic material. The spores themselves are the hardiest and most fitting hosts, able to last for countless ages in a dormant state in the most inhospitable of environments—outer space.

PRIMER TERMINOLOGY

The common people have noticed the effects of the Foulness and adopted this name from the Spitalians. They also refer to the Foulness as *mushroom spores* or simply *spores*. Regions can be *spored* and contaminated people are known as *sporelings*. Heavily spored areas are known as *spore fields*.

MOTHER SPORE FIELDS

Spore clouds drift over European settlements, causing panic and paranoia. The Foulness is normal in this era, but it is nothing compared to the Primer's ultimate power: the focal points of Foulness known as *mother spore fields*.

The mysterious walls that rise around the mother spore fields as if pulled by a ghostly hand from the rotten earth are more terrifying than the rolling dust clouds. On high, they resemble frozen ripples, as from a raindrop falling into a still pool. This erupting landscape rips man-made structures to pieces. Electromagnetic forces originate from the center of the fields, pulling old metal containers and the carcasses of cars into concentric circles around them. Foulness caps the spore field ridges with a thick, blood red down. Fist-sized buds belch out spores. The people treat this land as though the Devil himself lives there.

Submissive like dogs, the psychonauts crawl through the debris and septic waste of the mother spore fields, living among insect colonies that stream from the star-shaped center. The psychonauts dig through the spores, rubbing them on their bodies, and perform insane rituals, screaming, humming, and shaking uncontrollably. They live like diseased animals, only recovering when they are removed from the mother spore field, either alive or dead.

The varied and ancient tribal mythologies all view mother spore fields as the direct result of a communion between god and earth. These diseased parts of Gaia are considered holy and forbidden. The Spitalians wage a constant war against the Foulness. To them, the mother spore fields are tumors that need to be excised from the body of Mother Earth.

EARTH CHAKRAS

Foulness, spore field, mother spore field: this is the hierarchy of the Primer. What lies at its summit? The Spitalians believe the Foulness originates in the five *Earth Chakras* that have bloomed across Europe. This belief is derived from ancient Indian mythology: seven chakras feed energy to the human body, and each influences certain aspects of the person's character. It is similar with the Earth Chakras: they change the environment completely, drawing insects, spiders, and various swarming creatures to their field of influence. The swarms answer to awakened psychonauts in the same manner.

The Earth Chakras grew from regions where asteroids pounded the Earth. There are five giant craters: one in the Iberia Peninsula (now Hybrispania), one in the Italian Apennines (now Purgare), one in the French Central Massif (now Franka), one in the wide

steppes of the Balkans (now Balkhan), and finally the largest close to Warsaw (now Pollen).

The Earth Chakras are the birthplace of the Foulness. Swaying fields of white down have consumed the land with their deadly spore clouds meter by meter for centuries. The Earth Chakras are thus the oldest mother spore fields of Europe.

The Spitalians have no idea how many metamorphoses the Earth Chakras have gone through, but they know that the psychonauts worship them as the energy nodes of earthly awareness. Even with centuries of investigation, they can still only hypothesize on the Earth Chakras' true functions, goals, and origins. Throngs of theories exist, of course: many progressive doctors claim that the blueprints of life exist in the Earth Chakras—both terrestrial and extraterrestrial.

There is no proof for any of these theories, but colonies of long-extinct arthropods in the eastern crater lakes and living fossils on the coast of Franka are glimpses into the ultimate goals of the Earth Chakras.

BURN

Fist-sized buds, as fragile as the dry leaves of autumn, tower above the spongy down floor of a mother spore field. Inside, they carry seeds that spread the Primer across the land.

The buds are pulverized into a drug called *burn*. Burn obliterates consciousness and provides resistance to bitter cold, heat, and exhaustion. It sends the user on a journey to foreign spheres, but as a side effect it colonizes the lungs with Primer. Beware of the Spitalians if they hear about burn; any rumor of contamination will stoke their vengeful flames.

THE PLAGUES

Each of the five Earth Chakras manipulates the environment in its own, unmistakable way. While one might use spiders, centipedes, and scorpions to spread its seed, another sends ants, wasps, and termites—and yet another, swarms of leeches and fleas. These swarms are grave plagues for both the lands they strike and the vicious, teeming armies of the psychonauts. They infest the psychonauts' clothes and hair—waiting on the word to attack.

Wherever the psychonauts go, the plagues are not far behind. People panic and flee from them like condemned fugitives—not only in fear of the psychonauts, but also from the murderous spores and the effect they will have on their children. With their survival at stake, people resort to sealing their windows and doors, futilely crushing insects, and examining the carcasses for infection. Poison-filled pits encircle the remote settlements of Europe, hoping against hope to divert the flow of vermin.

FIVE EARTH CHAKRAS, FIVE RAPTUSES

As the Earth Chakras expand, they imbue the surrounding landscape with their characteristic properties. Children born in proximity to a spore field may demonstrate certain abilities that are attributed to the spore infestation's origin point. The term *raptus* (plural: *raptuses*) is used to describe the classification of any creature exhibiting mutations ascribed to a particular Earth Chakra. Each raptus category is linked to a specific Earth Chakra.

BIOKINETIKS

Psychonauts of the *Biokinetik* raptus see their body as a tool to form and reshape at will. Their true identities have long since been discarded and replaced by the thousands of masks they conjure. They carry their

plague in disgusting hide bags: spiders, scorpions, centipedes—and all other poisonous wasteland vermin. Their raptus is linked to the Pandora Crater in Pollen.

DUSHANI

The Balkhani are familiar with the Dushani psychonauts, who are found throughout the barren and rocky regions of Eastern Europe. Their songs echo across the rugged plains and caress the wide grassy steppes, touching the souls of human and animal alike. They are masters of manipulation, sneaking into thoughts and hollowing out their enemies from within. The spirit is their weapon; squid, jellyfish, and crabs are their plague. Their raptus is linked to the crater in Balkhan.

PARAGNOSTIKS

Paragnostik psychonauts can see into both the future and the past. In their lands, they are the self-described last hope of an oppressed people. They are only comfortable along the coasts and near their plagues: mussels, starfish, sea urchins, anemones, and trilobites. Their raptus is linked to the crater in Hybrispania.

PHEROMANCERS

Pheromone glands coat the body of the *Pheromancer* psychonauts, ranging in size from a fingertip to a fist, turning them into biochemical warfare factories. Pheromancers can subdue entire villages with their pungent fumes, filling them with an empty and fragile sense of peace. Their plagues include swarming vermin like rats, ants, wasps, and termites. Their raptus is linked to the Souffrance Crater in Franka.

PSYCHOKINETIKS

The Earth Chakra of the *Psychokinetics* imbues them with the ability to control matter with their minds. They can levitate objects, create force fields around themselves, or ignite materials simply through the power of thought. They are accompanied by swarms of leeches, mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, and tapeworms. Their raptus is linked to the crater in Purgare.

COLLECTED NOTES OF THE PANDORA EXPEDITION

Archived by Klaskov, Chronicler

NOTES 05.07.56

Part 1: 05.07.56, time—8:22

Author: Dr. Diego Ramirez

The water samples from the crater lakes arrived yesterday, shortly before sunset. Dr. Trendsens's zoological department ripped them right from our hands with due formality. Doctor Kleska assured me that he notified the researchers of the high risk of sporeling contagion, but they apparently weren't careful enough. I woke this morning to find the first report already in my igloo tent. With all due respect and honor to their work, we are not dealing with distilled water here. The hygienists under my charge must explain the standard procedures to the zoologists. Asclepius help them if the sample turns out positive.

NOTES 05.07.56

Part 2: 05.07.56, time—11:05

Author: Dr. Diego Ramirez

Had the samples of our western division given any hint as to what my expedition would discover, here in the atomic lands, I would have dismissed it as insanity: bryzoa, hydrozoa, mollusks, gastropods, primitive arthropods, and trilobites in the crater lakes! In unbelievable density, too—not to mention thousands of miles from the Atlantic. Is this the cradle of life?

Goskar, one of our preservists and the personification of vigilance, accompanied me today in my rounds—much to my dismay. Thick curtains of wet snow pressed down on us, and Goskar didn't do much to brighten my day. After endless tirades about the battle on the eastern sporefront, he finally began talking about our mission. He speculated that not only were the seas teeming with animal life, but that flora and fauna would also be extremely plentiful, citing specific overgrowths of the taiga biome. I won't speculate about how grounded his knowledge is—he is as little a specialist as I.

He did get me thinking, though. There are clearly discrepancies between that which we have cited as normal and the recently discovered samples. After taking stock of our supplies, I will send out another squad to collect examples of several of the arthropod species we've discovered here. As we discovered earlier in the Wupper Crater, we've found iron beetles here as well.

Interestingly, the dominant species here are large spider-like creatures whose webs cover massive tracts of land. They must live off of the centipedes and beetles, which are everywhere. It's strange that anything survives in this barren and cold region.

NOTES 05.07.56

Part 3: 05.07.56, time—13:12

Author: Dr. Diego Ramirez

Again and again I return to my desk and my books, to help pull all the ideas from today's work into some sort of hypothesis. Unbelievable things are occurring here.

The cellar vaults are but two minutes away from our igloo camp. It is serving as a helpful laboratory, as it is easy to protect and easy to seal in an emergency. One preservist could defend it against an entire tribe of savages.

I descended the wide stone stairs, opened the rusty iron door, and stepped into the glistening white of the laboratory. The lights had driven both the dark and the cold from the cellar. In the background, the generators heaved. I stood alone in the entryway, a room roughly ten paces long, from which several hallways extended, with further rooms attached.

Looking for a colleague, I pushed a plastic tarp aside and glanced into the provisional library. There, two open crates faced me; inside were rows of standard books, but also several works which made me pause.

These field guides didn't contain the flora and fauna of the twenty-first century, as stated in the table of contents, but rather were devoted to paleontology. Specific attention was given to the early "Cambrian" age, a time roughly 500 million years in the past. The writings were stained with age and older than anything I had held in my hands before. Conservationists had sealed the pages with a thin coating, which pointed to their

importance. I flipped through several of the chapters and was shocked: they told the story of a time that contradicted the common knowledge of the Spitalians.

Trilobites didn't belong on our world, these books claimed. They had been extinct for millions of years. Unbelievable! Forgeries? But why all the trouble?

It was Doctor Gharne from the zoological research group that first came upon me in the cellar. As I was about to engage him in conversation, he started into a not-very-well-thought-out lie, which made me question his sanity. Naked fear was plastered across his face, and he was sweating like a pig. He implored me to keep quiet and forget what I had seen. I pushed him up the stairs like a mongrel and chased him off into the snow, then climbed back down.

In a room adjacent the library, I found crates of fossils. The descriptions on the crates stated they had been removed from the ruins of a museum of natural history—and all this without me knowing! Crate after crate was hidden from me, and the magnitude of the undertaking weighed down like a mountain upon my soul. Everyone must have known.

What is going on here? Why have I, the leader of the expedition, been kept from the true details of our undertaking?

NOTES 06.07.56

Part 4: 06.07.56, time—1:43

Author: Preservist Goskar Fermentis

I have confirmed the fears already stated from the start of the expedition. Sending a foreign doctor on an undertaking to a giant crater, day after day an arm's length from the truth, was a mistake. Today we were forced to remove Dr. Ramirez from his post. I will temporarily fill his position until the arrival of another expedition leader.

Ramirez revealed questions to me about the supported understanding of the development of flora and fauna since the Eschaton. After studying the prohibited books, which Dr. Gharne foolishly left unguarded in his work place, Dr. Ramirez no longer views several of the hybrid forms, such as the iron beetles, as part of the established species of the twenty-second century, but rather as reactivated species. Clearly, he has come closer to the truth than the protocol allows low-level, foreign doctors. What is to become of him, others must decide.

TEXT FRAGMENT, SPITALIAN, PANDORA EXPEDITION

Dossier: Doctor Diego Ramirez

As a graduate of the Foreign School Project, Dr. Diego Ramirez exhibits exemplary physical abilities for field work in dangerous regions, which our homeland doctors must be excluded from due to their susceptibility to HIVE. This, together with his expansive knowledge of zoology and fundamental chemical processes, makes him an ideal candidate for the long-envisioned expedition to the easternmost of the known crater lakes: Pandora. We hope that his research discoveries do not live up to the name of this enigmatic region, thus confirming our worst fears.

According to our plan, Ramirez, with his team of five

Spitalians and two preservists, should have reached the bone fields of Warsaw yesterday. After leaving Danzig, his first task should have been establishing a relay radio transmitter in order to inform us of his progress. That this was not accomplished may already point to problems; however, it is often the case that our relay stations are demolished by the damned Scrapers and Apocalyptiks. The only certainty is that we know nothing of their progress. We can only hope that Preservist Fermentis, as control leader, takes the necessary steps if problems arise—or better yet, has the courage to lead himself.

NOTES 07.07.56

Part 5: 07.07.56, time—22:05

Author: Ramirez, on the run

The day before last, I lived in a troubled but understandable world, in which everything had its well-defined place. The knowledge of an ancient civilization lay at my feet, and to bend down and grasp it was merely an old ritual that everyone in my profession practices from time to time. One tried to be at peace with the past. That was all nothing but a pack of lies! Had I looked to the night sky, the shimmering stars would seem no more unreachable and further than the truth of the Spitalians.

Bitterness overcomes me while I write this. I've lived a life decreed by the elders, pressed into service and used as an instrument. My misguided path through the forest of lies ended at that crater—I risked opening Pandora's Box and lost everything.

TEXT FRAGMENT, SPITALIAN, PANDORA EXPEDITION

Final Report: Pandora Expedition

The unbelievable has happened. The Pandora Expedition, believed lost, was—after two years—spotted west of the Reaper's Blow. The expedition crew are currently being exa-mined by the hygienists for signs of sporeling disease. The outlook is dismal.

Even if their days are numbered, however, they will have been of enormous help to the Spitalians in their discoveries. Though they discovered nothing unknown, they have brought further support for the current theories.

Also interesting in this matter is the flight of the expedition leader, a promising foreign doctor named Ramirez. As prescribed by protocol, he was arrested by Preservist Fermentis. He was able to escape, however, and find refuge among the nomadic tribals of Borca.

The writings of Fermentis discuss numerous reports of a self-proclaimed prophet who roams the Reaper's Blow with a swarm of admirers preaching the history of the world. There is much to suggest that this prophet is involved with what Fermentis didn't finish.

Poor devil—the spores must have eaten away his sanity. Where this prophet seemed only a crazy person to us, however, he now stands in a new light. He knows his corner of the truth—that corner we have, with good reason, hidden from the savages for these hundreds of years.

I will have this information sent out to all the villages sym-pathetic to the Spitalians. Ramirez's days are numbered.

ASPERA

Borca, 2355: Report by Chronicler Streamline

DAY 2

The signal is unchanged. Two days ago our eavesdroppers noticed it for the first time: a simple sine wave on the ultra-shortwave band, interrupted every two seconds for a full second. No variation. Yesterday I ordered two antennas placed at a distance of one kilometer in order to triangulate the origin of the sender. Mediator Jotum's calculations were again incorrect, but still, the old guy has taken his place in our hearts.

The new guys, Rehec and Enter, idolize him like service programs and correct him discreetly. Jotum reminds us continually that we're humans and not perfect machines; even if we're taught otherwise in the cluster. We thank him for that.

Even with Rehec and Enter's corrections, however, our equipment is still too imprecise—but our direction is set. Tomorrow, we set out for the Alps.

DAY 10

The day before yesterday it began to snow. We looked for shelter in a ruin and roughed it for two days in the abandoned structure. Though our limbs were stricken with stiffness, our icy dispositions thawed slightly. I held long conversations with Enter about his medals and learned about his earlier life. He doesn't remember much, only that he had a sister named Fregga; his family lived by beetle collecting in the ruins of Dustlung. The snow outside reminded him of his past. He cried in his sleep and scratched constantly at the barcode tattoo on his forehead. I hope that he doesn't fault his parent's decision to give him to the Chroniclers.

Today we will venture out, as the storm has passed. It was a break that we all needed, and which distanced us from the cold, impersonal nature of the cluster. Out here in the wastelands, other rules apply—here the animal in man is required!

DAY 12

We have been traveling for ten days now. Every five hours we locate the signal and correct our course. We had two run-ins with the natives, but we used the usual tactics to scare them away. We turned the volume of our megaphones all the way up and screamed at them. Enter also lit a magnesium flare and threw it at them. With ducked heads they scattered—great fun for old Jotum. Like a demon he stood there in his dark, waving cloak and laughed throatily, exaggerated by the amplifier.

I'm nervous, however. The nomads are clearly watching us from afar—and they are following us. I can only hope that they hold us for gods of some sort and keep their distance.

DAY 14

We have pinpointed the signal to within a few meters. Everything points to a valley at the foot of the Alps. It is a proud moment: the knowledge that, in the next few hours, we will be at the source of the mystery. All of this in front of the scenic wonder of these massive peaks. It is snowing again, but this time the weather won't delay us. A cheerful excitement has overcome the entire group.

Just now, Mediator Goto is returning from his scouting mission. He's discovered a giant portal in the mountain. We will get underway immediately.

ADDENDUM OF THE CHRONICLER JOTUM

Unbelievable! The beast led us into a trap! Streamline, Enter, and Goto lie rigid in the snow, and Rehec is partially paralyzed. My good friend is screaming the soul out of his body down in the valley. Had he only ignored the others and listened to me ...

One after the other, as they've taught us for ages in the cluster. Enter hid our navigational equipment in the cellar of a ruin. Streamline called for light marching. We entered the valley at 14:35. The light was good and our range of vision was only slightly limited due to the new snowfall. Streamline and Goto marched in front, Rehec, Enter, and I followed at a distance of ten meters—standard procedure for exploration of unknown terrain.

The snow cover was refreshing, nothing pointed to a threat. As we closed to within fifty paces, the portal came into view—an undecorated slab of stone, over eight meters high and five meters wide. Certainly a relic of the ancients.

Suddenly Streamline and Goto fell. They simply dropped to the snow, stiff as stone. At first we thought they had simply tripped, and so we ran to them, hoping to help them up. They didn't respond. I turned Streamline onto his back and looked into eyes full of fear. His pupils widened and contracted in rhythm with his heartbeat. He was conscious!

Then Enter collapsed face first. Rehec fell on his side, twirling up the snow as he hit the ground. He screamed. A pin was stuck in his neck, which he pulled out with his stuttering left hand. Blood defiled the virgin white snow. He lay on his back, trying to right himself with his left leg, but only turned in place, his right side as lifeless as a dead piece of meat. It was like the crazy dance of a tribal shaman—his cries the parting song of his life.

I stood shattered in the middle of the fallen holy brothers and waited for the same fate to befall me. Then I saw her: a woman with two sizeable braids, wearing a light gray outfit. In her hand she held a gun, her finger on the trigger. She stood no more than twenty paces to my right and watched us. Noticing that I had seen her, she smirked and nodded. That bitch! Then she came over to us. She limped badly and could barely keep herself upright.

“Chronicler, the trap has shut,” she said, showing me a fist-sized artifact with blinking digits. She made a “blip, blip” sound and grinned again. She hobbled to Goto, turned him over, and went through his belongings. She took his voice distorter, the streamer glove, and his energy supply. She threw the holy technology of our order recklessly in a sack, then made her way on to Streamline. I could do nothing. I could only look on helplessly. While still busy with my brothers, she spoke to me.

“Chronicler shit. You disappoint me. Is that everything?”

She stood up and looked at me. “No vehicles? I need a compressor and a human-machine interface.” Angry lines creased her cold but pretty face. “All that effort for this little bit of junk!” I had a surge of rebellious hope as she stepped on the sack with our equipment in it and almost fell. Her leg couldn’t have been injured long ago.

One question burned in my soul, and she seemed to guess it. “Aspera. Call me Aspera.” Then she threw the sack over her shoulder and hobbled out into the desert of snow.

Now that we’ve discovered the source of the signal, we just watch her.

THE MARAUDER PROJECT

Argyre, Aspera, Aries—three of the presumably twenty so-called *Marauders*. These mysterious beings have accompanied humanity for hundreds of years. In the legends of the tribes they are viewed as gods, grotesquely formed monsters, or undying fighters with unending power.

Tribal elders tell of gleaming rays of fire from powerful artifacts awakened in the hands of the Marauders. Some know Marauders as the bearers of ancient wisdom; most didn’t live long enough to tell of their encounter.

To this day, they travel the wastelands. It is rare for them to visit the villages or cities of humans. When they do, they ask about long-eroded way-markers. Sometimes they hire themselves out as junk collectors or scouts. Those who cross them are destroyed. They search for something, but for what is known only to them.

RECOMBINATION GROUP

Excerpt from the Chronicler teaching: “They Ate from the Forbidden Tree”

In the ever-more-forgotten time of the ancients, the Recombination Group dominated the human medicine market as no other corporation before. Though many of their supposed achievements are no longer verifiable and such reports would fit better in the realm of legend than our databanks, salvaged data cartridges point to a new and extremely fascinating chapter in the history of medicine.

We lack the equipment to open the white cylinders—or to survive the nerve agent that streams from them like liquid nitrogen. The Spitalians have developed a certain skill in handling this deadly freight, though they too only operate it at the edge of understanding.

According to credible sources (*Elements of the Streams, Vol. 1–2*), one could “confer” with this liquid (apparently a type of programming) in order to achieve various results. Thus certain words could impart it with the ability to fight certain ailments. Once injected, the mass then fought against the offensive virus or bacteria in the bloodstream.

The control devices are lost, and the technique of using this substance remains unknown. Not all of the ruins in Borca have been explored, however, nor all the bunkers discovered.

THE CRATERS

For hundreds of years, the craters were a memorial to the Eschaton. Many kneeled, praying at their edges, begging for healing or forgiveness. Others went there on pilgrimages, in order to witness the ancient power of these regions. Only a few came to study.

Strange things occurred there. Primitive life forms bubbled in the crater lakes and spread via tributaries across the land. Arthropods and trilobites, long extinct, are now as plentiful as the common cockroach. No one sees the wonder in all of this, however, as they don’t have the knowledge to discern the new from the old. For them there is only the present.

GLOOMY DREAMS

Proximity to a spore field may not only take your children from you, but also your sleep and sanity. Even the brave are afflicted with sleepless terror, dreaming of incessantly chirping hordes of insects. The nightmares grow more lifelike and intense the closer one gets to those damned fields, so keep your distance if your sanity is dear to you.

PSYCHOVOR

Europe suffers under the Foulness, Africa under the so-called *psychovors*. While the Earth Chakras mutate insects and spiders,

the Primer has chosen plant life as its terrible laboratory in the steaming jungles of Africa.

Like a virus, the Primer rages within the vegetation, creating new species and destroying others. Massive areas of ancient jungle are suddenly sickened by bizarre diseases. The jungle rots as mutant plants take over. Every day the native vegetation loses ground—already the heart of Africa is lost.

Whoever nears the impassible wall of grotesquely transformed plants risks more than his life. Upon returning from the billowing green hell, one is left crazed and covered in dark boils, foul puss oozing from broken skin. Those so infected will not be allowed into any settlements—their spirits are lost to the demonic plants. They are already long dead. Thus the African tribes call this alien vegetation *the soul eater*, or psychovor.

HOMO DEGENESIS

The race has begun. In lane one, we welcome *Homo sapiens*, long-time favorite and crown jewel of creation. In the past he relied on cruelty and hubris to conquer his enemies. Cocky and headstrong, he cleared every obstacle on his path to the top. He mastered fire, metallurgy, and finally the bomb. First class credentials, don't you think?

In lane two, the children of the Foulness are gathering. A little unsure, they are barely able to contain the fire in their hearts, scraping their claws nervously in the sand. Like the humans, they are representatives of their own very particular species: *Homo degenesis*.

Homo sapiens and *Homo degenesis* are in a heated competition. It is part of their nature to be arch-enemies. One represents the spirit of individuality, the other is wrapped in the hive consciousness of the Earth Chakras. These two principles preclude each other. Only one can win this battle of evolution and leave their lasting mark on the Earth.

A WORLD IN FLAMES

Fire: a symbol of man's triumph over nature. From the first flint stone used to light dried twigs all the way to napalm, mankind had mastered the flame. This ancient power, which instilled spiritual wonder in primitive man, had become a toy for which respect was lost. The Eschaton reminded mankind of its importance.

After the apocalypse, the survivors of the catastrophe pawed the ground for any morsel they could find during the new Ice Age. They warmed themselves amongst each other's bodies in the flickering light of a small campfire, gazing into the shadows of a darkened era. Torches were swung about in the dark, drawing signs in the gloomy night, which again allowed for communication over long distances. Fire was again godly.

Even now, five hundred years after the asteroid fragments slammed the Earth into darkness, the meaning of fire is reflected in the beliefs of the people. In many cults—such as the Spitalians, Hellvetics, and Anabaptists—fire has plainly become a symbol of purity. These factions base the foundation of their power on the mastery of the destructive flame.

Fire, however, brings post-apocalyptic Europe much more than warmth and security. Spored meat is edible when thoroughly grilled. Foulness-infected insects turn into a nutritious source of energy for the hungry and destitute masses after a hot baptism.

Fire is the tool of *Homo sapiens*; nothing eschews the hosts of the Primer more than this ancient element. Spored extremities and wounds can be cauterized, spore fields lose their godlike power when incinerated, and even the psychonauts are vulnerable to the Anabaptists' flamethrowers.

SEVEN CULTURAL CIRCLES

From the ashes of a foregone civilization rose seven new cultures. They span from cold northern Europe across the Mediterranean and down into Africa. They are but mere children compared to their ancestors—unripe and weak. Yet they rule over the known world.

AFRICA: THE LION RAMPANT

Along the Mediterranean coast, the merchant cult of the Neolibyans flaunt their elaborate clothing and riches stolen from the treasure chests of Europe. Africa has grown powerful, its cities are now some of the prettiest pearls of the new world. And so they may remain—as long as the developments in the deep south of the Dark Continent do not foretell a different fate. There, the psychovors push ever northward, swallowing the land and spitting it out, forever changed. Above it, not yet molested, the steamy jungle waits patiently for its transformation.

Interestingly, the changes wrought by the psychovors aren't entirely negative. In the south, language barriers have disappeared; the inhabitants speak in a new curious tongue—a strange side effect of the psychovors. Here, unlike near the spore fields of Europe, the people don't lose their individuality and

free will. Rather, they discover a sense of oneness and belonging that erases all of their prejudices. This has melded Africa into a unit, but it has also obliterated much of the ancient cultural diversity of the land. Now only the Lion reigns in Africa; it is the symbol of a unified continent. The Neolibyans are the heart that gives it strength, the Scourgers are the claws that tear at its prey, and the Anubians are the soul that determines its fate.

BALKHAN: THE WILD LANDS

People are a reflection of their lands. The Balkhani are wild and untamed; no man a slave to any other. They are passionate and explosive. The Balkhani live by the principle “Me against my brother—my brother and I against my uncle—all of us against the world!”

Bloody disputes fray the patchwork of alliances and intrigues of Balkhani princes—the *voivods*. Overnight, they turn farmers into warriors, and the next night, their wives into widows. Only in times of great distress will the voivods leave their malice at home and shake clammy hands with their neighbor—hands which just the day before, they would have gladly placed into chains. Now the call resounds across the mountains—unite against the enemy!

Everywhere ring the dark, disturbing songs of the Dushani—the soulless. Threatening echoes cross the wide plains, breaking on the rugged mountains. The Dushani live in rocky grottos with their slithering companions, watching the events of human affairs from afar.

BORCA: THE LEGACY OF THE ANCIENTS

Gray snow covers the ruins of the ancients; an icy wind whips through the destroyed alleyways. Long ago, an ancient culture existed in Borca that bestowed its people with riches, wisdom, and the wonder of technology. Towers of concrete and glass created shimmering valleys through which motorized vehicles buzzed. Very little of it survived the Eschaton, as the Reaper’s Blow ripped the land into two pieces.

The people of Borca are strong and robust. They drape themselves in heavy clothes, fur, and leather. Those that stayed west of the Reaper’s Blow strive to reclaim the power of the past. Their Scrapper armies comb the ruined landscape, always searching for traces of their ancestors.

East of the murderous fault, Borcans drive herds of musk oxen across a wilderness of endless pine forests. They don’t share the frivolous nature of their Western brothers and sisters. They are too tied to the present.

FRANKA: THE SWARM

The wind of a million beating wings blows the shells of dead insects before it. The swarm seeks a new home. In feverish waves, flies erupt from the rotten earth, destroying every living thing in their path. The inhuman Pheromancers are the last barrier between Homo sapiens and their extinction in Franka. With sugary-sweet mists, they break the will of the insect swarms and scatter them to the winds or beset them upon their enemies.

Once, Franka was a fertile land ruled from a giant metropolis. This old capital, Parasite, still teems with life, but it is no longer human. More than three hundred years ago, the city was lost to a swarming army of billions. Even the Pheromancers have no power here.

This shocking event was devastating to the people of Franka, but it prepared them for their inevitable separation from the past. The campaigns of the African merchant cult, the Neolibyans, and their assiduous Scourgers completed the dismantling of Franka. Since then, the ancient buildings scattered across the rotten countryside are nothing more than empty husks.

Today, something new and healthy is growing amidst the debris of the past. The root of civilization is still young, but the seed has sprouted.

HYBRISPANIA: THE KILLING FIELDS

Hybrispania is a land ravaged by hatred and rage; a murderous lust condemns its citizens to endless strife. The African occupiers defend themselves against the attacks of Hybrispanian guerrillas. The expanding jungle is soaked with the blood of murdered Africans and fed with the corpses of native rebels. This is a land dominated by power, retribution, and endless war.

Only on the high plains of Castilla are the death cries of the children of Hybrispania silent. Yet peace does not exist here, either. The Jehammedan hosts gather there, preparing for their holy war against the invaders. In the meantime, their strange beliefs seep into the minds of the natives, poisoning the people with hate and fanaticism.

POLLEN: ENDLESS WANDERINGS

This land is dead. In the wasteland, however, oases of thick forests and fragrant flowers flourish for days or even months, defying the laws of nature. Hideous mutations of beast and man sneak through the night, cruelly striking down the weak and the lost.

For the Pollener, mobility and adaptability are crucial. In these lands, the fertile field, worked for weeks, can decay into rotted wasteland in an instant. The Pollener keep all they possess on tank-like carts and wagons, ready to move the minute the land dies.

From Pandora, the largest crater of the Eschaton, prevailing winds blow the spores southward. Strange creatures sprout from these infectious seeds. The Foulness is spreading feverishly here; Pandora is merging with the spore fields of eastern Balkhan, creating an impassible wall.

PURGARE: THE LAND OF THE CHOSEN

The Purgar stand between two fronts. In their own land, they battle against the insane Psychokinetics. In the east, they are entrenched in never-ending war against the Balkhani.

Only as a family can the people of Purgare survive, and so it is no surprise that they obsess over their siblings and relatives. Twelve tribes rule the land with an iron fist. With eagle eyes

they watch the Apocalyptiks, who with their seductive sins, seek to unravel the tight networks that have supported Purgare for ages. The families chase them away wherever they can.

The Anabaptists see Purgare as their promised land. Here, any holes in their ranks are effortlessly filled. The entire land is an army ready to be called upon. Purgare is at the same time the home of the soulless Psychokinetiks, who in the Neo-Gnostic mythology of the Anabaptists are the arch-enemies of their deity, the *Demiurge*. A long, bloody path lies before the bloodthirsty Anabaptists: only when the last of these monsters is slain and thrown into the Reaper's Blow will the wound heal and cause the land to bloom again.

THIRTEEN CULTS

The survivors of the Eschaton evolved together into new organizations and factions, all with their own history and goals, in a foreign world they shaped into a homeland. These are the thirteen cults.

SPITALIANS:

THE CARETAKERS OF THE EARTH

The Spitalians are the last line of defense against the spore invasion, because they know the truth. Born from a mysterious medical caste of the ancients, they boldly go forth unflinchingly into poisoned lands, fighting against the spore fields with fungicides and fire.

Their base, the so-called Spital, lies amongst the ruins of Borca. Armed with hydraulic cutting tools and flamethrowers and wearing protective suits, they travel through the devastated world, healing the sick and destroying Foulness and those unlucky enough to become infested with the spores. With their might over life and death, few are brave enough to oppose them.

CHRONICLERS:

THE INFORMATION GATHERERS

The Stream was once a worldwide data net, one that sowed odd seeds. Sects now cluster themselves at data terminals, letting themselves be propelled through the data stream. They chase after unexplained bursts of errors just as a priest scampers from miracle sighting to miracle sighting.

The Chroniclers are the premier technical cult in Europe—they are also much more. They aim to absorb the world's knowledge, reactivate the Stream, and lead humanity back into the light of civilization.

Emanating from their order's strongholds, the aptly named *clusters*—which serve as both refuge and research facility—the Chroniclers travel the land equipped with voice distorters and bizarre shock devices. They lead expeditions into the dangerous world, searching for more and more knowledge from the ancients.

Written in chalk, their barcodes appear on the walls and monuments of every village and city. These marks inform the junk-dealing Scrapppers that the cult is prepared to trade their knowledge for the technological relics pulled from the ruins.

SCRAPPERS:

THE DIRT DIGGERS

Scrapppers rummage through the ruins, searching for artifacts from a lost age—the remnants of the ancients. Their life, lost in the billowing dust and dirt, is hard and thankless. Their stories are born from the intense cold and their constant hunger.

Life amid the towering, shimmering tombs of a dead culture, with all its deprivations, has turned the Scrapppers into cold-blooded throat slitters who think only of their own survival. Yet it is these vicious loners to whom the new cities of Borca owe their rise. They are the ones who drag the artifacts out of the dusty cellars and bunkers to trade with the Chroniclers, stimulating trade in the barren wastes of Europe.

ANABAPTISTS:

TORCH BEARERS OF PARADISE

Domstadt—the Cathedral City—in Borca is the anchor that stabilizes the violent beliefs of the Anabaptists. From the center of the city rises the Anabaptist's cathedral, one of the most impressive sacred buildings of both the old and new worlds. Dark and sinister, it casts its shadow across Europe through the power of its fervent disciples, the Anabaptists.

The beliefs of this cult are based on ancient Gnostic teachings that view a god known as the *Demiurge* as the destroyer of the world and the root of all evil. Once upon a time, the *Demiurge* seduced the people away from paradise, turning the Earth into a seething cesspool of corruption. The goal of the Anabaptists is to purify the Earth of its shame and pull paradise out of the darkness through fiery baptism.

Time and time again, their work bears fruit. From the little the land provides, the Anabaptists have an income; an army of farmers follows them devotedly. This is only one side of the coin, however. Though they sprinkle holy water upon the wounded body of paradise, they also bathe those who refute their beliefs in the unrelenting flame of purification. The rule of the Anabaptists is just—until one views it from the other side.

ANUBIANS:

TRUE TO THE PROPHECY

The history of the universe is a never-ending cycle of life and death. This cycle is like a series of ripples; only through death can one travel across them and change the course of history. The Anubians believe this and see themselves as the custodians of humanity. They have warned of the encroaching Primer since the beginning of time.

Centuries after the Eschaton, the Anubians returned from exile to their homes: the temples of the ancient Egyptians. For the people of Africa, they are the spirit of the continent, shamans who can see the past and weave it into a new future. They are ambassadors between the world of the living and the world of the dead. They embrace death as a companion and live with it in the boneyards of the African villages. Like jackals, they roam the graveyards.

Their oral traditions preach of the weaknesses of *Homo degensis*; they know how to bring the psychonauts to their knees. They must vanquish these monstrosities before the evil of the

Primer destroys the world. A great fate lies in their hands; as a consequence, they must pay a heavy price. To defeat the devil, one must play by his rules.

APOCALYPTIKS: THE RULERS OF DESIRE

Crows, vultures, ravens—innumerable names exist for these nomadic folk, loved by some, despised by others. The Apocalyptiks emanate a ferocity for living that burns all who cross their path.

As quickly as they appear, they disappear—their wagons trailed by lost souls wishing to join the search for hedonistic freedom and orgiastic lifestyle. Everything the heart desires can be found in the houses of the Apocalyptiks: gambling, prostitution, fortune reading, and the drug known as burn.

These gypsies know they have nothing more to lose; their world is long past the point of salvage. Why be bitter when one can ecstatically enjoy one's last breath? Anyone can be bought, everything has its price. The Apocalyptiks are the masters of addiction, parasites in a dying world, weeds that never wilt. The last laugh will be theirs.

The Apocalyptiks use a specialized form of the tarot, adapted to the world's objective facts, to prophesize the future. Their fortune tellers are masters of deception, but their predictions come true with surprising frequency.

THE ASHEN: CAVE DWELLERS

Equal parts warden and slave, the ancestors of the Ashen locked themselves in the depths of the Earth to escape the Eschaton. Centuries of adaptation to the darkness transformed their appearance and soul. Their skin is now bleached and their senses—particularly their hearing—are heightened. Scratches on the walls of their tunnels serve as a secret language.

Speech has a particular power in the life and mythology of the Ashen. Their words conjure powerful hallucinations—no wonder that their leaders, the so-called *demagogues*, are some of the most famous singers and storytellers of the known world.

The Ashen see themselves as a giant bunker family in which everyone watches out for the other. The “scorched ones,” as they call the inhabitants of the world above, are seen as primitive animals. One day, the Ashen will inherit the surface and will command both man and animal—when the time is right.

HELLVETICS: BROTHERHOOD OF THE WEAPON

The descendants of the Swiss military rule over large swaths of the Alps. They operate in small self-sufficient teams and follow a strict code of honor, which they hold more dear than their lives. They demand tolls from the Neolibyans when they wish to cross the Alps, but otherwise remain neutral in the struggle between Europe and Africa.

Their armor is fireproof, and the systems of tunnels under their alpine strongholds are warmed from the molten rivers of the Reaper's Blow. The trailblazer—with its three barrels, high firing rate, and precision targeting system—is their weapon of choice. They also use fire against invaders; the lower levels of their bastions can, within seconds, be flooded with napalm. Neither

plunderers nor the Foulness will ever take a Hellvetic stronghold.

JEHAMMEDANS: WEARERS OF GOD'S COURTESY

A chorus of prayers echo across the battlefields of Europe, fervently chanted by the disciples of Jehammed. This cult is as influential as it fanatical. With their deep familial bonds, they dominate the eastern regions of Europe, securing God's dominion over the Earth. They cannot be avoided or ignored, and every day their numbers grow.

Their sermons are simple: turn away from the past, corrupted by technology, and honor thy family! The strength of the Jehammedans springs from their community and forges them into warriors of faith. They are the chosen people, as was promised by the last prophet. He decreed that at the end of days they would be the lords of the Earth. Since then, the Jehammedans lay claim to more and more land every day.

The priestly caste—the *iconists*—is comprised of blessed sons of Jehammed from whom death turns away. They are at once the banner of the cult, its greatest advisors, and its stern parents.

NEOLIBYANS: THE CAPITALISTS

The coastal cities of New Libya are renowned throughout the post-Eschaton world. Ships from the entire Mediterranean region come here to unload their cargo. The unbelievable opulence of Africa is a sharp contrast against the bitter poverty of Europe. The Neolibyans send notorious giant transport ships to the southern coast of Franka and release their Scrapers into the European wastelands to pillage the last treasures of the ancients.

The Neolibyans are the personification of capitalism. They divide the known world into trade regions and franchise them out to those who obey their will and turn the greatest profit. These so-called “concessions” give the Neolibyans full power to exploit the inhabitants of these regions.

The gaudy palaces of the Neolibyans dominate the landscape surrounding the Mediterranean. In the inland regions, however, the Scourgers are revered as the true heroes of Africa. They risk their lives in the battle against the enemies of Africa, while the Neolibyans merely wrap themselves in expensive clothes and coast through a pampered life. The truth lies somewhere in between.

MARSHALS: HAMMER OF JUSTICE

The Marshals—judge, jury, and executioner. Marshals protect the inhabitants of the Borcan city Justitian and its Protectorates. The hammer is the symbol of their power—and as such it is used with great fervor.

Marshals maintain the peace with a long established code of laws and precedents. Great debates rage between the lawmen over ethics and credibility, but one thing is certain: expansion is the key to a new and golden future.

Very few balk at the decrees of this grim cult. Only the Spitalians defy them. Long simmering, the conflict between these two cults is on the verge of erupting.

SCOURGERS: AVENGERS OF THE DARK CONTINENT

The Scourgers are the claws of the Lion and the promise of justice that has been denied the abused African people for too long. The Scourgers make deep forays into the European continent to enslave its inhabitants, bringing them back to toil on the massive Neolibyan plantations.

The Scourgers are a proud folk, subordinate to no one. At best, their military force represents a loose band of mercenaries—more akin to a pack of dogs than an army. Large hyenas crouch by their sides, ready to lunge into battle. Woe to he who hears their throaty laughter in the night!

TRIBALS: RULERS OF THE WASTELAND

In the years after the Eschaton, many fell, forlorn, into the darkness of a new stone age. Today, they pray to gods who represent the powers of nature. They pay homage to their ancestors and venerate ancient artifacts. Many tear and eat the flesh from the bones of their fallen enemies in order to absorb their strength into themselves. They pierce and tattoo themselves repeatedly and practice other gruesome customs.

The animal instinct is strong in the Tribals. Freed from the once civilized patina of morals and decency, small bands of Tribals roam the wastelands. Very few settle down; the majority see their home as anywhere they make it under the expansive sky.

TIME FLIES

The clock is ticking.

If it weren't for the efforts of the Chroniclers, the measure of time would long since have become a local phenomenon, varying drastically from settlement to settlement. The Chroniclers have salvaged tons of old newspapers and electronic data storage devices from the wastelands, however, keeping them ever conscious of the importance of time. They keep the history alive—without them, the people would have no past.

The Chroniclers divide the year into twelve months, noting important events in the history of their order and the local population. Long ago, their measure of time snuck into the vernacular of the other cults. After centuries of confusion, now treaties, meetings, and historical events can finally be organized and arranged.

Not all of the cults, however, allow themselves to be molded by the habits of the Chroniclers. The Jehammedans count only the years since the Eschaton. In their understanding, there is no time before the great cleansing of the Earth—at least, none worth mentioning. As such, they write the year as “512 After the Revelation of Paradise.”

The Ashen count the years “after the awakening of the sleepers in God's chambers.” This means that some Ashen communities are still in the year zero, while in the same mountain range, another group of Ashen is already ringing in the fourth century.

Tribals, from the northern tundra of Pollen all the way down to the psychovor belt of central Africa, have developed local and personal forms of time measurement. Some count in moons, some in sunrises, and others reset their count every time a leader dies.

The most mysterious form of time measurement is that of the Anubians. According to their prophecies, humanity is in the thirteenth millennium since the awakening. They claim that the dreams and memories of their oldest members reach back to a time when man and beast were still one with the world and the spirit of Anubis swept lovingly over the newborn people of Earth.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE WAR

AFRICA

THE LION
RAMPANT

THE DARK CONTINENT

The smell of the Mediterranean hangs like a leaden curtain above the coastal towns of the new Africa. Resigned to the stench, the people wrap rags around their faces, covering mouth and nose, as if a sandstorm was about to happen. There have been no sandstorms here, though, for a long, long time. Thick palm forests and swampy mangroves grow along the coasts, stretching their roots into the dirty water—they are the transgenic mutations of the ancients, created to produce life even out of sand.

Everyone that can afford to do so smothers themselves in a mist of scents—spices, perfume, and mildew grow into heady clouds above the cities. Everyone also hopes for a fresh wind from the Atlantic. It is going to come—maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after tomorrow.

Life in the African metropolises is bustling. Small buggies painted in green-brown camouflage thunder across wide asphalt trails. Colorful rags hanging from the walls of small clusters of buildings, dwarfed by the gigantic housing complexes behind them. Between the skyscrapers with their protruding balconies and balustrades of carved wood, one comes across an occasional altar. These giant gnarly trees in the middle of the urban jungle are artfully decorated with wiggly lines and adorned with tribal carvings and the names of the ancestors said to live within them.

The rich salesmen of the Neolibyan cult stroll the streets with their entourages, checking on their dignified stores and saloons, each canopied with bright white linen banners. The Neolibyans are easy to spot by the status symbols they carry: finely crafted hunting rifles and precious cloths wrapped around their bodies. They exude self-assuredness and power, commanding their followers, who buzz around them like bees, with casual gestures. It is their culture that brought glory to the metropolises, glory that is known far outside the borders of Africa and deep into deserted Europe.

Their new high culture now threatens to overshadow all others.

Away from the broad roads, one can easily get lost in a labyrinth of narrow alleys. Pedestrians are hassled by date sellers, drivers, guides, hunters and technicians, while proud Tribals stride past. Some wear traditional colorful capes with bright hoods, some force themselves into the empty shells of broken machine men, others prefer airy camouflage pants and laced leather boots. Everyone carries a weapon: simple slim hunting spears, ancient kalashnikov rifles, or ultramodern automatic weapons. The atmosphere, however, is relaxed and joyful. People sit together, drink tea from hefty tin samovars, laugh, and horse around with each other.

Away from the coastal towns, many smaller villages dot the back country. Here the streets are eroded by heavy rains and flooded in many places. The steaming jungle bursts the asphalt with its roots, as the plants creep into the smallest cracks. In many areas, all of the trees have been cut down to make room for tapioca and grains. Men and women work here, and also by the stinking black oil pumps of the Neolibyans, burnt red by the sun and supervised by Scourgers. They are slaves from the Balkhan and Hybrispanian crusades. They are strong and healthy, but their eyes are empty. They will never return to their families; their families would never allow it. Any who were captured surely did not fight fiercely enough; surrender to the Scourgers is never considered an honorable option.

Farther south, the vegetation grows thicker, becoming an impenetrable jungle, a confusing interplay of green hues. The humidity is unbearable, poisonous plants and animals thrive everywhere. Sharp screams and throaty gurgling sounds alternate, and movement is all around. Colorful birds jump from treetop to treetop, chirping or bickering if a stronger fellow wants to steal their juicy fruit. The forest is alive. Humans are only guests here. Few tribes move through the thicket here or even call it home. Here something else is at home, something strange. The plants are different; they don't exist anywhere else in the world. The changes are only small at first, maybe a deeper green or more thorns than usual. But the farther one advances, the more bizarre and the more obvious the mutations become: leathery buds grow on ferns, moss grows in strange hexagonal shapes, man-eating plants press their calyces to the ground. This rampant strip of land along the equator grows further outward every day, pushing tribes ahead of it. Now that Africa has awakened and starts to live, are its days numbered?

THE GREAT MIGRATION

In the far past, Africa wasn't always free and it never dominated Europe. The remaining history of the Dark Continent is fragmentary, as almost all of the pre-Eschaton knowledge has been lost. The Anubians, however, know of the devastating epidemic that started it all.

HIVE, as the disease was called, first broke out in the Ivory Coast. In just a few weeks it spread like a bush fire, raging among the weak and the poor and not sparing the wealthy, either. Tribes fled from their villages and drifted down the Niger on floats or dared a dangerous walk through

the Sahara—just to get away from the disease. In spite of the panic, they did not forget who was to thank for this: the white man, once again. It was his ships on the Ivory Coast from which the sick sailors came, and it was he that first developed a serum. Everything fit. The Lion was to be weakened and put in chains again.

Chaos and riots broke out. Half of the population was suddenly armed with kalashnikov guns. They fought their way to the north, following rumors that the first ships with hundreds of thousands of doses of serum were already waiting for the military and rich people on the coast. No border could keep the panicking masses from moving on; no army was able to stand in their way. African stood against African—and the white man had once again managed to turn the mighty African Lion against itself.

The defenses of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt weren't prepared for this onrush of people and had no choice but to make room for them. These countries were flooded by waves of SUVs, rusty transporters, and Russian machine guns—an army of the poor. Refugee camps spread across the coastal regions, but the masses could not be contained there. The sickness spread, and bodies lay strewn across the roads. Countries fell apart and war was waged on the streets. There was no serum, however. It was all misinformation, mass hysteria. All hope was blown away—transforming into a burning hatred of Europe.

A grotesque armada of rotting floating coffins, rafts, decimated pontoon bridges, and overloaded cutters made their way across the Mediterranean to demand a cure from the Europeans. Those who didn't drown, dehydrate, or starve along the way were greeted by an iron wall of fear and aversion. Hundreds of cruisers, frigates, torpedo boats, and destroyers formed a barricade along the African coast, denying passage to everyone. Corpses floated in the water. Europe had sinned once again.

The situation climaxed when the UEO (United European Organization) built staging posts in friendly African nations and sent mechanical, semi-intelligent support troops out to quell the disturbances. What was planned as a de-escalation developed into a fiasco. The autonomous machines defied the control of their engineers and slaughtered the scared refugees. The UEO relentlessly pressed forward, expanding their influence through a network of fortresses, secured oil wells, and mines.

THE LION AWAKENS

Many Africans felt the imperialistic Europeans were once again seeking to divide and conquer the continent. There was whispered talk of a new colonialism—enough to galvanize the Africans into action. Cruisers were secretly boarded at night by commandos and set on fire. The clothes of ebola victims were thrown over fortress walls. Guerillas ambushed UEO patrols. Fought on every front, the Europeans were forced to withdraw back to the Mediterranean coast. At home in Europe, people lost interest in news of the African conflict. It was too far away, it didn't affect them personally. Instead they turned their

attention to the approaching asteroids, waiting for technology to save the day as usual and turn the Apocalypse away.

On March 13, 2073, the sun was eclipsed. Glistening bands of plasma and nitrogen oxide cut through the atmosphere. Enormous impacts in Europe sent shockwaves through the Earth's crust, noticeable even in Africa. Several asteroids just missed the Dark Continent. One of them tore through the sky and imploded overhead, creating a high-pressure blast wave that ripped a corridor hundreds of kilometers long across central Africa. A new era had begun.

THE FLOOD

At first, North Africa seemed to have been spared. To the south a gleaming red wall of dust, dirt, and glowing rock rose into the atmosphere. In Europe, enormous mushroom clouds pushed into the sky where asteroids had hit the earth's crust. Then one of the fragments crashed into the Mediterranean.

At first the flood wasn't noticeable, hardly visible in the expanding hemisphere of foam and vapor. It dug its way across the bottom of the sea and gained more power as it neared the shore. Frightened, the people watched the water rise. It looked black under the cobalt blue sky and seemed strangely quiet. Then it receded, meter by meter. Suddenly fish lay on the beaches, flapping their fins as they suffocated.

Children ran to the beach laughing and collecting the dying animals—easy prey for a dinner that would never take place. Suddenly the tidal wave exploded on the coastal people with deafening thunder. It advanced on the coast as a several hundred meters high wall that swallowed people and rocks and crushed everything under its weight.

North Africa, humanity's last hope, was hit hard. Only a few villages in the back country and nomadic tribes survived. Shepherd tribes watched the horror from the Atlas Mountains with their reddened eyes. Governments were pulled into the sea with their capital cities. The survivors had to fend for themselves, but they found solace in their religion, Islam—and they still had oil.

THE LION STRETCHES

Centuries passed. Climate changes reshaped the continent and created a new Africa. The temperature dropped by just a few degrees, but that made a huge difference. Humidity blew over the Sahara from the Atlantic and turned the desert into a blooming savannah. Old dried-out lakes and riverbeds filled with water again and flushed away the dust and sand.

The city of Tripoli was erected on the ruins of Tripoli, and it evolved into a melting pot of cultures. Berbers, Arabs, and sub-Saharan Africans all worked together to build a new civilization.

The trade-cult of the Neolibyans appeared at this time. Trucks fought their way through cracked streets and connected the young North African settlements into a promising network of trade relations. Ships went out to sea, sending Scrappers into the damaged and deserted European coastal regions to take anything that might be of use at home.

The Africans had no pity for the miserable white creatures in the north, but so far they swallowed their anger. The white man didn't seem to pose a threat anymore, and he was an unworthy opponent.

THE LION SHOWS HIS CLAWS

This was about to change. When Hybrispanian conquistadores attacked Africa and carved a path of destruction from Gibraltar all the way to Tripoli, decades worth of reconstruction was destroyed, proud cities and people perished in the flames. The Africans understood. The white man would never let them live in peace—no matter how much he harmed himself by doing so—the Dark Continent was just too tempting. If it wasn't kept in chains, it would be a threat forever.

Indeed, united they managed to defeat the Hybrispanian army in Tripoli. For the cult of the Scourgers the battles became a practical test—which they passed. This meant new hope for Africa, to free themselves forever from the stranglehold that Europe had over them, and to take revenge for the centuries worth of humiliations that had been caused by the Europeans in the past.

The Scourgers pushed the headless Hybrispanian army back to their homeland and occupied it. Prisoners of war were carried off in long, sad convoys to ruined African cities, where they were forced to work on reconstruction or in the plantations and oilfields. The Europeans paid their debt with their children.

LIFELINES

The triangle formed by the **Ahaggar**, **Air**, and **Tibesti** mountain ranges in the former Sahara is regarded as the heart of the north and origin of the rich vegetation of Africa. Rain clouds are carried here by the west winds and unload their cargo on the jagged slopes, gushing down onto a steaming jungle. Once an infertile gravel and sand plain called the Tenere region by the ancients, the land is now a sea of fragrant blooms and thick green foliage from which a boulder occasionally protrudes.

Emi Koussi in the Tibesti range is the king of the giant mountains. At 3415 meters, it is the highest point in the Sahara and can be seen from afar. This is where the lifelines of the vast wilderness originate. Water cuts through the land, turning it into a Garden of Eden. The fine network of rivers and creeks flows all the way down to Nigeria. It is so vast that nobody has managed to explore it in its entirety. A patchwork of green and brown spreads across the continent; the enormous mountain ranges protrude from the only gaps. Cold and hard they peek out from the lively, vibrant mass.

Broad rows in the vegetation are evidence of constant changes and geological evolution: unchallenged by man the water digs itself new beds. Only the mountains remain unchanged in the new Africa.

THE LAND GROANS

The African landmass, namely what were once Algeria and Morocco, nestles against the edge of the Reaper's Blow—the tectonic anomaly is a mere stone's throw away. From the tops of the cliffs one looks down on smashed massifs and shattered granite monoliths, as tall as skyscrapers, that have become an indomitable labyrinth of crevices and hollow spaces. The gigantic heap of rubble still moves; it groans and rumbles. Earthquakes turn allegedly safe caves into debris. Any expedition here must face other obstacles as well. The rocks are covered by the slippery foam of the Mediterranean and the algae and moss that has been washed ashore. Toxic gases, released through volcanic activity, are just as deadly as the erupting geysers whose boiling water cooks human flesh in seconds. Anyone not prepared to meet these dangers with advanced technology will find death everywhere.

THE LAND BLOSSOMS

A mild but foul-smelling breeze blows across the land from the Mediterranean and keeps the temperature a pleasant 75-85 degrees Fahrenheit. Rising moisture mixes with the warm air of the Atlantic into distinctive cloud formations that majestically move across the continent. High precipitation, especially in the Atlas Mountains, and moderate temperatures led to the growth of dense forests of evergreen trees. Lichen, moss, as well as bushes and ferns have conquered the ground.

In the south there is a transition to tropical rainforests with their massive treetops roof and their lush and manifold vegetation. Beneath the giant trees, with their sprawling networks of roots, there is only twilight. Hardly a ray of light ever penetrates the green ceiling that towers twenty meters overhead. The ground is covered with branches and leaves; humidity glitters everywhere. It smells like decay. The climate in this region is stable most of the year. The seasons aren't as distinct as in regions farther north or south.

Many lakes have developed from the changing courses of rivers and the thunderous masses of rain. The groundwater is only a few meters below the surface and can easily be accessed. Water is no longer a rare commodity, as one can see in the villages. Hunger, too, seems to be a relic of long forgotten days—the trees carry ripe fruit and prey is plentiful.

THE EAST

The **West Darfur**, a long mountain range in eastern Africa, is the watershed between the Nile and Lake Chad. Only wisps of the heavy rain clouds carried here from the Atlantic reach

Anubia and Sudan, peacefully floating over the region. The climate here is correspondingly dry; a vast savannah with grass up to three meters tall stretches across the land. Forests crowd alongside the rivers and lakes and can also be found in dense groups scattered across the plains.

THREE ASPECTS OF THE LION

The Lion is a metaphor for the African tribes. It is master of the savannah, wild and boisterous, and no one's slave. Its beauty is legendary and is only eclipsed by its strength. Three aspects define the Lion and its tribes. First are the Scourgers—the Lion's claws—with which it defends its freedom and lacerates its enemies. Second are the Neolibyans—its heart—since it was they who brought new strength and endurance to the weakened continent and who keep it alive. Finally, the Anubians represent the soul of Africa because they conserve the wisdom of the ancestors; they are shamans in search for meaning.

While this analogy defines the people of the coastal regions from Gibraltar all the way to Anubia, in the wild regions of central Africa there are still independent tribes that have escaped the influence of outsiders for centuries. They might not even know of the existence of the Neolibyans, the Scourgers, or the Anubians. It is amazing that these secluded communities structure themselves much like the major tribes. It is almost as if the splendid tradesman, the secretive shaman, and the dominant avenger are archetypal elements that automatically develop in any culture. This might be coincidence or consistent with sociological and psychological predictions, but there also exist strange similarities in the naming of the tribes. The equivalent of a Neolibyan might be called Na-olibya or Nolib in a remote village, and the same is true for Scourgers and Anubians even though the village had never been in touch with the African culture on the Mediterranean. It seems, indeed, as if Africa might be permeated by a rising spirit that doesn't leave room for anything else. Have the ancestors awakened and taken their descendants by the hands?

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The competitive nature that is so common and familiar to the Borcans and Franks is unknown to the normal Africans, who live in a world permeated by spiritual and mystical principles, watched and assessed by their ancestors and natural spirits. With their belief in these supernatural powers come certain moral obligations. For example, if one doesn't want to fall in disgrace, one must follow the path that has been passed down for centuries. One has to justify every deed, be it slaughtering an animal or cutting down a tree, because every human, every animal, and every dusty stone at the foot of a jagged rock could be the reincarnation of an ancestor or irritable spirit. Respect and humanity, even towards the lowest creatures, are not a question of moral integrity, but of keeping one's own peace of mind.

COOPERATION

A Neolibyan's peace of mind, on the other hand, is not preserved through mystical fuss but through the dinar—a damn big heap of jingling dinars. The business savvy of the Neolibyans is legendary. The wealth of the coastal towns, as well as many smaller villages in the interior, is unquestionably due to them. It is a blessing for the African people that the Neolibyans aren't content with being successful and wealthy—they also want to display it. They improve their hometowns in order to present their status. A new well is dug and a pump is installed, buildings are stonewalled, streets are paved, electric light turns night into day. Their villages are a mirror for their vanity—look here, see how well my brothers and sisters are doing! The inhabitants are happy and content. This tradition has existed for centuries, and it works well. The competition between the opulent Neolibyans has made Africa rich and fat.

On the other side of this wealth are the Scourgers. The population admires them since they risk their life in the fight for Africa—and they bring slaves whose labor helps Africa to prosper. Scourgers are destined to die, and so they seek to make their last days as pleasant as possible—at the expense of the Neolibyans of course. According to tradition, a Scourger has the right to ask for food, housing, and weapons. Most of the time the tradesmen restrict their donations to the bare necessities, but if they are benefactors of a village and the Scourger is a native, they are not allowed to hide anything from him. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many pregnant women move to wealthy cities such as Tripoli right before giving birth, hoping that their children will be provided for as Scourgers.

The economy of Africa is an endless cycle of giving and taking. The Neolibyans bring wealth and throw it at the people with all their arrogance. The Scourgers live off of it, paving the way for the tradesmen and bringing slaves to labor for the country. All is going well for Africa.

THE WEALTH OF THE NEOLIBYANS

Tripoli, as the largest and most influential city in Africa, is home to one of the most important buildings of the Neolibyans—the **Merchant Bank**. Here the tradesmen buy their trade licenses once a year that allow them to trade certain goods on certain routes or to claim the profits of certain regions, part of which are also from plantations and oilfields. This form of commercial protection is extremely effective and limits direct competition within the cult. It also benefits the Neolibyans who are already the wealthiest—whoever has the most money gets the best licenses.

SYMBIOTE OR PARASITE?

While vast parts of Europe were lost to the Foulness, Africa was affected differently but no less dangerously. Instead of using mold and spores, the Primer seems to have concentrated on different ways of spreading. Decades ago, in the deserted land along the equator, an evolution began—foul cancer blossomed on plants and animals, biting into their flesh. The cadavers were hardly rotten before the alien genes began probing into the bodies of the next generation. All species were tested, emotionlessly and automatically, like a calculator that dully runs through all of its predetermined programs and in the end spits out a score. Plants in this humid area were superior hosts than the mold spores of the cold north. The resulting vegetation was different; it didn't have much in common with the domestic plants anymore. They were grotesquely contorted and genetically reprogrammed with new characteristics so that only their rough outer structure resembled their predecessors. This was the genesis of the psychovors.

They intoxicate man, animal, and earthly vegetation with their tempting scents, prick them with their thorns, and shoot barbed spores at them. They penetrate every pore and inject strange gene-sequences into their victims. Afflicted creatures adapt, or they are eaten from the inside by a fast growing cancer. Humans die a horrible death.

The bizarre plant mutations seem to have characteristics that go beyond pure destruction. The farther south one ventures, the stranger the clans living there behave. Their language consists of rudimentary babbling—they speak in tongues—and they understand each other. If one stays with them for several days, their seemingly senseless syllables start to touch something in one's mind, addressing feelings as if every phoneme were a well considered pound on the marimba. A few more days and the language develops into a sensual instrument, communicating through intuitive music that finds its way into the nervous system like a waterfall of rattling and rhythmical beating on drums. Now the language begins to make sense. There are no misunderstandings between the interlocutors anymore; one's soul pours into the spirit of the other. The people live in peace—even tribes that have been enemies for centuries become friends.

The Neolibyans, however, use a negative term to refer to the advancing mass of plants: psychovors, meaning mind-eaters. The plants drive the African clans away from their ancestral territories, greedily swallowing the land. One day the plants will reach the coastal towns. If no solution is found by then, the Lion will undoubtedly die—at least that's what the tradesmen think. The Scourgers mock the Neolibyans for their pessimistic world view—they see the psychovors as incarnations of their ancestors that have come to support them in their hour of strength. The Anubians see it all. They know and they remain silent.

STEEL, NOT SOUL

Everything seems strangely wrong about the steel machine men. They stand outside of the ancient strongholds—cold, animated machine bodies that couldn't even house a demon's soul.

Their mere presence is a barbed dagger in the Lion's side—they don't belong to this time or in an awakened Africa. They embody the characteristics of the hated white ancients: dominance, submission, and exploitation. Despite the humid heat they are wrapped in rotting rags, standing guard on the pinnacles of massive concrete blocks in the middle of the endless green jungle.

Toxic fumes rise from these chimneys, deadly waste trickles down the walls like stinking feces on the leg of a sporeling. If the doors are opened, buzzing steel beetles break free, devouring the earth and spitting it out like a fountain. A blue haze fills the air—foul breath from the netherworld.

The goals of the machines are unknown. Most of the known machine men guard the old fortresses and are not a danger to people, so long as they keep their distance. But there are wanderers who patrol the surroundings and sometimes even speak to Africans in their guttural voices before they attack.

In recent years, more and more empty shells of disemboweled machine men have appeared in the markets: breast, arms, and legs. Their endurance is exceptional—they make excellent suits of armor. They are rare, however, and therefore much too expensive for regular people, but many Neolibyans like to buy them for their trips in foreign waters. Artfully painted, these shells are gorgeous indeed! Too bad no settings for rubies and sapphires can be drilled into them.

THE PRIDE OF AFRICA

Seafarers compare the harbor cities of the new Africa to expensive pieces of jewelry, gemmed with precious stones and made by the masters. After weeks on a rusty boat and three portions of cooked tapioca per day, anyone would agree. The comparison holds against the bright light of objectivity—the harbor facilities are decorated with stately and extravagant fountains and ceramic mosaics on walls and floors.

Everyone is free to drink from the fountains or take a handful of dates from an open barrel. Nobody goes hungry or thirsty—the rich local Neolibyans take care of that. If one leaves the docks and passes through the suburbs toward the

city center, one is surrounded by scents of spices and shouting tradesmen. The main streets are paved with sandstone or granite, whitewashed facades are speckled with cheerful dots of shiny cobalt blue tiles. Behind the two- and three-story buildings lay the giant tower buildings, constructed in terrace style, erupting from the haze of the city. Narrow alleys of colorful sales booths filled with goods from all over the world wait for customers with big wallets. In the intersections one meets plazas surrounded by palm trees in which slaves and Scourgers do their work. Dented buggies, often riddled with bullet holes, are fixed in the Scourgers' repair-shops and are sent back out on the hunt a few days later. The smell of diesel, and the violence it stands for, is foreign here. They belong to the heavy transport ships that leave the African coasts to conquer the countries on the Mediterranean.

VAST COUNTRY

TRIPOL

Tripol is the pivotal point of African culture and economy. Here, Scourgers, Neolibyans, and Anubians meet and go out into the world to conquer it anew every day.

Many dozens of the wealthiest Neolibyans live in Tripol, and their quarters are pompously designed according to their individual desires. Tall buildings decorated with tribal art and great frescos stand beside one-story lodges with clean, white walls, big terraces, and balustrades constructed with beams of dark hardwood. There is enough space for everything. There are no other government districts or central institutions that would be worth being close to.

Poverty is unknown in Tripol. The Neolibyans ensure that every beggar in front of their residences gets food, new clothing, and sometimes even a place in their entourage.

ANUBIA

For millennia the Nile has meandered like an artery through the swathe of land once known as Egypt—now known as Anubia. It carried fresh water, fertile silt, and fish, enriching

the lives of the people who lived on its banks. If the river flooded, the people suffered. The massive Aswan Dam burst many years ago—huge concrete blocks, half sunken into the mud, are the only remnants. Since then, the Nile has grown, erasing long-forgotten cities from the map.

The Eschaton also brought other changes to the Nile. Pods of spores dance on the dark green surface of **Lake Victoria**, eventually carried down the Nile by the current. Some pods don't make it around the bends, and get stuck in the fertile mud on the banks. They sprout and the psychovors spread. From the Nile delta it's not far to the Mediterranean. From there they spread across to the Balkhan coast.

Anubia is an ancient land and home to one of the oldest cults: the Anubians. While ancestral cities like **Cairo** have been abandoned and destroyed, cultists streamed to the sites of the ancient Egyptians and moved into the colossal temples and pyramids. They made Cairo the Forbidden City, reserved for their high priests. Not that anybody cares—the settlement lies in the middle of a dense psychovor forest which is impossible to penetrate. It is an enigma how the Anubians have managed to avoid being influenced by the strange plants. They are not willing to reveal their secret—neither are they willing to say why they chose this hostile place for their home.

The area not dominated by the psychovors was a desert in pre-Eschaton times. It was replaced by billowing grass steppes. Rivers on the East Darfur, the mountain divide between the tropical west and the moderate east, feed deep blue lakes and vast swamps with meters-high papyrus bushes. Aside from the mutated vegetation, the land is friendly to its people, mostly simple peasants. The time of the big civilizations seems to be over—no clan has the power or even the desire to found a nation anymore. The people stick to their own tribes, living day by day without much planning, though each day they are pushed farther and farther north by the psychovors.

AGADESH

Agadesh lies on a much-traveled caravan route in the heart of Africa. Its importance for trade has diminished since the growth of the psychovor forests has cut off the south from the trade routes of the north. The Neolibyans pulled out of it, but the city is still important to the Scourgers. This is where they store their knowledge of the past and future, painted with earth and blood onto the white walls of the ancient buildings and mud huts.

EMBAYE

Embaye is the strong heart of the Lion. Surrounded by three mountain ranges—the Ahaggar, Air, and Tibesti—it is the oldest part of the African jungle. Rapid waters, dirty from the earth they carry, cut through the dense underbrush and branch out into the most remote corners of the continent. These waterways are the most important traffic routes between the villages in the back-country and the cities along the coast. They are dangerous and wash bloated bodies ashore every day.

Even though the pulse of Africa beats far away in the coastal towns, a few tribes live at the foot of the mountain ranges on platforms high up in the trees. They know nothing about the

Neolibyans, Scourgers, or Anubians. The forests are filled with observation posts and rope bridges, outnumbering people. Much about the past of the Tribals still lies in the dark—why they don't come down to the ground? Who taught them their craftsmanship? They are friendly, and thanks to the nearby psychovors they speak in tongues—babbling that strangers instinctively understand after a few hours or days.

DHORUBA

During the Eschaton, an enormous asteroid plowed through the atmosphere above Africa and tore a valley of destruction across the continent. Awestruck, tribal elders spoke of the gleaming, burning sun that hung in the air for hours after the devastating blast and heat waves had passed. It announced the beginning of a new era—the era of the ancestors.

Today Dhoruba is a scar in the middle of lush green. The trade winds thunder through a gorge kilometers wide, blasting through so fiercely that only the strongest plants cling to the torn earth. Thorn bushes and grass are predominant here. Strange people have also settled down in the jagged mountains that border on the Dhoruba. They dig galleries into the rock in order to mine ore, but these rumors have not been confirmed.

BALKHAN

THE WILD LANDS

ECHO

Balkhan: a wild region whose pride, unpredictability, and beauty touch the heart. It takes the wanderer by the hand to teach him of extremes. Storms thunder across the plains, stirring the tree-tops of dark forests, but the ridges of the mountains divide and tame the winds, stripping them of their elemental force. When heaven's gates open, it doesn't rain, it pours—torrents dig their way towards the valley, merging into rapid floods. Knotty trees dig their roots deep into the ground, refusing to surrender to the extreme forces of nature. The winters are cold and merciless. Snow piles up in the mountains, meters high, and swallows the coniferous forests. In the summer the sun burns the grass steppes into yellow stubble. Balkhan never gets to rest. It groans and screams and never gives up, getting stronger and more resilient with every battle.

The Balkhani people love their land—it is a mirror image of their souls. They themselves are untamed, proud warriors of a proud tribe. They gather in the *voivodships*, swathes of land controlled by merciless warlords, indulging in life, celebrating battle, and reconciling again and again. Constant changes of allegiance and declarations of war create a future of adventure with the starting point always different from the night before. Threats are laughed at and viewed as a challenge to one's own strength and cleverness. Ever since the Africans crossed the Bosphorus, the battles have been ceaseless. Fewer and fewer warriors return from the battlefields, but in the eyes of those that do you can see the powerful flames of wrath.

THE LEGACY

The news of the impending Eschaton was a signal for many to return to their roots, to face the inevitable apocalypse united with their parents, friends, and brothers. Endless lines of cars

crept from Western Europe to the East, towards home. Turks, Serbs, Greeks, Magyars, Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, and many other ethnic groups thundered across the highways. Chaos and the rule of might dominated the streets. The approaching end and the promise of pandemonium ignited the ancient flames of hate, dissolving law and order even faster than one could have expected.

It was an explosive situation. The people needed an outlet, a common enemy whom they could blame for everything. No one can say today who started the ranting about the centuries-long occupation of their homeland by the Ottoman Empire. Just weeks earlier, these crazy people with their tirades would have been pushed back into the holes they crept out of, but with impending doom on the horizon a hateful minority easily agitated the entire population. The flame was lit, and soon even moderates were swayed by the litany of pathos and false propaganda. The situation quickly escalated—and the Turks became its victims.

First, Turkish refugees were denied gasoline, then food and lodging. Then they were attacked in the streets, their vehicles pushed into ditches and their belongings stolen. Even though many stood in the way of the agitated masses, preaching reason and peace, they all drowned in the towering wave of violence. The United European Organization (UEO—a UN successor) peacekeeping troops were powerless. They were prepared to keep the order in selective hot spots and to de-escalate certain conflicts, but even now the laws were changing in the Balkans. Hatred spread like a massive inferno across the land.

Almost overnight, the scapegoating and thuggish violence aimed at Turkish transients culminated in a civil war. This mass delusion united the Balkan people, who no longer saw themselves as Serbian, Romanian, Greek, or Magyar. In 2072 this new tribe, piqued by propaganda and intoxicated with early victories, moved across the Bosphorus and assaulted Turkey under the leadership of the clever demagogue Ezkiel. The war had begun—the losses on both sides were immeasurable, the world waited with bated breath and then turned away, seeming to sense that the happenings in the Near East were only a foretaste of what they all would face after the Eschaton.

The Turkish government collapsed. Nobody had expected that anything like this could happen in the morally and ethically advanced 2070s, and even less were prepared to handle it. The Turkish population fought for survival and withdrew into the mountains.

When the Eschaton shook the Earth in the spring of 2073, Homo sapiens had already proven what it was capable of. It was only the beginning.

THE BALKHANI EMPIRE

Decades later, numerous unscrupulous warlords seized power over enormous regions and their populations. These despots called their fiefdoms voivodships, after the historical voivods of the region, and elevated peasants into soldiers. At the same time, the first Jehammedan emerged and preached a new way of the faith. The voivods of **Bucharest** and **Beograd** rose

above the rest, ruthlessly destroying their opposition. Rather than engaging each other in a war that would bleed each of them dry and leave them vulnerable to the circling wolves, they allied and proclaimed themselves the Balkhani Empire. It would not last ten years—which was ten years longer than anyone would have guessed.

THIS MEANS WAR

The African Scourgers came seemingly overnight, and they came as a legion. With only a few decisive battles they captured the burnt-out shell of what was once Turkey from the Balkhani tribes. Inexorably, they made their way to the Bosphorus, stealing children and women away to an unknown future. Their advance, however, didn't end there. When the Beograd and Bucharest voivods finally agreed to unite their armies, the first burning barrels of oil were already rolling into the walls around Bucharest. Beograd ignored its alliance with Bucharest and left its former friend, which had always been considered a competitor, to its fate. Their troops were pulled back so that they could organize the defense of their own land.

The battle for Bucharest seemed hopeless—the superiority of the Scourgers was bone-crushing. The invaders, however, weren't prepared for the obstinacy and patriotism of the Balkhani tribe. Suddenly partisans appeared everywhere: men, women, and children—anyone who could carry a weapon on his or her back used it against the Africans. Fanatical Jehammedans threw themselves at the enemy, while Apocalyptiks poisoned the water and dehumanized the Scourgers' bodies with burn. This was no war that could be controlled. The invading army began to falter and eventually retreated to the Bosphorus.

MAGGOTS ON MEAT

At the same time as the African invasion of Balkhan, something strange happened in the remote regions of the **Carpathian Mountains**. There had been talk of ancient, sealed bunkers, deep in the rocks, and gloomy stories were told about pale creatures that emerged from these at night. These were just the usual camp-side stories that nobody believed during daytime. With their concentration focused on defending Bucharest, the Balkhani didn't care about such children's stories. Only after entire families disappeared without a trace did people begin to listen and search for a grain of truth in these myths and fairy tales—and they found it underground. In a long-forgotten world and time, a communist called Tito had dug tunnels under all of Yugoslavia; the land was hollowed out as if a horde of moles had been let loose underneath it.

Others had continued Tito's work. The last and most productive in a long history of burrowers were the men and women of the Recombination Group, a pre-Eschaton enterprise. Their goals were a well-guarded secret, and even today only fragments of their plan are understood, but they are said to be the ones who locked the so-called Ashen into the underground bunkers to guard the forbidden areas. For ages these colorless creatures remained there, but hunger drove them to the surface. Many of the smaller Ashen communities had already gone insane by

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WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS, THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM

THE ONE WHO TALKS OF OATH AND LAW

WILL NEVER BE HEARD AGAIN.

THE VOICE OF THE ONE

WHO PREACHES BELIEF IN CHRIST

WILL DIE AWAY IN THE DESERT.

BUT EVERYWHERE, THE POWERFUL WATERS

OF THE FAITHLESS RELIGIONS WILL DISPERSE.

FAKE MESSIAHS

WILL CROWD THE BLIND PEOPLE AROUND THEM

AND THE HEATHEN WILL WANT TO CARRY ARMS LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

HE WILL SPEAK OF FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE,

AND HIS BELIEF WILL BE FERVENT AND SHARP.

HE WILL TAKE REVENGE FOR THE CRUSADE.

[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

then. Time didn't treat them well. They degenerated, forgot about their doctrine, and many turned to cannibalism.

For years the Ashen secretly lived off the villages above them. They tapped their wells and stole their livestock from the meadows. After years of deprivation, however, their desire for excesses grew—their raids became bolder and resulted in more and more victims. The Ashen's greed could not be satisfied. Once again, the Balkhani natives had to choose between destruction and war. To this day, in the northernmost regions of Balkhan, a war rages between the people from below and the villagers—the former being strongest at night, the latter during the light of the day. Neither side has yet been able to declare victory.

SOUL GIVING

Unearthly sounds echo across the land in varying intensity. They are sometimes soft and low, sometimes ecstatically vibrant and painfully shrill. If the Balkhani had access to recordings of whale songs, they would be able to describe the strange sounds in some sort of acoustic context. The sounds address more than just one's sense of hearing, however—they touch the heart, planting pain or solace.

The originators of these calls are the Soulful Ones, the Dushani. These strange creatures experience the world around

them through sounds and waves. Born into—and expelled from—the villages near the spore fields, they retreated into the grottos and the acoustically pristine domes built into the rocks of Balkhan, or they climbed the highest peaks, where they still sway with the songs of the wind. They are children of the Foulness, messengers of the Balkhani Earth Chakra. They are shy, but their songs accompany you almost everywhere you go.

DIVERSITY

No other land distinguishes itself through such an unbelievable diversity of landscapes. Across Balkhan, vast plains alternate with mountain ranges and grass steppes butt against dense deciduous or pine forests. Over millions of years the water has cut caves and grottos into the rocks, finally conquered by moss and lichen.

While the Carpathians in the north are cool and inhospitable even in the summer months, the southern regions, thanks to the regulating influence of the Mediterranean, are more moderate. In between, dense jungles stretch across the land, swallowing the old roadways from ages ago. No other land offers as many hiding places as Balkhan; the rough terrain conceals anyone who doesn't want to be seen. Jagged mountain ranges with an immense number of valleys and grottos could keep entire armies hidden.

The **Danube** is the lifeline of the land, though its source changed after the Eschaton. According to the old atlases, there is still a river originating in the Alps that could be called the Danube. This stream dies young, however, meandering through the tectonically-unstable Reaper's Blow, where it eventually rushes headlong into a crevice. It never makes it to the east. What the Balkhani call Danube is only an ancient riverbed fed by water from the Slovenian mountains, flowing from the city of Pest all the way to the Black Sea. Along its banks the people have built the biggest cities in the country, but vegetation and animals also profit from its proximity. Dark forests crowd here and are good hunting grounds for the wolves of the region.

ANTAGONISM

Balkhan, with its jagged mountain ranges and vast steppes, is good to its children—they know how to make use of their land in battles. Even the technologically superior Africans experienced this painful lesson, more than once ending up with bloodied noses.

The Balkhani are a partisan people that stand up to the invaders, thorns in the lion's flank. Their attacks are fast and come from nowhere. If the African opposition is too strong, the guerillas spread out and regroup in a new location. Their chances are slim, but their knowledge of the area and tenacity readily make up for that.

The Balkhani are also an explosive people. Passion smolders in them and just as fast turns into pure, all-consuming hatred. Threats from the outside are the cement that holds the brittle walls of Balkhani politics together. Together, they beat their enemies senseless, but as soon as they triumphantly celebrate around the lifeless bodies of their foes, the alliances start to crumble. The lust for war is all-consuming—it wants to be acted out. If there is no external adversary, they look around themselves and find enemies everywhere.

This aggressive behavior can be witnessed even within families. Outsiders find it strange that fathers and sons fight each other violently over petty differences in opinion, only to laughingly embrace each other the next morning. Me against my brother—my brother and I against my uncle—all of us together against the world!

The battles between the Balkhani and the Africans have raged for centuries. Sometimes one side dominates, sometimes the other. The losses on the Balkhani side are growing, however—the overwhelming hordes of Africans become more suffocating every day. The Bosphorus seems lost as the Neolibyans construct huge fortresses there, assuring African dominance for a long time to come. Yet the Balkhani merely laugh at the advances of their arch enemies and spit in The Lion's face. A defeat is only a defeat if you accept it as such—no other tribe builds up such an illusory world as the Balkhani do. They see success in defeats and draw strength from them, yet they are slowly bleeding to death. They see the loss of the Bosphorus as a contest of strength, the African armies as cattle fit for slaughter. They are the dam that protects the weak Borcan and the cowardly Polleners from the African invasion. All they desire in return is respect.

OF STRENGTH AND FALL

BEOGRAD VOIVODSHIP

No voivodship has been around as long as Beograd. The city can look back on a long line of cruel princes who maintained order and ensured continuity, making the region the heart of Balkhan. Indeed, life is more vibrant in Beograd than in any other city in the region. This is due mostly to the Apocalyptiks—with lust, gambling, and burn they lure people into their net and turn the Beograd Voivodship into a temple of life—and of sin. The Jehammedans in Bucharest accept this with difficulty, which is of no concern to the citizens of Beograd—however, Beograd's guards keep their eyes on the surrounding forests just to be safe.

Djurcic, the voivod of Beograd, watches the tumult in the streets of his city with mixed feelings. The Ravens—as the Apocalyptiks are called—preach anarchy, and their voices are hard to suppress. A simple peasant would be put on the stake for voicing such rebellious slogans. If only the Apocalyptiks weren't the reason for Beograd's—and Djurcic's—fortunes.

BUCHAREST VOIVODSHIP

Once, Bucharest verged on annihilation. Its walls were torn down, the rocks scorched black. Nobody bothered to rebuild the streets, nobody cut the creeping underbrush. Today, Bucharest lies in the middle of a dense forest. The buildings serve as comfortable dens for wolves and other animals. The city is a newly-strengthened voivodship, however, dominated by Jehammedan eikoniden. Long ago, the cult put up its tents here and transformed Bucharest into a religious center.

The tribes usually spend their days with their herds of goats in the overgrown street canyons, praying and preaching at the city's historical sites—at the Stavropoleos and Patriarchal churches

as well as the monumental ruins of the House of the Republic. When night falls, they seek shelter in the catacombs of the city.

For years, the Jhammedans have worked at rebuilding Bucharest. In some quarters they have already pushed back nature and turned some of the well-preserved ruins into habitable houses. The streets leading to the voivodship of **South Carpathia** and the former Black Sea harbor **Constanta** have also been cleaned up. Slowly, life flows back into the city.

PEST

Pest is a thoroughly-decayed city in north Balkhan. Once it was called Budapest—the union of the town Buda, situated on the western shore of the Danube, and the city Pest on the opposite side of the river. The great fire of 2092 completely devoured the former, turning the latter into a bereft widow. Pest didn't escape unharmed, however—Foulness spread across the land in thick veils, clinging to the ancient buildings. Several mother spore fields opened, causing the characteristic wave patterns in the outer quarters of the city.

Ages have passed since then. The vegetation here, undisturbed for centuries, transformed the ruins into stunning green grottos. No one dares approach the city, as even from afar they can feel the sub-sonic songs of the Dushani. The psychonaut sounds differ from those in the Carpathian grottos or the vast plains of southern Balkhan—they resonate with anger, stealing one's breath. Sometimes a wanderer's nose might bleed as he approaches Pest; others have reported tooth and headaches. Hardly anyone seeks to discover the source of this phenomenon; those who try are never seen again.

LJUBLJANA

The city of Ljubljana resembles a cemetery for giants. Gray and untouched by the hands of time, its buildings reach like sad tombstones into the cloudy sky. The ground is sealed with gray plates—the remains of ancient buildings. In some places, the sealed tombs have sunk into the ground and small lakes form like sad halos. No plant is able to take root here; the grass around the outskirts of the city is yellow and dying.

No one stays for long or even voluntarily in Ljubljana. The city lies in the **Carnic Alps**, at the gateway between Purgare and Balkhan—directly on an old smuggling route that occasionally leads visitors through the silent streets.

There are strange tales of a bandaged creature with glistening eyes that burns anyone who dares to come close to ash. It pulls slaves behind it, chained like dogs, that it kicks and abuses. Anyone traveling through Ljubljana should make sure to look over their shoulder from time to time.

TURKEY

The Nile flushes hundreds of psychovor pods into the Mediterranean every day. There they lay in the stinking liquid until they rot away and sink to the bottom or are carried to the shores of former Turkey by the shallow current. In the moist sand, they burst and take root—and the seed is sown.

The coastal areas of Turkey are heavily infested with psychovors. The wall of plants creeps inland unhindered. They swallows meadows, wetlands, and lush green deciduous forests, driving away the brown bears and red deer. The descendants

of the Turkish refugees survive amidst these dangerous plants, even managing to take possession of some of their old cities again. The price for their relative safety from the Balkhani and Africans is a life in bulky protective clothing several millimeters thick, made from an elastic synthetic material. They carry heavy breathing apparatus on their shoulders, transforming them into people behind bizarre alien masks. The excellent technological quality of their equipment amazes the Balkhani. The source of their wealth is unknown—rumors range from UEO warehouses to the stock old factories.

It would stand to reason that the Turks would like to re-conquer Turkey, but nothing so far has hinted at that. They keep to themselves in the psychovor regions and avoid all contact and conflict with their former tormentors. Their culture remains a mystery, but people should prepare to hear from them in the near future.

BORCA

THE LEGACY OF THE ANCIENTS

RELICS AND ASHES

The singing of steel, the crackling of concrete, the rustling of the breeze as it ebbs and swells through the ruins, the patter of wind-swept red dust on the hoods of automobile carcasses—out here, amidst the remains of a long gone civilization, the voices of centuries long-gone echo in the street canyons, trapped for eternity. Only the snow is silent as it falls.

Monotony and loneliness, the legacy of the ancients, define the lives of the Borcan tribes, becoming part of their nature. The Borcans have never overcome their descent into the abyss of a technological stone age—and the descent into meaninglessness. How could they, when day after day they are mocked by the monuments of a grander era—the gargantuan ruins?

Children should always achieve more than their parents. The Borcans are children that have never been able to free themselves from this belief. They have never grown up, so they set forth to rebuild what can't be rebuilt. The artifacts in the ruins are misunderstood miracles—splendid mysteries they scrutinize to vainly recapture their former glory. Children.

A BODY SPLIT IN TWO

The **Reaper's Blow** cuts the earth open, dividing Borca in two. Originating in the icy north, this tectonic chasm cuts in a rolling arc southward through the Alps, meandering unnoticed under the Mediterranean, eventually terminating on the shores of Africa. Gigantic blocks of earth, as big as entire cities, are piled into a puckering scar, hundreds of kilometers long. Rivers pushed out of their beds rush over the cliffs, only to be forced back to the surface as boiling geysers somewhere else. In this region the heat of the Earth is close to the surface, erupting in violent volcanic activity.

This jagged slice of land, on which golden grain once prospered, is hard as coal. It smells and tastes

like ashes. Cracks run through the packed earth and divide it into plates with scabbed edges. Bubbling puddles of slag emit yellow fumes that rupture your lungs if you approach without protection. Aside from the bursting blisters of lava, it is menacingly quiet here. Animals and men fled this region long ago. All that is left are the skeletal remains of a sophisticated society—now baked into brittle cocoons of soot. Farther to the east, you can catch sight of evergreens—though stunted and weak, any life is a miracle in this hell, even a cockroach on the sole of your boot.

Anyone traversing this region must wade through knee-deep heaps of ash along dried out lava streams, climb treacherous jagged cliffs, and evade explosive skin-boiling geysers. Earthquakes force you to your knees; the thunder of avalanches, with the ominous crack of stone against stone, still echo in your ears—pure elemental force. Some people never get over this experience—yet they count themselves lucky, as most travelers end up in a crevice, brains smashed on the rubble and limbs twisted underneath their battered corpses, their bloated faces and burst lungs breeding grounds for cockroaches and woodlice.

Borca was split apart by the Reaper's Blow. Like twins, each half has the same origin: the ancestral culture that shapes the land even beyond its death. Yet the people west of the Reaper's Blow differ from those in the east, like twins who have spent their youth apart.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

To the west of the Reaper's Blow, Borca is cold and inhospitable. The great seas of the north are frozen over and snow falls almost year round. In the ruins, nature failed to recapture that which the ancestors had stolen from it. The steel and concrete skeletons of the apocalyptic landscape are virtually uninhabitable for the dry brushes, cotton grass, and meadows of moss and lichen that break the solitude of the cold steppes. Wind tears the plants off the asphalt and blows them away, as if the ancestors still guard the sad remains of their homes. The only thing that deprives the gray monoliths of their sadness is the ever-present dust, a crimson mixture of dirt, ash, and rust. Like a shroud, it covers the land in the few months free of snow and threatens to smother the farmers' sprouts. Storms lash the dust into red clouds that obscure the sun. The fine particles find their way into every little nook and cranny. Eyes become encrusted and inflamed, lungs collapse if one doesn't breathe through thick rags. Mother Earth makes life hard for every Borcan.

The people adapted, not because they wanted to, but because they had no choice. Wrapped in colossal layers of heavy rags and furs and protected by dust masks, they perform their daily chores. The ruins, their legacy, are the center of their thoughts and actions. They stand for solace and sadness, subsistence and death. The West Borcans never detached themselves from their ancestors, trying to maintain a strange and misunderstood life on the ancients' graves; a life that had ended long ago with the Eschaton. Technical know-how died with their forerunners,

the precious artifacts now nothing more than worthless junk without electricity. Despite this, the daily fight for scrap metal and power is still the dominant theme in Borca.

Cities send out Scrapper squadrons to scour the ruins for scrap metal; unscrupulous warlords and their gangs attack their opponents' posts to steal weapons and technology. The influence of a cult is measured by the man-made junk that fills its halls. Hardly anyone is engaged in reconstruction, though; as long as the dumpsters of the ancestors deliver enough, they crawl and live on it like rats.

Though they share the same past and history, the tribes east of the Reaper's Blow diverged from the path of self-destruction, put ancient traditions and an outdated culture aside, and dared a new beginning in the vast evergreen forests of East Borca. Where their Western brothers only came across dust, concrete, and insects, they had wood and huge herds of musk oxen at their disposal. They reminisced about the origins of the human race and found their way back to a simpler lifestyle. While life in the West was turbulent, focused on the here and now, a constant struggle for survival, the East pursued a more leisurely lifestyle. They followed the tracks of the herds and developed into a nomadic tribe of eternal migration. The cities of the past sank into oblivion, eventually enveloped by the forests and steppes.

RISE AND FALL

The desire for stability and authority is deeply rooted in the Borcan tribes. The chaotic years after the Eschaton were a heavy burden for the Borcan people. They longed for a solution and were ready to sacrifice anything for it. The city of **Exalt**, in the center of West Borca, promised a new golden era. It was not controlled by a warmonger and did not have any corrupt clans presiding over it; safety was guaranteed by armies of mercenaries led by influential financial rulers. It seemed a gleaming light of freedom in a frighteningly dark time. It was also meant to become a melting pot of peoples, but the mixture was tainted by old hostilities and cracks soon formed at the foundations. Street fighting between rival clans, looting, and increasingly unsafe trade routes finally destroyed any hope for lasting peace, and the city collapsed under its own weight. Entire districts joined forces and emigrated, looking for a home in the deserted lands surrounding the city. Small villages and towns sprouted in many places, still clinging to their progenitors' ruins. Columns of dirty figures in rags streamed into former megaplexes in the Rhine-Ruhr region. Anything seemed possible, everything was allowed—it was a time of fear and despots.

Like parasites, cults such as the Anabaptists bathed in the chaos, drinking themselves fat and content on the uncertainty of the age. They preached to the aimless and partly hysterical population of a way through the bedlam, claiming to be role models who could provide meaning to Borcan lives. Their only true intention, however, was to bolster their own power. They competed like rival framers—who would be first to harvest their crops?

Only strong communities were able to provide protection in these turbulent times. Nobody wanted to be on their own—alone you were nothing. Fanatical armies of zealots clashed in enormous battles among the hallowed ruins, sullyng the time-honored constructs of the ancients with blood and gore. The rats never went hungry.

PROTECTION

Anyone hoping to maintain order needed to learn from and ignore the mistakes that Exalt made. **Justitian**, the City of the Righteous Fist, grew from a union of Chroniclers and Marshals in the northern outskirts of the **Dustlung** region—the dust-clogged Ruhr Basin. Its denizens were forced to decide: freedom or security. Those who preferred the former were free to try their luck out in the waste land. The Marshals of the city assumed power and governed with ruthless authority. Their Advocates enacted laws that harshly divided the populace into citizens and outcasts. With rigorous punishments, work camps, and a strict re-education program, the corset of control was tied tighter and tighter every day, suffocating the people.

Justitian prospered. They sent Marshals to the surrounding villages, offered protection, and demanded submission. Since then the Protectorate has grown. It swallowed one community after the other, like a greedy amoeba. What used to be independent settlements are today districts of the Justitian metropolis. Though independent enclaves were once allowed to vote in Justitian matters, they no longer have this option—to ensure that they shout out agreement, the Marshals’ hammers float above them like the sword of Damocles. Now, Justitian has grown to become the dominant power in the so-called Dustlung, and outcasts of the Protectorate soon won’t have the option to return anymore.

THE EYE OF THE STORM

Though the Foulness conquered entire districts and spread almost unchallenged in surrounding regions such as Franka, Pollen, and Purgare, the resistance against spore infestation was more concentrated in Borca. The arrogant and stubborn Spitalians are on the front lines, believing their struggle for survival is crucial to all of Europe. Close on their heels are the fanatical Anabaptists, who justify their violent outbreaks against the psychonauts and spore-infested enclaves with their Gnostic world view. The cults prey on the fear of the people, seed mistrust, turn friends into informers, and stir up paranoia and despair.

Jointly the cults push back the decay, the psychonauts, and their swarms of insects, driving them back into the gorge of hell from whence they came. Insects and spiders are regarded as messengers of disaster and have been completely extinguished with pesticides in many places. Hardly any enclave survives without a chemist who produces barrels full of toxins in his laboratory. The land stinks, the air is polluted.

FEEDBACK

Borca is the native country of many influential cults. Aside from the Spitalians, it is also home to the Chroniclers. Their affinity with history and the ancients has shaped them into a sect of Eschaton technophiles. Chroniclers initiated the trade of artifacts, turning Borca into a land of Scrappers and adventurers. Along with it they introduced a new form of currency, the chronicred, now accepted in almost the entire region, and with it their power has become immeasurable. The people regard the Chroniclers as direct descendants of their forbearers, and so their ever-growing power remains unchecked. No settlement can afford to turn away a delegation of Chroniclers, since they are regarded as the motor of development and economy.

THIEVES

The Chroniclers aren’t the only ones to profit from the riches of the ruins. After the Neolibyans plundered Franka and Purgare, in previous centuries, this cult of craftsman and traders turned their attention to Borca. The Chroniclers are furious about this development. They consolidate their power, become spies and manipulators, and fuel hate for the intruders. Should the Neolibyans continue to let their legions of Scrappers loot the Borcan ruins, a conflict is going to engulf the region—a conflict so intense it will reduce all other events in the history of Borca to mere footnotes.

CRYSTALS OF THE WASTELAND

THE JUSTITIAN PROTECTORATE

The expanding Justitian Protectorate now comprises 24 settlements, many of them worthy of note.

The free trading town of **Liqua** remains one of the last independents, managing to negotiate a peace treaty with the Justitian Marshals that allowed their princes of water to maintain sovereignty in their domains. The city must grant unfettered access to the judges, however, and in times of need, provide Justitian with water.

Technikcentrum was once the domain of an independent network of Scrappers out by the deserted ruins. Like maggots, they had eaten through a collapsed skyscraper, digging tunnels and underground halls and creating the legendary “Beehive.” A guild controlled, evaluated, and bought the artifacts that were recovered from the ruins. When Technikcentrum finally joined the Protectorate, however—or rather, was forced into submission by a persuasive troop of Protectors—the Advocates broke up the guild and put the Chroniclers in its place. Some say the guild still operates from the underground, but this is most likely the gossip of old Scrappers who can’t shake the past or who have been smashed by the gavel of justice.

A235 was once a well-situated fort occupied by a gang of thieves. Strategically located on the dried-up riverbed of the Rain, the outlaws were a curse upon the caravans. Their leader,

the Sarge, sensed the winds of change and abandoned his life as terror of the wasteland; one more year and the Marshals would have burned A235 off the map. It's ironic that one of the most lawless places in the southern Dustlung is now the model of justice, with the Sarge as head Protector.

Also worth mentioning is **Ferropol**. This city was long famous for its steel products, but then the furnaces of Justitian took over and the steelworkers emigrated. Over the course of just a few years, Ferropol degenerated into a drug haven in which only the most desperate scoundrels remained. The Marshals initially used the underground facilities as a prison but soon lost interest. Today the city resembles a huge garbage dump. Claustrophobic corridors wind through it, teeming with all kinds of strange folk. They say that this is where the resistance movement against the Justitian Protectorate has its headquarters.

Justitian has also become famous in the past few years due to the three enormous greenhouses operated by the Anabaptists in which a new generation of crops grow—crops that will supposedly transform Borca into a Garden of Eden.

N O R E T

The City of No Return. How many Scrappers, driven by greed, have disappeared into Noret's strangely well-preserved street

canyons? Nothing is known about this area but grim rumors of strange machine men—wise folk take the reports of infinitely fast and deadly creatures in rags to heart and stay far away from the ruins.

T H E W U P P E R C R A T E R

It was the Wupper Crater—with its millions of tons of dust that spread like a red shroud over the Ruhr Basin—that gave Dustlung its name. In its immediate surroundings you still encounter dunes a hundred feet tall and all kinds of ancient insects, such as the iron beetle. Unlike other big impact craters, such as Pandora in Pollen and Souffrance in Franka, the Wupper Crater is not ridden with Foulness. The area seems inert—even the insects aren't infested with spores.

T H E F E S T E R I N G

In the ruins of the city **Menden**, the Spitalians discovered the first mother spore field in Borca. The Medics—as the Spitalians are sometimes called—came in droves, with the preservists in front on their nervous horses. They circled the field, buried strange ceramic cylinders at the edges and thrust others deep into its core. Then they advanced with fire and fungicides, taking samples and burying more cylinders into

the contaminated earth. It was an endeavor of massive proportions; hundreds of Spitalians risked spore infestation. Then they retreated and lit the cylinders. As the curtain of smoke receded, they discovered the land changed. Bizarre carbon formations grew skyward; the crystallized remains of plants stretched their stems and leaves out to the wind, creating a prismatic effect with the light. The ebon ground crumbled when touched; it had the consistency of a dried-out sponge. The land is dead—but it still spreads. Inexorably it eats its way forward, leeching the life from the land and shaping it into twisted black tentacles that grow and grow.

In the top Spitalian circles, this region was considered a testing ground—one they would risk sacrificing. As one elder uttered to a group of Spitalians: “The Foulness is a cancer. The growth of metastases must be avoided at all costs.” These words are considered justification for the land’s destruction and the use of dubious means to fight the decay; criticism is paramount to betrayal of the cause. It remains to be seen if the Spitalians enlisted the devil to fight their demons in the Festering.

RAIN

Once a mighty river flowed north from the Alps, cutting through what is now the Ramein region of West Borca, providing the people and their land with water and serving as a trade route for their ancestors. After the Eschaton and the drop of the groundwater table, this once-great waterway shrunk to a trickle, eventually drying out completely near the ruined town of Noret. What remains is a cracked desert, penetrated here and there by fetid swamps. In the more humid areas wild wheat is able to grow, spreading all the way to Dustlung in the north and the Alps in the south. Many of its evaporated tributaries have also been conquered by the yellow gold.

Though no ships have been through here in ages, the Rain’s function as a trade route has endured. Along its shores and through the dry riverbed run well-worn paths that connect Liqua to southern Protectorate enclaves such as A235. These roads are controlled by Justitian protectors up to about five kilometers from Noret—nobody dares go any closer to that damned city.

DOMSTADT

Domstadt, the Cathedral City on the Rain, was the last bastion of the Anabaptists when the cult was near extinction in 2482. Only after their unofficial alliance with the Spitalians did the Anabaptists find time and peace to strengthen their ranks and lick their wounds. Domstadt was but a ghost town with only a few hundred cultists back then, but today with an estimated 20,000 people it is considered a metropolis by post-Eschaton standards. Things have changed in the last one hundred years: a crude rampart, ten feet high, made out of wreckage from the ruins and decorated with a forest of barbed wire, surrounds the city center. Only via heavily guarded underground tunnels can you get inside this defensive ring. Trade is restricted to a square outside of the wall—the city center with its time-honored cathedral is reserved for the Anabaptists alone.

The city is a masterpiece left over from better days; in the era of the ancestors it was already considered old. Its appearance is

daunting. The massive twin towers of the cathedral, decorated with heavy stone ornaments, spear the sky. The tall, colorful glass windows of the nave can be seen from miles away. The portal of the cathedral is carved from stone and wood with ancient Christian scenes, unrivaled in craftsmanship. The Anabaptists’ master builders have taken on a difficult task, but they do their best to preserve the old cathedral.

The city itself seems to have been designed on a drawing table, with ubiquitous, square, two-story houses forming neat rows along broad avenues. Straight lines and simple structures are predominant and in their austerity are more reminiscent of an army encampment than a wholesome place to live. Only in a few places are the streets dotted with pre-Eschaton buildings. A whole quarter of the old city has survived in the southwest, as has the old train station.

RAMEIN

Years ago, a mysterious star fell on the middle Rain region, known as Ramein. The star struck the capital of the time, Nullpelia, and extinguished the Tribal dynasty of the Taunar family. The surviving Mechan priesthood took advantage of this stroke of luck, sweeping away the Taunar rule, hunting down the last of the Taunar followers, and seizing control of the area. The Mechan priests built shrines with fragments of the star in many Ramein cities, which then became pilgrimage sites. The pilgrimage business grew and made the priests wealthy, fat, and decadent. Peace is now maintained by the warriors of the fallen Taunar tribe, the Pneumants, who switched allegiances to Mechan priests when their Taunar masters died; their steam weapons are legendary, as are their orgies of punishment.

East of the area of Mechan influence, the bizarre cult of light, the Phosphorites, watch for an opportunity to take over the lands. Neither party shows any weakness, however, resulting in a stalemate. If nothing happens to shift the balance, it could remain like this forever.

BERLIN/OTTOMAN

Once called Berlin, the largest city in East Borca is the primary sanctuary for the Turks, who were driven away from Balkhan centuries ago. Here their ancient culture is not only preserved—it grows and flourishes. The old hostilities, however, have not been forgotten and the Turks lock this memory in their hearts like a treasure. One day they will march into Balkhan and claim their land back from the voivods and Africans.

Roughly thirty Turk clans have divided the city of amongst themselves. Many of them feel attached to the Jhammedans, but most still follow the ancient, pre-Eschaton religions. The most influential family (and oldest, according to city historians) are the Ottomans. For 34 generations they sustained the traditions of the Turkish people. In 2490, after their victory over the invading army led by the mysterious upstart Cultrin, the Turks renamed the city after this leading family. Since then, the Ottomans have maintained peace among the clans, sometimes through dubious means. Their *janissary* soldiers are infamous for their violent nature and are sent to massacre dishonorable families without a second thought. In truth, a secret war is being waged in the city for influence over numerous

quarters. Subtle methods are employed, however, to evade the wrath of the Ottomans.

Just as legendary as the jannisaries is the immense library in the forgotten underground halls in the center of the city. Established in 2512 by archivists from Prague, it is a contact point for Scrappers and literates from all over East Borca and Pollen. The Chroniclers, however, have no influence here—their clusters are too far away.

PRAGUE REPUBLIC

The Prague Republic's name resonates with awe and wisdom. Everyone knows of the Prague Republic from numerous dazzling tales, and they humbly nod in agreement when there is talk of Prague's enormous intellectual wealth of old machinery and vast halls of recorded knowledge. For the Borcan nomads, it is both an Atlantis and an El Dorado: legendary and promising bliss, but infinitely remote. Such talk is all conjecture, however, as no one has ever seen its alleged grand streets or its machines decorated in gold.

The Prager tribe of archaeologists, once very influential in Ottoman due to their construction of the library there, are now entirely reclusive. The mountains around them are mined and patrolled by soldiers in grey-and-black camouflage uniforms and brawny tanks. The only access to Prague seems to be from **Dresden** through the **Elbe Valley**, but here too the way is guarded with extreme border defenses. The truth about the Prague Republic is bound to stay behind well-secured doors.

NEEDLE TOWERS

The greatest fiasco in Chronicler history may be their plan to send 16 of their highest-ranked cultists, the so-called *fragments*, over the Reaper's Blow. Their mission was to build a network of information junctions and Scrappers in the East, equally as efficient as the one already established in Dustlung. Eight of the fragments survived the ordeal of the crossing, but far from the control of their leaders, human longing and desire broke free. Some of the envoys broke their oaths to the cult and took possession of the radio towers used to communicate across the Reaper's Blow—these towers were called Needle Towers because of the numerous antennas that pierced the sky. With their vast technological knowledge and Chronicler weapons, these renegades found it easy to impress others with their "divine powers" in a world of superstition. They also leased whores, mercenaries, and other adventurers, establishing their own private fiefdoms. Nobody knows how many Needle Towers survive, but they are unquestionably places of danger, adventure, and trade.

HELLVETICA

The Alpine fortress of the Hellvetics is the needle's eye of Europe. If you want to travel long distances in Europe, sooner or later you'll have to cross the Alps and deal with the well-armed members of the Hellvetic military order. They control the tunnels and passes through the mountains and can ensure a safe passage over the Reaper's Blow—as long as their price is met.

STUKOV DESERT

North of the Dustlung lies the Stukov Desert. The meager tundra vegetation is weak here and often succumbs to the dusty desert of dirt. The deeper you advance, the saltier the ground gets—the air is dry and stings the skin. Legend has it that the famous scientist Stukov found a vast landscape here, filled with valleys and chasms and populated by semi-intelligent beasts. Like bees, these beasts swarmed out to look and dig for artifacts, bringing what they discovered back to their hives. According to the tales, Stukov visited one of their underground refuges and saw their accumulated treasures with his own eyes. As proof of his stories he brought back from every one of his trips wondrous artifacts and finely-decorated claws the size of human hands. The maps he drew, the claws, and some of the technological masterpieces he brought back are today stored in the chambers of the Chronicler's Central Cluster in Justitian.

BREATHLESSNESS

Chitin shells dance across the muddy ground, gently nudged by the wind, rustling like the fall leaves. A cloud of tittering insect wings passes overhead. Wafts of mist ascend from the morass and drift across the land like a torn veil. In spite of the swelling western wind, a sickly-sweet smell hangs in the air. Like oil, it seeps into the pores of the skin, stays with you and marks you for days. Some insist it works like an aphrodisiac, others experience overwhelming disgust—but everyone who encounters it experiences a peaceful feeling deep inside, as if the oil calmly fused itself with the unsettled waves of one's consciousness. A balm to soothe the soul? Who knows, perhaps the rising hate is pulled to the bottom of the ocean of unconsciousness—and all the trapped emotions patiently await their reincarnation there.

PULMONARY EMBOLISM

Paris, the city of love, center of an entire nation—too many positive memories are associated with this city for it to be easily surrendered after the Eschaton. In a time of decline, Paris was supposed to be a beacon in the dark. When asteroids rained down on both the North Sea in the north and the Central Massif in the south, the question of where to go was never really a question for the Franks. There was no doubt that any help from the government would first and foremost be concentrated on the Ile-de-Paris. With all their belongings, people joined the refugees streaming towards the capital. Even today, the endless lines of rusted car bodies winding their way through Franka bear testimony to the migration of a nation—and its end.

Paris grew and grew, but it didn't flourish. Too many people, too little food, overloaded filter systems, no medical supplies—living conditions were miserable. Support units from the UEO (the European successor to the UN) deserted their tanks and joined the ranks of beggars and day laborers after their supply routes broke down. Many took advantage of their superior armament and turned themselves into warlords and despots.

THE LIBERATION

It was in these days that a drug called *burn* first appeared in the poorest outer districts of the city. The people there were hopeless. They were newcomers whom nobody was willing or able to care for. Solidarity, initially highly regarded, couldn't face up to reality anymore—pestilence and hunger chipped away at it until it collapsed. People suddenly found they were alone, and that you had to be a wolf to survive. The urge to escape was overwhelming, either to make the pain bearable or to suppress the pity and guilt. Alcohol was expensive, rare, and reserved for medical use—but *burn* was readily available, and it worked. Those high on the drug vanished into a bizarre dream world for hours, returning from it with new strength. It freed the body of desire, from the crippling pangs of cold and hunger. *Burners*, as the addicted came to be called, burned from the inside—literally fueled by their souls.

At first it was a well kept secret, a few years later common knowledge. The drug's place of origin was the **Central Massif**. It sprouted in the region's large fields, on the slopes of the **Souffrance Crater**. Individual adventurers and entire clans raced south to secure a piece of this fruitful region. Some predicted long battles for dominance as a growing criminal class engaged in a drug war that would envelope the land like one of the seven biblical plagues. None of that happened. The would-be drug lords came to an accord—they shared. Though the pessimists' omens had pointed the wrong way, they were fulfilled nonetheless. Instead of the seven plagues, there was only one: *insects*.

Unseen in the dark catacombs beneath Paris, massive colonies had been constructed. Dazzling and vibrant life erupted in the darkness, better adapted to the cold and rotten food than humans. When they first surfaced, they were regarded as one of many nuisances, like the raging typhoid epidemic and the poisoned drinking water. The people of Paris increased their *burn* dosages to repress their growing unease and terror. As teeming floods of insects appeared, an unknown decay likewise spread. It grew on walls and reached into the deep, only to surface elsewhere and conquer new territory. The more the contamination advanced, the more *burn* poured into the metropolis. Nobody was shocked when the first *burn* victims died, white foam oozing out of their gaping mouths.

The countryside had once breathed in unison with its capital, had drawn life from it. That was about to change. The lungs were clotted with phlegm; a gasp of plague and insects poured from the throat of the dying.

The breeding grounds of an army of millions buzzed with activity, the intervals between the eruptions of vermin became mere days—too few to escape the devastation of the last wave. Food resources evaporated as the swarms found their way into silos and other stores were fouled by maggots. The black brood commanded the streets.

Eventually, the survivors fled to the newly founded Sufferance—the city by the crater, where people were close and *burn* even closer. The swarm followed them, digging up the land, defoliating trees, and devouring the budding green of Franka. Columns of destruction poured out of Paris. The once beloved and now detested capital was renamed Parasite, as it clung to Franka and sapped the strength of the country like a shameless tapeworm.

Franka wouldn't be at the mercy of the vermin for long. Strange people rose from the mountains of the Central Massif that were shattered by the Souffrance impact. Most of them were naked, at best concealing their pubic areas or wearing boots, dusty from the debris. Knotty lumps disfigured their bodies, as if they suffered from a grotesque disease. They swayed erratically, faltering like drunks, yet appeared disciplined and powerful. It was a secret, complex dance that they used to communicate with each other, no word crossing their lips.

These newcomers were peaceful as they crept through the villages in their bizarre fashion. They watched the horrors that the plague of insects brought the Franks. At first, the population shied away from them in fear. When the Strange Ones demonstrated for the villagers that no insect dared to come near them, however, distrust became admiration, and the strangers eventually expanded their mystical influence. People became aware that the Strange Ones—who called themselves Pheromancers—offered a new beginning. Agriculture and the storage of supplies were no longer impossible. Merging several families into a single co-op was no longer an incalculable risk anymore. Life evolved, and the Pheromancers took on a pivotal role. In some places they were counselors, in others they became mayor. In Sufferance, five of them became high judges—and indeed, Sufferance prospered, as everyone had wished for in Paris.

DECAY

While vast areas of Europe were afflicted with drought and degenerated into dusty deserts, a tectonic anomaly bound Franka's water circulation, causing it to drown in its own rotten sewage. Swamps and moors dominate the central areas today, where vast vineyards used to constitute the country's wealth. Groups of birches and willows, as well as patches of grass and thorny shrubs, are now the only specks of color amidst the miserable brown and black of the morass. Flat boats and huts on stilts are part of the Franks' daily life. The ruins of their ancestors capitulated to the dampness, overgrown by moss, shrubs, and trees. The few remaining concrete areas, blackened by the dirt of centuries, are today seen as more of a natural phenomenon than a testimonial to a forgotten culture. Former street canyons resemble ravines that swarm with insects and rats. A new ecosystem has developed here, protected from storms and undisturbed by humans.

If you leave the central areas of Franka towards the west, bright deciduous woodlands replace the swamps; the land drains into the Atlantic via the **Loire River**. Ocean currents bring a warm front to the cold Franka coast every summer, breaking the thin layer of ice, allowing nature and man to breathe. Occasional forests, open fields, and grass steppes attest to the moderate climate.

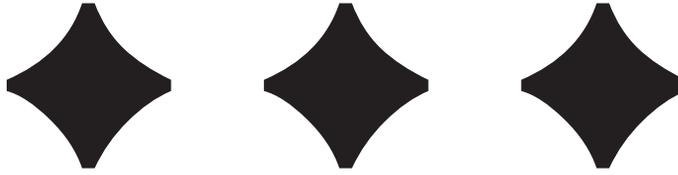
MEMORIES OF YESTERDAY

Even after the Eschaton, Franka remained a sponge saturated with culture and tradition. The Franks lived in the shadows of the buildings of the ancients, read old writings by even older masters, and tried to emulate dated ideals. There was room for none of this in the rapidly changing new world. Everything in the life of the Franks seemed wrong, only finding a place in reality with difficulty—like a puzzle piece with edges you cut off to fit. Only the Neolibyans were able to spur the Franks into action, awakening them to the here and now.

African tradesmen invaded the land like locusts, stealing the relics of the past that were the source of baffling pride for the Franks—and thereby reinvigorating them. Today the wind blows tattered magazines through the streets of the former metropolises. The clamminess emanating from the swamps has dissolved the libraries to decrepit rotten halls. Machine shops resemble disemboweled carcasses. Screws, rusty wiring harnesses, and dented scrap metal were all that the Neolibyans left behind. What started as hatred towards the strangers turned into agonized thankfulness decades later. The door into a new world, without the rules and history of the ancestors, was pushed open for the Franks. Now life for the Franks is about finding their own space in a new system.

The Franks now regard the achievements of their lifetimes with pride rather than regret for the past. While the Borcans cling to their ruins like a scared child clings to his mother's leg, the Franks regard the ancient buildings as quarries; the more that was cleared away, the more they freed themselves from the burden of the past. Any Frank stumbling across an artifact in the debris throws it aside and continues to work with hammer,

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM
 MANY PEOPLE WILL BE AFFLICTED BY HUNGER
 MANY HANDS WILL BE BLUE FROM THE COLD
 SO THAT THESE PEOPLE WILL WANT TO SEE A DIFFERENT WORLD
 AND THE TRADERS OF ILLUSIONS WILL COME AND OFFER POISON.
 BUT IT WILL DESTROY THE BODIES AND DECAY THE SOULS
 AND THOSE THAT MIXED THEIR BLOOD WITH THE POISON
 WILL BE TRAPPED LIKE WILD ANIMALS
 AND KILL AND RAPE
 AND BLACKMAIL AND ROB
 AND LIFE WILL TURN INTO AN A P O C A L Y P S E RETURNING EVERY DAY.
 [JOHN OF JERUSALEM]



chisel, and saw. The few Chroniclers in the country have found that no one is willing to drag a rusty motor for days just to be told that it isn't worth anything. The Franks decline their inheritance because they can't use it anymore anyway. Instead, the Franks now look ahead. They erect factories and dry up swamps so they can cut the peat to fuel their machines. Their devices radiate with the glow of ingenuity.

The Franks have integrated many former enemies as well as refugees from the British peninsula and renegade Spitalians from Borca. The young, vibrant culture of the Franks fascinates them all and seems to unite adversaries. This seems to partially be a disease, however—it spread from one person to another, leaving each with a feverish pressure in their heads. Many people longed for recovery, but were only able to find it far outside of the country. It is still a mystery how the peace-loving Franks suddenly find themselves consumed by aggression and fear when outside their homeland. There are reports of massacres in Hybrispania and Borca that were triggered by Franks—perhaps this is the reason the Spitalians maintain strict controls on the routes between Franka and to Borca.

PROLIFERATIONS

PARASITE

What once was the city of love to the ancestors, drawing people in because of its legendary buildings, indescribable charm, art, and liberal sentiment, is today a stinking cesspool from which you try to keep the greatest possible distance. Many quarters are below sea level and remain perpetually swampy. The only remnants of the city's infrastructure are the mossy streetlights and the electric lighting control boxes that stick out of the rotten sludge. Foundations are rotten; lichen, grass, and moss have conquered the once-dignified buildings. The Eiffel Tower, the city's phallic landmark

since time immemorial, is partly sunken into the ground and now reaches crookedly toward the sky. Its cross beams are rusty brown. Birches sprout in and around Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe. They say that the Basilica of the Sacre Coeur on Montmartre has endured, but this is only a rumor.

For more than three centuries, Parasite has been considered lost. The Franks still commemorate their former capital with nostalgic feelings—it is the poor, poisoned heart of their country. Vanity, defiance, and disgust blend together to produce a grotesque fascination with the cradle of the scourge of Franka. Gigantic breeding grounds in the catacombs and the clammy halls that once housed the knowledge of the ancestors now spew great swarms of insects several times a year. Like a flood these swarms wash over the people who refuse the Pheromancers' protection. Who in Franka doesn't dream of repossessing Parasite's ancient streets?

AQUITAINE

Situated on Franka's west coast, Aquitaine profits from the mild Atlantic climate, without which the region never would have gained its reputation as the country's granary. Billowing seas of wheat and corn extend to the horizon; the air is sweet and sticky from the perspiration of the Pheromancers.

Despite existing for centuries and having hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, the city has remained strangely faceless. Where one would expect to find a cheerful and bawdy peasant culture, one looks instead into empty, dispassionate eyes. Intellectual lethargy seems to have infected each person who visits the thirty-foot-tall chimneys of clay and secretion that are so common here—and that bear such a strong resemblance to the constructions of termites.

If the Spitalians controlled this region, their first official act would undoubtedly be to start up the pilot light of their burners. And they wouldn't stop there.

BRITON

The Anabaptists are infamous throughout Franka. To them, the Pheromancers are a damnable spawn of the Demiurge; the land is considered rotten through and through. Their approach to such a problem usually involves a stake, the smell of burning flesh, and lots of blood. The Strange Ones are well aware of this and have so far managed to keep the Franks between themselves and the cultists. It didn't take a lot of convincing—without the Pheromancers it would only be a matter of time until the black flood reached the villages.

Only in the northwest region of Briton did the psychonauts fail. The peasants here became frantic after the death of a Pheromancer that controlled the area, burning down all signs of the Strange Ones' dominance. Then, in an act of supreme arrogance, they declared their independence. Knowing it would be impossible for them to survive on their own, they sent messengers to Borca to hire mercenaries. Instead of mercenaries, however, the Anabaptists came.

At first only a few dozen cultists came, on an apparent suicide mission to measure the strength of their enemies. They dug in and waited for the psychonauts to attack—but the onslaught never came. Nobody seemed to have counted on this—standing troops with high mobility didn't exist anyway. The Pheromancers were blinded by their own power and the influence they had on the people, and in their conceit they downplayed this uprising. They only sent one emissary: Ganaress, undoubtedly, one of the mightiest psychonauts of his time. Two days later he still hung, flayed, from the battlement of a Briton village.

This single act of violence represented a fight for freedom that severed the bonds of fear. The schismatic Franks began to trust the Anabaptists who integrated into their communities and committed themselves to the liberation of Franka. Cities in the ruins of **Brest**, **St-Brieuc**, and **Rennes** are the principal Anabaptist settlements today; countless smaller villages in the back woods support the opposition with agricultural products and volunteers.

SUFFERANCE

Nowhere can you be closer to burn than in the new capital of Franka, on the slopes of the Souffrance Crater. Foulness twists through the air, settles as dust on the streets, and mixes there with burn spores. Every step disperses the potent mixture so that it covers humans and animals alike. The inhabitants protect themselves with breathing masks or submit to the spores.

Ever since the mass exodus from Parasite, this settlement has grown exponentially, spreading up the walls of the crater. Buildings have been erected everywhere; they nestle against the rock like an organic part of the landscape. Right angles are a general exception—the architecture is dominated by curved surfaces (clay is applied to a meshwork of branches). Many houses grow over the course of the years; room by room they are added to, as long as there is space. Fixed streets don't exist; pheromone tracks from the psychonauts direct the streams of people in ordered paths.

Nobody lives in the crater itself, though the Pheromancers are said to occasionally climb down into it. The Strange Ones declared it a forbidden zone, and people are happy to accommodate them. Anyone scaling the ridge of the crater wall looks down on a bizarre wavy landscape with patches of gnarled deciduous trees and thick undergrowth. Chimneys up to twenty men high project from the matte green. Foulness rests on everything.

THE SWITCH CITIES

The swarm, both the curse of Franka and its most powerful tool, is controlled by the Pheromancers. After Parasite was abandoned, the psychonauts built cities in concentric rings on the swampy ground around the former capital, securing leading positions for themselves and their brood. The people conceded to them because they were the only ones who could keep the insects away.

A few decades ago they were considered the saviors of Franka, but today a shadow is cast on the leadership of the Pheromancers. It is assumed that the so-called Switch Cities were deliberately built on the routes of the swarm, in order to prevent rebellious enclaves from revolting. In the event of an uprising, the Pheromancers could simply “turn the switch” and no longer impede the swarms heading in that direction—the village would be assimilated without a battle. After the loss of Briton, the Pheromancers are more intent on tightening the noose.

ROADWAYS

Trade between Borca and Franka has been reduced to a minimum since the Spitalians practically cut off access to Borca. In their endeavor to protect Borca from the decay of the west they sent out a military force, the mounted preservists, declared villages near the border to be spore infested, and burned them to ashes. Now only two fortifications on the border—one in the north, one in the south—allow commerce. The Spitalians permit restricted trade only in front of their attentive eyes.

Mulhouse, 30 kilometers northwest of the Hellvetic-controlled city Basel, is the last bastion of the Spitalians in the south before the border with Franka. From there, a well-preserved roadway, the A36, runs towards **Besancon** and later swerves towards **Dijon**. About halfway between Mulhouse and Besancon the Spitalians have established a checkpoint in a giant, ancient gas station. Traders as well as their goods are checked for spores here and if necessary treated with fungicides for a fee. Aside from a surveillance tower there are barracks and a quarantine station. This post could potentially become a city, as every day dozens of Borcan and Frank traders meet here—at times, more than 500 people crowd the dusty streets. The Spitalians, however, tolerate no settlements as they would offer psychonauts and smugglers unforeseen possibilities to evade their control.

In the north, a weathered roadway cuts from **Aachen** to **Liege** through the hilly and sparsely-wooded Ardennes. Similar to the A36, the Spitalians occupied an old inn here and made it a control point. Interestingly, the Chroniclers have reintroduced large billboards in some places on the road

to Franka from here. On them, the techno-cult offers traders maps or ominous predictions from a mysterious oracle—which is nothing more than a direct line to a highly ranked Chronicler in the Central Cluster in Justitian.

HYBRISPANIA

THE KILLING FIELDS

PRINCIPLE: RETALIATION

We find ourselves lost in the midst of an endless primeval forest. Knotty, giant trees overgrown by ivy and other creeping plants surround us; ferns and bushes cover the ground like a thick carpet. High above, a complex network of green and brown overwhelm the senses with variety and vicissitude.

Silhouettes scurry through the thicket, bodies foreign to this realm, but suited, in every respect, to live in this maddeningly dim world. In their hearts they carry a sick, consuming need for revenge. In their hands they carry the tools of their wrath: Kalashnikov rifles, spears, sharpened sticks—anything will do as long as you can club, maul, or impale the African invaders with it.

They are Hybrispsonian guerrillas. They follow secret paths from Madrid to the land of their enemies. Castilla, the sunny plateau with its few remaining cities, is all that they have left. How many people will have to die to keep it?

Occasionally, a murmur shakes the trees; the wind swells and rushes along the leaves. It isn't able to drown out the sounds of moaning, screaming, and the barking of guns ... and maybe it never will again.

THE FIRST STEP INTO THE LIGHT ...

While the apocalypse blazed mercilessly throughout Europe, the Hybrispnians didn't exactly hit the jackpot in the lottery of God's mercy, but theirs was one of the better prizes to be sure. The Eschaton spared Hybrispvania—only a small piece of asteroid hit slammed into a mountain range south of Toledo, discharging its energy into the mountains and sparing the cities that were all more than 100 kilometers away from the site of the impact. The people breathed deeply and waited for the world to change.

The years after the Eschaton were hard and full of privations, but the people made it through them together. They felt a calling to do something big. They had the technology and the brains to use it. What they lacked was fuel.

Maps were spread out on tables; amoral men and women gathered around them making their plans. Finally, one of them pointed to a mass of land in the south, threw a dusty folder next to it and hurriedly opened a page with lists and charts. Her finger traveled across columns of country names and seven to nine digit numbers; her finger shook with greed. Suddenly it stopped—on Libya! The closest and richest oil fields were right there. It would be a long journey and many battles would be fought, their outcomes unforeseeable, but the ancestors of the Hybrispanians had always found the right people for such undertakings. Less than a year later, three conquistadores stepped forth, surrounded by enormous armies. Submachine guns, assault rifles, track vehicles, jeeps—their arsenal was impressive at a time when other countries made fire with stones and dry leaves. Certain of their victory, they started towards Gibraltar.

... ENDS IN DARKNESS

The tectonic movements of the preceding decades had moved Europe and Africa together at **Gibraltar**. Dirt washed ashore and shipwrecks sat on the gap that still measured several kilometers like leaky drain stoppers. The falling sea level, due to the expansion of the polar caps, turned the strait into a land bridge between the two continents. It was difficult to traverse, but the fervor of the Hybrispanians assured that the swampy terrain would soon be passable. Dams were built, marshes drained. Mountains of rubble were loaded on flat-bed trucks and dumped into the basin.

The construction took years, but their fighting spirit ripened. Now they had a direct connection between their dreams and their homeland. They would be able to fortify themselves with a steady stream of supplies and weren't dependent on ships. Their entire army could march right into battle.

The nearest African coastal towns were incinerated—now there was no turning back! They pushed forward, farther and farther, faster and faster! They could almost smell the oil, and licked their chapped lips in anticipation. Greed, power, all of their desires seemed within reach now. It never occurred to them that the Africans might become a serious foe.

Africa is a huge continent with many different people. It took some time before its inhabitants fully assessed the violent intrusion. It took even more time for them to rally at Tripoli, the former Libyan capital of Tripoli. When the arrogant conquistadores arrived, confident of victory, they were repelled by an army larger than the entire population of Hybrispania. Even if every bullet had hit its mark, it would have taken more than they could ever muster to defeat this new African juggernaut. Until then, the advance of the Hybrispanians went unchallenged, but here it came to an abrupt halt. They fled and the Africans pursued them like rabid wolves into a flock of frightened sheep. The fugitives

saw Gibraltar as their savior—behind it, the strong and untouchable Hybrispania waited to protect its children. The Africans, however, were unimpressed and followed the example of those who had defiled their land. They crossed the bridge as a massive invading horde.

A CHANCE TO RETREAT

The battle for Hybrispania lasted for more than two centuries. Both sides committed atrocities that will never be forgotten. Since the fall of Gibraltar, the Hybrispanians were on the retreat. City after city was lost to the Africans, until nothing remained except **Madrid**, Castilla's last defense. Here the invaders were repelled. The Africans marched through forests littered with traps, were ambushed on numerous occasions, and were unable to breach the mighty fortress that Madrid had become. Andalusia, on the other hand, was considered lost forever, its proud army splintered into hundreds of guerrilla troops. The time of large, open battles was long over. The glorious plan to take Africa by storm, and the military technology to accomplish it, now lay rotting and forgotten in the damp forests of Hybrispania.

The Hybrispanian people were humiliated, but they refused to give up the fight. They put all of their efforts into waging guerrilla campaigns against the African forces. The African soldiers had seen the devastation in their own country, however, and many had lost kin to the Hybrispanian invasion. Pride and vengeance on both sides intertwined into a twisted knot of hatred and anger. The jungle south of Madrid stank of death and decay, as both sides hunted down their enemies and nailed the corpses to the trees as a warning. It was never a fair fight, on either side.

DELUSION

Wars, with their wrath and despair, attract strange creatures, just like rotting meat invites flies. No one called for the Jehammedans, but they came nonetheless, uniting with the Hybrispanians and turning the war with the Scourgers into their own. The Africans were not unknown to them, as their Balkhani brothers and sisters in faith far to the east fought a similar battle. The country was different, but the enemy was the same. They were confident in their strategy and threw themselves onto their enemies with ardent zeal. The terrain, however, didn't support their offensive style of battle. In droves they were ambushed or ran headlong into the traps of the Scourgers. The Hybrispanian guerrillas watched the events from the dense forests, shaking their heads, but they would never dare to risk losing the Jehammedan's support through thoughtless criticism. On the contrary, they supported Jehammedan pilgrimages by building shrines on the Castilla Plateau and building camps and entire villages for their fanatical guests. Even if the cultists fought badly—at least they fought.

BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN

The war with Africa has waged for an eternity, and it would have been lost a long time ago if the Hybrispanians didn't have the help of the Paragnostiks. These mysterious psychonauts withdrew long ago to the Atlantic coasts and high mountain lakes, far from human civilization. There by the water, their gaze isn't clouded by human perfidy and they whisper in one another's ears while their pupils twitch behind eyelids stitched shut. Anyone seeking their advice must take a cumbersome trip through the Hybrispanian jungle and leave the safety of the familiar forests. In an age when even a short trip to a neighboring camp is risky, they say that such an undertaking will purify the soul and separate the resolute from the weak-minded. It is definitely worth the effort: in the past, people who could correctly interpret the divinations of the Paragnostiks were able to set a snare for the enemy or warn their brothers and sisters of an attack before it happened. The prophecies are a two-edged sword, however—if they are misread, they can turn against you and cause confusion in your ranks.

RANK GROWTH

Heavy clouds blow in from the Atlantic and move over the Hybrispanian peninsula, bringing rain to the mountain ranges of the region. The farther south you go, the hotter and more humid it gets, finally turning to a swelter in the vast deciduous forests. A number of rivers slice through the green carpet and partition the country into several hard-won regions. Crossing the rivers has always been risky; it's impossible to know if the enemy waits for you on the other side. The few bridges that remained after the Eschaton were scuttled by the Hybrispanians upon their return from the failed campaign in Africa.

The Africans quickly realized the tactical importance of the forests for the guerrillas. The enemy could spring from them, attack with lightning speed, and dive back in to disappear without a trace. The logical conclusion was to take this advantage away from their enemies, even if it meant destroying the land. In large parts of **Al-Andalus** in the south, which the Africans control, the forests were reduced to stumps. The ground, bereft of its protection, eroded quickly—today the first signs of a new desert can be seen.

In the center of Hybrispania, the **Castilla Plateau** protrudes from the forests. The climate is mild and moderate, supporting corn fields nestled between hills and jagged rock formations. This is where life beyond war takes place—no African has ever set foot here. The ancient cities of **Salamanca, Leon, Burgos,** and **Valladolid**—as well as many smaller villages—have been

lovingly preserved over the centuries and continue to spread their fervent charm just as they always had. Their cityscapes are still characterized by their Gothic and Renaissance buildings. Many of the local builders and sculptors have rediscovered the old techniques, for themselves and Hybrispania.

A LIFE ON THE DECLINE

Many cities on the other side of the Castilla Plateau were taken away from the natives and sacked, leaving black marks in an otherwise luscious green forest. Unlike the Castellans, people in the war zones live in hastily-constructed camps that have no sentimental value and are easy to abandon. These days, only mobility matters if you desire to stay a step ahead of the enemy; worldly belongings are a burden that bind you and make you vulnerable. Unity with the forest, a talent for improvisation, the willingness for self-sacrifice, and mercilessness are the hallmarks of the new Hybrispanian. Men and women are all born guerrillas, and die as such in the traps of the Africans: sieved by the bullets of their enemies, torn to pieces by land mines, or simply bludgeoned to death.

There is a more gruesome reality than death offered by the African Scourgers: slavery. To be at your arch enemy's mercy, to serve him, is regarded as the worst kind of humiliation. The Hybrispanian slaves have never given in to their fate, however; seldom can they be broken. They have always been, and will remain, the leading cause of disturbances among the Scourger's slave population.

SELF-DECEPTION

The crossing from Gibraltar to Africa marked the beginning of the decline of Hybrispania. The Hybrispanians, however, refuse to accept responsibility—it doesn't match the dehumanized image of the African invaders that has been cultivated for centuries. They view themselves as victims, not perpetrators—history is a dangerous and endangered commodity in Hybrispania. To mention the pride and arrogance of the early conquistadores is regarded as a stab in the back to the guerrillas who fight and die in the war—a matter of high treason punishable by death. On the other hand, this lie alienates the people from their past. Even if times had been bitter, Hybrispania had seen glorious days that now decay in the well of oblivion.

9

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM
THE PEOPLE WILL ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR BLOOD AND THEIR FAITH.
NO ONE WILL HEAR THE SUFFERING HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN
THEY WILL BE PUSHED OUT OF THE NEST LIKE LITTLE BIRDS
AND NO ONE WILL PROTECT THEM
FROM THE HAND WITH THE GAUNTLET.
HATRED WILL FLOOD THE EARTH
THAT THOUGHT ITSELF SECURE
NO ONE WILL ESCAPE,
NOT THE OLD,
NOT THE WOUNDED
HOUSES WILL BE DESTROYED AND LOOTED
ONE WILL TAKE THE PLACE OF THE OTHER.
[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

The denial of their history was only the beginning of a long downward spiral at the end of which waits a cultural stone age. Education and books are restricted to a paranoid intellectual elite; it is their mastery of the art of war and the notches in the butt of their rifle that earn a Hybrispanian his reputation, not his moral and intellectual maturity. The people longed for heroes, and the guerrillas took up that mantle, though the number of martyrs far outweighs the number of heroes.

It seems impossible to break the vicious cycle of violence, yet there are groups in the Castilian underground who work fervently for a return to the old ways, toward a cultural and moral renaissance. They are regarded as romantic oddballs without much hope for success and hardly recognized by the population. Soon they will have to face the people and justify what they have done for Hybrispania other than eating its resources, and the people's reaction will be anything but enlightened.

ENEMY TERRITORY

GIBRALTAR

Gibraltar is easily one of the most impressive structures built after the Eschaton. The original dam measured two hundred meters at its widest point. Countless ships have been caught in the wooden scaffolding since then, and millions of tons of sediment, debris, and sand have turned it into an imposing edifice several kilometers wide. Today it is hard to tell that the flat plateau covered with thick grass and the occasional visible piece of rusty ship wreck has an artificial core.

In the past few years, a Scourger camp on the west coast of the dam has grown into a small town—they named it Gibraltar. The ground here is soft and spongy and too unstable to support stone buildings, therefore the town is composed of airy tents. The streets are already worn deep into the earth.

AL-ANDALUS

Andalusia (renamed Al-Andalus after its old Moorish name) was the first province that Hybrispania lost to the Africans—and is felt as the greatest loss in the Hybrispanians' failed campaign. It is a festering wound that threatens to poison the entire organism.

The invaders established a base camp here from which it is easy to advance into the other parts of Hybrispania without much resistance. The Hybrispanian guerrillas are so inferior to the Africans in numbers and technology that if they wish to survive the Scourgers' onslaught, they must restrict their defense to a few points of little strategic importance.

In the past, the freedom fighters dared to assault the Andalusian cities, but all of their dreams of success were bound to fail. The presence of the Africans is suffocating. Hoping to open up new markets, unlicensed Neolibyan merchants supported the war camps and managed to transform the dirty, mossy huts into stone buildings and cobblestone streets. The flourishing cities are gametes of glorious new development that import the cultural and material wealth of the African coastal towns to impoverished Hybrispania. African emigrants settle here and further develop an infrastructure that supports the Scourger hordes.

Seville is the region's capital. It is one of the most fascinating cities in Al-Andalus, with its ancient buildings such as the Alcazar, a royal palace built by the Moors, and a massive gothic cathedral (ironically, its bell tower was originally the minaret of a mosque that stood there centuries earlier). Winds of the past blow through the narrow alleys and fill its inhabitants with a desire to devote themselves to the fine arts—it is a strange place for the Scourgers.

A Neolibyan woman named Chisema controls Seville. She opposes the patriarchal structures of the Scourgers and does not tolerate dissent—insubordinate Scourgers are known to have startling accidents with weapons and vehicles. Despite her absolute authority she's a fair diplomat, open to the needs of her interlocutors. She knows the abysses of the human soul and how to manipulate them. Under her leadership a rat hole has been turned into a friendly, aspiring settlement.

Seville also owes its wealth to the vast vineyards and olive plantations—and to its slaves. Some might think that the Africans are playing with fire by supporting such a large slave population so close to the Hybrispsonian heartland. Perhaps Chisema's influence quiets the agitated minds of both natives and Africans alike, allowing them to forget their enmity, at least within the city limits. The Scourgers restrain themselves and the slaves, aside from their injured pride, have a better life now than before their capture. People accept their roles and violent conflicts are an exception.

The situation in the surrounding cities, however, is quite different. In **Granada** and **Huelva**, conflicts are daily. The walls of these cities are covered with the skins of insurgents.

CARTAGENA

The city of Cartagena has been looted and torn down hundreds of times by African armies. Scorched with firebombs, bombarded from African ships, it has defiantly been rebuilt again and again. No other Hybrispsonian city this close to Al-Andalus has been able to survive as long. It's a miracle any Hybrispnians manage to stay alive here. Of course, there's not much left of the old town, and the inhabitants would be happy to flee into the jungle as fast as possible if Cartagena hadn't developed into the symbol of Hybrispsonian freedom. For the guerrillas, the city is a place of pilgrimage where they kneel before the graves of the great leaders and swear an oath of eternal vengeance.

MADRID

Madrid was once an open-minded city shaped by a variety of influences. The ancient ways artfully mixed with the modern. Due to the damp surrounding jungle and years of neglect, however, a large part of the city has degenerated. Very few antique buildings still adorn the narrow alleys; others await their rediscovery under a thick layer of roots and bushes.

The rest of Madrid is quite different. The modern quarters are bisected with broad boulevards that nestle against majestic buildings. The city hasn't lost any of its charm. People meet on the streets as well as in the bustling plazas that can be found all over the city; they spend the few carefree hours of the day there, before they must return to the twilight of the jungle.

The Arena Las Ventas is one of the biggest stadiums in the country. In the five centuries following the Eschaton, hardly a day has passed in which hundreds of feet haven't tramped down its broad steps. Bright, curious eyes gaze in awe at the round arches and tiled floors. In earlier times it was a refined gathering place, today it serves as a training ground for the guerrillas. Spectators are omnipresent, watching the young recruits crawl through walls of barbed wire and practice close combat maneuvers.

The Prado used to be an important museum with a world renown collection of paintings—today its halls are empty and damp. The artwork now hangs on the walls of thieves or has been sold to tradesmen from Borca and Franka.

The royal palace, with the Armeria, an enormous collection of weapons, is now the headquarters of the local guerrillas. The pompous building is overgrown, the facade is green and black from the dirt of ages. Roots have cracked the asphalt of the streets surrounding it. Thick underbrush makes it hard to advance—unless you know the path ... and the traps.

POLLEN

ENDLESS WANDERINGS

METAMORPHOSIS

The ground is cracked and crusted, like a scab it covers the biggest of all scars: **Pandora**, a crater many kilometers in diameter. Red dust and a veil of fine spore webs are carried across the dead steppes around the crater by the western wind. The earth is not bereft of all life, however: spiders dominate the gorges and the melted ruins of cities while insects dig elaborate tunnels and throw themselves onto any grain of seed that dares to sprout. The people here are heavily-built giants that have come to terms with the cold and the adverse conditions. They pull all their belongings from town to town on carts, always looking for land they might reclaim. Indeed, again and again oases of fertility poke through. If they can defend them from the voracious swarms of insects, they can feed entire clans for months or even years.

For centuries the Polleners have performed this drunken dance, their chins thrust out in pride, their gaze focused far ahead, never looking back. To them, the land is their protector and their worst enemy at the same time. The post-Eschaton wars for dominance in the East, almost forgotten today, turned their ancestors into refugees who preferred death by starvation over death by club and sword. With their backs to the wall they climbed it—and chose to be exiled to Pollen, a country to which no war party was willing to follow them. There is nothing here that could sustain an army, no treasures awaiting discovery. The Easterners forgot about the refugees and devoted themselves to their own destruction again. The Polleners had found their sanctuary.

8

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS, THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM
THE DRONE OF DEATH
WILL CRASH ABOVE THE EARTH LIKE THUNDER
THE BARBARIANS WILL
MIX WITH THE SOLDIERS OF THE LAST LEGIONS
THE GODLESS WILL LIVE IN THE HEARTS OF THE HOLY CITIES
ONE AFTER THE OTHER BECOMES BARBARIAN,
FAITHLESS,
WILD.
THERE WILL BE NO MORE ORDER AND NO MORE RULES
HATE WILL SPREAD LIKE FIRE IN A DRY FOREST
THE BARBARIANS WILL MASSACRE THE SOLDIERS
THE GODLESS WILL STRANGLE THE BELIEVERS
THE FEROCITY WILL BE FOR ONE AND FOR ALL,
AND THE CITIES WILL PERISH.
[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

STAGE: LARVA

No one knows the history of Pandora. No one can refer to an ancestor who, with his own eyes, saw the mighty rolling flames that raced across the land when the asteroid hit, that burned people and their cities to cinder and dust. For a long time, Pollen lay fallow. People and animals avoided the barren deserts of molten rock. It was the streams of refugees from now-forgotten Russia, and later Borca, that revived the land with new life and culture.

While the young populations of refugees were integrated and forged into a new culture on the anvil of adversity, a new threat appeared: the spore fields. They quietly spread, creeping down the crater walls of Pandora, conquering the surrounding land, a few square kilometers every day. The Polleners shied away from them—flight had always worked for them. This time, however, there were no warlords to evade. This time it was the Earth itself that turned against them.

Decades later, the first disfigured children were born, spawning a new challenge for the Polleners. Despite their grotesque appearance—deformed limbs, bony outgrowths under their skin—the little creatures seemed to be perfectly adapted to the disagreeable climate and malnutrition. They never froze, their injuries healed extremely fast, and they transformed—slowly, subtly, but continuously. Each went through both an inner and outer metamorphosis, at the end of which they found themselves alienated from their clans and surrendered their own humanity—they were Biokinetics now.

The psychonauts were kept in the families as long as possible—after all they were brothers and sisters—but the people knew that one day they would go out into the desert and dispose of the bonds that linked them to their former lives. There was no hatred—the way the Spitalians would have liked to see it—only sadness and regret.

THE PACT

Danzig was only a few kilometers south of the Ice Barrier; in the winter its ruins were suffocated by snow drifts. The Polleners never stayed in their city during the cold season. It was good enough as a gathering area and an emporium in the middle of a seemingly endless wasteland, but everyday life spread to the fertile oases and forests of the south.

The Spitalians were not invited to Danzig—no one had called on them for aide or assistance. When scores of them—including the infamous mounted preservists—gathered in front of the gates of Danzig, however, there was little choice but to let them in. The Polleners closely watched the movements of this expeditionary force for some time, but nothing justified their show of power. What of any importance did the Spitalians expect to find in Danzig and its surroundings?

The intentions of the Spitalians didn't remain a secret for long: Danzig was transformed into a fortress with warehouses, barracks, and operating rooms. In less than a year the huge

facility produced its first well-trained and armored troops, and the battle against the Foulness began in earnest.

While the northern division of Spitalians took over Danzig without any opposition, the Preservist Prochor and his army of two hundred failed in their similar mission at the walls of **Wroclaw** in Pollen's south. Prochor was denied entrance by the Piast. This legendary Pollener had built the city with his own hands, gathering his followers together to defy wolfish tribes, storms of spores, and the cold. In front of the bolted iron gate of Wroclaw, the Spitalians wrathfully declared that the Piast deprived the population of salvation from the Foulness. The people watched Prochor grimly from the battlements and threw him a piece of meat, so that he finally shut his mouth—just like you tame a mad dog. What was meant to be a simple operation developed into drawn-out negotiations and finally turned into a siege with no end in sight. On November 16th, 2455, Prochor didn't return from his morning inspection as usual. The Spitalians sent out interns to find him and help him out if he had trouble. All they found of him were remains that trickled from the walls of Wroclaw. A new legend about the Piast was born that day, and the Spitalians retreated and continue to watch Wroclaw closely.

ON THE FRONT

The belt of spores made passage to the east impossible decades ago. As the claws of the Primer close around the throat of Europe from Africa to Balkhan, threatening to choke off the continent, Pollen seemed the last hope of eradicating its rotten grip and restoring contact with the rest of the world. From observations and field reports, the Spitalians concluded that the spore fields at their weakest points measured only three kilometers across—comparatively little for a well-equipped army. The Medics were wrong. For decades they have been fighting to build a corridor to Asia, poisoning and burning the earth to eliminate the Foulness. Fully-automated destruction machines, a grand synthesis of Chronicler and Spitalian technology, spray fungicides at predetermined intervals, making survival in this zone impossible without protective clothing. The corridor resembles a pulsating worm, constricting when the Foulness approaches, expanding as Spitalian troops push the decay back. The siege has lasted five times longer than originally planned—and no end is in sight. Many of the Spitalians speculate that no land or hope remains on the other side of the belt.

DANZIG

BETWEEN PERMAFROST AND SILENT FORESTS

Vast pine forests stretch from neighboring Borca far into Pollen. Like over-sized octopi they reach deep into the land, only to pull back again, wounded. Streets and ruins, nothing man-made is able to resist the spreading wave—roots burst through concrete and break open the asphalt. Construction that didn't topple the first time falls on the next advance. Whole apartment buildings have collapsed, leaving twisted Gordian knots of bent metal bars amidst the stubborn pines. Where the forest failed, the ground is interspersed by a system of roots. The dirt, bereft of its vital force, has dried up and been carried away by the wind, exposing a treacherous wooden network in which insects have assumed leadership.

The forests are silent. No bird chirp, no rodents scurry between tree trunks. There is only the hissing of the wind and the rustling of branches. The dense forests leave no light or nutrients for the underbrush; they suffocate it. What remains is a layer of moldy leaves and pines.

It's astonishing that fertile fields and deciduous forests thrive even farther north, so close to the Ice Barrier. They never last long, however, maybe only for two or three months, occasionally a few years, until Mother Earth realizes her error and puts an end to their arrogance. The Polleners see such green oases as a confirmation of their belief in the fertility gods. For the Spitalians, the

inexplicable surfacing of plant life is, despite the lack of evidence, a breeding ground for the Primer, which they have to get rid of—ancient seeds, newly animated by their arch enemy.

CHANGES

Even if the spontaneous mutations of seeds slumbering in the earth seems to be a sign of mercy, the Polleners lost their land to the Foulness long ago. Their tribes have submitted themselves to the cycle of budding and withering, the migration from oasis to oasis, and taking what they can, because they know no better. Hope for the future and the Earth's well-being is the core of their existence. Will it grant their family survival for another month? Will the roots grow healthy, or will the decay win over them? One is well advised to expect the worst. As a result, the growth of a tribe depends on its scouts. Will they find good land, or will they return with bad news? Therefore, Pollener dwellings are armored trucks, trailers, railway cars, trolleys, and dented car bodies, the axles always well oiled and in excellent condition. Sooner or later, the strongest of the tribe will have to put on harnesses to pull the cars to a better future.

Fertility cults flourish in Pollen, reflecting the dependence of the people on the mercy of the soil. From Ceres, who drives in ears of corn and battles the infestation of insects, to the Vanen, that give the fields the fruit of their wombs, to Phallos,

Aschera, Astarte, Sankgeorgi, and Baal—the number of gods and spirits is unmanageable. Faith in Pollen is something very personal and differs from family to family. To share your belief with outsiders would mean to let them in on your family's history and secrets. Your conviction consists of the experiences and traditions of your ancestors; new anecdotes enrich and expand it to include new legends and myths. The oldest tribes often have the most colorful beliefs, with a pantheon of interacting spirits.

One might expect that in these surroundings, the teachings of the Anabaptists would fall on fertile ground, but it isn't so. The Polleners have never let others lead them. Their ancestors fled from their oppressors so that they could offer their children a future that was marked by deprivation but also free of violence and slavery. Their children have long grown up, but they never forgot the teachings of their parents. They might seem coarse and vulgar, but they aren't fools. They love their freedom and are prepared to flee for it; the only bonds they accept are the laws of their tribe.

In many societies, escape is regarded as cowardly, but to the Polleners it is a virtue. They have nothing that is worth fighting for except for their lives and the survival of their tribe. The ground will soon decompose into stinking ash and their cities surrendered ages ago. Escape is part of their being, part of the constant change. Those who shy away from conflict will get a new chance in a new place the next day.

BURN

Pollener burn is as much a part of the native life as their daily bread. Using it is akin to making a pact with the weather spirits—the cold is more bearable, diseases fall off you like crusted up dirt. Several Apocalyptic tribes harvest the promising

fields and smuggle the drug past the Spitalians to Borca and Purgare, where they can be sold for a great profit.

METASTASES

WALL OF SPORES

It started out in Pandora, and then chose the easy route east, following the wind. To the north and south the Foulness spread more slowly, but nothing was able to stand up to the tidal force. It was in no hurry.

When the Spitalians came, it was already too late. The Pollener's spore fields had united with the Balkhan decay in the former Ukraine, creating an impenetrable barrier. Near Brest, the Medics tried to block the closing door with a wedge—and they failed. Since then they have lead an embittered battle against the utterly potent front of spores. Nobody thinks of surrender.

PANDORA

The largest asteroid to fall on Europe landed here, tearing open an enormous crater. The destruction was indescribable: Cities burned instantly to ash. Terrible earthquakes shook the few remaining buildings until they fell to the ground as clouds of concrete dust and vaporized asteroid rocks.

The field of destruction was recaptured by nature over the following centuries; today pines and spruces grow on the six-hundred-meter tall crater slopes. The red dust steadily blows east, where huge swathes of land suffocate under the weight of the dunes.

In this region can be found strange mirror lakes and rivers—swathes of molten rock hundreds of meters long, whose immaculate smoothness is penetrated only by the sharp edges of burst magma bubbles. These areas are bereft of vegetation and even the dust has no hold and is blown away by the wind.

The number of spore fields is enormous. One of the biggest mother spore fields in all of Europe lies in this crater. In fact, several of these fields joined together to create the largest zone of Foulness in Europe. The insect and spider populations here rivals those of Parasite. Vast stretches of land are covered by a layer of thin snow—if you tear the meshwork, streams of quick, eight-legged bodies pour out, with their eight eyes seeing all flesh as food. Many wanderers have not returned from the gorges.

DANZIG

One of the last big cities of the Polleners, Danzig was taken over by the Spitalians. Before long, however, the Ice Barrier will suffocate this piece of land under its icy shell—a great migration is inevitable. The Polleners don't mind, as for years this settlement has been haunted more and more fiercely by demonic creatures that have settled deep underground.

WROCLAW

Wroclaw is the lethargically beating heart of a dying country. The beat is defined by the tradesmen and markets that are simultaneously the nomads' outfitting and information

exchange station. It is a meeting point in the middle of nowhere, a city without fields, without oases. Impossible? Wroclaw is a mystery, its key jealously guarded by its ruler, the legendary Piast.

ETERNAL OASES

The legends are full of them: green swathes of land, oases in a decaying country, beyond the vicious back and forth of death and resurrection. If they even exist, they are most likely jealously guarded and kept secret because they are the key to prosperity and power in Pollen. It is rumored that the Piast controls three of them in the hinterland near Wroclaw. Is this simply another legend?

ROOT FORESTS

The deeply-rooted pine forests stretching across Pollen are desolate lifelines. Ever since the Spitalians marched into Pollen, insects and spiders have found refuge here. The silent trees and complex terrain also provide hideouts for the Pollen psychonauts, the Biokinetics, and Apocalyptic drug smugglers.

PURGARE

THE LAND
OF THE CHOSEN

BURIED ALIVE

Dark clouds of poison slowly drift across the country, robbing it of sunlight and life. The foul carpet of algae that covers the Mediterranean lazily splashes onto the shore, unfolding onto the beach into the black, wrinkled skin of a giant. In a few days it will degenerate into oily pitch, turning the formerly pristine sandy beaches into a stinking desert of tar. Here and there, old kiosks and toppled beach chairs protrude from the blistering blackness, the remains of ruined hotel resorts that sadly watch the dead sea. No one lives here anymore—no one *can* live here anymore.

The air is acidic, the water contaminated. Birds fall dead from the sky.

Only one thing grows: the Foulness. It advances only slowly, however, blown back by the westerly wind or forced into hibernation by the ever-present toxic gases. The ground is sticky and foul. Not a morsel fit to eat, even for the Primer.

A sound, like the deep, menacing, growl of a beast echoes in the distance. It seems to be far away but it approaches rapidly, soon growing into a protesting roar. It shakes the body and mind. A small transporter breaks through the wall of dust, thundering across a fissured street. Cone-shaped tunnels of light blink from the headlights into the sooty black air, dancing up and down like the antennae of an insect. Black giants sit behind the steering wheel; mummified creatures with gas masks cling onto the bruised body of the vehicle. Then they are gone, followed by long veils of dust. The predators will find their victim in a different place. The silence returns.

To the east and across the **Apennines** mountain chain is a different world from this nightmarish debris-filled desert. In the foothills lie old towns like glittering diamonds, some quiet, dead, and forgotten, others thriving and safe—a bright future in front of them. People duck through the narrow alleys and pass bulky stone buildings. Many display the three-point-tattoo of the Anabaptists on their foreheads, obscured by loose strands of black oily hair. They wear nose rings of dull laminate and their wrists are adorned with leather bands used to pull back their hair. Giant claymores, wrapped in rags, are bound menacingly to their backs. The whole village, the region, the country: an army of Anabaptists. Here the preacher's words of

enlightenment and humility echo emptily and unheard across the market place, however, and the old sermonizer's blessings are carelessly wiped away.

Crows watch, unmoving, from the rooftops. They rise in the air and glide over the vast, billowing fields of the Adriatic lowlands. Kilometers of fertile land stretch beneath them, until suddenly the ground cracks as if ravaged by an army of moles. Trenches, security walls, and the charred remains of abandoned positions transform the idyllic scene into a garish nightmare.

The crows know where to look. It doesn't take them long to draw their circles around a blackened, smoldering ditch. They cautiously glide down, land on the bodies, and warily peck seared skin from the lifeless faces, pulling the rotting flesh from the victims of war. They are the only winners.

PROTEST

Long ago, the ancestors strolled in the gardens of delight, refreshed themselves from fertile olive trees, and drank aromatic wine from the slopes of the Apennines. They were decadent, preferring lust to humility. Though they controlled veritable marvels of technology, they lost all knowledge of the natural world. Material goods became more important than the soul. The situation couldn't last forever. Some might call it God, others karma—however one sees it, the ancients soon discovered their limits, which manifested as a catastrophe of biblical dimensions. Fire fell from the sky and burned their dens of sin to the ground. The people ran through the ruins of their vanity, cackling like chickens. While they complained and shook their fists toward the sky, a few honest ones hid quietly and obediently in the cracks left by the Eschaton. They waited for what was to come and reluctantly listened to the miserable commotion all around them. The agitated gaggles of heathens eventually quieted down. Screams of pain and anger blew over the common grave of human civilization as the ancestors defied their fate. Unfortunately, as long as one of them survived, there would never be peace again. Finally, the Chosen Ones leapt from their hiding places and put an end to the selfish clamor with fire and swords. Silence lay over the bloody land. Finally.

God/karma nodded its approval and bestowed its mercy upon the Chosen Ones. It sent a cleansing flood through the country that swept the remains of the ancients back into the sea from which they had once come. The curtain of the first act fell and the stage was set for the decisive battle. The country was given to demons and people in equal shares, so they would fight for it. Soulless creatures—the carcasses of the ancestors—sprang from the floods, and stood against the Purgars, which is what the Chosen Ones had named themselves. They eyed each other suspiciously, looking for fear in their opponent's eyes, but each saw only determination.

Those who fought for good rhythmically tapped their spears on the ground and started a song meant to awaken fear in the hearts of their opponents. Then the demonic army, compelled by hatred and fear, advanced on their enemy as a disgusting carpet of black chitin bodies and sallow skin. Wave after wave they swept over the Purgars, lacerating the strong ones purely

with the power of evil thought. Sustained by evil, they refreshed themselves with the fresh bodies they had ravished. If a creature fell, it burst into a cloud of white spores; the defenders soon looked as if they had been rolled in flour.

The battle was set to last decades; sometimes one side dominated, sometimes the other. They left behind an infertile, raped land; a thick layer of soot settled on the dying body of paradise that once was Italy. The Purgars' goal is to revive it again, to push every little splinter of viciousness back through the gates of Hell. But the war is far from over; there is still a lot of blood, bone, and entrails separating them from their goal. The Soulless Ones dominate the west while the Purgars lick their wounds in the vast grass steppes east of the Apennines, strengthened by their belief and once again waiting for history to come.

This is Purgare's past—or at least the way the people see it. It influences the future—where words such as “understanding” and “love” lag far behind words such as “annihilation” and “hatred.” The truth about those fateful days five centuries ago is long forgotten—written history ended with the apocalypse. In the years that followed, ignorance and fundamentalism completed the destruction, disintegrating the ancients' inventory of knowledge in just three generations. Written language vanished from the minds of the populace and the old culture was ravaged until only struggle and fear remained. Legends and myths, passed down orally, clouded people's minds and created a world filled with demons. The Purgars are the ones chosen to fight them.

SIGHTINGS

Some Purgars did not want to turn away from the ancestors and their ideas. They grimly watched the murders from afar, experiencing the tragedy of their culture's disintegration. Today they give us a small glimpse of the time before the Eschaton, untarnished by all this religious fuss. They report on a massive flood followed by ash rain and gas clouds that forced the people to flee across the Apennines until they were exhausted, terrified, and close to death by starvation. Many Purgars simply dropped to the ground wherever they stood; leaning onto a cool concrete wall waiting for death to come. Their will to live was shattered. It didn't take monsters and epic battles to break them.

Centuries later, there were sightings in the **Avellino** region, near the massive, spore-infested crater almost 50 kilometers west of the **Vesuvius**. These encounters changed everything. Scappers found several people living in seclusion. Despite the cold winter, they were half naked, digging for roots in the ground and scooping water from muddy puddles. Their pallid bodies were covered with tattoos and dozens of leeches stuck to them. They moved fast and unerringly, an inner fire seemed to keep them going. At first people thought they were hermits and left them alone, respecting their chosen solitude. It wasn't until people saw the hermits' command stones fly into the air, circling them the way moons circle their mother planets, that superstition and fear broke loose. Villagers banded together, blaming the strangers for poisoned water and bad harvests.

These hotheads wanted to see the strangers burn—an old tradition that, free from justice and order, people wished to revive. Clouded by alcohol and driven by empty phrases, the mob started for the mountains, armed with lances, pitchforks, and flails. At this point, reports are vague. They read like a list of horrible mutilations: bodies pierced by stone splinters and dismembered limbs. Strangely, reports on the battles themselves can't be found. A sentence that many reports end with is: "Not a single one returned."

These were the first Psychokinetics that the Purgars encountered, and the relationship between Homo sapiens and Homo degeneration was off to a bad start. The only guidelines the Purgars had to explain the psychonauts were remnants of the doctrines of the now-extinct Catholic Church. The psychonauts were obviously evil and possessed—this was the only explanation for their powers and lack of shame. Many priests turned towards Avellino in these days to exorcise the devil's spawn. They were not successful.

The psychonauts spread out over the country, taking possession of West Purgare. Their expansion was unobstructed as the native population had fled to the east to escape from the windborne clouds of gas carried towards them from the Reaper's Blow. Only a few settlements remained to brave the

invasion—maybe because they were afraid of change or because they still hoped for better times. The Purgars campaigned against the psychonauts and collected stories and observations about them, each more grotesque than the one before. These tales painted a picture of brutal creatures and did their best to dehumanize them. They became demons—the Soulless Ones—and it was considered a moral obligation to slaughter them.

FOUL PARADISE

On the other side of the Apennines, the refugee camps grew into new cities. The land was merciful; the dried out Adriatic Sea turned out to be fertile farmland. The discovery of Balkhani peasants, militant and domineering, as is their nature, was like bile in the nectar of paradise. Arguments turned into minor skirmishes and finally escalated into a conflagration of violence. The Purgars stood with their backs against the wall. They didn't want to go back into the deserts of debris that were controlled by the Soulless Ones. They had hungered too long, had invested too much in a new future. The Balkhani had to leave.

A decision had to be made. It was a rainy day in the year 2201 when they gathered on the slopes and formed lines of battle.

Thousands of men carrying spears and hundreds of equestrians equipped with firearms from old UEO supplies faced a forest of pitchforks and maces.

As unorganized and discordant as the Balkhani seemed in daily life, they stood decisively against the Purgars. Like a swarm of angry hornets, they darted into the ranks of their opponents, tearing bloody aisles into the rows of spear fighters. Fueled by hatred, the armies stabbed each other to death or beat each other into the ground with their bare hands. It was a massacre such as this swathe of land hadn't seen in a long time. For half an hour, the masses surged back and forth. The two armies had bitten into each other like a pair of mangy dogs. Then the equestrians were sent into the battle: horses thundered down the hills and pushed through the flank of the Balkhani. The automatic weapons grunted and hissed. Gun smoke hung in the air above the battleground. Some Balkhani peasants believed that the Horsemen of the Apocalypse had come for them. A storm of bullets from assault rifles and machine guns felled the soldiers row by row—whoever didn't die immediately was trampled to death by the horses' hooves. The battle was over. Badly beaten, the remaining Balkhani troops hurled themselves into the floods of the Adriatic Sea and swore to themselves that no Purgar would ever set foot on the opposite shore alive.

The news of the victory over the army of peasants spread at lightning speed. All of Purgare cheered and celebrated for days while across the sea, the Balkhani had already set their lines of defense.

Today, heavily guarded camps can be found on both sides of the **Adria River**. The soldiers in these cities of barracks build heavy walls to protect them from fire bombs; they catapult oil bombs and burning carcasses into the camps of their enemies without fervor—in an almost bored manner. The units have dug themselves into the ground; the static warfare has lasted an eternity, with varying intensity. Today the fire burns on a low flame and would have long gone out if it hadn't been kindled by fanatics within the Anabaptists.

WEST, CENTER, EAST

Perdition, protective barrier, paradise—this is how the three main regions of Purgare could be described.

The West still shakes from the aftermath of the Eschaton. Active volcanoes cover the land with sulfur rain, tectonic movements shake the ground, and clouds of gas from the Reaper's Blow drift across the land. All of these factors can definitely spoil your day. For the Purgars, this is their purgatory on earth.

The ancestors' cities in the former coastal regions, that today lie up to 80 meters away from the water's edge, are practically uninhabitable. Only farther inland can one find little Mediterranean towns that still have streets in relatively good shape. Volcano ash lies heavily on the buildings, drifting between rows of columns, and lying on the clay and marble tiles like powder. Wherever you turn, the land menaces the people. The air is toxic and the rivers of magma devastatingly hot;

without gasmasks and protective clothing you might get two or three burning breaths before collapsing. The Psychokinetiks, however, roam through the venomous zones without visible protection. The Purgar mountain tribes call them the real masters of Purgare—like cockroaches and rats they will be among the last still roaming the face of Mother Earth, long after humanity has been forgotten.

The farther one flees upcountry from the toxic coast, the more bearable the air becomes. In the mountains, finally, the fumes from the Reaper's Blow are hardly noticeable anymore. The air is cool and clear and in the fall and winter months refreshingly moist. Lichen and moss thrive here. Farther up are deciduous forests—their rattling leaves a refreshing break from the depressing silence. Rats, foxes, and wolves roam the underbrush, and in the lighter areas herds of cows graze. Several massive spore fields, some several kilometers across, litter this virginal area like a disease. Abruptly they emerge from the green; their edges are festering wounds, ever growing.

If one crosses the Apennine mountain range, one advances to the Adriatic lowlands. In earlier times, as legend has it, there was a sea here that divided Balkhan from Purgare. Over the course of the centuries, it has dried out. Only a glittering stream remains that winds through the region and makes up the natural—as well as heavily armed and guarded—border between the two cultures. Fertile fields and olive gardens nestle the western slopes and reach far into the lowlands. Wild vines reach down into the valleys, growing into an impenetrable jungle. Here, the Purgars are a robust kind of people, peasants closely connected to their earth. If you put an axe and a shovel in their hands, they turn the brushwood into arable land at lightning speed. Even though the Anabaptists like to claim that they brought the ancient arts of agriculture and winegrowing back to the Purgars—here, it has never really been lost.

THE IDEOLOGICAL SEED

The people of Purgare have always been God-fearing. Even when the Vatican went up in flames, burning the last fragments of glamour off the Catholic Church, many adhered to a basic form of Christianity, stripped clean of the old dogmas. For some time, one was able to live well as a free Christian, but there was no community that would quiet the mind and protect the fields. When the Anabaptists crossed the Alps in 2333, the cult came across a country empty of belief. The people longed for divine leadership, a strong church, and an explanation for all the horrors that they had lived through. The Anabaptists provided them with all of that, presenting themselves and their teachings as the missing puzzle pieces that would turn the world view of the Purgars into a glorious whole. The cult provided meaning to the lives of the Purgars—and weapons to make use of it by annihilating the Anabaptists' enemies. If one looks deep into the vortex of pathos, healing formulas, and esoteric accessories, one finds the frighteningly simple truth: the battles in Borca had become too much for the Anabaptists—they needed more soldiers. The Purgars made perfect victims. That was all the

Anabaptists wanted from them and their dirty piece of land. Some skeptics expected strong resistance from the ranks of the Christians, as the Anabaptists' Neo-Gnostic beliefs differed widely from Catholicism, but it never materialized. Aside from a few crazy, easily-defeated missionaries, Purgare turned out to be a country hungry for religious development. The community of the Anabaptists and their well-established belief system impressed the natives. Never again would it be this easy for the Anabaptists to convert people.

Today, the Neo-Gnostic belief is the popular belief in Purgare. There isn't a family that can elude the cult's influence. Even here, though, the Anabaptists are divided between two common denominations: the Opportunists, who serve the cult as mercenaries and take advantage of their power to advance their own goals, and the True Believers, for whom the goals of the Anabaptists are everything. Both fight for heaven on Earth, so they can become one with the breath of God. No problem—according to Neo-Gnostics, all will find enlightenment at the right time, as long as they are on the right side.

FAMILY TIES

Family means everything to the Purgars—a relic from the days when they fled across the Apennines. Back then they were strangers in their own homeland. Only grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles anchored them to their past, giving them identity, allowing them to see themselves as something more than just refugees. Who else could they have trusted when surrounded by a pack of ostracized dogs, each hungrier than the next?

Over the course of the centuries, familial influence grew, becoming a person's protector and cultural center. The history books were blank, but big families didn't waste any time writing their own versions of the past, making up traditions and inventing codes of conduct. Lineage became extremely important; keeping the ranks of one's family pure turned into an obsession. Through marriage and adoption, fresh blood is mixed in, expanding the community and strengthening the ties with other families—all steered by strict patriarchs. Anyone refusing to submit to the almost scientific endeavor of arranged marriages is threatened with internment in the family headquarters. It is an embarrassment for the entire family if one of their members roams unattached without approval. The individual is nothing in Purgare—they are seen as susceptible to the whisperings of the Demiurge, God's adversary in the Anabaptists' mythology. A family is the least that one has to be able to show for themselves as a Purgar. Outcasts are ostracized, becoming a target for open aggression. Purgars whose genealogy is incomplete—or who escaped the influence of their families—are regarded as subhuman. If you can't even keep peace with your own family, how should anyone be able to trust you with business affairs?

SODOM

It is an incalculable risk for the Apocalyptiks to advance far into Purgare. Anything might befall them, from assault to being burned on the cross. Bad things are much more likely than encountering friendly faces, and yet the wanderers just can't stay away. The Purgars are just too tempting: all the unsatisfied men and women, all the peasants that grimly and quietly wait for their prey in their holes like hungry snakes. If anyone has a need for company and gambling, it is the Purgars.

The answer to their sinful longings is a small village in the **Southern Alps** under Hellvetic control. Here the traveling man can indulge in lust, drink, burn, and gambling until the Demiurge himself comes to shake his hand. The establishments are very discreet: only small groups of strangers are allowed at a time—perfect for famished Purgars. A network of old tunnels from pre-Eschaton times guarantee an unnoticed departure.

Entering the village, fittingly named Sodom by the Apocalyptiks, is less problematic, since it is located directly on one of the main routes for through-traffic. Travelers that want to reach the cool valleys have no choice but to push themselves down the worn down clay paths and through stacks of ancient camper vans arranged into grotesque mountains. In the narrow alleys, life pulsates—life that in the eyes of a traditional Purgar is neither loveable nor liveable. Easy girls and hookers force themselves onto the travelers, uttering suggestive obscenities. Apocalyptik card-readers promise a glimpse into the future—or the past—or whatever. Street magicians, gamblers, and pickpockets will find you, even if you aren't looking for them.

When the first rays of sunlight glint off of the Alps, waking ibexes from their nightly rest, Sodom falls into a hazy slumber, a heap of dead scraps. Dew collects in the tracks, turning the street into a muddy swamp. Only the grim Hellvetics that patrol along the village border disturb this picture of seeming abandonment. Until sunset.

BORDERS

Purgars are very territorial, not only as a people dug into the ground between two battle fronts, but also as families and individuals. Once staked off, a claim belongs to the entire family, and that family will defend it using all available means. Bloody feuds over borders have killed off entire tribes; an eye for an eye is custom. In this respect, Purgars are very similar to their Balkhani archenemies. Families maul each other, while disputes overshadow daily life and deprive them of the enormous collective strength that a union would doubtlessly have.

There have been many efforts to unite the Purgars. The Anabaptists from Borca try to end the eternal disputes by imposing new laws, but they are only moderately successful and the laws are disobeyed as soon as the cult diverts its attention elsewhere.

NEMESIS

The Apocalyptiks are the nightmares of the common, pious Purgars. Their anarchic lust for life, expressed by drug use and harlotry, is met with disdain and open hostility. The patriarchs see the loose morals of the cult as a challenge to the cohesion of their families and a lure that encourages the weak to take false steps. Nobody in Purgare wants to be an embarrassment to their family, so they avoid the Apocalyptiks, just to make sure.

In the last century, fear of lust has transformed into a widespread aversion to the Apocalyptiks. Purgar patriarchs frequently petition the Anabaptists in Domstadt to prosecute the Apocalyptiks as Demiurge followers. The Borcans, however, do not share the small-mindedness of their Purgar brothers and sisters. In Borca, the services of the Apocalyptiks keep an army of a thousand Anabaptists in good spirits. Stopping this will take more than hearty paroles and messages of salvation.

THE CHOSEN ONES

The Anabaptists make up the most powerful faction in the Adriatic lowlands. They are both a curse and a blessing for the population. Their armies of peasants are to thank for the fact that today the wind blows through cornfields where yesterday there were only wild steppes and swamps. They provide solace and give the people a sense of community. Hope and regeneration, visions of paradise on earth, the recapture of the West—this is what keeps the Purgars alive. The Anabaptists won't let the people forget; they strengthen their belief that they are the Chosen Ones. The Purgars can't break away in order to go their own peaceful way.

Many Purgars see themselves as a people with a mission. They stubbornly hang on to their pain, search for it, and need it for their eternal fight. They commemorate every murdered ancestor, carrying his bones through the village on holidays or calling on him in an hour of need. This is atypical for the Neo-Gnostic belief of the Anabaptists, which preaches death as an opportunity to reach enlightenment. The enlightened don't return to deal with mortals.

The true believers among the Purgars aren't proud of their successes in the war against the Balkhani and the psychonauts or of their technological advances. Rather, they are proud of their role as guardians of the country and a tradition they don't even know is not their own. They see themselves as the Chosen Ones at the gates of hell, tooth and nail with the hordes of the Demiurge, destined to drive the demons back into the underground from which they came. They say their sacrifice will one day purify all humankind. This is also what the early Borcan Anabaptists had told them. There is no end to their parroting.

As a result of their self-proclaimed status as Chosen Ones, they seldom question their own doings. Anyone who stands in their way is humiliated as a heretic. This is what happened to the Balkhani: they denied the Purgars their land and thereby became messengers of evil to be annihilated. Human or psychonaut—evil knows many faces.

If you look at Purgare, you might think the entire population has mobilized to find and eradicate the servants of the Demiurge. Actually, many Purgars use their belief as a common tool, either to gain power and respect among the ranks of the Anabaptists or so they don't stand out. If you are attentive and greet the right people, or if you show up at a sermon on the market place every now and then, you can lead a normal life even as a so-called Chosen One—a life consisting of hard work, occasional fun, and free from contact with the enemy.

FRAMED

The Anabaptists weren't the only ones to stake their claim in Purgare. The Spitalians also knew how to become an important factor in the country. They keep well-equipped army hospitals on the western shore of the Adria River, and they have supported the Purgars for decades in their battle against the Balkhani.

The true reasons for their medical assistance are less honest than they seem and that the Purgar population might believe: they need a bridge to Balkhan in order to guard the spore fields there. Hundreds of preservists have disappeared into that inhospitable land, their remains later found on stakes along the borders of the voivodships. Some Spitalians were found completely disoriented. They spoke in tongues—unintelligible blabber, an expression of incurable delusion on their faces. Whatever might have happened, to the Balkhani's credit, it must be noted that they don't know what they are doing. They are the victims of the Dushani: the cursed psychonauts of Balkhan that put a spell on the population with their singing. As long as the population protects the Dushani, there is no freedom of action for the Spitalians. The Purgars are the ones who will have to break the dams.

ANTAGONISM/DISCREPANCY

Fortresses of rusty steel lie in the stinking harbors of West Purgare. Heavy trucks on tall, thick tires thunder across metal bridges on the shore, shaking of tamed power. They waited for the command to start, the hoarse scream of a Neolibyan.

The Africans disproved the Purgar myth that only the Soulless can survive in the West. For decades the Neolibyans have used this place as their starting point for ventures into Purgare. On the ruins of **Rome** they built one of their first Scrapper cities. In the beginning, tens of thousands gathered there, but later, when their interests had moved to more fruitful areas, the settlement degenerated into a ghost town whose loading docks were maintained by only a handful of natives. Rome isn't completely forgotten, however; today it serves as a staging area for Neolibyan tanks that are about to be set loose on East Borca and Purgare.

The Purgars' relationship with the Africans is ambivalent. On one hand, both people see the Balkhani as their common enemy. On the other hand, the Neolibyans, are to blame for the annihilation of the Purgars' past—centuries ago they fell on the country like locusts, stealing its cultural possessions

and technology. Nobody stood in their way—the West had already been abandoned, so most Purgars don't even know the role the Africans played. Ancient Sicily, named **Bedain** by the Africans and taken over by them ages ago, is a distant and unknown country. That it once belonged to Italy and therefore the Purgars has long been forgotten. This ignorance is to the Purgars' own advantage: the relationship between the Purgars and the Africans is unencumbered. Today, the Africans are known as savvy salesmen that are famous for their weapons. The Scourgers stay in the background and do the Purgars no harm—perhaps because they agree to keep a united front against the Balkhani, or perhaps because Purgar slaves aren't popular right now.

THE FAMILIES

Today, nine families dominate the Adriatic lowlands. Going from north to south, they are:

THE BRANDUARIS

With barely a twenty-year history, this relatively young family, controlled by the liberal Augusto Branduari, is contaminated because they freely adopt strangers into the family. The adoption of some Hellvetic outcasts and a few Balkhani renegades—mainly Ashen—has bolstered the Branduari into a powerful troop that emerges even stronger from every battle. So far they have evaded the Anabaptists' influence. They usually take up a neutral position in conflict.

THE D'AMATOS

The D'Amatos control a spiritual pilgrimage site known as the **Gorge**. They run a thriving business feeding and protecting the pilgrims—who isn't willing to give a few bushels of corn for a safe path cleared of all danger? The D'Amatos are utterly pragmatic—some might call them opportunistic. All family members are Anabaptists—when it suits them.

THE CATALANOS

The Catalanos control the biggest wheat plantations in Purgare and maintain good relations with both the Anabaptists and the Spitalians. They allowed the latter to build the two hospital cities of **Santiago** and **Cruces** on their property.

THE BADLIONIS

Perhaps the least powerful of the big families, the Badlionis' primary profession is to protect the peasants. Though endearing to many farmers, this has not prevented them from losing much land to rival families.

THE MODICAS

After many heavy battles over ancient land rights with the Badlionis and the Capodiecis, the Modicas are one step away from disintegration. The first renegades from this family have already been spotted working for the Catalanos.

THE CAPODIECIS

Utterly aggressive, the Capodieci family traces their ancient traditions back to pre-Eschaton times. They see themselves as guardians of the Purgar culture and assert sole claim to the entire region. For now they are forced to deal with the other families, but their rivals' destruction has already been decided.

THE SFORZAS

The Sforzas control the city of **Perugia** with an iron fist and coordinate punitive expeditions into the land of the psychonauts. One could say they are in the tourism business, organizing days of excitement and passion for the pilgrims. Unlike the Capodiecis, they don't find it important to maintain garri-sons of strong fighters, even though they live in an environment marked by war. Perugia's protection is guaranteed by the presence of so many well-armed pilgrims.

THE DE PAULOS

The De Paulos are one of the first Purgar families to convert to Neo-Gnosticism, and so the Anabaptists show them the utmost respect. Many Anabaptists would love to see the De Paulos win over the other families.

THE BARANCOTTOS

The Barancottos control the utterly fertile Adriatic River delta and are in constant conflict with the Balkhani border crossers. The region is so swampy, however, that so far they have failed to build a lasting fortress complex there.

BREEDING GROUNDS

PERUGIA

Perugia might be the only place on the western side of the Apennines big enough to call a city. At the same time it is a place of pilgrimage for the less religious Purgar Anabaptists. Inner contemplation, self-mortification, sermons loaded with mystical symbolism—this religious rubbish is not found in Perugia. The city is a sharp sword in the battle against the Soulless Ones, a war camp in the middle of the enemy's territory. Those who want to repent or add some excitement to their boring lives join the troops of hunters that gather daily to find new ways of punishing the Psychokinetics.

BEDAIN

Nobody remembers the time when the Purgars made up the native population of ancient Sicily. When the fleets of Neolibyans arrived and spat out their dogs of war, the Purgars' days here were over. Like rats they fled their sinking ship—those who didn't wound up as slaves on African plantations.

The Neolibyans were impressed with Sicily. The land's fertility—olive gardens, vineyards, and billowing fields—marked it as Purgar's breadbasket, and so they named it in one of the old languages: Bedain. It wasn't the favorable agricultural conditions, however, that made the Neolibyans' newest capture so

valuable. The decisive factor for them was its closeness to the Purgar and Balkhani mainland.

Since then, the Bedain city of Syracuse has been the starting point for most of the Neolibyan scavenger trips around the Mediterranean. Gigantic amounts of relics have been collected over the centuries, taken apart, tested, fixed, and in part reshaped. What remains are mountains of useless metal struts, broken machines, and defunct weapons technology—a Mecca for the tinkerers among the Scrappers. The influence of its technophile population is obvious in Syracuse: a rusty technodrome has grown and suffocated the flair of the historic old town under massive plates of steel and iron beams. Brawny cranes with magnetic grippers do their noisy job where people used to stroll through enchanting alleys. The spell has broken. Oily reality blows through the streets of artifact-bazaars and workshops, bestowing a peculiar, new charm upon Syracuse—especially if you are a Scrapper.

THE GORGE

A popular myth of the Purgars tells how the body of paradise broke open and the vermin of the Demiurge that had been fermenting inside spilled out. Where else could this have happened than the Reaper's Blow? And where else would one start to close the festering wound? For centuries now, the bodies of dead psychonauts have been thrown into the Reapers' Blow, in the belief that this would start the healing process and paradise on earth could be built anew.

The Gorge plays a special role as a spiritual center for the Anabaptists. Though only one gorge among many in Reaper's Blow, the Anabaptists have worked hard to make this particular ravine significant. It is now the focal point for the fulfillment of the divine mission to annihilate the Soulless Ones. According to the legend, one is supposed to cross the gorge walking on the bones of dead enemies—an epic act considering the dimensions of the gorge: 40 meters deep and at least 60 meters wide. Such a goal is far more realistic than what the early Anabaptists had planned: to completely fill the Reaper's Blow with the remains of psychonauts—centuries ago it was agreed that the symbolic meaning from even one gorge would be enough.

CORPSE

The Reaper's Blow nestles to the island of Corpse like a lover to his nightly conquest—making it a death zone for humans. A maelstrom of toxic gas and smoke escapes from the yellow, boiling waters. Earthquakes shake the land, crumbling ruins to dust.

No one survives here for long. Yet they say that light signals are sometimes seen on the island that clearly differ from the gleaming red of the rising masses of lava. There is also talk of sea monsters and aggressive schools of fish that bore themselves into the hull of approaching ships. Over the course of the centuries, Corpse has collected an impressive repertoire of legends—and some of them may actually prove true.

The story is ages old, yet it finds curious listeners in every generation. It speaks of the old mechanist Gepetto, who tried to come to terms with his loneliness in his remote little village by building moving, humanlike robots. First he created a baker robot to take the place of old Antonio, who had died from typhoid shortly after the Eschaton. By the village well there was a mechanical makeshift for the ever-happy laundress Francesca. Clicking and rattling creatures made of iron soon populated the streets. Life did not return to the village, however. There was no laughter, cursing, or bargaining in the stores, only clicking and buzzing, clanking and rattling. The eyes of the robots were dead. They didn't see a loving father in Gepetto the way he wanted them to. When he took a walk down from his little house to his woodshop every morning after breakfast and strolled among his creatures, he felt as if loneliness was going to suffocate him.

One day, as he was picking up the gears and screws that his robots had lost, he made a decision. He would put an end to all this, pack his belongings, and go out into the world. The machines found out about his plans; however, and in truth they had always seen Gepetto as a nuisance. He was different from them and he always meddled around with them, causing them to pass out and wake up again in a different place. When he fumbled with the washwoman's bodice in order to get at the controllers behind her back plate, the other robots were waiting. They overpowered Gepetto, tore him up like a child's doll, and threw his bodily remains into the well. Then they went back to their jobs as if nothing had happened: the washwoman washed, the baker baked, the policeman guarded.

Three days later, after a horrible thunderstorm from which all of the robots villagers had fled into their houses, they suddenly saw light behind the milky window panes of Gepetto's woodshop. None of them had visited that cursed place since his death. It was even more remarkable, therefore, that a man of Gepetto's height and figure walked out of the shop and onto the street at night. On his back he wore a pack, and in his hand he carried a walking stick. He locked the door behind him and marched down the main street, leaving the village. And he clicked and buzzed and clanked and rattled.

CHAPTER
CULTS 3

ANABAPTISTS

TORCHBEARERS OF PARADISE

SHEPHERDING

The air in the ancient stone building was dry. The daylight streaming through the stained glass windows created playful colors on the marble tiles. In times past, the nave would have been filled with pews, but now the church was nothing but a gutted carcass. Even the religion that built it was no more. Something else now occupied its place. Something powerful. Something unavoidable.

He was a part of this new faith: a man with a piercing stare and rough fingers. A tin ring made his slim nose appear broad. He reeked of sweat and earth. He knelt at the altar in self-reflection, his fingertips folded together in prayer. When a horn groaned outside, so loudly that the windows trembled, he rose. The main doorway stood wide open, revealing only a beautiful spring day. The man walked around the altar and knelt down to a simple wooden box. The rusty hinges creaked as he lifted the lid. Inside were his only belongings: a small leather-bound book, rings, a dried rose, a rag doll with only one button eye, and several green glass bottles. He retrieved one of the bottles, uncorked it, and tilted it. A yellow, oily fluid trickled into his hand.

“Strength, faith, enlightenment,” he mumbled. He ran his hands through his hair, oiled it smooth, and bound his widow’s peak with a leather headband. Today he would go to war, and everything that he was, as a farmer, would remain in that box.

The others were waiting outside, clutching their swords, flails, or pitchforks. Men and women, some with an erratic, downward stare, others psyched with fiery eyes. The biting stench of petrol wafted overhead. Nearby, five robust men refilled their flamethrowers from green canisters. Their armor was made of several layers of leather, between them linen, soaked with water. Soon they would throw their tanks onto their backs and fasten them to their chests with a strap, and it would begin.

How many of them really believed in enlightenment? Harris da Vorne was once a farmer, just like Frenke beside him. They weren’t dumb, but they were simple folk. The Anabaptists had

promised them God's grace, but from the entire community, they were the only two souls to convert.

Harris gazed over the rows of Anabaptists dressing for the battle. Their hair slicked back, their bodies draped in leather aprons. The emblem of the Anabaptists, the cross within the broken gear, was everywhere—etched upon armor, drawn in chalk on the chest, sewn on crackling banners. Desperate support in a faith that one chose without having a choice.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

Creation. Billions of fine tentacles trembled eagerly, jerked forward, then quickly pulled back into the slimy body of the Demiurge. The being dreamed; dreamed of a material world, solid and sinful. Ages ago, God had created the Demiurge to spread the paradise animated by the breath of God. But then something unbelievable happened: God's servant combined his Lord's breath with the soulless material and created the world of the ancestors—sickly effluent atop godly paradise. The Lord observed and waited. Could His youngest creation, mankind, resist the corruption of the Demiurge? Of course, they could not. Mankind was swallowed by the swamp of ignorance. They joyfully inhaled the toxicity.

Only one tribe refused to bow to the Demiurge. Rebus the Baptist stood before his Creator. He pled with the Lord not to destroy the Earth despite the ever-escalating sins. Day and night he fasted and prayed, chastised himself and his followers and shouted towards heaven. And finally, God heard him. He granted mankind one more chance. "Look there and act," He bellowed.

THE LONGEST NIGHT

A dull pounding sounded, paused, then pounded again. The heart of paradise thumped like that of a wounded stag—erratic and weak. The next pause would stretch to eternity. Paradise was dead. The apocalypse could begin.

The Lord took hold of the globe and buried his hand deep inside it. Rising lava wound around his fingers, but he felt no pain, only sadness. Then He tore the Earth apart. Like maggots, the brood of the Demiurge had eaten through it and welled up like pus on the surface. The Lord shredded the Demiurge with a wave of His hand and threw the broken body into the boiling sea. Balance had been restored. On one side, demons and avatars of the Demiurge, the remains of perfidy. On the other, Rebus and his Anabaptists. Between the two fronts stood mankind, unknowing; waiting to be tempted by one group or redeemed by the other. That was the deal between the divine and the ignoble. Humans needed to prove they still belonged to God. Victory or extinction. No middle ground. God had grown weary of mankind.

The last battle was portended to be fought across the bloody murder fields of what was once Paradise.

VEILED PAST

In Domstadt, among the archives of the sacred edifice that gave the city its name, the historical truths of the Anabaptists lie—philosophical treatments on the worth of Gnostics, religious clamor against psychonauts, and thousands of vicious propaganda pamphlets. Corridor after corridor of dark folios, their spines etched with gold letters displaying titles such as *Cultrin's Advance and Legacy*, *Chronicler Gavel*, *The Seven Circles of the Earth*, *Flames of the Apocalypse*, *Leadership of a Sect*, *On War*, and *Recombination Group*. Dark oak tables cluttered with inkwells, oil lamps, and the finest paper fill the vast halls of the building. Every wall is adorned with an Anabaptist cross.

One of these folios recounts, in striking detail, how the Anabaptists drove the Chroniclers out of the cathedral in Cologne and nearly exterminated the technophiles in the process. Copies of the Chroniclers' network with assessments of loss accompany it, easy to recognize by the sober language of the technology fanatics. In another folio, an individual named Cultrin stands in the center of the action. What the Anabaptists had nearly succeeded in doing with the Chroniclers, Cultrin accomplished against the Anabaptists with an army of the Awakened. The folio details great battles, followed by an Anabaptist retreat to Domstadt and years of reflection.

While the reports contained within these mysterious folios are fragmented at best, they leave little doubt that the history of the Anabaptist cult is far more complex than they claim. More than just a doctrine has endured on the inside.

NEO-GNOSTICISM

The Anabaptists' beliefs are as old as time. However, they were lost for an age, damned to be forgotten, as other religions that were jealous of their flock drove them into the dark. Rebus the Baptist hunted for traces of the Holy Scriptures and finally discovered them buried in the pagan cultures. This discovery was Neo-Gnosticism, a queer spin-off of Gnosticism. The doctrine proclaimed that the presence of God can only be felt during a desperate search for Him. From then on, Rebus the Baptist spread the word.

Neo-Gnosticism is a doctrine of redemption. It is not faith, but insight, that stands at the core. God and the world in macrocosm stand in opposition to spirit and material in microcosm. Once upon a time, these two principles were separate. One is good, the other evil. The Demiurge was the first to mingle the two poles and thus sealed his fate and that of the world. Spirit—a wisp of Godly breath—slipped into flesh and brought mankind to life, but it couldn't free them from the flesh. The body became a prison. Anabaptists view humanity as evil and spoiled, treating mankind accordingly.

Since the fall of the Demiurge, light and darkness are one within the hearts of men. Only death brings eternal enlightenment and redemption. Death destroys the bonds between the body and soul, making it possible for the spirit to unite with God. However, between death and absorption into God stands the path—might an unenlightened one find it and dare tread upon it?

What happens with his soul, should it drift off and reunite with the flesh? The Anabaptists take their followers by the hand. They instruct their brothers and sisters in the techniques of self-reflection, liberating thoughts from the burdens of the every day. Their lessons promise their followers eternal life in God.

FARMERS AND WARRIORS

According to the scriptures, the Eschaton swept away the foul illusion of reality and allowed a glimpse into paradise. The ground, ashy and toxic, awaited the work of honest hands. The legions around Rebus rolled up their sleeves. Years later, golden fields flourished in the midst of battered cities, gardens sprouted on the battlefields of old. The land blossomed. Word of Rebus's prosperity quickly reached the mountains by way of the ruins throughout the vast steppes. Its echoes did not go unheard: like locusts, the famished fell on the fruits of the field and slew the farmers who stood vainly against them. And so, Rebus mobilized the field hands, armed them with pitch forks, lances, and

rakes. Over the decades a caste system developed of farmers and warriors within the cult.

Despite the militarization, the warriors stayed close to the people and remained down-to-earth, providing the stability the ruined Germanic culture needed to get back on its feet. Their religion wasn't intrusive—redemption tied to death was easy to understand. Whether one believed the chiefs' ranting of paradise and an eternal battle or not, everyone would be liberated.

The farmer-warrior cult spread, forming an impressive base of power. It largely avoided religious fuss and more resembled a freemason lodge.

Not until Rebus's deathbed visions, which predicted the arrival of the psychonauts, did the parallels become clear to the followers of the Demiurge, igniting a change. Suddenly, they saw themselves as Biblical baptists. They consecrated the people and the soil, baptizing them to awaken their vigor for paradise. Water to heal, fire to redeem. From that point, everyone knew them as Anabaptists.

OPIUM FOR THE NATION

Today, Anabaptists focus on recruiting simple folk, to whom the cult offers a release from poverty. They preach of power and glory for those who welcome the embrace of the cult.

The cult works very closely with the people, allowing them to attract a great number of followers. For a commoner, it is easier to believe in stories of the Demiurge than the scientific jargon of the Spitalians. Even the wailing of the Jehammedans, based on their strict rituals and lifelong devotion, is easier to understand than secular slogans.

The people want a cult that reflects them, possibly lowbrow and common, but with its heart in the right place. The ideal Anabaptist proceeds mercilessly against his enemies and sacrifices himself for the good of the community, with a clear collection of firm principles. The promise of the Anabaptists is this: "Join us, and tomorrow more brothers and sisters will be standing by your side than you ever dreamed. We are your family, your life, and your death."

TWO HEARTS

The Anabaptists present themselves to outsiders as an unbreakable wall of strength, will, and community. But among themselves, the caste system eats away at their unity. Once upon a time they were called farmers—today they are ascetics and orgiasts.

The ascetics condemn the body as a burden of flesh that imprisons them in sin. They labor in the field to repair the harm done to paradise. Not until late at night, when their muscles ache and their bodies fail, do they return to their chambers and meditate for enlightenment. They admonish themselves for the cursed blemish of the Demiurge. They suppress their bodily needs. They starve themselves, recoil from every kind of sexuality, and flagellate themselves into unconsciousness. In their own way, they're even more fanatic than the explosive orgiasts of the warrior caste. Although they see themselves marked with the brand of the Demiurge, they believe in the transcendence of their spirit. It helps them rise above their carnal drives. And so they allow the beast to rage in their hearts, while the orgiasts set their rage on the enemy.

The dichotomy of the ascetics and orgiasts creates tension within the cult. Both sides disapprove of how the other seeks to reach salvation. The orgiasts throw themselves against the followers of the Demiurge and hope, in this way, to prove to the Lord that the human race is worthy. The ascetics, on the other hand, distance themselves from their bodies through pain and meditation, hoping to break their corporeal bonds and become one with God.

Which movement should the chief of the Anabaptists champion? Should he side with the ascetics, who make the cult so popular with the common people? Or should he embrace the army of orgiasts, without whom no battle would be won?

The tensions simmer under the surface, but both sides remain outwardly calm. Toleration is all they can muster.

OPPORTUNISTS

Few Anabaptists believed before they joined the cult. They joined because they valued an active community—and the well-stocked weapon chambers. Others joined simply because they were hungry. Anabaptism is a religion of mercenaries and war veterans, adventurers and pariahs. They'll accept anyone, because that ensures the recruit will not stray to the side of the enemy.

Even though an Anabaptist would never openly dismiss the Neo-Gnostic doctrine as false, half of the cult is reluctant to believe in the monstrous Demiurge and the polarization between material and spirit.

SYMBOLISM

Even though the faith is not forced upon anyone, per se, there are strict rules to follow when joining the ranks of the Anabaptists. All cultists, whether ascetic or orgiast, wear a nose ring that signifies they are a slave to their bodies. Their hair must be oiled back and bound with a band so their view is always clear when battle calls. Finally, they tattoo a three-point mark on their foreheads, an indelible sign of personal dedication to the cult. Should spirit and body ever wander off the true path, these permanent marks won't allow them to travel unacknowledged among foes, thus forcing them back into the arms of the cult.

The symbolism of the cross, coupled with the broken gear wheel, points to the Christian-Gnostic roots. Followers display it on the shoulder pieces of armor and on pennants. The gear has two meanings. It represents the unstoppable, almost mechanical advance of the cult as well as the incompleteness of creation. Only when the circle is closed will God's people receive salvation.

INFANTRYMEN

The Anabaptists recruit their members from all social classes, but in doing so they're skimming the dregs of human society. They take the beaten and humiliated and put them in office and give them dignity, give them more than they could ever dream of in their normal lives.

In exchange, the cult demands only one thing: subordination to the community and its laws. The belief in the Neo-Gnostic doctrine is not really required, but would surely give a recruit an advantage.

In the first year, the cult assigns an elder Anabaptist to mentor the recruit. The mentor teaches the recruit the basic principles of Neo-Gnosticism. During this time the recruit is considered a footman, and as such he must be at the service of his mentor, helping him dress and preparing his meals. Otherwise, the recruit enjoys great freedom since his body isn't yet pledged to the cult; the spot tattoos on the forehead come later. A recruit may join any orgiast group for days or months, or work in the fields with ascetics. At any time, he can quit his work to try something new.

14
WHEN THE MILLENNIUM THAT FOLLOWS THE CURRENT AGE BEGINS,
SIGHT AND SPIRIT OF MAN WILL BE MADE PRISONERS.

THEY WILL BE DRUNK AND UNAWARE.
THEY WILL BECOME REPRESENTATIONS AND REPLICAS.
THEY WILL BECOME LIKE THE SHEEP OF THE LAND.

THEN THE PREDATORS WILL COME.
BIRDS OF PREY DRIVE THEM TOGETHER INTO HERDS,
MAKING IT EASIER TO FORCE
THEM INTO THE ABYSS AND PIT THEM AGAINST EACH OTHER.

MANKIND WILL SKIN THEM
TO GET THEIR HIDE, AND WHEN MAN SURVIVES,
HIS SOUL WILL BE ROBBED.
[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

But after one year, the recruit must decide his fate. How will he pursue enlightenment? Does he desire to wade through the blood of the Jehammedans or psychonauts on the battlefield, or does he wish to become one with the earth and wring life from it? Once he selects his faction, he is bound to it for life, and his new companions tattoo the three points upon his forehead.

THE CLIMB TO THE TOP

Whether a recruit joins the ascetics or the orgiasts, the goal of every faithful Anabaptist is the attainment of divine insight. Anabaptists refer to these moments as *emanations*. Some experience an emanation as a blinding vision, others believe they hear voices, while still others feel an indescribable spiritual change in their soul as though someone had moved the needle on their inner compass to a godly pole. The variety of emanations is as diverse as the affected Anabaptists—it's a unique and individual experience; an experience that defines the development of an Anabaptist within the cult. The more emanations an Anabaptist has experienced, the closer he is to enlightenment; and thus, closer to God. It is understood within the cult that those with more emanations than their brethren shepherd the less enlightened and guide them in their spiritual development. This creates a simple ranking system, but it is difficult to control.

THE EMANATION COMMISSION

Due to the extremely personal nature of emanations and how Anabaptists claim to experience them, it is difficult to judge whether or not an emanation is genuine. For this purpose, there resides in the great hall of the cathedral a commission of elderly Anabaptists who evaluate and rate alleged emanations. Whoever faces this commission must endure days of questions about the doctrine of the Anabaptists, the specifics of the emanation, and relative connections.

Whoever wants to be promoted cannot avoid the questioning and the process becomes sharper each time a person tries to prove an emanation. Ultimately, it is only the truly faithful or the extremely wily who manage to sway the commission.

The Emanation Commission is populated by feeble old men whose decisions have been influenced as much by political stress as by the style of the day. Almost daily obituaries stream to the outside. Of course, natural deaths, they say.

Being accepted into the Emanation Commission is an easy way to quickly collect more emanations, because its members aren't subject to the normally rigorous testing. Through their holy work and their daily contact with the emanations of their brothers and sisters, they receive one emanation automatically.

THE EDEN COUNCIL

The eight Anabaptists possessing the greatest level of enlightenment sit upon the Eden Council and determine the cult's trajectory. These eight are referred to simply as *baptists*.

One of the cult's problems is communicating with the Anabaptist groups spread throughout all of Europe. Here the so-called *emissaries* preside. With at least twelve emanations, they are among the most trustworthy brothers and sisters. They receive the commands of the baptists personally and pass them on to followers in the wastelands. However, they are far more than just messengers. Because of their unprecedented access to the baptists, emissaries are believed to know the true will of the Eden Council. If there is too little time to get a decision from the Eden Council, then authority falls into their hands. Emissaries are also responsible for establishing and fostering contacts within the other cults.

FRIEND AND FOE

The pre-Eschaton world was that of the Demiurge, in which materialism suppressed the mind and enslaved the people. The ancestors were blinded until this world was destroyed and slipped into oblivion. Evidence of it still climbs like acrid smoke high into the sky, but time will erase all traces until there is nothing left to remind the people of their ancestors but the whispered legends around the camp fires of the heretics.

All the wondrous myths of the past are to blame for those who long for the empire of the Demiurge to return. Those who wish for this most are the Chroniclers. One may feel sympathy for the Scrappers, although they rummage like rats through the refuse of the ancestors, because they aren't much more than

the informers to the Chroniclers, dependent on their mercy. The Hellvetics, on the other hand, give themselves over to the cool elegance of technology. Only their neutrality and territorial placement protect them from being officially declared as enemies of the Anabaptists.

The Jehammedans are the declared archenemy of the Anabaptists. Both are the last great religions in Europe and propagate a world view that envisions a place for only one at the top. One cult must die, so that the other may follow its calling. After a century-long conflict, both cults are like an old married couple that finds the least little detail of the other revolting. The rantings of the Jehammedans, their neatness, their precisely trimmed beards, their white clothing, their pungent goats (and the obvious signs of bestiality)—all prove their arrogance, haughtiness, and sin. Should orgiasts attack a Jehammedan tribe and defeat them, it is often the animals who pay the price. The goats are stabbed and run bleating in fear through the villages, defiling all they touch with their unclean blood.

The Foulness stands as one of the great Anabaptist enemies. Anabaptists see it as a withering decay upon paradise to be battled as severely as its brood, the psychonauts. The body markings of the Biokinetiks and Pheromancers indicate they are slaves to the material, and thus the Demiurge. Wise Anabaptists even preach that Homo degenesis doesn't carry any breath of God and therefore should be exterminated without a second thought. It has never been simpler to distinguish between good and evil.

WEAPON CHAMBER

The countless battles between the Anabaptists and their enemies filled the weapons chambers of the cult. Shelves and racks are full of lances, spears, flails, two-handed swords, two-handed axes, maces, torches, and war flails. Flamethrowers and fully automatic firearms are stored deep under the surface of Domstadt in well-secured bunkers, but they aren't distributed to every enthusiastic orgiast. Those who want to take a weapon must stand before a commission for a question-and-answer session and defend their request. Only those who repeatedly prove themselves and are also blessed with one or more emanations prove they are embodying the spirit of the Anabaptists. For such a person, the gates of the Anabaptist knowledge will open, as do the steel-reinforced arsenal entrances. Usually these are the leaders of the group—who then decide the weaponry of their brothers and sisters.

WATERS WORTHY OF BAPTISM

Once upon a time, a raging river snaked through Borca from south to north, branching off into a dozen smaller tributaries that made the land of the ancestors fertile. The descendants, however, are not so lucky. The rain is but a trickle in the south, while in the north it has long vanished, leaving nothing more than dusty riverbeds. Other rivers push into the Reaper's Blow and run underground, sometimes surfacing as geysers. Today, the water seems to hide from the people.

The city of Liqua in the Justitian Protectorate is an exception. Here the water runs into the tunnels and caverns, and it is clean and pure. Although the water princes of old still rule nominally over the city, the Anabaptists control the daily happenings. Every one of the princes were assigned orgiasts for protection, or so it is said. The cult's control over Liqua is no longer secret. Since the springs are owned by the Anabaptists, they are able to transport their water in great caravans to distant fields, ever-enriching and increasing the crops of the ascetics.

But holding the water monopoly in Dustlung brings forth many dangers. The number of enemies is great, and the Anabaptists never take the easy path. Justitian is an ally, but is also dependent on the mercy of the Chroniclers. It may be that the influence of the techno-cults will one day destroy the sensitive balance, forcing the Anabaptists to wage a war on the city-state.

BURNING BANKS

In Purgare, the situation is more inflamed. In the battle against the Balkhani Jhammedans, the Anabaptists have converted many Purgars and organized great celebrations along the Adriatic River. Constant warfare now rules here. Heavily armed troops stream out of the squat castles, while the shrieks and moans of the wounded echo throughout the lowlands.

An armed orgiast can demand anything of a lower ranked peon that he needs for the execution of his war craft, because nothing else is meaningful here. Nowhere else is faith so unimportant, and an orgiast valued so highly. He only has to mete out a quotient of blood and death to justify his role.

THE EIGHT BAPTISTS

The eight baptists navigate the cult through the perils of this dangerous epoch. However, their views often differ, dictated by family and local ties. Conflicts between them are every-day business as are decisions concerning the lives and deaths of thousands of Anabaptists.

Many people outside of the cult say the baptists are lackadaisical, moving tokens around battlefield maps from within the safety and comfort of their fortresses. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The baptists are men and women of action, who energetically removed all obstacles in their way to the top and assumed their office with enough momentum to not collapse into lethargy. Despite their exalted position, the orgiasts among them still pit themselves against the enemy while the ascetics are brilliant examples in the field.

BAPTIST AMOS

Amos, an orgiast from Franka, believes the Anabaptists of his homeland have been stripped of their holy wrath, and is heading a crusade against the Switch Cities of the Pheromancers. The Anabaptists of Franka look up to him and would follow him into hell. He is lauded as both an ingenious general and an invincible warrior, at least according to the rumors of his heroic deeds. However, many question the validity of these claims. Baptist Amos controls a vast network of informers and demagogues that fuels his personality cult. Few Anabaptists can separate truth from exaggeration; most just adopt the opinion of their mentor. Frank Anabaptists enamored with Baptist Amos are a powerful faction that is a thorn in the side of the other baptists on the Eden Council.

ANABAPTIST WORLDVIEWS

ANUBIANS

Their belief is strong and firmly rooted in their history. But could it be the Demiurge whom they worship in the center of their wheel of life? We still don't know for certain, but experience teaches us that evil doesn't stay concealed forever.

APOCALYPTIKS

They dance like crazy, listening in a daze to the whispers of the Demiurge. They carry the Foulness in their hearts and bring it to the land, giving paradise no peace. Only when the Strange Ones are subjugated will we learn to accept them.

THE ASHEN

Pale toads who creep into the depths, full from the fruits of the labor of others. They deserve only our disgust, but they are the enemies of our enemies. At a later time, we will have to investigate them and ask them about their place on the battlefield of the last war. Until then, we spare them from our flames.

CHRONICLERS

Demented old men who hide their pig eyes under masks and impress the people with magic acts. We should not underestimate them, however, as they are masters of intrigue.

HELLVETICS

Their neutrality is nothing more than confessed cowardice. In these times, one must decide which side they are on. We tolerate them for now, but our patience is limited.

JEHAMMEDANS

They are the last schismatic human tribe that has turned away from God and, without a doubt, carry the guilt for the fall from paradise. They are worse than the worst of the Foulness. They are born without souls and live free of goodness. Yet the Jehammedans were once filled with godly breath and chose of their own accord to descend into the pits of evil. Don't liberate them—destroy them!

MARSHALS

A powerful organization that understands how to execute control over a nation. Only their dependence on the Chroniclers is worthy of disdain—and could mean our doom.

NEOLIBYANS

They tend to our troops in Purgare and support our righteous battle. Even if they haven't yet awakened from their wrongful life among strange ancestors and pagan idols, they still seem immune to the whispers of the Demiurge. One day we will bring civilization to them.

SCOURGERS

Of all the Africans they are the most dangerous. Their thirst for revenge cannot be quenched. They don't understand what is happening. They just don't understand that humanity is closed off to the Strange Ones. It must be. We would lead them to the right path, if they would join us and not enslave themselves.

SCRAPPERS

Like us, they love the earth, scraping through the body of paradise in search of past riches. If they weren't such loners, they would be excellent for our ranks. We need tough people.

SPITALIANS

They support our work, ease the suffering of our warriors after battle, and bring pestilence and ruin to our enemies. We often considered making the hospital a cloister of the Anabaptists and the physicians an implied order. But they need their faith in their freedom. So we let them be.

TRIBALS

The people of God were spread out in all directions. To unite them is our calling. The tribes are the shards of the collapse—in us they rediscover a strong family.

PERSONALITIES

VINCENT, THE BREAKER OF BASSHAM

Culture: Frank

Cult: Anabaptist (orgiast/emissary)

Characteristics: Vincent liberated the city of Bassham in Franka from the power of the swarm and since then rules unquestioned over the border city. He is considered an important middle man for the Spitalian missions in Franka.

CASSANDRA THE DREAMER

Culture: Purgar

Cult: Anabaptist (ascetic)

Characteristics: Cassandra is one of the greatest resistance fighters west of the banks of the Adriatic. The orgiasts say she is capable of reading the thoughts of Balkhani foes in her dreams. But deep down, she pines for peace in this region ripped apart by war.

LEIBNER THE HUNTER

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Anabaptist (orgiast)

Characteristics: Leibner made a name for himself around Domstadt in his early years. Known for his courage and skill for tracking down beasts, he hires warrior groups to smoke out the nests of these monsters.

ANUBIANS

TRUE TO THE PROPHECY

SWAN SONG

The sun blazed down from the sky, drying the earth that was saturated by the noontime rain. The Anubian woman shaded her eyes from the sun as she walked out of her cool bone house. She surveyed the cemetery around her. Jackals roamed between the graves.

The sun was treacherous this time of day; it spared no one. Less than a hundred feet away a sea of cool green leaves beckoned her. She wrapped a plain cloth around her hips and threw another one over her shoulders. Her exposed abdomen was adorned with concentric circle tattoos, indicating her social position. Her arms and legs were coated with black resin and she carried a dog-faced Anubis mask on her back.

She descended the creaking stairs from her house, shuddering with rapture as her feet touched the baked earth. Until now, she had avoided looking at the mound of corpses; she didn't need to see it. The villagers had paid her a visit during the night. The moans of their dying warriors had awakened her. The villagers had dragged crippled and burned Scourgers to her cemetery and quickly vanished back into the world of the living. In this place, death ruled. The Anubian woman was its companion and mistress.

Almost lovingly, she bent over the dead bodies, running her slender fingers across the cold faces. She took the corpse of a warrior, freed too early from the cycle of life, into her arms. She put her hand under the dead man's neck and lifted him up, then put a buzzing scarab in his mouth, which immediately disappeared down the dry throat. She released red anansi spiders from a cow's skull and watched as they covered the stiff body with a net of silvery threads. The webs bound the dead warrior's soul in a way that only Anubis can free. The process would take two full

days, after which the corpse would be wrapped with rune-covered bandages. The warrior's journey into the unknown would begin.

The same rune inscriptions line the walls of a seemingly endless network of ancient corridors. Oil lamps hang from the low ceilings, islands of light in otherwise complete darkness. Men and women in simple linen clothes scurry through the hallways, carried by the winds of the past. Sealed ancient chambers hide around every corner. Each day, new tunnels are revealed, and lost secrets are freed from the dust.

Above the corridors, huge openings gape in the sides of a cavernous dome. The knowledge of the ancients, sealed in clay jars, fill the vaults of this enormous cave. They have been brought from crypts all over Anubia. Ancient machines crouch in the corners like huge dormant beetles. Not even the high priests know how these stone and brass machines work, nor can they guess their purpose.

The machines are far removed from the scorching sunlight, buried in the depths of the temple. Young Anubians are not even aware these devices exist. The knowledge will be theirs in due time. The path of an Anubian cannot be mastered in one life cycle—especially since the future of the cult lies waiting in the dark.

EON

Night had fallen upon the city of the dead. The heat of the day evaporated from the sand. It had gotten windy; thin veils of sand dusted the stone graves. A cautious figure stole through the necropolis. It appeared human in shape but it had the head of a jackal. It was black, darker than the night with eyes like stars: Anubis.

With fingers like spider's legs he wove a web in the air. The web fell over the tumbled obelisks and monuments. Souls on gossamer wings were drawn to it and Anubis harvested them. They were to be judged by Osiris. Occasionally, a soul escaped—it was foreign and not destined for his net.

Once, long ago, he had planted the *ka* in his people. For generations it was passed from mother to child. But the *ba* crept into their souls and poisoned them. The *ka* diminished in his people. Every cycle, the *ba* crossed the earth, and its influence grew more and more powerful. In this way Anubis lost the souls of his people.

Only one tribe remained true to the *ka*—the Anubians. The first tribe. Anubis had once revealed to them the fate of the earth and they saw it as their duty to end that which would last forever. But just as silver tarnishes when exposed to air, time had stained the purity of the Anubians. Only the oldest ones have the power to destroy the source of the *ba*. They have lain for an eternity beneath the desert sand, and now long for their resurrection. Their descendants, the new Anubians, strive to awaken them.

WRITTEN HISTORY

The caves in the Anubian desert once served as refuge for the ancient ones. They are now hidden beneath the sand. In the Anubian's massive corridor systems, their history lies scrawled on ancient scrolls and sealed away in clay jars. When a container is discovered, it is opened by the priests of the order with painstaking caution, so as not to lose or damage any of the forgotten secrets inside. With every discovery, the veil of the past rises a bit more, revealing another small piece of the mysterious Anubian history.

They appeared as scholars and scientists in ancient Egypt—a highly evolved culture among barbaric tribes. The first pharaohs of the Nile exiled them to Kerma in the kingdom of Kusch. But they were not forgotten. The Egyptians were fascinated with the opulent pictography and the death cult of the Anubians, so they emulated it like awed children. They tore the organs out of their dead, mummifying the useless empty shells. Then they covered them with gigantic pyramids. The Anubians pitied their ignorant brothers and sisters, but chose not to enlighten them.

Egypt flourished and the Anubians withered. Egypt, reunited under the 18th dynasty, destroyed the Nubian Empire, dispersing the remaining Anubians. They appeared once more in the second kingdom of Kusch but disappeared from history soon after.

THE ETERNAL CYCLE

If one drops a stone in a pool, concentric circles ripple across the surface of the water. Waves flow toward the edges, their strength ebbing. According to the Anubians, life originated in the fertile seas, stirred by the hand of Anubis. Today the Anubians adorn themselves with circles. They tattoo their bodies, dye their clothes, and decorate themselves with hoops to show they are the children of Anubis.

Once there was only one swell, startled into being by Anubis's gentle touch. Life and death—the violent beginning and gentle end of the wave; the cycle was his creation. But his was not the only influence. There were others, like the pattering of rain drops on calm waters. His wave pushed through the troubled sea, but its brilliant symmetry broke into millions of rippling pools. Waves bounced and collided forming new waves. Reality became complicated and branched into a near limitless myriad of possibilities on its way from birth to death. Relentless drops fractured the time-wave creating eternal cycles like the seasons or day and night. These disruptions changed the world, led it away from its original simplicity into chaos.

The Anubians seek to detach themselves from the time-wave—they aim to become like Anubis in order to support him in his quest for perfection. He had given them the key a long time ago, now they seek to use it to perfect themselves and become like him: immortals trapped between life and death.

ANUBIS SYNDICATE

The archives of Cairo are filled with ancient manuscripts. Most of them date from a few years before the Eschaton. Some mention the Anubis Syndicate: a mysterious group of eight African scientists, doctors, and philosophers that had devoted themselves to the resurrection of the body after death. The reports were vague, and although the media greedily ate up any information about them, every lead was a dead end. Little more was known about the Anubis Syndicate than its name. The last bit of printed gossip stated that Norman Thorn, one of the founders of the Recombination Group, had fled into the arms of the mysterious organization after being accused of industrial espionage. Then the Eschaton annihilated humanity and everything but survival ceased to be important.

Was the Anubis Syndicate made up of Anubians? The high priests in the subterranean temples don't deny it, but they hide the truth from their brothers and sisters.

KA AND BA

In Anubian mythology, the ka represents the original shape of the genetic strand that has passed through all life on the Earth. Some call it the soul; others view it simply as the shape of the universe. On the other side is the ba. It is a disruption in the ka; it grows inside it like a virus. The ka becomes twisted and the time-wave breaks and its power ebbs. Wherever it strikes, life becomes mutated and evil; the Earth seeks to destroy its children.

The Eschaton is the progenitor of one of the biggest and most destructive cycles in history. It strengthened the ba and weakened the ka. It blasted the fabric of nature into new and fractured circles. According to ancient Anubian records, the cult had prepared for several millennia to strengthen Anubis's creation before the catastrophe. Newer scripts note that they almost succeeded. Now time is running out. The consequences of the Eschaton are becoming clear: psychonauts turn Europe into a playground of absurdity, while in Africa, homicidal plants spread across the land. The time has come for the Anubians to focus their knowledge and skills before the wave started by the Eschaton swallows Anubis's work for good.

THE SOUL OF AFRICA

The Anubians are the shamans of Africa. They are known as healers, fortune tellers, masters of ceremony, ritualists, genealogists, and guides of the dead. If a house is haunted, they cleanse it of evil spirits. If a sick man seeks their help, they meditate with him to speed his recovery. They are the link between the ancestors and modern Africans.

LOST CHILDREN

The Anubian tribe is ancient. For millennia, they lived side by side with the high cultures of Africa. When they went into exile, a few remained behind to maintain their link with Africa.

The remnants of the Anubian culture filtered into the metropolises of the distant past. They mixed with Nubians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Egyptians, losing touch with their culture as they melded into the great civilizations of history. In spite of this, the Anubian genetic strand still exists in the descendants of the North Africans and Asians—the Anubians search for their sleeping comrades.

The cult uses the finger of Anubis to find their lost brethren. It is a hollow bone, the length of a forearm, artfully decorated with circles and spiral engravings. Apparently, several hundreds of these fingers exist though they are yellow with age. According to legend, the bone is filled with jackal bile, through which the children of Anubis can be distinguished from the rest of creation. If the skin of an African is scratched with the finger of Anubis, a true descendant will develop fingernail-sized sores during sunrise and sunset. This is the mark of Anubis. Africans that have been marked in this way are destined to follow the path of Anubis.

DEATH AND REINCARNATION

New inductees of the cult are matched with an Anubian guide of the dead. The mentors traditionally blacken their bodies and cover their faces with masks shaped like the head of Anubis. Together they journey to one of the four large catacombs in Africa. The inductee must descend into its darkest depths.

Far underground, in the inky darkness, surrounded by the bones of his ancestors, he must wait until the bridge between life and death has been crossed. He lives off of beetles and dead flesh, which are thrown down to him through ventilation shafts. Greedily, he devours the rotten pulp which is mixed with drugs.

The sounds in the darkness, amplified by psychotic intoxication, bring him to the edge of insanity. He stumbles through the stone intestines of the catacombs like a ghost. The skulls of his ancestors stare maddeningly from the walls. The visions are frightening, but the new Anubian must endure them. His screams subside and he collapses sure that he is dying. But the guide of the dead won't allow him to die. He must remain in the catacombs until his humanity has been burned away and he can stand face to face with Anubis.

When he has finally crossed into the realm of the dead, the inductee is brought back to the surface, embalmed with scented oils and wrapped like a mummy. For three days he has to remain in this position, motionless. The oils extract the poison from his body, the heat flushes it away. Water is given to him through a straw, liter by liter. On the fourth day after his symbolic, and "death", he returns from the world of spirits to the world of the living. The guide of the dead removes his bandages and greets the still weak Anubian as one of Anubis' reincarnations.

SYMBOLISM

In the first years following his reincarnation, the new shaman is taught the rules and arts of the cult by the guide of the dead.

He learns the ancient burial rites and studies the secrets of the insects and spiders. For days at a time he wanders through the psychovor forests, listening to the whispers of the leaves as well as the whispers of the ancestors.

The Anubians are a cult with distinctive symbolism: they draw circles on their foreheads, around their bellies, on their shoulders, and the backs of their hands. These represent the circular waves on which one rides towards death, as well as the world created by Anubis. They stain their faces and bodies with black resin—the color of their god. Combined with the jackal mask, they appear impressive and authoritative; Africans often bow to the floor to honor them.

They wield the sickle sword into battle, severing the unworthy to restore the perfection of Anubis's creation. Skulls and bones focus their meditations and act as instruments for their prophecies. Often these trinkets are decorated with the forgotten hieroglyphs of their ancestors.

According to the mythology of the cult, knowledge is inherent in the ancient symbols. Therefore, young and inexperienced shamans dress in richly decorated garments and paint their bodies following the old traditions. "What one cannot carry in the mind, must remain visible on the skin," an old African saying states. Indeed, experienced cultists exchange their splendid clothes for plainer ones and do without some of the body paintings. They return the skulls back to the graves from which they had taken them. The most wizened elders can no longer be recognized as Anubians—they have withdrawn to the cult's temple with the map of knowledge in their mind.

THE SEVEN CIRCLES

Most Anubian body paintings are rich in symbolism yet reveal nothing about the shaman. The henna circles around the Anubian's navel are different. The circles symbolize the hierarchy of the Anubians. The outer circle represents the broad wandering paths of newly initiated shamans. If a high priest, also called a *hogon*, notices the determination of a new initiate, they are promoted in the cult. They symbolically leave their old life cycle and advance deeper into the secrets of the world. They are now closer to Anubis. Now they will only paint six rings on their bellies. Their prestige has grown; but their destination is closer. The ranking system of the Anubians is vague. They say all hogons are on the third circle. Beyond that nothing is known.

BONE HOUSES

The African tribes worship and fear the Anubians. The shamans are loners that seek the peace of cemeteries or old battlefields. They shun the hustle and bustle of the villages. Like jackals they roam between the graves and harvest bones that stick out of the ground—eventually they construct a bone house in which they live and prepare their potions and salves until they die or are called to the Forbidden City, Cairo.

THE HOGONS

The hogons are the highest-ranking Anubians that an uninitiated African will ever see. They are wise women and men who travel the land of the psychovors. If they meet a fellow Anubian, they judge their development by taking hallucinogens together. Their minds merge and they communicate in a wholly open and foreign way. The hogan explores the very depths of the initiate's soul. According to legend, Anubis takes possession of the initiate's soul and balances it with a feather. Then, the shaman wakes up and the hogan is gone. If the Anubian was deemed worthy, he has one less circle on his torso.

HEALERS

The Anubians are experienced with the use of healing herbs and potent waters. They mix tinctures that take away the pain of the Scourgers and keep the Neolibyans healthy. Anubians with a profound knowledge in this area are called healers.

Many of their medicines are extracted from the psychovors, like the legendary marduk oil that negates the intoxicating perspirations of the Pheromancers. Only a few Anubians know these special formulas. There is a rumor that the ancestors tell the healer these secrets in a dream when he is advanced enough.

As important as these potions are to the Anubians, they are practically placebos. The healer always heals with his mind. Speaking about the disease with the patient makes it easier for the patient to recover. In pre-Eschaton times, the Anubian healers might have been called esoteric psychotherapists.

THE CROSS OF THE SUN

The most famous symbols of the Anubians are the death mask and the jackal's head. However, as one travels the inner circles, the cross of the sun eclipses all the other icons. It is a cross made up of four conjoined fours, which the hogons claim contains the absolute truth about the past and the future. The prophecy of the jackal, which was extracted from the old scriptures, is based on the cross.

MASTERS OF CEREMONY

To an African, anything taken from the Earth must first give its consent—the spirits of the land must be appeased. Unfortunately, their language is not always clear. To understand the hidden world, one should ask an Anubian for help.

If an Anubian needs to build a ladder, he goes into the forest and looks for a strong tree. He then asks the tree if it is willing to sacrifice itself. If the tree agrees, the Anubian starts his work. He draws circles in the ground around the tree with a bone and watches falling leaves and their position in the diagram or just listens to his inner voice. Every situation is different—in all there are seven million mitigation rites, or so the masters of ceremony say.

Fear of angering the spirits guarantees that every village has an Anubian nearby. Their prevalence ensures that their influence in rural Africa is absolute. In the big cities, however, one rarely sees masters of ceremony at work. The bustling apartment towers are too young to house any useful energy and the constant noise and dirt drives away both friendly and evil spirits. The metropolises are godless.

MESSENGERS OF FATE

The people of the African countryside only know the benign, morbid side of the Anubians. Generally, they use the Anubians for mundane things like anti-venom or corpse mummification. The Scourgers, however, have seen the other side of the shamans. Far from home, on European soil, the Anubians become the merciless messengers of Anubis: the fates of entire villages are decided with a throw of the bones. Countless Balkhani villages have been annihilated, banishing the inhabitants' souls to the netherworld because the Anubians said it must be so. Other settlements were spared, using the same, seemingly random, methods. They never give their reasons. They allow Anubis to show them the way, acting as his servants and balancing disturbances in the ka wave. How can one understand what's happening outside of the wave when one is inside it?

GUIDE OF THE DEAD

Whenever an African dies, his way is lit by a guide of the dead. The dying man is anointed, introducing him to his ancestors. When the body emits its final gasp and begins to stiffen, the Anubian takes the corpse to the bone field. There he puts a scarab in the dead person's mouth, ties the jaws together and lets the anansi spiders cocoon the body. After a few days, he examines the cocoon and wraps it in bandages. He shoos away the spiders—they will inform the forest spirits of the death—and pushes little *ushabti* figures under the linen bandages. These statues will protect the dead from evil spirits on the way to Osiris and Anubis. All that remains is for the Anubian to hastily bury the mummy in his bone field.

Guides of the dead are quite revered in the African villages. They are believed to know how to talk to the dead and seek their advice. But people are also scared of them. They are the most secretive and mysterious of all Anubians. Their presence can be a bad omen, or so the African women whisper by the wells; if a guide of the dead looks at you, it might arouse Anubis's attention. No one wants to risk being cursed, but nobody wants to live without the Anubians either.

ANANSI SPIDERS

Anansi spiders are hairless and about the size of a fist. They are the companions of the Anubians, impressed on the wave by Anubis himself. The arachnids are seen as tricksters with their own will; it takes a strong mind and a close connection

to Anubis to convince them to envelop a body and conserve it for eternity—an ability that is absolutely necessary for a guide of the dead.

THE ANUBIAN SICKLE

For their extended expeditions into Europe, Neolibyans often hire Anubians. Generally, they employ healers to take care of Scourgers and Scrappers; guides of the dead and masters of ceremony are usually seen as a burden by the pragmatic tradesmen, even though the shamans strengthen the morale of the warriors.

One might think of the Anubians' religion as drivel, but no one can deny their uncanny sense for psychonauts. This is why the Neolibyans always bring them along. The shamans can sense the chakras of the Strange Ones from a thousand feet away and have the ability to direct the psychonauts' powers against them. If the chakra point relating to the psychonaut's Earth Chakra is touched by an Anubian, the bond between the psychonaut and the Earth Chakra is broken. If this happens, the psychonaut dies: Psychokinetics burst into flames, Biokinetics bleed to death from their genitals, and Dushani scream themselves to death.

INTOXICATION AND POWER

Ecstasy and trance are important parts of the shamanic tradition. Young Anubians dance for hours until they are overcome by a sleep-deprived and dehydrated intoxication. Hallucinations take hold: voices from the ancient past, visions of misshapen creatures, dancing lights, and the kind caresses of the ancestors' spirits. They long to heed the comforting calls of the ancestors but they cannot. A veil separates them from this forbidden world; they feel the veil, but cannot pass through.

However, the psychovors have provided a way to meet the ancestors more directly. They are called *Anubis seeds* and lie scattered around the edges of the vast psychovor forests. They are deep black and the size of sunflower seeds. There is no shell; the naked fruit has the consistency of coal.

The Anubians crush the strange Anubis seeds and mix the powder with dried leaves. They smoke the leaves and are instantly transported to a state they can only reach through hours of deep meditation. The world around them ceases to move. All sounds suddenly seem grotesquely slow and dull. The veil that pesters them in even their deepest meditations no longer seems to exist. They feel the ancestors all around them, though the spirits evade every glance. Voices that once called out over the void of ages now whisper in their ears. The ancestors praise the power of the Anubians over the other tribes.

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WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM,
THERE WILL BE A DARK AND SECRET ORDER.

ITS LAW WILL BE HATRED AND ITS WEAPON POISON.

IT WILL ALWAYS HUNGER FOR GOLD

IT WILL SPREAD ITS LORDSHIP ACROSS THE WORLD
AND ITS SERVANTS WILL BE

BONDED BY THE KISS OF BLOOD.

THE STURDY AND THE WEAK WILL FOLLOW ITS RULES.

THE POWERFUL WILL SERVE IT.

THE ONLY LAW WILL BE

THE ONE IT DICTATES FROM THE SHADOWS.

IT WILL SELL THE POISON EVEN INSIDE THE CHURCHES.

AND THE WORLD WANDERS WITH THE SCORPION UNDER ITS FEET.

[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

The voices are far from content, however. Over the course of years the voices demand more and more in return for their gift. They become lascivious and promise great miracles if they are obeyed. They constantly beckon the Anubian deeper into the psychovor forest, coaxing him to disappear amongst the barbed leaves.

Many Anubians find this practice very disconcerting. They limit their consumption of the seeds and remain loyal servants of the African people. They concentrate on their work as healers or masters of ceremony. These Anubians will never break the fourth circle. They will never be allowed to enter the Forbidden City. But those that follow the voices lose their connection with the villagers. They are filled with an intense desire for perfection, mental as well as physical.

THE LEGACY

The strand of life. The intertwined chain, given by Anubis to the ancient ones. Nowhere is it purer, nowhere has it been as well guarded as with the Anubians. Generation after generation has passed the genetic material on to their children and it has evolved and mutated over the course of eons. The original potency of the genetic strand is now only a weak memory in the modern Anubian—but the gift of Anubis is still there, seething under the surface.

An awakening of the genetic strand could transform a cultist into a container of pure ka and thereby into the soul of Anubis. However, it has yet to occur. The hogons claim it will be possible to mark faulty sequences with the help of psychovors, removing them from the genetic chain. Only the ancient rites of the Anubians can completely reshape the genetic strand. The psychovors are the key, the Anubians the lock. Once the Anubians' minds are unlocked they are free to leave the wave and stride the Earth side by side with Anubis. In their mythology, the underworld is not a place of the dead—it's the place above the waters, a place that only belongs to humans and individuality. To get there is their legacy and their goal.

JACKALS

The jackal is the hunter of the necropolis; reviled for its bestial attraction to graveyards. Digging all day in the sand, he scratches the ground, as if looking for something. Upon finding a mummified arm or leg, loosely wrapped in gray bandages, he pulls until it comes free and disappears in the hills with his find. The Anubians are no different—some people have suggested that the jackal is merely a mimic. But the Anubians aren't in search of Egyptian mummies. They simply seek all things Anubian, anything from the first tribe. They swarm out into the desert and wander through remote mountain regions, armed only with a blessed staff, their eyes and their souls. Their staves dance across the sand accompanied by ancient songs, as the Anubians scour the land; again and again, rhythmically, step by step. Eventually a mental image forms—begging hands reaching out from the dark. When the hallucinations are strongest,

the searchers stay in that place and start digging in the sand with their bare hands. Often they find nothing but hard rock. Then they give up and move on. Sometimes, however, they find stairs. Stairs to the atrium of the underworld. The ancestors wait there, conserved eons ago in splendid sarcophagi made of gold, lapis lazuli, and chrome. Now the time has come to take them to the Forbidden City.

Even though the jackal is the dominant symbol of the cult, the Anubians reserve that name for the grave searchers.

THE FIRST TRIBE

The old scrolls tell of opened graves, of the arrival of the ancestors and their reanimation. The original genetic code was composed by Anubis himself and is still in excellent condition. No wrong letter, no wrong sequence disrupts the perfection. The ancestors are born of Anubis and they are identical to him. He will walk the Earth in them one day. The old texts further mention that only the awakened will be able to advance to the Earth Chakras without being sucked in by them. They will destroy the work of the Primer from the inside and break the alien wave.

THE FORBIDDEN CITY

The psychovors have a stranglehold over **Cairo**. The pyramids of Giza are grown over, just like the streets of the former metropolis. Yet the most scholarly Anubians are often commanded to go there—deep into a poisonous jungle that has nothing more to offer people than a gruesome death or madness.

Every Anubian knows that the oldest high priests of the cult have moved into the temples of the ancestors here, but nobody knows what they are doing. The African tribes have long fled to the back country, away from the psychovors and the contaminated waters of the Nile. None of the former tribes reside anywhere near Cairo. The Anubians are alone in this swathe of land.

Some impetuous Anubians have hoped to get to the bottom of the secret and ventured into the psychovor forest. A few days later they stumble, dazed, back into the clay-hut settlements from which they came. Their skin is scratched from the thorns of the thicket and rotting pustules dot their bodies, oozing stinking pus. The villagers back off when the mangled Anubian returns, surrounded by clouds of psychovor spores. The battered Anubian collapses in the dust, consumed inside and out. Most die in silence, but the few words that have made it to the onlookers' ears are echoed from village to village: "Cairo is forbidden. For us and for you."

If an Anubian is called to the Forbidden City, it's a step into the unknown that few dare take. According to the legends, a high priest ascends the dusty stairs of his bone house at night, and wakes him from his dreamless sleep. The priest is dressed in the ornate garb of Anubis: a splendid jackal mask decorated with gold and lapis lazuli on his shoulder, his body black from resin. Around his hips he has wrapped a cobalt-blue cloth and in his hand he holds an ankh of pure electrum. He hands the chosen

Anubian a vial filled with a tonic (they say it protects the user from the poison of the psychovors) and then disappears into the night without a sound. That day, the path of the Anubian splits: he can go on roaming the African jungle as a shaman, go to war with the Scourgers, or conquer foreign countries with the Neolibyans. Or he turns his back on his past, steps into the psychovor jungle of the Nile and is never seen again. The decision is his alone.

BOOKS OF THE DEAD

The ancient Anubians equipped the graves of their people with books of the dead—mystical guideposts to the dangerous underworld. When the soul of the deceased finally reached the empire of the dead, it was assessed by Osiris and his forty-two demonic assistants. If the soul was judged to be sinful, horrible punishments awaited it. However, if it was deemed worthy, it was sent to the heavenly fields of Yaru. There the grains grew strong and the afterlife resembled the life before.

There is evidence that the books of the dead were introduced by the first Anubians in Egypt. The books contained a complete transcript of the life essence of the deceased—in a language that the human eye can't read. They say that only Anubis himself was able to decipher the writing—and it was he who read it to Osiris and his demons. If the god of the underworld enjoyed the passages, he had the books sent to Yaru. If Osiris was bored, he destroyed the scripts with one point of his finger. Even Anubis wasn't able to decipher them after this. Countless numbers of these books still exist. Many have been recovered from the hidden crypts in the desert. They were given over to young Anubians, putting the spirit of an ancestor at their side. Only when Anubis is among the living again will the books open and speak.

ANUBIAN WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

We don't know much about them. They don't stand against us, either in Hybrispania or in Balkhan.

APOCALYPTIKS

They are the disruptions of the time-wave personified and spread out to poison everyone.

THE ASHEN

Their strand is thin from age and incest. Their wave is going to end soon.

CHRONICLERS

They are so different from us. They love technology, trying to instill in it the spirit they don't have themselves.

HELLVETICS

Their weapons are more advanced than ours, but their wave is a boulder in a pond. One day the returning tide will annihilate them.

JEHAMMEDANS

They hate us without knowing us. If we don't cut their strand of life, they will cut ours.

MARSHALS

They belong to the soldier tribes in Borca.

NEOLIBYANS

They are a small, colorful piece in our huge mosaic. They don't worship us like the Scourgers, but they too, as part of the trinity of Africa, perform their duties to our satisfaction.

SCOURGERS

Like us, the claws of the lion listen to the whispers of the ancestors. They are on the right track.

SCRAPPERS

They go to Europe excited, but they are nothing more than slaves of the dinar and thereby slaves of the Neolibyans.

SPITALIANS

They are shamans like us, but they don't see the spiritual side of man. They stick sharp objects into their patients where we stroke them gently with our hands.

TRIBALS

If we are the soul, then they are the flesh on the bones. Without them, Africa would fall apart.

PERSONALITIES

EZENWA THE HOGON

Culture: African

Cult: Anubian (hogon)

Characteristics: He has seen Cairo with his own eyes. It changed him. Since then he has often gone to the psychovors, collected seeds, and chewed them. He rarely ever speaks with the population anymore; he doesn't even perceive them. Yet he still unerringly finds the brothers and sisters of his cult and leads them across the threshold into a new world of understanding—and into the psychovors. Some never return.

ANUKI THE COBRA

Culture: African

Cult: Anubian (poisoner)

Characteristics: The psychovors call him, but he still closes his mind to them. Instead, he lives among Neolibyans and Scourgers in Tripol, mixing medicines and poisons for them. He is known for always showing the effects of poison and antidotes on himself.

WAITIMU THE ANUBIAN SICKLE

Culture: African

Cult: Anubian (sickle)

Characteristics: His sickle sword is made of the finest steel, gleaming like the sun, punishing like the spirit of Anubis. It cuts through the life strands of the unworthy, dismembers their bodies in order to block assessment by Osiris. First the white man. Then all the ones who carry an impure life strand.

APOCALYPTIKS

THE RULERS
OF DESIRE

BAD HAND

“Shit, look at her ass move.”

Dushkov’s gleaming blue eyes followed the dancer’s every move. Her costume seemed to consist only of buckles and belts. The Apocalyptik standing next to Dushkov patted the Scrapper on the shoulder.

“For ten you get the full program. Special price. For friends of the flock.”

The Apocalyptik disappeared in the haze of the brothel towards the bar. *Only ten*, Dushkov thought. This had to be his lucky day.

The dancer noticed him, then winked. Dushkov winked back. *What a fool I am*, he thought, *I couldn’t have reacted more stupidly*. He was angry at himself, but she did not seem bothered at all. She was a pro. She came up to him slowly, as if by coincidence, then looked him up and down several times. Dushkov moved his leather coat around uncomfortably and ran his hand across his linen shirt. He wasn’t the cleanest man. After weeks in the dust, grime seeped from every pore. Not even yesterday’s visit to the bath house had helped.

The dancer suddenly moved very close. “Hey, you ...” She nestled into his chest. He was breathless, sweat ran down his forehead. She looked at him shyly and then quickly straddled his lap. He smelled her perfume, her sweat; her hair smelled as intoxicating as the secretion of a Pheromancer’s gland. *Things move fast here!* he thought.

“Why did you say ‘zig zag’ at the entrance?” Her mouth was close to his ear now.

“Because ...” He stopped. His arousal turned into an uncomfortable tingle in his stomach.

“Stay calm, sweetie,” she sighed and ran her long, well-manicured fingers through his oily hair.

“The old Deisha told me.”

“That’s not what I meant.” Her voice was harder now, but there was still this lovely undertone in it. She was simply divine, he thought. But she confused him.

"I don't understand."

"Mmm ... " She touched his ear with her sensual lips. Then she bit him. Viciously. He screamed and tried to push her away, but her legs were wrapped around him like a vice, her arms wound around his, trapping them against the chair. She bit harder, then let go, jumping up and spitting a piece of thin meat in his face. He jerked back, threw his arms out to catch the slimy thing as if it were a swarm of bats, and fell backwards. He got up immediately, standing with legs apart over a black puddle that grew bigger and bigger. Blood streamed down his face and neck. His eyes were wide open, scanning the room, looking for help in the strange faces. They were all expressionless, staring back at him from the twilight of the tavern. With his shaky fingers he felt for his ear.

"Why?" he whined, trying to feel the missing piece. He didn't want to believe it.

"You still haven't answered my question, Dushkov."

Her mouth resembled an open wound. A river of blood streamed from its corners down to her chin and over her throat, disappearing between her breasts.

"It's the password, dammit! As a thank you! From the old Deisha!" His voice quivered.

"He doesn't know it." Her voice was mocking. She looked at the other Apocalyptiks that drew closer. Some laughed.

"That password," she took a deep breath, enjoying the moment of tension, "is not the password for the brothel." Her voice sounded amused now. "If you had uttered the brothel password at the entrance, Siska would have led you next door. At this very moment, there's a lot going on over there." She pointed to the wall behind her with her thumb and grinned.

"The password 'zig zag' is only given to those that betray us, so that the crows can take care of them." She looked into the group invitingly.

"And now let's show the sweetie what 'zig zag' really stands for."

MYSTICISM AND VIOLENCE

The past is just as unimportant to the Apocalyptiks as the future. They live in the present, channeling all their efforts into the satisfaction of their appetites; the caress of a fragrant woman or a strong man is preferred to caressing the soul with dusty old books. As a result, their history has been forgotten. Only the Chroniclers have collected facts and legends about the Apocalyptiks over the centuries, but the history is filled with holes.

Old records suggest that the cult was widespread in pre-Eschaton times. The face of Jerome Getrell, a televangelist and master of the tarot, was seen on millions of television screens, his sermons broadcast directly into the softened brains of TV addicts and pseudo-Christians. He preached free love, communism, anarchy, democracy, and dictatorship—paradoxes that only allowed for one interpretation: live the way circumstances allow, but live! Never be a slave! Live as if the world ends tomorrow!

His followers went out and shocked the world. Every day the media reported on gangs that had set entire blocks on fire or had taken control of the drug market of a city. They always left the

sign of the raven on building walls—the sign of the Getrellian Apocalyptiks. The tree planted by the preacher blossomed colorfully. Some blossoms were poisonous, others healing. Peaceful offshoots of the movement consisted of spiritual people that turned away from religion and science with disappointment and found inner strength in Getrell's mystical tarot.

However, shortly before the Eschaton, Getrell disappeared, abandoning his followers. There were alleged sightings, but no trustworthy reports exist in the archives of the Chroniclers.

Despite the absence of its leader, the cult refused to die. As the inevitable doom approached, the Apocalyptik mindset provided a release for many people. Like animals they overindulged their senses and followed only desire. Already burdened with controlling a panicked society, the police were unable to control the Apocalyptiks. The followers of Getrell became a huge gang—a nightmare for any conservative who crossed their path. Neo-hippies, transcendentalists, and the rest of the esoteric scene that was not infected with Getrellian fever were clubbed down when they tried to convert their unleashed brothers and sisters to peace.

THE YEARS THEREAFTER

Decades after the Eschaton, the Apocalyptiks still awoke the beast in man and drove the world towards the age of the animal. Freedom to do whatever they pleased remained their highest priority and therefore stood above the freedom of everybody else. Only centuries later did the mob finally cool down; the eruptions of violence hardened into slow streams of lava that pushed their way through old riverbeds.

During this entire period, the tarot influenced the decisions of the Apocalyptiks. If they planned a raid, they first asked the card reader for advice. If there was a potential conflict between Apocalyptik families, the impartial wisdom of the tarot mediated. The cards took the place of the gods, their interpreters became the leaders of the clans. The border between the nihilists among the Apocalyptiks and the mystics disappeared completely.

LIVING AT ANY COST

"Live as if there is no tomorrow" is the principle of the cult. Every emotion is as precious for the Apocalyptiks as a sea of diamonds. Be it love, hate, the rush of burn, sex, or the wind in one's hair while riding a motorcycle across the steppe—everything is internalized and celebrated to the extreme. The will to take the body to its limits, to expect everything from it, turns the Apocalyptiks into jaunty creatures without fear. Fear of the future holds no power over them. Will there be enough food to make it through the winter? Will there be consequences for my actions? Will the Jehammedans start a hunt for the brutes who robbed them of a hagari? Questions such as these are not of concern to an Apocalyptik. The migratory birds live in the here and now, they dare only to glimpse into the future through the tarot—and it never reveals whether or not they will see the sunrise in the morning.

THE FLOCK

Whether they are a loosely connected group of Apocalyptiks or a tribe that has grown over the centuries, all members are like brothers and sisters. They are one big family with leaders and inferiors, whether or not they are related by blood. They regard themselves as a flock. In the wastelands, there exists the Flock of the Red Dust, the Flock of the Steppes, and the Flock of the Eastern Wind, among many others. Apocalyptiks carry these names with pride, as if they had been born with them.

As brotherly as they may appear, if the ranking order is questioned, brutal battles do erupt. If a young member of a flock deems the leader old and useless, he can always challenge him. A leadership challenge is usually a brawl inside a circle of spectators. Everything is allowed in order to bring the opponent down to the ground. Dirty fighting tactics are encouraged as they demonstrate intellectual superiority. A low blow or eye gouge is always rewarded with raucous cheers from the blood-thirsty onlookers. While a challenge is rarely fought to the death, the consequences for defeat during a challenge are severe. The loser must leave the flock, forever an exile.

Other disputes between flock members are settled in a similar fashion, though with less permanent repercussions. A black eye or a broken rib are usually enough to show someone their inferiority. For Apocalyptiks, this is how conflicts are resolved. Their hierarchy is determined in a manner similar to a pack of untamed dogs.

For this reason, the ranking order within a flock is in constant flux. Whoever leads the raid today might be taking orders from his current footman tomorrow. The Apocalyptiks love their freedom and firmly believe in might makes right.

BIRD'S FLIGHT

They are known as migratory birds, crows, ravens, and countless other names. They control the smuggling of burn, they maintain the most popular brothels and gin palaces, and they foretell their version of their future.

Whatever they call their flocks, according to their domain or their way of life, they always give their brothers and sisters the name of a bird that corresponds to their nature:

FINCH

What good is a finch? It pecks, it flies, it shits. The finches are the lowest rank in the Apocalyptik hierarchy. They haven't achieved anything yet and they are pushed around by their brethren. They can only escape from this dreadful life through a test of courage that proves their usefulness to the flock.

RAVEN

Mighty black birds whose appearance is always interpreted as foreboding, Apocalyptiks known as ravens are the fortune tellers of the cult. The leaders of a flock are also often called ravens, because they decide the fate of their clan.

CROW

Screeching crows foretell disaster, circling battlegrounds, waiting for the perfect moment to strike and gouge out an enemy's eye. An Apocalyptik crow is two-faced and quick. They are the defenders and assassins of the flock.

MAGPIE

A whore that steals from her trick, a cunning burn dealer, a cut-throat highwayman—these are the Apocalyptiks who bear the name of the thieving magpie. However, pilfering from the clan is taboo, even for a magpie.

VULTURE

Apocalyptiks daring to venture into the ruins alongside Scrapers and dig in the dirt for artifact treasures are given the name of vulture. The con men of the clan are also given this designation. Any sign of weakness from an adversary and the vulture will pounce.

CUCKOO

An Apocalyptik cuckoo is a cheater and trickster that poaches in the domains of other cults. He lives on the edge; only his thousand masks keep him from extinction.

ALBATROSS

The albatross is the king of the seas. Harbor princes, pirate kings, or those who rule over the course of a river take the name of albatross.

SEAGULL

Seagulls are the menace of the seas. Unerringly, they throw themselves at humanity's waste and tear it apart. Apocalyptik seagulls are airy fellows that flit away from danger on the next stiff breeze.

OWL

The owl only attacks at night. It is graceful and precise. Its enemies do not suffer; they don't even have time to scream. It steals off into the night with its victim in its claws and disappears into its nest. Apocalyptiks given the name of owl are efficient robbers and assassins, always avoiding conflict unless it's on their terms. They are masters of ambush.

WOODPECKER

An Apocalyptik with the name of woodpecker is a pioneer of the flock. They travel through uncharted territory, gaining a foothold for their clan and establishing new trade routes with the villages they encounter along the way.

STORK

The storks of the flock kidnap people to either assimilate them into their clan or to force them into slave labor. Their targets are usually children, though adults fall into their clutches as well.

NEST BUILDING

If a brothel or gin palace opens in Justitia, it is almost a certainty that an Apocalyptik woodpecker bribed the right people to establish the operation. However, the woodpecker serves an even more critical purpose for Apocalyptik clans—the establishment of safe havens, or *nests*. Secret escape routes and rendezvous points for smuggling operations are established and maintained by woodpeckers. Nests are well-protected and clandestine beyond compare. Here, Apocalyptiks make deals, plan raids, have their fortunes read, lick their wounds, or hoard their spoils.

Discretion is their highest law, because most of the time their nests are built on forbidden ground. Only through informers can one learn about a nest. Without the password, though, you can only expect to enter the “front” for the nest, sipping bad brew served by a bored and surly innkeeper.

RISKY BUSINESS

Apocalyptiks are intrinsically drawn to shady business. Whether it's the human trafficking of Balkhani girls, smuggling burn past

Spitalians into Borca, battles in Purgare, harlotry and gambling in every major enclave, or pillaging and theft, Apocalyptiks are almost always involved.

Their image in the villages is mixed. For Scrappers, the gin palaces maintained by Apocalyptiks are the only places they can call home for their short stays in civilization. The Jehammedans and Anabaptists, however, see the Apocalyptiks as a nuisance, leading men and women alike into temptation. More than one family has fallen apart because of the allure of an Apocalyptik whore.

An occasional uproar from the agitated masses can disperse the migratory birds in all directions, but eventually, the desires of the people pave the way for their return. Movement is always in the air, just as an eye for the weaknesses of the people is the instrument of their profession.

Despite the airy character of the Apocalyptiks, many people in the wastelands only come to know pleasure through them. For the right price, the migratory birds can soften a hard life with drugs and prostitution. Many view Apocalyptik settlements as glimmering oases of bliss in a heartless world. Those who keep their eyes peeled in the presence of an Apocalyptik can succeed in their world. Those who trust an Apocalyptik blindly are just asking for trouble.

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM
THE FATHER WILL TAKE THE DAUGHTER IN HIS LUST
THE MAN, THE MAN; THE WOMAN, THE WOMAN
THE OLD ONE, THE CHILD.

THIS WILL HAPPEN IN FRONT OF EVERYBODY'S EYES.
BUT THE BLOOD WILL BECOME IMPURE.
EVIL WILL SPREAD FROM BED TO BED.

THE BODY WILL TAKE IN ALL THE FOULNESS OF THE EARTH.
THE FACES WILL BE TORMENTED
THE LIMBS EMACIATED.
LOVE WILL BECOME THE BIGGEST THREAT FOR THOSE
THAT CAN ONLY RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES THROUGH THE FLESH.
[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

TAROT

The Apocalyptik tarot is ancient and yet always new. It is a changing game where the cards reflect the current state of the world. Cards representing pre-Eschaton governments, technology, and ideas have been almost entirely stripped from the present decks, replaced by the thirteen cults, the primer, the stream, the psychonauts, and their plagues. However, there are still some ravens who employ cards of the past in their decks. Many also create their own cards from visions they have while under the influence of burn. The only rule to the Apocalyptik tarot is that each deck is as individual as its owner.

FORTUNE TELLERS

While their brothers and sisters sometimes ravage like gendos on the loose and embrace violence like a dear friend, the ravens among the Apocalyptiks lift themselves above the world of mortals into an empire of knowledge. With their knowing gaze, they watch the rows of cards they have laid out, symbolizing the disposition of their flock as well as the events of recent days and months before they give their recommendations to the people listening in awe. Most often their recommendations are about concrete questions: When is the best time for an attack on the trader outposts? Where should the new arena for trench fights be built? Will the Scappers move to a different enclave because of the higher burn prices? Seldom is the word of the fortune teller refused—with all their imposing behavior, the

Apocalyptiks are just kids at heart, with their gaze fixed on today, not on tomorrow. They want to be guided into the future, and so the ravens gain enormous power over their flock. They are strategists and ministers at the same time. They lead their people across bumpy terrain by an invisible leash, pulling back those that blindly walk towards the edge.

THUNDER ABOVE THE STEPPES

The motorcycle has been a special fetish of the Apocalyptiks for centuries; a fetish that demonstrates power and the ability to assert oneself. The technology of these vehicles is ancient and obsolete, the tires are porous, the gas precious. Few can afford a working machine, and that's what makes them special. Cycle riders keep an eye out for tires, recognize the next fender for the backwheel in a street sign, and fashion brackets to attach a lancet. Gas must be stolen from the Hellvetics or the Scourgers if they don't want to pour their own schnapps into the tank. Whoever has all the pieces and can screw them together to make one of these roaring infernal machines has proven assertiveness more than once: they are masters, respected by the flock.

But the motorcycles are more than a symbol for dominance: the power of 100 horses lets them break through Spitalian barriers, advance quickly into enemy territory, and retreat just as quickly. The motorized robbers among the Apocalyptiks are every enemy convoy's worst nightmare.

BEAUTY BEFORE AGE

The Apocalyptiks are a cult of beauty and vivacity. When the bones start to hurt, the skin wrinkles, and the eyes tear in the harsh wind of Borca, an Apocalyptik's days are numbered. A fading flower has no place in a forest of colorful blossoms.

However, a fading Apocalyptik rarely accepts his plight. He holds on to his former youth, clenches his rotting teeth and puts on powder and perfume to hide the stench of decay, while every action of his younger brethren screams into his shriveling face, JUST GO AWAY! Others avoid him by the campfire, yet he laughs along with them as they knock his crutches out from under him. He tries to remain jovial and even offers "parental" wisdom, but no one needs a mother or father. Apocalyptiks need brothers and sisters with whom they can soar out into the world or live out their need for thrills. Oldies put the brakes on the adventures of the group. Youth has no patience. The old, ugly grimaces disgust them. Finally, after enough badgering, it becomes clear to the aged Apocalyptik that he is no longer welcome within the flock. If he doesn't leave of his own accord, he is pushed from the nest. The fall is far and, most of the time, fatal.

Whoever still remains, and gets away with it, is sharper than all the young Apocalyptiks together. Aged Apocalyptiks are rulers of life and death, swift with the blade and refined in crafting intrigues. It would be foolish not to give them respect. They mostly operate underground and control an impressive syndicate. However, these stalwart old timers are more likely to have a Hellvetic at their side than a bird of prey.

SEAGULL PLAGUE

The seagulls and albatrosses are to the sea what the carnivorous crows are to land. For centuries, the Neolibyans have battled pirates who dash around in nimble torpedo boats, board African transport ships, take everything of value and are gone again in an hour. Other pirates aren't as interested in a ship's freight—they tangle the marine propellers of the ship with steel cables or put bombs in the hull. Others throw garments laden with pox or pest at the crew and then sell them the antidote.

Undoubtedly, the Apocalyptiks—the seagulls and alba-trosses—are behind this piracy. But it is unknown where they come from. Their pirate cities on the Frank and Purgar coast-lines are well hidden. The Neolibyans also presume there are a few nests in Syracuse, but they are invisible among the mounds of junk. African businessmen are helpless. They have no defense against the sea gull plague.

CLIPPED WINGS

Those who know the Apocalyptiks are unlikely to award them a sense of justice. But this is only true outside the flock. Within the flock, the birds must follow the rules or have their wings clipped. An Apocalyptik's possessions are just as untouchable as the truth—thieves and liars within the flock are dealt with severely and expelled without hesitation. The flock will break a thief's arm or tear out a con man's tongue. But under no circumstances will the flock kill anyone: murderers and traitors will have their eyes gouged out, then be sent out into the wasteland.

TESTS OF COURAGE

The Apocalyptiks give nothing away for free. They must earn what they receive through a test of courage. In typical tests of courage, crows might be drugged and thrown into a pit full of hungry dogs; magpies might be asked to ride a motorcycle through a Scrapper camp, snatching artifacts on the way; a cuckoo might be disguised as a Jehammedan and forced to seduce the saraeli of the clan. Migratory birds must pass these dangerous tests to earn respect and supplies from the flock.

APOCALYPTIK WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Anabaptists are like children in the darkness of the night, running after a flaring candle, orienting themselves here and there with the short shot of a flame out of their burners. They hunt a phantom called “foulness” and deny the psychonauts their humanity. If the Spitalians whistle, they plod dumbly in their direction. They understand nothing but claim to know everything.

ANUBIANS

Their bodies, their eyes, their mouths; they are soft and tender, too seductive to leave untouched. But those who get involved in their game feel the cold scales of the snake. Anubians embrace life—and caress it with poisoned lips. Be wary of them.

THE ASHEN

They sit in their holes determined and ailing. Those fools! They want to shut out life and drown it in darkness. They seem to have succeeded.

CHRONICLERS

They hide their bodies and their sensuality behind a cool air, portray themselves as asexual. They are humorless and their language is interlaced with strange phrases. You don't want to have them as friends, but they are unbeatable as business partners and informers.

HELLVETICS

They are gun freaks, without spirituality or joy in their lives. But in our brothels, Hellvetics scream as loudly as everybody else.

JEHAMMEDANS

They float on a cloud of belief—a belief that consumes them and us. Any kind of joy is foreign to them, while we embrace life—and they hate us for it. Like maniacs, they throw themselves upon us, senselessly butchering our brothers and sisters—but our crows are already circling above them.

MARSHALS

Influential people with a thing for control. We can get along with them as long as we are smarter than they are—which is most of the time. Every now and then, we throw them a piece of meat, which they dig into like starved gendos. Give and take.

NEOLIBYANS

We sell passing lust. They sell off things of substance. We are not in each other's way.

SCOURGERS

Perhaps Scourgers could be brothers in spirit if they didn't behave like wild dogs and snap at everything with white skin. Stay out of their way.

SCRAPPERS

Good customers. What more is there to say about them? Directly from the ruins to the Chroniclers then to us with the chronicreds. Keep it up!

SPITALIANS

They are physicians, they say. But if you look into their souls, you can see truly sick people. Human flesh is not designed to contain this much evil. Often, the better ones flee to us, indulging in the liberating intoxication. Still, Spitalians are snakes at heart, snapping at the helping hand.

TRIBALS

The tribes are sensitive if you interfere with them. If a tribal leader is introduced to a new collection of daughters of joy, they can be ripped off twice: once for the provided services and a second time for discretion.

PERSONALITIES

DEJAN THE RAVEN

Culture: Balkhani **Cult:**

Apocalyptik (raven)

Characteristics: As a raven of the Carcass flock, Dejan was one of the big players in the entertainment business in Justitian. Then came the Dust Riders. Their leader, Vulco, humiliated the raven in a battle. Beaten like a naughty child, Dejan crawled back to his flock. Since then he has lost his reputation and throws himself into all kinds of challenges in order to redeem himself.

JELENA THE MAGPIE

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Apocalyptik (magpie)

Characteristics: She rubs herself with precious ointments and wraps herself in sexy fabrics—and still she always stays in the dark: She is an Ottoman iconist's playmate. He has fallen for her completely, letting her flock get away with things that would cause others of his rank to avenge them with a saber. Even the fact that many small valuables disappear from his rooms doesn't arouse him as much as Jelena's nightly attention.

HAGRA

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Apocalyptik (vulture)

Characteristics: In the Hybrispian forests, he secretly approaches battlegrounds and then hides and listens. He waits for the noise of the battle to quiet down and for the moaning of the wounded to ebb away. Then his moment has arrived. He scurries between the heaps of corpses, goes through the clothes on the bodies that are still warm, takes everything of value, and disappears again into the forests before the victors are able to catch him. They call him the vulture.

THE ASHEN

THE CAVE DWELLERS

BUNKER RATS

A small square of light marked the border between the outside world and the deep eternal darkness of the tunnels. The square narrowed to a slit, and loud footsteps receded down the corridor. A group of women and men watched intently, their pupils dilating as the light faded away. A last shimmer—like a strand of pearls—then complete darkness. With an ominous groan, the door sealed itself. Motors, deep in the walls, howled in protest as they forced huge metal bolts into grooves buried in the door frame.

The portal sealed the mountain tunnels behind it for a century. Fluorescent tubes sputtered to life. For the rest of their lives, this light would be the only day these people would know.

Many generations later, people stand once again at the ancient portal. Spots of rust bloom on the door's brushed steel surface. Cracks in the concrete walls are stained with centuries of condensation; nubs of stalactites grow on the ceiling.

When the seal is broken, the once-mighty motorized locks wheeze and strain like invalids. The door is finally forced open with the aid of a few hydraulic jacks. Starlight falls into the hallway and glitters in the eyes of the buried people.

These eyes are far different than those that had voluntarily stepped into the darkness so many generations ago. Their skin is waxy and pale, their eyes are deep, black holes like the darkness of the tunnels. Many ages have past, but their doctrine was never forgotten: "Care for the Sleepers and take over the world."

IN LINE

They marched by the hundreds and thousands, under cover of night. Across the world, they streamed into the underground facilities of the Recombination Group. Unclouded by doubt, they fixed their stern gaze on the path that lay ahead of them. They were attractive people, strong and well built, with flawless skin. With broad strides they descended into the mountain, passing through a labyrinth of whitewashed and brightly lit corridors.

They went past operating rooms and ignored the massive generators and various holding chambers. The farther they progressed, the more their goal was clear: the waiting rooms.

The spectacle of glittering computer consoles, masses of cable, and thousands of massive glass cylinders did not distract them. They hammered on the red flashing switches and the bolts on each cylinder unlocked with a hiss. Icy fog floated across the floor, but they did not shiver or complain—they simply waited as the sleeping chambers opened. The cylinders were divided into two halves, and the upper part on each unfolded. In them lay men, women, and children. They looked pasty and racked with illness. They slept without stirring.

The envoys thought it counterproductive to wake them from their artificial coma—all of the screaming and the questions would have made the task at hand that much harder to carry out. The sleepers might even have been able to stop what was to come.

The attendants pulled the sleeping bodies from their chambers and hefted them onto their shoulders. They marched deeper into the complex, their boots echoing in cadence through the tunnel system. They filed into enormous storerooms, massive and empty. Over the course of a few days, the bodies were piled here. After the heinous deed was finished, the storeroom doors were locked, sealing the halls for all eternity. The massacre of the sleepers went unnoticed—and unavenged.

INTO THE DARK

The attractive, healthy people formed an honor guard when the chosen ones drove up to the tunnel entrances in armored cars. Together they strolled down to the now vacant glass cylinders at the heart of the facilities—the *dispensers*, as they called them. All traces of the preceding sleepers and their cleansing had been erased. The halls gleamed the brightest white—the white of a liar's pointed teeth.

The chosen ones appeared to be normal people at first glance, only a tattoo on the back of their hand set them apart from the others. The tattoo was a bar-coded number—a multiple of 100; there were the 100s, 200s, and 300s, eventually ending well into the 1,000s.

People wearing aprons were waiting at the glass cylinders, poking and testing the electronics with blinking devices. Everyone was anxious; they felt like they were on the verge of an extraordinary event. There was an almost festive atmosphere, like Christmas. The gifts this year: survival.

Ten days later, the chosen ones had become Sleepers. Sealed in the glass cylinders, their eyes gazed, absent of emotion, through the translucent walls. Green-lit LCD screens confirmed the cryostasis. The lights went out and the doors were closed. Heavy steel bolts slid into their grooves. The countdown began. It would be 100 years until the first Sleepers awoke.

The attractive workers of the tunnels, those responsible for the cylinders and the Sleepers, toiled in the outer chambers. They tended the holding systems and the bioreactors. They observed the data stream from the core of the facility—the Sleepers' chambers. They called themselves *watchers* because it was their sole duty to protect the Sleepers. This ethos had been pounded into them during their long training sessions with the Recombination Group. It was repeated over and over until they believed it wholeheartedly. The thanks for their labor: survival.

DEFICIENCY SYMPTOMS

It took only thirty years for most of the bunker complexes to be abandoned. Maddening claustrophobia tested the sanity of the watchers; a test they were not willing to endure. They could not wait for the appointed time to open the heavy doors of the compound. They dared to begin a new life outside in the wasteland. They shook off the brainwashing and melted in with the survivors on the surface.

Yet some remained. Year after year, they choked down the slimy sustenance of the algae tanks. They drank water that had already passed through thousands of bodies and marginally maintained filtration equipment. When the daylight simulators—light tubes filled with xenon—had finally burned out, they existed in a never-ending twilight.

Stories of the last days of light, portrayals of impending helplessness, and the bitterness of living in dark subservience were handed down from generation to generation. After a number of centuries, Day X was seen as a mystical event: it wasn't the watchers who had chosen the darkness, the darkness chose the watchers.

Life in the obscurity of the tunnel systems demanded its tribute. The watchers suffered from deficiency syndrome. After generations they had become pale and deformed. Their sight drifted into uselessness while their other senses blossomed. Hearing and touching became the most cherished senses. A beautiful voice was the most valuable gem. The echoing screams of children were liberating and gave a dimension to the nothingness to which they clung. The watchers sang in order to keep their hearts free of gloom.

KNOWLEDGE

During all the years secluded in the bunkers, the watchers never forgot the purpose of their existence. Impassable steel portals crested with the emblem of the Recombination Group blocked their access to the secret depths of the facility. These entrances were under constant guard, a tradition passed from generation to generation. But what lay behind these massive doors?

The educational background of the watchers differed between dispensers. Culturally degenerate, they found fulfillment in ritual and superstition. They alleged gods and demons were hidden behind the sealed doors. They believed the gods would rise and roam among them when the time was right, while the demons must remain sealed in their prisons for all eternity.

Only a few bunker communities in the Balkhan region maintained the true knowledge of their predecessors. They copied it onto paper when the machines malfunctioned and scratched it into the walls when the last lamps burned out. The darkness took their sight, yet it could not take away their past. Whoever learned to read the walls and feel the artwork of knowledge experienced the last days of brightness. They learned of the doctrine of the Recombination Group, the secret of the Sleepers, and the problems and fears of the watchers.

At first, only a few of the facilities' systems stopped working. They were replaced as long as the watchers were able to do the maintenance on them. Then the propeller engines of the air recirculation systems began to squeak, eventually grounding to a halt. Spare parts for repairs began to dwindle.

The filtration units of the water treatment systems were growing unreliable. The drinking water stank, the toilets stopped up. Mold spread into the hallways and made entire sectors uninhabitable. The bioreactors leaked, cable insulation became brittle, screens flashed one last time and then went eternally black. The bunkers lost power, and there was nothing the watchers could do about it. The control systems at the entrances no longer reacted to any input. The dispensers had become a prison.

No one knows how many groups rotted in their chosen exiles. Some may have starved to death. In some of the facilities there were watchers who had dedicated their lives to the study of the written language of the ancestors so that they could consult the old operating manuals and take control of the dire circumstances. They had to undo centuries of forgetfulness and all too often their progress was abandoned because of their untimely death.

However, several did the unthinkable: they reactivated the surge cylinders and the opening mechanisms; others pried the seals open with portable hydraulic jacks or pounded through meters of concrete and rock with jackhammers. Centuries later, they emerged for the first time into the sunlight and met the endless heavens. And they were afraid.

AWAKENING

The world was so different from what they had imagined. It didn't capitulate to their demands. The wild Balkhani merely laughed at their pale weak bodies and their stories of sleeping gods. They beat the watchers back into their holes. It was then that they became known as the Ashen and hatred grew in their hearts.

Back in the security of their tunnels, the elder watchers advised the survivors of the first expeditions on how to proceed. Their goal stood unwavering: they must prepare the Earth for the awakening of the Sleepers.

A direct confrontation with those above ground was to be avoided, so they embraced their strongest ally: the night. Under the protection of darkness they returned to the place of their first humiliation. They throttled their opponents in their sleep and stole their belongings. Their campaign of terror had begun.

Surface dwellers now stay far away from the haunted tunnels. Upon discovering an opened bunker one either flees or stops to whisper into the darkness. If the intrepid whisperer is a former watcher, they might find sympathetic ears in the lower depths—listeners who still share the goals of their forefathers. Soon the whisperers will find themselves in the loving embrace of their Ashen brothers and sisters. The community of the Ashen is again great in numbers.

Ancient drawings are all that remain of the predecessors of the Ashen. According to these rudimentary documents, they were highly regarded and among the best technicians and engineers of their time. They had every resource of the Recombination Group at their disposal. But that wasn't enough. Deep below, in the lost depths of the sealed catacombs, they who had once belonged to the elite waited for their awakening. Are they scientists, governors, soldiers? The computers of the underground dispenser facilities archived the events of the past, but their life elixir faded centuries ago. Without electricity, they were silent.

Current historians and sages have only the words of Jaquar, a reputed Sleeper, to fill in the gaps of the Recombination Group's story. Captured by Hellvetics in the ruins of Laibach, he told them a story of treachery, immortality, and madness:

"We are the vanguard of yesterday: 100s, 200s, 300s. The world was supposed to send us out in regular intervals so that we could salvage the wastes of Europe. But something happened, yes? We had to abandon the dispensers in northern Europe shortly after the catastrophe. Automatic emergency evacuation—an earthquake.

"Our boys and girls were violently ripped from their comatose state. Together with the watchers they climbed from the tunnels centuries too soon. 300s and 100s should never have met. Now they put their heads together and plan. I don't know much about them, but what do you think happens when a bunch of crazed superhumans scheme like that? I was far away by the time it came to cleaning up all that blood and gore ...

"What is it, Hellvetic? I see the numbers rattling in your brain. At least you can count. You're thinking, 'this loser here thinks he's been alive for at least 400 years!' Do you morons just have that one facial expression? Must have gotten it for a good deal ...

"Do you see this 100 here? Nano-particles were injected into my skin five hours before Day X. My wounds heal in just a few minutes—no scars. It all goes to my bones. The driver's license for a new millennium. But that wasn't all. They pumped us full of chemicals and hi-tech stuff, said they wanted to prevent intracellular crystal build up. Without that stuff our bodies would have been destroyed in the cryostasis chambers.

"The crap worked, but it had its side effects. They played us all. The whole great plan—all of it a ruse. And what for? You'll see. Maybe the 500s will start it. Or the 600s. But not me. I'm out of the game."

This conversation would become his legacy. Shortly afterwards he died from mysterious causes in his sealed chamber in the alpine fortress. When the Hellvetics prepared his body for cremation, they noticed, for the first time, countless puncture points on his skin. It looked like his blood had been milked.

DEVELOPMENTS

The pretty people from before are no more. Their descendants have waxy skin, many are hairless. They are no longer dressed by rank in gleaming blue or dominating black uniforms. Everything has long decayed. Instead, they loop furs around their bodies or use patches from looted clothing: shot-up

Spitalian neoprene suits, Scourger flak jackets, or bloodied Balkhani scale armor.

The Ashen may not care about their appearance, but they do have a preference when it comes to their weaponry. Firearms must have silencers, in order to be as inconspicuous as possible and to protect their hearing in the bare tunnels. Blunt weapons must be short so as not to collide with the walls in the hallways when retreating. Boots are padded so they won't make any noise while running. Silence and darkness—without them the Ashen would have no chance against the powers of the Overworld.

LIFE BY DAY

The energy supply in the bunkers is a weak, shaky spark; it's not enough to completely light the place. Only a few rooms, including the central junction inside the bunker systems, are still bathed in a flickering twilight. LCD screens still glow cool green with the status of their Sleepers. The communications systems, including A/V components, have been out of order for centuries. And yet the Ashen remain in contact in the yard-wide corridors and network of rooms. They use a tapped code and the old pipe systems that wind endlessly through the facilities. Though still and forlorn, these dark tunnels are far from silent. Dull hammering, sometimes fast, sometimes with long pauses, fills the air with a sinister cacophony.

Language and communication has enormous meaning in the Ashen community. An Ashen with a deep voice will have more influence than someone with a falsetto. Children with promising voices are made to practice their pronunciation for hours a day. The elderly demonstrate to the children the fine art of storytelling. One day they will be called upon as demagogues, then the world will determine the fate of the Ashen.

DEMAGOGUES

The Ashen demagogues have mastered their voices. Whether haunting or flattering, commanding or wary, they control the Ashen people with cold efficiency. If a demagogue calls an insubordinate to order with a thundering voice, then it is a weapon; if they use their voice for arbitrating a dispute in the bunker, then it is a tool of the community.

Every Ashen enclave has at least one demagogue, depending on the size of the bunker. They can be male or female but there are never more than ten. Their age is immaterial, as long as they evoke, in a single word, the necessary emotions to control their listeners. Love, fear, or lust; snarled, mumbled, or intoned; these powers raise the demagogues above their bunker mates. They are judges, warriors, or whores. There's Rato, the fear demagogue, who rules by using terror, punishing those who disobey him with panic and nausea. Chire, the violence demagogue,

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM,
THE SUN WILL BURN THE EARTH,
 THE SKY WILL OFFER NO PROTECTION FROM ITS FLAMES.
 IT WILL BE BUT A SHABBY CURTAIN AND THE BURNING LIGHT
 WILL CONSUME EYES AND SKIN.
 THE SEA WILL FOAM LIKE BOILING WATER OVER THE CITIES,
 AND RIVERS WILL BE BURIED.
ENTIRE CONTINENTS WILL DISAPPEAR,
 THE PEOPLE WILL FLEE TO HIGHER GROUND.
 THEY WILL BEGIN TO REBUILD
 AND FORGET WHAT HAPPENED.
 [JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

uses words which hurt more than the lashes of a whip. Jikla, the demagogue of the senses, who controls her people with a lilting song which washes away the horrors of the Overworld.

The Ashen are not the only ones influenced by the voices of the demagogues. Even those in the Overworld feel the fire in their words. The power doesn't affect them the same way, but the voice of a demagogue is irrefutable. The demagogues are considered dangerous. If invaders attempt to smoke out a dispenser, the demagogue is their first target. If this tactic proves unsuccessful, the demagogue will turn his sheep into snarling bloodthirsty wolves with a few passionate words. Then the raiders should run for the quickest exit.

WAKERS

Many lower-level tunnels would never have been opened if the watchers hadn't sent the first wakers to save their dying masters from the depths. Equipped with ancient access badges and high level command codes, they released the Sleepers into a world that could not understand them.

Sealed dispensers were a grave problem for the wakers. Not only were the logistics of opening the massive doors a problem, but there were serious religious implications as well. Would the sleeping gods approve of the break in? Despite the importance of saving the Sleepers on the lower levels, the wakers were often admonished as grave robbers and plunderers. It was a thankless job, for which many of them sacrificed their lives.

Centuries later, the general perception of the watchers has changed. Modern Ashen remember the pioneers who broke the seals and saved the lost Sleepers from starvation with pride. Their names are held in honor and are often passed on to children of the bunker clans in remembrance.

For a long time now, no waker has wandered in the dark depths. All of the sealed sleeping chambers seemed to have been located, opened, and examined. Recently, however, documents have surfaced that mention forty-four undiscovered locations.

Why were these new Sleeper dispensers kept secret? Their positions aren't even drawn on a map—little more than vague hints point to their true location. Now, the wakers scour the tunnels as in ages past; the hunt is on.

SOLARS

The sun is the hateful enemy of the Ashen. It blinds them and reveals them to their foes. But it is also the keeper of life, like the cylinders in the dispensers, and is therefore a matter of great importance to the Ashen.

On bright days, a sect of the Ashen called solars unfurls dull black panels above the bunkers. The panels collect the essence of the sun, funneling it into the dank interior of the tunnels. Electronics flicker gleefully to life for a short while and during these special days the command center again relays its cryptic information to the dreadful denizens who endlessly watch and wait.

According to legend, the solars balance the forces of nature and push the sun back into darkness each evening where it recharges and returns fresh the next day.

TRADE

The Ashen never developed a social sect to venture out and find other communities. Because the Ashen believe themselves to be superior to all other humans, dealing with them is unpleasant and often fruitless. They make demands when they should be begging for mercy and scoff at offers they desperately need to take.

Nonetheless, they boldly drag their heavy merchant bags to the bunker portal and try to strike up business. They understand the dangers and pitfalls, but a successful trip could reap great rewards. Reputedly, the rubbish of the bunkers is worth quite a high price from the Chroniclers.

NIGHT HUNTERS

Life in the darkness is constantly on the verge of disintegration. The stinking vats of algae may have ensured their predecessors' survival, but lack of attention and lost biological and chemical knowledge have turned the healthy green brew to a toxic sludge. The only replacement food existed in the surface world.

The Ashen never considered farming or herding. The only collective organization they understood were camps that could only exist by using a strict rationing plan. And what else could the silos and herds of those in the Overworld be anyway? The only difference they could glean was that the people of the Overworld had no common or regulated plan.

Since they first emerged, generations of Ashen have ventured from the darkness of their underground realm to ransack local villages in the dead of night. The northern Balkhan regions, suffused with an unnaturally high concentration of bunkers, suffer disproportionately from the destructive Ashen raids. More than a few villages have capitulated to the nightly incursions. Depleted of their precious resources, the villages implode, pulling the parasitic Ashen clans into ruin as well.

Though initially dependent on the local settlements, large bunkers like Talus and Fermat developed critical strategies that would ensure their survival for a long time to come. They sent trackers to the Overworld earlier than their less forward-thinking counterparts. The raids soon lost their spontaneous character and developed into painstakingly planned actions taking long-term consequences into account. A rotation system was put into place to give the plundered settlements a chance to recover—they suck the land dry, but they won't let it bleed to death.

THE DAY AFTER

The Sleepers will awaken. Their eyes are like gold and fire, their skin like white plaster, smooth and flawless. They control the weapons of the first reckoning, powerful artifacts hidden in the depths of their tunnels. The heat of the sun will fall upon their enemies and burn them to ashes or turn them into salt.

They will rise above the subdued mortals on beams of fire and keep an atrocious reckoning at bay. They will take the Ashen by the hand and lead them back into the light, avenging centuries of humiliation and degradation. Together, they will build an empire on the bones of the human insects of the Overworld. The few survivors will become lowly slaves in service of the arisen Sleepers.

The Ashen will make up the priest caste. It is their calling. Even if the world of men initially thrashed about like a wild stallion, they will thank them in the end—and court them. For all eternity. Amen.

SECRET LANGUAGE

Outside of the bunkers, the Ashen communicate using a system of ticking and snapping sounds. It is modeled after the knocking language of the dark tunnels. Aggression against the Overworld has a better chance of success when the victims cannot decipher the plans. It is a language of war, and though all Ashen tribes use it, it differs greatly from bunker to bunker.

AWAKENED PROPHETS

When the one hundred year-old Sleepers arose from the darkness in 2173, the third generation of watchers followed them into the untamed land of the Balkhani. Knowledge was already an endangered commodity, but time had yet to wash truth from the minds of the watchers and replace it with dull superstition.

A hundred years later, another wave of Sleepers awoke in their dispensers and gazed into the eyes of stilted and deformed worshippers. What had happened to the watchers?

Today, a handful of Awakened prophets roam Europe. Their names are Daimondal, Trice, Helios, Uriz, and Enceph. They conjure fire, heal deadly fevers with ancient stones, speak with such thundering voices that they drown even the roaring of the winds. In the eyes of the superstitious, they are gods. They view themselves as heralds of a much greater power.

Many Ashen leave their bunkers in order to serve the prophets. Thus they break their holy vow of protecting their sleeping gods.

ASHEN WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

They love the big cities and multiply there like rats. We, on the other hand, prefer the isolation of the bunkers. They are of no consequence to us.

ANUBIANS

These children of death are perfectly suited for the night. Their black skin makes them one with the shadows. They have a rich history, so rich that it's a burden to them. Like us, they wait for their gods.

APOCALYPTIKS

Their hedonism is disgusting, like their aimless, uprooted life. But they don't bother us, so if they stay over there, we'll stay right here.

CHRONICLERS

If they knew what treasures we possess, their glasses would burst from greed! But we hide from them, because we're still not armed for the final battle. Our gods have yet to awaken.

HELLVETICS

They block our way, they hinder our search for the ancient Sleepers and drive us back into our tunnels. Instead of realizing that we simply want to give the world a golden age under our rule, they meet us with distrust and fire. We answer with burning silent lead!

JEHAMMEDANS

They worship a god, whom no one can see nor touch, but in whom one must *believe*—how crazy are they?

MARSHALS

They watch over their Protectorate; we over our dispensers. Between us lies a lot of land.

NEOLIBYANS

What purpose do businesspeople serve when everything belongs to the Ashen? Everything he owns must be stolen! But we put on a good face in an evil game. We are not yet ready to take our rightful inheritance.

SCOURGERS

Their voices swell with the ancient phoneme. It touches our hearts. We feel their longing for their homeland. What powers must be there!

SCRAPPERS

They actually dare to barge into our holy halls! What we will do to them when we catch them will surely be unpleasant.

SPITALIANS

As long as they war against the psychonauts, our paths won't cross.

TRIBALS

They are the poor remains of the ancestors and wait only to experience the glory of all times under our rule. And what is the task of servants? To take care of their masters. And they will, even if it's involuntarily at first.

PERSONALITIES

FINGER

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Ashen (waker)

Characteristics: When he was still an infant, his shrill screams echoed through the corridors. The decision that he would be a waker was made before he could speak a word. Thirty years later, he's a legend. He has tracked down countless bunkers, and has apparently already made contact with the masters. The only question is where he got the finger on his chain.

ZO N

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Ashen (solar)

Characteristics: Outside in the gleaming sunshine, she glues panels, buries cables, and curses the light. She not only hates her work, she sees it as a detestable punishment. She wants to retire to the depths, to hide from the angry ball of fire in the sky. She wants to cool her soul. But she is the best technologist the bunker has had in centuries.

MESNIK THE CUTTER

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Ashen (demagogue, fear)

Characteristics: He has long, filigree hands, suitable for holding surgical utensils. He loves his cold blades that cut into supple pale flesh. He doesn't understand medicine, but he's a master of pain and ace with a scalpel. Sometimes he sings while he works. Mesnik is mad—he is a demagogue of fear in his Balkhani bunker community.

THE CHRONICLERS

THE INFORMATION GATHERERS

SWARM INTELLIGENCE

Sporadic bursts of light illuminate the sable mask of a hunched, hooded form. The mask stretches tight over his mouth and forehead; a seam bisects the mask running from the nape of his neck, over his head, and terminating just beneath the chin. Nimble fingers twist closures at the base of his skull, tightening the mask into a second layer of skin.

Blackened goggles are secured over the glossy jet facade of this second skin. Golden points of light dance across the round, ebony lenses; an occasional jagged line transverses the black void. Sometimes the lights evaporate completely leaving no trace—just dark glistening pools. Furtive eyes flit behind the dark lenses, caged in a prison of metal and glass. They stare, cold and remote, at a world that is dark except when brightened by the chaotic flashes of light.

The mask obscures and distorts the Chronicler's face. Hoses and cables branch, rib-like, from the nose and mouth, disappearing into the inky blackness around him. A pocked membrane vibrates over his mouth. Worm-like cables, thick as two fingers, transmit the sound of every breath, every whistling of the lungs, and the smacking of saliva-drenched tubes to an amplifier that dangles at his chest. The tones are distorted and obscenely modulated; they mix with the analog static of his amplifier. Hundreds of speakers murmur in the background, reverberating into a roaring sea of cacophony. Bursts of feedback crest the din, resounding through the sepulchral hall until they are eventually reclaimed by the maddening, ceaseless hum.

The Chronicler doesn't notice any of this. His insane grimace is hidden behind the mask and he is drowned in the darkness of his cowl. Mirrored discs, small as coins, appliquéd to the shoulders of his cape reflect the amber light of the monitors that stare from the walls like the countless eyes of a spider.

In time, the Chronicler rises from his terminal. He disconnects himself from the tubing and with bowed head steps out of the cavernous chamber into a lustrous metallic corridor. Bright blue strips illuminate other robed figures as they scurry past him; all of them identified by a white barcode stretched across the back of their black cloaks.

The robed figures move with determined strides through the steel labyrinth of the cluster. They navigate the twists and junctions without hesitation. Arcane monitors hang from the ceilings, displaying a bizarre sensorium of cameras, barcode scanners, and antennas, seeming to observe the river of Chroniclers moving below. Servo actuators rotate and swivel the monstrous equipment from side to side.

The Chronicler parts from the mass of bodies and enters a cool ventilated corridor. The smell of sweat, oil, and charred synthetics evaporates as he emerges from the dim tangle of subterranean corridors. Red clouds of dust obscure the sun as he enters the dim courtyard.

A hooded guard silently beckons him to kneel. He falls to his knees before the guard, pushes his hood back, and loosens the top clasp of his mask. He peels the mask from his scalp revealing pale sweaty skin and a bar code tattoo in the center of his forehead. The cold metal of the guard's scanner presses against his brow. A vertical beam of light passes across his periphery, scanning the lines etched onto his forehead. With a squawk the guard's speaker issues a high-pitched order: "Exit!" The Chronicler rises, dons his hood, and exits the cluster.

The Chronicler wanders through a daunting maze of wagons and metal curios. Solar plates cover the dusty earth, scattered like the scales of an ancient beast, absorbing the light of the cheerless Borcan sun. Cables, thick as arms, wind deep into the ground, feeding solar energy to the buried compound. Down below, an old sleeping heart of data swims in the nourishing fluid of bits and bytes. Before long, it will begin to beat. Soon the Chronicler will no longer have to make his way outside of the cluster to appraise and purchase artifacts; a new age will begin.

STABILITY

It's difficult for most cults to trace their heritage more than a few generations and nearly impossible to find any who's lineage predates the Eschaton. Ancient ambitions were no longer viable after the world changed. A new doctrine of survival emerged. Only the present had any significance; the past had been obliterated. This was different for the Chroniclers.

OPEN

The origin of the Chroniclers has few gaps, thanks to their tireless obsession with knowledge and history. Before the Eschaton, the cultists called themselves Streamers. They were more like a mass phenomenon than an organized group. The core of the Streamer movement was the Stream, a constant flow of data that connected all things. The people were the neurons of its global network, transmitting the impulses that drove it. It

calculated and amassed the sum of human knowledge. Entire digital civilizations rose and fell in the lush binary gardens of the Stream.

But the Eschaton ended this era; the Stream ebbed. People thirsted for the wisdom of the Stream, but it had evaporated. Centuries later, the Chroniclers would label the great catastrophe of 2073 the Zero Hour; the moment when all the meters dropped to zero and the flow of data ceased.

While the world rushed toward a new dark age, the Streamers hoarded any scrap of knowledge they could find. Instruction manuals, data storage devices, reference books, and all manner of computer equipment were frittered away all over Borca. In the first decades, the Streamers were nothing more than techno-pillagers. They valued quantity over quality, filling their basements with an excess of junk and useless items. There was no organization; merely the longing for a rebirth of the Stream. They needed a leader; a prominent technician, a messiah; anyone who might give their deeds and their collections meaning and focus.

In the year 2102, the course of the Streamers changed. While many of the details from this period are obscured, one fact is a certainty: 2102 marked the establishment of the Chronicler cult. The spring following the cult's official genesis, the core of the **Central Cluster** was erected in an old warehouse. Digital dust lies thick on the files that detail the events of the founding year of the Chroniclers. The last Chronicler with access to this knowledge died centuries ago. To this day, the history of the founding is tightly secured in the Central Cluster in Justitian. People still speculate on the reasons for this secrecy and what information might lie within the files. Chroniclers refer to this data as the *core*. Only a handful within the cult have even the slightest knowledge regarding the core or what is contained therein.

Direct contact with the core is known as *streaming*. It is seldom achieved and parallels the search for the Holy Grail. Disciples can only experience it when they reach the rank of fragment, the highest in the cult.

START

It didn't take long for a bunch of disorganized Streamers to grow into a tight-knit community endeavoring solely to reconstruct of the Stream. The first crucial step toward this goal was the occupation of the cathedral in Cologne. The cathedral contained a computer museum and the captured data allowed the Chroniclers to leap from a Stone Age cult with nothing but leftover scraps into a highly sophisticated and technical organization. Anabaptists stormed the cathedral in the year 2148 and much of the knowledge was lost before it could be deciphered. The Chroniclers were no match for the fanatics and their corpses were nailed to the great door of the sacred building. The Anabaptists had begun their reign of terror. Great sums of information and technology were irreversibly damaged and vanished from the consciousness of humanity. The achievements of the past few centuries perished in the flames of zealotry. The Chroniclers fled from their persecutors, finally gathering in the safety of the Central Cluster.

RESET

A new awareness dawned on the Chroniclers after the defeat in Cologne. They were vulnerable and their future depended on mercy in a time when the blade of an Anabaptist was sharper and swifter than the written word. As supplicants, they had to bow to local warlords and ignorant mobs. Their ambitious goals could never be attained with pacifism. There was but one way out.

After the events of 2148, no stranger would ever see the face of a Chronicler again. They covered their heads with disturbingly tight leather masks, covered their robes with mirrors and disguised their voices with modulators and amplifiers. The cultists changed themselves into inhuman, grotesque monstrosities. Power through terror—this became their maxim.

If they had learned anything from the Stream, it was this: knowledge is power. An exchange system replaced bartering. They traded artifacts for so-called *chronicreds*. These small slips of paper, filled with barcodes and random lines of numbers, were traded from one cluster to the next. Information became their currency. All sorts of knowledge and artifacts were trafficked. The Chroniclers absorbed whatever passed through their cluster, distilled it, and passed it on to others.

Cities could no longer escape the cult's influence. To deny the Chroniclers a seat on the city council would mean the exodus of the cult. If the Chroniclers left, they took with them the knowledge that separated the rich and powerful from the damned. The Chroniclers became a symbol of economic and political power. Soon, they no longer needed military might. Power followed them and the elite of post-Eschaton Europe were willing to pay nearly any price to secure it.

GENERATION ++

Initially, it was difficult for the Chroniclers to fill their ranks. Up-and-coming technicians proved to be crooked or unable to perform the serious work demanded by the Chroniclers. Currently, an alliance with the Spitalians helps them swell their ranks and focus on more important matters. The cult takes children into their care who have been pronounced autistic or who become ostracized due to some bodily deficiency. Generally, strength and endurance are the tools of success; children with pronounced imaginations or interest in ancient writings are a burden on the community and therefore gladly given to the Chroniclers.

If the cult selects them, the children undergo a battery of logic and aptitude tests. Then they are assigned to a mentor, generally a high-level Chronicler.

Once assigned to a mentor, the recruits get a unique barcode tattooed onto their foreheads. They are moved into a small chamber where they live, sleep, learn, and work. They toil and study until they earn a promotion, or *update*. After an update, their daily tasks may change. Such changes in the cluster are frequent. Over the course of many years, the profile of a Chronicler will change and their duties will adapt to their particular skills and abilities.

BEYOND THE STREAM

In the cities and villages throughout Borca, the Chroniclers are known for their extraordinary services. Their barcodes are drawn on the walls with chalk as a sign of their presence. Their technical skills are legendary, and their talents as advisors, messengers, and informants are invaluable.

Although they spend much of their time in the local communities in order to obtain artifacts, they aren't particularly close to the people. The distortion of their voices is intimidating and their bizarre appearance separates them from the normal populace. They are considered super-beings, shrouded in mystery, which is their aim. Is it any wonder that many Chroniclers lose themselves to their own secrets?

It is presumed the Chroniclers manage things behind the scenes in Borca. They are the gray eminence that can begin or end a war with one carefully placed bit of information. They are feared and revered with just cause.

CLUSTER LIFE

When in the safety of their cluster, the Chroniclers shift back to human form. In the cluster, one is never alone. They share the same twisted language and the dream of digging the Stream a new riverbed so it can flow out and irrigate the world. The air vibrates with excitement; one feels like part of a great and sublime plan.

When the Chroniclers speak to each other, their language is free from flowery phrases; it's a strange mixture of data sequences and computer commands. Words are chosen with care as it is better to speak slowly and thoughtfully than to misspeak. The brain is treated like any machine; syntax errors are viewed simply as a malfunction. Consciousness is viewed as a program needing continual updates to keep a Chronicler focused and help them adjust to the chaos of the outside world.

The barcode on the forehead ties the Chronicler with the database of the computer system, in which the value of the individual to the cult is determined and constantly actualized. This tattoo serves as an entry code to forbidden areas as well as a tracking device to follow the movements of Chroniclers. The cult does not believe in coincidences; life itself is seen as predetermined and describable by a formula. Movements and transactions are registered and entered into the central computer, which adds them to a universal fractal formula. It is said that with this code one could read the fate of a Chronicler, or any person for that matter, like a book—if only one day the database became large enough.

THE CHRONICRED

Even though the cult could print chronicreds in excess, so far they have shown restraint. Perhaps, so as not to tempt their own brothers and sisters, the chronicred printers are set to a predetermined amount. If this amount is exceeded, only a streamer can reset it.

SIGNATURE

The ebbs and flows of the Stream are one of its greatest mysteries and the Chroniclers devote much of their energy to discovering its source. The Eschaton destroyed the physical infrastructure of the Stream, though the Stream had dried up a few hours before the event. The public archive describes the appearance of a mysterious packet of code shortly before the Zero Hour—referred to as the **2¹⁶ signature**.

Just before the Zero Hour struck, global networks were mysteriously accessed from the Stream. A flood of data poured in and caused the machines involved to crash under the enormous strain. As the Chroniclers revived the ancient technology they

found the signature lurking in the digital residue of the past and its mystery grew. Is the signature the sign of an emerging intelligence, or is it the key to keeping such a thing from happening?

To the Chroniclers, the signature is an enigma. It is viewed as a threat, and simultaneously as the key to the Stream's evolution. Letting the Stream flow again without proper understanding of the 2¹⁶ phenomenon is risky. On one hand, it represents the reclamation and expansion of human knowledge—yet it may also trigger the expansion of the Stream into new and unimaginable dimensions.

THE NET EXPANDS

The Central Cluster in Justitian was first. Terrifyingly beautiful, its untamed gardens of copper and steel transformed the surrounding area into a magnificent living machine. The pervasive buzz of loudspeakers electrify the air. Although the Chroniclers consider the Central Cluster to be the pinnacle, another large cluster was built in the Frank city of Aquitaine, modeled after its Borcan counterpart. Though younger and smaller, it is no less influential and its power grows daily.

In the Aquitaine cluster, the steel cadavers of airplanes linked by rope bridges form an intricate jungle of technology. Since

THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS
 THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM,
 MAN WILL BARTER
 WITH EVERYTHING.
 EVERYTHING WILL HAVE ITS PRICE
 TREE, WATER, AND BEAST
 NOTHING WILL REMAIN TRULY FREE, AND EVERYTHING WILL BE SOLD.
 ALAS, MAN WILL BE NOTHING MORE THAN THE WEIGHT OF HIS OWN MEAT.
 HIS BODY WILL BE OFFERED LIKE A **POUND OF FLESH.**
HEART BE TAKEN AWAY.
 NOTHING WILL BE HOLY ANYMORE,
 NEITHER LIFE NOR ITS SOUL.
 MAN WILL FIGHT OVER HIS MORTAL COIL AND HIS BLOOD,
AS IF TEARING INTO CARRION.
 [JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

the Africans thoroughly pillaged this area, relics are rare and extremely valuable. Unlike the Borcans, who are greedy for artifacts, the Frank Chroniclers have found the manipulation of data to be much more profitable.

Smaller clusters can be found in nearly every city in Borca and Franka. The Needle Tower disaster prevented the Chroniclers from expanding past the Reaper's Blow into East Borca. Despite invitations from the Spitalians, they have resisted settling in Pollen's Danzig. In the west, it's a similar story. As the cult spreads from the Central Cluster, their control over subordinate clusters weakens. The fragments limit the expansion of the cult to reduce corruption and decay. Security is another issue which limits their growth. While they are indispensable in Borca, the Hybrispanians do not depend on the knowledge of the Chroniclers and are unconcerned with their safety and well being. Though the Chroniclers continue to tighten the knots of their network, holes still remain.

HIERARCHY

AGENT

The foundation of the cult consists of agents who perform the daily mundane tasks of the cluster. They possess a basic knowledge of electronics which allows them to make simple repairs and upgrades. They are rarely authorized to leave the cluster.

MEDIATOR

Mediators are responsible for the contact with other cults and enclaves. Analyzing scrap and making purchases are also their responsibility.

STREAMER

The streamers' knowledge of the Stream and the sublime powers it possesses are infamous. Every streamer has enough information to destroy the lives of prominent people. However, they have attained this rank in the cult due to their prudence. Discretion is their prime directive. They function as ambassadors and advisors for the Borcan and Frank elite.

FRAGMENT

Little is known about Chroniclers of this rank. They rarely venture from the depths of their cluster and have little direct contact with the brothers and sisters of lower ranks. Their access to the databanks of the cult is virtually unlimited. Their knowledge is profound and vast.

CONNECTIONS

The relationship between the Chroniclers and the Marshals of Borca is very close. Although their lifestyles differ, they are united by a common history. Since the Chroniclers were responsible for the construction of Justitian, Marshals support and admire them. There is no official accord, but mutual respect strengthens their bond.

The relationship between the Chroniclers and the Hellvetics is quite different. The Alpine fortress of the Hellvetics is a source of great interest to the Chroniclers, but the descendants of the Swiss military continue to deny them access to their hidden computer system. It is debatable what the Chroniclers find more annoying when it comes to the Hellvetics: being denied access to an invaluable store of information or that there is a cult in Borca beyond their influence. Regardless, their affiliation is tense. However, the Hellvetics are quite experienced in neutrality and refuse to let the demands of the Chroniclers raise their ire.

The information embargo that was imposed on the Anabaptists centuries ago still exists. The only thing that has eased some of the bitterness between the cults was the release of Domstadt to the Chroniclers. It is doubtful their relationship will progress much beyond this small *détente*.

COMMUNICATION

The language of the Chroniclers is strange and oddly monosyllabic. Streamers use it as a method of intimidation and mystification. The following tags are often used:

Level: The rank of the Chronicler. Aspirants begin at level 1; the fragments range from level 20 to 40, though this information is unsubstantiated.

Bios: This is the stored lifestyle of the Chronicler. It tracks movement patterns, rank, successes and failures, and calculates the data resulting in their score.

Update: If the bios displays a certain score, a higher-ranking brother or sister will grant the Chronicler his new level. The Chronicler's tasks and habits may change when they receive an upgrade.

Redundance: States the information is already available and no new knowledge can be gained.

ON DUTY

Scrappers and Apocalyptiks in the red-light districts of Justitian have observed meetings between Chroniclers and strange mummified visitors quite often. The latter appear to find themselves in a state of numbing agony. They wince constantly from pain, holding an arm or chest, or dragging a useless leg behind them. Many observers describe bandages soaked through with pus under wide robes and a tattoo on the vellum-like skin of the back of their hands. The strangers never linger in the city and vanish without a trace after the interview with the Chroniclers. Lower-ranking Chroniclers are unaware of these meetings as they generally keep their distance from the life-loving Apocalyptiks.

The pillaging raids of the Neolibyans are frowned upon by the Chroniclers. As the Africans rob the land of its valuable resources they take with them the cult's base of power. A secret investigation by the Marshals revealed that the Chroniclers have used misinformation to trick Anabaptist troops into attacking African Scrappers. However, the High Protector of Justitian, Rutgar, denied these allegations with a huffy "Nonsense!" The Chroniclers maintain silence on the matter as usual.

The frequent cooperation between the Chroniclers and the Spitalians in Borca alarms Frank authorities. Apparently, the Medics had been using the cluster in Aquitaine as a weapon distribution center for the Frank population. Though the Chroniclers claim disdain for these types of actions, their neutrality is on the line. No one trusts them.

Chroniclers on missions outside of the cluster are given so-called streamer gloves that administer tiny electric shocks from the little finger. The Chroniclers' warning gesture is well known: if they show their little finger to an opponent, it means to keep one's distance. The gesture is used to great effect on the uneducated and the superstitious population, who attribute the Chroniclers with a seemingly supernatural talent for shock.

CHRONICLER WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Conflict. Possess core of data in Domstadt. Mission there is still not accomplished. Immediately forward compromising information to Jehammedans and other potential adversaries upon entering. Keep embargo in place.

ANUBIANS

Africans. Possibly of Egyptian origin. Extensive mystical world view with regard to the wheel of life. Bears resemblance to Indian mythology. Opinions: none.

APOCALYPTIKS

Incomprehensible. Their agenda cannot be interpreted. Speculation: senseless constructions and confusing life patterns. Insanity a possibility.

THE ASHEN

Watch over the Sleepers from pre-Eschaton existence. Mostly degenerate, trade only possible within limits. Infiltration unsuccessful so far. Recruiting of the banished continues.

HELLVETICS

Allegation: prevention of the information stream. Refuse access to the data cores in the fortress. In the way of our goals. Procedure must be chosen carefully.

JEHAMMEDANS

Sect. Caution: extremely dangerous potential. They have no basis for understanding, mediators should work toward interfacing. As an antipode to the Anabaptists, they merit support.

MARSHALS

Righteous organization sponsored and civilized by us. They create a safe place for our ambitions in Borca.

NEOLIBYANS

They are a virus in the system inducing a resource conflict. They damage the cluster. Counteractive measures are being initiated.

SCOURGERS

Astonishingly progressive weaponry, very possibly of pre-Eschaton origins. Initiate questioning when opportunity arises. Caution: dangerous individuals, combative background.

SCRAPPERS

Their intelligence as a swarm makes possible an optimal scanning of the ruins. Every successful drone brings us closer to the Stream.

SPITALIANS

Fascist organization under pretense of saving the world. Identified danger of Primer. Worthy of support. Will give us time to reactivate the Stream.

TRIBALS

Uncivilized tribes see signs of their gods in technical artifacts. They produce valuable resources. High risk; refuse teamwork.

PERSONALITIES

EJECT

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Chronicler (fragment)

Specialties: Eject is one of the eight schismatic fragments of the Needle Tower fiasco. In the East Borcan forests, he has erected a monument to himself near the city of Chromium that could never do his ego justice. He surrounds himself with subjugated tribes, fearing an attack by the Chroniclers, and hunts down anyone with technical knowledge.

OUTLOOK

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Chronicler (streamer)

Specialties: The Chroniclers sent Outlook to Aquitaine to increase artifact recovery operations in the Frank cluster. As he boosts these efforts, however, he reaps all the rewards for himself. Hardly any relics land on the tables of the Chroniclers in Justitia as he barter away everything to the Apocalyptiks who feed his lust for young boys.

NAIKE

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Chronicler (shutter)

Specialties: Naïke was once a part of the Central Cluster, where her eardrum was ruptured by screeching acoustic feedback. She's been deaf ever since and is only used by the Chroniclers in the life-shortening wasteland. She is responsible for the dirty tasks that require work with deadly technology.

HELLVETICS

BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS

SHIFT CHANGE

Focus on the weapon: the trailblazer. Here in the darkness it can't be seen, only felt. The soldier cleans it with his eyes closed, as though in a trance. Every touch, every movement of the hand, is taken in deeply. The trailblazer: his light in the darkness, his eyes when he cannot see; his accomplice, his dearest friend, his greatest love.

His inner eye fills with scenes of his childhood: the festive presentation of weapons at age fifteen, the first time he fired it and dislocated his shoulder, and, finally, his first combat. His face hardens as the images of a failed rescue mission and his catastrophic evaluation sink into his conscience. Reduced munitions and bitter mockery—the shame will last a lifetime. His friends' eyes blazed with contempt.

Friends? No, just comrades, fellow soldiers—no one in whom to confide. They cover each other's backs and rely on each other in the heat of battle, but that is all. That is the sum total of their life together. Their life is their doctrine; their best friend, the trailblazer. They are soldiers, and they live and die as such.

A furtive gong resounds from a crackly loudspeaker, announcing the start of a new shift. The neon tube over the door is losing its fight against time: it flashes and immediately grows dark again. What remains is a flickering, blue-white glow at its anodes. Its time will soon have run out.

He steps out of the barracks, and listens to the ventilation system that alternates between a scraping sound and static. The air is stale. He marches alone along the dim gray corridors; the lights flick on as he approaches and then gutter into darkness as the hallway recedes behind him. As he nears the swinging doors of the gymnasium, his face unconsciously broadens into a smile of unwavering pride and confidence; his steps stiffen, his posture tightens. With a noise like a hundred marbles rolling down a ramp, he opens the door and steps into the glowing light of the gym. His boots squeak on the linoleum, the odor of sweat and rubber linger in the air. The kids are waiting. They are sitting at the far end of the room. When they notice his arrival, they spring to attention and group themselves into rows, then salute. He

strolls by them, implacable, and examines their young, innocent faces. His is marked by destitution and asceticism, qualities that will soon carve themselves into their young faces. They have no other choice.

DUSTY BOOKS

The Hellvetics have a purpose. Their purpose is to protect and to lead. To forget this would be a greater sin than the one they committed to ensure their survival. Since those fateful days in 2073, they have maintained a fortress diary in order to pass their doctrine along to the next generation; to keep old wisdom secure—and to ease their consciences. Their precipitous flight into the bunker and misgivings about leaving the people to fend for themselves were meticulously recorded. The role this has played in shaping the Hellvetics will never be forgotten.

SANCTUARY

History: it fills the crates in the empty hangar. In between the buried annals and proceedings lay undelivered testaments and long-lost love letters. The hearts that would have been overjoyed by these missives have long been muted. These ancient, dusty archives tell of the first attempts to restore the abandoned Swiss fortress to its original state.

In 2072, the Swiss accounted for a malfunction of the asteroid shield and set about protecting their endangered culture. The extensive layers of bunkers seemed to be an excellent place for storage, but they could also be used to house a small group of people, ensuring their survival. These people would seek to restore order after the apocalypse that would soon plague the continent. A contingent of professional soldiers, about two thousand men and women, were assigned to safeguard a smaller group of civilians; among them were artisans, scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and other specialists, as well as leading representatives of the government.

For over a year, army vehicles conveyed food, computers, extensive cabling, and plumbing to the alpine fortress. Only in the final phase did they empty the museums and libraries to bring the cultural legacy of Switzerland into the dark halls of the bunker. With this action, it finally dawned on the Swiss people that the military and the elite of the nation planned on abandoning them in their darkest hour. Records from the provinces report tumultuous demonstrations; long lists of people imploring for admission into the fortress lay untouched in the main historical archive. Unbelievable scenes of tragedy and madness played out before the gates of the bunker in those days. Ensuing generations of Hellvetics have only inherited the factual reports and know little of the horrors of the damned. Their past is a historical morass strapped into a girdle of bureaucratic insurance plans and faceless numbers.

ISOLATION

As the doors between the chosen of Switzerland and their unfortunate countrymen finally slid to a close, something ruptured on both sides. Those left behind felt betrayed and, driven by their own fear, denounced the alleged traitors; those in the bunker were forced to watch helplessly. Outside, their friends and relatives cursed them and prayed for mercy; many left their children and spouses to an unforeseeable fate. The isolation had only just begun and they already longed for its end.

The Eschaton pounded the Alps mercilessly. The relentless asteroids split an infernal gorge through the once-unbroken mountains: the Reaper's Blow. The mighty crags broke open; massive boulders splintered from the seam, falling deep into the boiling gash, burying the rising magma under millions of tons of stone. The alpine fortress was ripped apart. The large hangar doors caved in or were blocked by boulders. Tunnels that once led to living quarters and staging areas now opened upon staggering vistas—sheer vertical drops into a cyclopean abyss. Toxic columns of black smoke spiraled into the heavens. The unbearable heat seared flesh from the bone. The mountain had become a prison.

Entire sections of the compound were divided from the core. The fate of those within was unknown. Abandoning the missing was unthinkable, especially after the horror of deserting their friends and countrymen. Thus, an absurd rescue plan was devised—a bridge would be built over the Reaper's Blow, over Hell itself.

Those who labored day after day soon began calling themselves Hellvetics, because of the hell they lived through. Their only protection from the erupting magma below was thin asbestos suits. Nothing could protect them from falling debris or sheer drops into the bubbling magma a kilometer below. The effort lasted several years. Success was dubious from the beginning. Saving the trapped survivors would only be successful if the survivors had access to stockpiled food and water in the storage areas. Every year that passed eroded their hope.

The first of the six great bridges was completed in 2076. They had been able to cross the Reaper's Blow the year before but met disappointment when they discovered the two sections that housed the artisans and officials had collapsed. The high commanders and politicians housed there were presumed dead; not even ashes remained. Had all the blood and sweat been in vain? The beleaguered military apparatus began to falter. Throughout the previous years it had been able to hold on to this one aspiration, but now its heart and brain had been ripped from its body. Empty and burned out, the Hellvetics stared into a bleak future.

Finally, a highly decorated Hellvetic named Leonhard Gboy took command and successfully altered their course. He devised a plan to divide the land into a number of territories. All of the Swiss territories would be assigned to a corps commander who was responsible for the area's security; all decisions flowed from him. Every commander was attached to a number of small units of a few dozen soldiers each who underwent constant quality inspections administered by an independent review board. This arrangement bolstered the

survivors with much-needed bureaucracy and a new vision. The chain of command had been restored.

However, one thing remained. The door to the past had to be closed in order to open the gates to the future. It was decided, with an overwhelming majority, that the Swiss would forthwith call themselves the Hellvetics.

OUT OF HELL INTO HELL

Prior to the downfall, they went into the mountain convinced they would later emerge and confront the suffering and devastation of the Eschaton as a united front. But the Hellvetics came too late; it was years until the gates to the Swiss heartland were cleared and ready to pass. In the winter of 2080, they escaped the mountains and marched out into their ancient, snow-covered homeland, finding cities such as Bern and Zurich devoid of life. Signs of riots and plundering were everywhere. The few remaining survivors hid from their old military, for they lived in fear from bitter experiences with armed and organized bandits.

Although the Hellvetics were unknown and unsought, their doctrine demanded they protect the population, regardless of the people's wishes. In accordance with their internal orders, the Hellvetics stormed the bandit camps, snuffing out resistance with their Sagur 11 assault rifles and superior tactics. The remaining bandits were given quick trials and forced to choose death

or exile. During this time, many war criminals fled to Borca and continued their reign of terror there. For the Hellvetics, their operations were not about making the world a better place; it was about the doctrine and protecting the helpless people. Once found, visions aren't easily surrendered.

The siege was broken and the Hellvetics were celebrated as liberators. The Swiss restoration could begin. The Sagur 11 assault rifles blazed the trail of freedom and, in honor of this victory, they were renamed "trailblazers."

LAPSES IN TIME

Time passed. The hinterland enjoyed peace. The wound caused by the Reaper's Blow was sutured with bridges. The cracked Alpine fortress was rebuilt. The initially simple asbestos suits evolved into form-fitting, multi-functional body armor—the so-called *shells*. These new suits were able to counter the heat of the Reaper's Blow and meet the demands of battle. More shafts, corridors, and halls were cut into the mountains and the Hellvetics' influence grew. Transfer tunnels allowed travelers to pass through the Alps and Reaper's Blow for a fee.

Before long, the Neolibyans became the Hellvetics' most important customers. Their oil ensured the operation of generators and vehicles. Anabaptists made their way through the Alpine passes from Borca to Purgare. The Spitalians needed a safe route to reach their eastern posts in Pollen. Hellvetica became the

eye of the European needle. They were offered many alliances, and turned them all down. They have never surrendered their neutrality.

THE DOCTRINE

What kind of army has no government yet is still driven to fulfill the will of the people? Without goals and leadership, an army risks becoming nothing more than a band of well-organized vigilantes. The enormous power of the Hellvetics poses a threat to all of Borca. Only strong unity, a strict code of honor, and worthwhile objectives can tame these hellhounds.

Thankfully, the Hellvetic doctrine has provided stability throughout the centuries. It demands the protection of the Swiss heartland and its citizens and urges the soldiers to respect life. But time hasn't left the doctrine untouched. New passages have been added, an admission of a changing global situation.

Today, the Hellvetics have no God to make decisions for them and from whom they can escape their sins. They must answer to their conscience and to the Hellvetic doctrine. They must swear their loyalty to it and no other. The doctrine gives them their power, and it can also take it from them.

TYPES OF TROOPS

An assignment to one of the three divisions takes place soon after the first promotion and is reversible only at the rank of Sergeant.

Fortress troops watch over the bunkers and are responsible for patrolling the entrances and protecting the bases. Additionally, they operate the gun turrets in the surrounding mountains. Machine operation, ventilation monitoring, power, and the supply of drinking water are also a part of their responsibilities. They are masters of invention, as it is up to them to create what they need from nothing. They are the blood of the giant organism that is the Alpine fortress. They flow through its veins, energizing and repairing its essential organs.

The engineer corps ensures the mobility of the Hellvetic army inside and outside of the fortress. They build bridges, dig tunnels, pave roads, and service the vehicles. No great assignment can take place without their logistical magic.

The infantry bears the lion's share of the fighting but are also indispensable for missions of peace. They maintain contact with the population in the territories, guard the passes, manage trade, and do whatever else is need to protect Hellvetica. When Borcans speak of the Hellvetics, they generally mean the infantrymen as they are the only ones visible outside of the fortress.

THE SOLDIER AND HIS WEAPON

Hellvetics are recruited exclusively from the population of Hellvetica. Drills begin at fourteen years of age. Boys and girls are treated equally. If the recruits manage to prove themselves

worthy, they are presented with a trailblazer a year later. For the remainder of their lives, this weapon will be at the core of their thoughts and deeds. If their weapon is stolen, destroyed, or sold, they are banished from the army.

In an environment of constant competition, the trailblazer is a Hellvetic's only companion. Its daily care resembles an act of lovemaking and receives far more attention than social contacts within the cult. No Hellvetic would admit it, but the cult of the weapon is responsible for the deterioration of the group's solidity; more and more soldiers are developing into lone fighters.

TERRITORIES

The Hellvetics' influence reaches over the Alps, from Franka over the Swiss heartland and into Balkhan. The area was divided into four territories soon after the Eschaton—two on each side of the Reaper's Blow. In the process, new responsibilities, challenges, and ambitions emerged for the assigned Hellvetics.

Territory I in the Frank Alps requires only the security of the passes and the city of Turin. Their relation with the Frank populace is fairly calm and easily managed.

Territory II is completely subordinate to the military—a temporary regulation that has been in place for centuries. According to the doctrine, the heartland should be educated in Switzerland's ancient democratic practices and the government should be modeled after it. The Hellvetics reject this as anarchistic. However, in Bern, an independent parliament developed that prohibited a local militia. The military leadership seems content with the situation.

Territory III, which spans the entire area of what used to be Austria, requires a much more offensive approach than necessary in the heartland. Wild tribes and organized bandits endeavor to pass through certain portions of this zone. For centuries, the engineer corps have been laying roads throughout the mountains in order to maximize the mobility of the Hellvetic army. The odds of passing through the Alps unnoticed declines from year to year.

Territory IV is mostly unexplored. The Hellvetic fortresses here are mere skeletons—tunnels crushed into the rock without camouflage or protection. Their occupation is limited. On both the Purgare and Balkhan sides of the Alps, the familiar passes and transfer tunnels are under constant observation by the Anabaptists and Jehammedans.

AUSTERITY

Severe austerity is demanded of every Hellvetic in the alpine stronghold. The central authority reports that despite intake from the Alpine pass tolls and the many self-manufactured items, it remains a challenge to keep a military of several thousand men and women operational. They are probably right, as the machinery necessary to mass produce the ammunition for the trailblazer no longer exists. In fact, the distribution of munitions to soldiers has been strictly regulated for decades. But this is not only limited to the war unit. All gear is considered property of the Hellvetic army. Any reckless or unnecessary use is treated as larceny.

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WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM,
ALL WILL KNOW,
WHAT IS AT THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.
AND CHILDREN WILL SILENTLY WEEP,
WHOSE BONES PUNCTURE THEIR SKIN,
WHOSE EYES ARE COVERED WITH FLIES.
THEY WILL BE HUNTED BY RATS.
BUT THE MAN WHO SEES THIS WILL TURN HIS CHEEK,
FOR HE CARES ONLY FOR HIMSELF.
FOR ALMS HE WILL GIVE A HANDFUL OF CORN
WHILE HE SLEEPS ON FULL SACKS.
AND WHAT HE GIVES WITH ONE HAND,
WITH THE OTHER HE WILL TAKE AWAY.
[JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

The four territories are further divided into twenty subsections in order to see that resources are evenly and effectively distributed. Each section is allotted a percentage of Core Command's monthly production. The proportions are, however, based on the effectiveness of the Hellvetics stationed there. Drastic cuts occur if the squad fails in a mission or was unable to fulfill their tollway quotas. Munitions are reduced and access to special support weapons or vehicles is denied. The existence of an entire section is at stake if the responsible soldier isn't properly disciplined.

RANKS

Records dating from the origins of the cult suggest the ranking system of the old army stayed largely in place. Nevertheless, over the course of generations, the structure of authority was forced to bend to new demands. Core Command needed a simple system to evaluate the soldiers in order to optimize the distribution of munitions. Since then, Hellvetics earn or lose status in the form of points. In addition to the required tasks of a rank, these points determine the soldier's advancement.

The lower ranks of soldier, private, and private first class represent the entrance point into the cult. Next follow the non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks of corporal, sergeant, and sergeant first class, where the soldier is introduced to leadership and executive responsibilities. Typical activities of an NCO include guarding the passes and peripheral tunnels, as well as commanding a small cadre of troops. Intensive training in policies and the doctrine is obligatory.

Senior NCO grades include the sergeant major, quartermaster (a sergeant responsible for the care and pay of soldiers), chief sergeant major, warrant officer, and and staff, head, and chief warrant officers. Depending on the capabilities of the Hellvetic, the range of responsibilities increases and becomes more specialized. The senior NCO must prove himself as a capable platoon leader, which generally consists of commanding a number of smaller cadres.

In the commissioned ranks of second lieutenant and first lieutenant, authority expands to cover multiple platoons. The captain is responsible for all organizations in his section. Field officers complete the highest echelons: major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel. They support the corps commander in the administration of his territory.

DEBRIEFINGS

After a mission, a Hellvetic must undergo an evaluation and rating which is witnessed by their section. The chambers of their trailblazers are fitted with an interface and are sorted at computer terminals in front of a large plasma screen located in the drill hall. The total number of bullets fired is examined, as well as the rate of fire and any overheating caused by overuse. If the weapon is singled out, the soldier must turn to his comrades and await their judgment. His stats flicker behind him over the wall display, supplemented by the statistics of the assignment and the evaluations of his superiors. The reactions range from respectful silence to scornful abasement.

Whoever fails to meet the demands of his section hands his trailblazer to the section commander and is escorted out of the fortress. He is no longer a Hellvetic.

At the end of the reviewing process, the section computer calculates the remaining munitions for the month and compiles a new list, ranking the most efficient sections. This list shows how much danger the section must endure before it can unlock access to extra munitions and hardware.

TERRITORY DUTY

The Hellvetics have neither functional agricultural nor natural resources at their disposal. Their value is in their fighting power and the stability of the central command in the Alpine fortress. If a section runs out of food, then their troops are rented out as mercenaries. They are highly prized in Borca and Pollen, however, their strict code makes them employable only under certain conditions. Every attack is scrutinized and rejected at the slightest misgiving, while the defense of a threatened settlement is always given the highest priority. As a basic principle, Hellvetics stay out of clashes between city-states and cults. Therefore, no one will ever see a Hellvetic in the forces of Anabaptists from Purgare attacking a Balkhani Jehammedan stronghold.

BUNKER FRENZY?

The Alps near the city of Laibach have always been considered a mysterious region. Sightings of iridescent lights justify this reputation, as well as sudden vertigo and hair loss among patrolling Hellvetics. Most of this would be dismissed as bunker frenzy if it weren't for dozens of independent observations and the collaborative opinions of external doctors.

One particular legend has stubbornly endured over the centuries—the legend of **Triglav**. Old chronicles tell of a grotesque, crooked man in wavy layers of dark wraps who moves freely in the tunnels of the Hellvetics. He is extraordinarily wily, helping himself to the base's materials without hindrance. If one counts back to the first sighting of him, he must be at least 400 years old. Many of the traditional tales outdo themselves in their absurdity. He is said to be the one who gave the asbestos suits to the Swiss. His wandering body is said to be the soulless shell of one of the first Hellvetics. He is called the Protector of the Alps and the last surviving ancestral relic. If even a few of the rumors about Triglav were true, Hellvetic history would undoubtedly need a rewrite.

HELLVETIC WORLDVIEW

ANABAPTISTS

One of many sects, but with a strong military arm. Still, they pose no threat because of their second-rate weaponry.

ANUBIANS

Rare guests in the passages. They are a mystified version of the Medics. Apparently the Scourgers need this hocus pocus.

APOCALYPTIKS

Damn Bastards! They simply won't accept our claim to power. They constantly cause trouble on the passes.

THE ASHEN

The Ashen have a similar fate. This binds us; however, their doctrine is weak. Now, like hairless rats, they creep underground, snooping and grunting. Poor creatures.

CHRONICLERS

Beware! It is obvious they are after our technological treasures. The infiltrators must be kept from entering the fortress!

JEHAMMEDANS

Goat herders with a goat for a god. We have no understanding of such things.

MARSHALS

A paramilitary troop that wants to unite Borca under its flag. Miserable weapon technology. No threat.

NEOLIBYANS

Sly foxes, these Neolibyans. Not as foolish as the Anubians or Scourgers. They suck Borca dry, say the comrades from Territory II. That suits us as long as they pay their tolls in the transfer tunnels.

SCOURGERS

No chain of command, no ranking, no discipline. Things would have to be pretty bleak to be conquered by such a chaotic troop.

SCRAPPERS

The African Scrappers are disrespectful and loud. The Europeans are morose and quiet. We prefer the latter.

SPITALIANS

A very old organization with great knowledge. Their mistake: they interfere in everything.

TRIBALS

Vestiges of the nation. We swear on our very lives to protect it. This is difficult for us.

PERSONALITIES

CORPORAL GRUBER

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Hellvetic (corporal)

Characteristics: The colonel of Territory II declared Gruber's behavior in social groups lacking.

His point: Gruber is human waste; excellent qualities for a mercenary. The Core Command agreed and they have sent him as an emissary to the Chroniclers and Marshals. Problem solved. Carry on soldier.

HELENA VOM TIMMELSJOCH

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Hellvetic (quartermaster)

Characteristics: Four years ago, Helena and her troops took over the Timmelsjoch, a pass near the Alpine fort in Territory III. Appalling conditions existed before her arrival. There was illegal trespassing virtually every week. Helena has taught the tribes and Scrappers to fear her. Her soldiers swears by her. She is considered a hero.

ADJUTANT SLABON

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Hellvetic (adjutant)

Characteristics: The fortress troops of Territory IV search for the Triglav phantom, but Slabon doesn't make it easy for them. Indeed, he coordinates the manhunt for the marauder but secretly leaves the door open for him, making a last minute flight possible. Because of Slabon, Triglav has been able to transport valuable technology from the Alpine fort to Laibach.

JEHAMMEDANS

WEARERS OF
GOD'S COUNTENANCE

SACRIFICIAL LAMB

His horse tramples a path through the lines of attackers. Around him, enemies fall and die. The bent blade rises and falls, every stroke a mortal wound, every glance searching for a new target in the sea of enemies.

“Jehammed!” It sounds from his throat, and hundreds of his brothers in faith answer his bark by screaming out in response.

He whirls his black horse around and cuts a path in the direction of the enemy's camp. His wreath of pinned up hair loosens in the headwind; his face has been ravaged by countless battles. Old scars adorn every area of his skin not protected by greasy leather and clanging scales. On his forehead, scars merge into a complex pattern that sings the quiet song of his history.

The Jehammedan looks back to see his men desperately struggling against the fierce Anabaptists. Another three hundred feet and he will have reached the enemy's tents, where he suspects the leader of the Anabaptists and his bodyguards to be. A suicidal course, but only the death of the opponents' commander can still turn the tide for his troops.

If the enemy's head is cut off, then even his strength of arms can't help him. The Anabaptists would run off in all directions like frightened quail.

Another two hundred feet. The warrior intones the prayers his iconists taught him and thinks about his strategy. The camp's bodyguards already storm towards him. He will have to sacrifice his life for the lives of his brothers and sisters. He comes from the line of the *isaaki*, the sacrificial lambs of the cult—it is his destiny to die so that others can live.

Another one hundred feet. Wet mud splashes up from under the horse's hoofs. There is no salvation for this *isaaki*, only victory for his clan. If they can push the enemy back at this point of the river, then new families can settle on the banks and

turn the lush meadows into pastures for sheep and goats. The future of dozens of families depends on him.

Another fifty feet. The first lancer that tries to knock the isaaki from his horse goes down to the ground with his forehead split in half. The next is trampled beneath the charge of his mount. The third is passed skillfully on the open field. From the corner of his eye, the isaaki spies a bodyguard aiming a crossbow. Squeezing his body tightly along his horse's neck, making his silhouette as small as possible, the isaaki storms forward.

Ten feet. Hardly enough time to bid farewell in his heart to the glorious days as a blessed child. To the love of his father. To the praises of the priests.

Five feet. The isaaki leaps his stallion over the spear wall of the fenced-in camp. His family will never see him again.

The sun rises in Ottoman like a gleaming marble, shining through the red fog of dust that still hangs over the city from the last storm. An iconist steps onto the balustrade of the sickle tower, his head high and wrapped in expensive fabrics. With the booming voice of authority, his prayer to Jehammedan thunders down into the city—and the city answers to him in response.

CAIN AND ABEL

He appeared to them on the Kaaba, that mysterious black building in Mecca—Jehammed, the last prophet. He was a luminous figure, filled with God; his voice rained down upon the people, revealing a hint of the power of his Lord. He announced God's wrath would descend upon the Earth and cleanse the wastrels and the non-believers. The descendants of the great ancestor Abraham would see their seed bear fruit and the land would blossom with belief.

Then God hit the world with silence and dust. The years swept over the land. Life was hard and unbearable for everyone, even those who had sought an alliance with the last prophet. But the spark that ignited the flame of belief wasn't extinct. Small clans and families whose belief was strong supported each other in the reconstruction, drawing upon the knowledge that they were God's chosen. As promised by Jehammed, a vast country lay at their feet that they had to pacify and settle, so the last prophet can one day return to his flock. Countless followers of the cult abandoned their faith during this age, surrendering to their base instincts and joining the unleashed masses of the Apocalyptiks.

Yet the truly devout remained. Survivors worked feverishly to build a better life in the dark days after God's tribunal, always scared to be deemed unworthy in the eyes of the Lord. They mastered cattle breeding. They kept clean and took care of themselves in order to keep pests and lingering illnesses away from their families. They forged new weapons and suits of armor from the scraps of their ancestors. They stayed away from the barbarism of the simple minded and non-believers. They proudly called themselves Jehammedans. With the name came

unity. Jehammedans carried it proudly like a flag, and drew people to them, growing into an extended family that not only offered each other protection, but also frightened and awed their enemies.

The Jehammedans spread across Europe from Balkhan to Borca to Hybrispania and grew into an imposing cult, merging more and more tribes that felt homeless and stranded in the wasteland under the roof of their belief.

In the heart of Balkhan, on the ruins of the old Bucharest, the center of the Jehammedan belief formed. Berlin, the city of the sickle tower, converted within a few days after the first iconists came through the gates and announced the alliance with God. In Hybrispania, the cult came to dominate Castilla. Its warriors, the Swords of Jehammed, were welcomed with open arms as blessed angels of wrath. Formerly independent and proud settlements joined the Jehammedans and only days later ardently echoed the cult's prayers.

Yet what appeared to be an unstoppable expansion suddenly came to a halt in the virginal Adriatic lowlands. The Anabaptists, a cult of peasants and troublemakers, claimed the new soil for their fields, but the Jehammedans wanted to use the lush meadows and fecund prairies for their sheep to graze. Armed conflict broke out on the frontier, savage and brutal. The life-giving Adriatic Sea was awash with the dead.

As when the peasant Cain killed his shepherd brother Abel, the Jehammedans were now forced into the role of the victim. The Anabaptists attacked viciously, slaughtering and devastating everything the Jehammedans had built throughout the centuries after the Eschaton. Horrified, they fled across the beaches and retreated to the eastern shore. The Anabaptists followed them across the water to sound their funeral bell.

In the darkest hour, however, the tides turned. A stranger appeared, Aries the ram, in the tents of the iconists.

He promised to devour the souls of their enemies, because his wrath was limitless and ancient. Having no other choice, the Jehammedans trusted the strange warrior and placed him in charge of their remaining forces. The wind of revenge roared over the Anabaptists, the occupied swathes of land in the East Adriatic plains were retaken by a thousand blows. The Anabaptist forces, so close to total victory, were destroyed.

Wearily, both sides withdrew from the conflict, unable to take and hold both shores. They entrenched themselves on each side of the river and slowly rebuilt. Today, after a long-needed rest, hatred starts to awaken again. Both parties greedily leer at the other's land, a smoldering fire glows under the surface of daily life and sings even the thoughts of those that urge peace. It's just a question of days before swords will cross again.

FAMILY TIES

The Africans advanced quickly in Balkhan, engaging the Jehammedans in a desperate fight for Budapest. Swords of Jehammed, the cult's waves of warriors, were passionately thrown at the invaders in Hybrispania. One family after another fell, and the winds of tragedy swept over the battlefields.

Enemies lurk everywhere; heresy lurks everywhere. Hate is the fire that never lets a Jehammedan rest. It burns within them every step they take. Eternal watchfulness and seething bitterness requires a balance—and they find it in their belief and their family. Unity relieves physical and mental pain. A tight knot of tradition binds every Jehammedan into a predetermined role within the cult. No one is left alone, and there are no outsiders.

A strict caste system divides the men up into *abramis*—married men that are the absolute rulers of their tribes—and *ismaelis*—young, unmarried members of the families. Then there are also *isaakis*, blessed men who throw themselves into battle against skepticism like sacrificial lambs. The women in a tribe are divided up into *hagaris*—the married women—and *saraelis*—unwed women. Above all of these stand the holy men of the Jehammedans, the *iconists*.

THE ISMAELIS

Most children are born into the caste of servants. As ismaelis, they are the sons of an abrami and a hagari. They lead a dog's life in their families, working hard from early childhood on. The base daily chores and back-breaking labor is reserved for them, such as leading the goats to the fields, ridding them of lice, carting away garbage, and so forth. Just as much as isaakis are praised, ismaelis are humiliated. Only when they take a hagari as their wife, and thereby found a new family, can they flee from the burden bestowed upon them by birth. From then on, they may call themselves abrami and can beget an ismaeli with their wife.

THE ABRAMIS

Abramis are the secular rulers of the cult; the shepherds and leaders of the families. Their protective hands hover over the farms and the cities of the Jehammedans. Abramis are honored

like exalted father figures, but not like the holy iconists. Rather, they are revered as experienced men who have been taught by life itself.

Life as an abrami starts with marriage. From then on, they are responsible for the well-being of their family and its growth. An abrami is assessed by the number of his children: if his loins are fertile and none of his children go hungry, he is considered a blessed man and favored by God. Highly ranked abramis from Bucharest or Ottoman are said to have had more than thirty sons.

Besides the hagari, his main wife, the abrami picks a saraeli, a blessed woman, as his second wife. She can be his daughter, sister, or any other virgin creature that belongs to the clan. The important thing is her virginity, her purity before God. After their wedding, the abrami may share a bed with the saraeli once a year. If she bears him a child, the family has been blessed by God with an isaaki.

THE HAGARIS

Hagaris are the backbone of the cult. Even though they are the lowest-ranked members of the Jehammedan family system, they are still the main wives, and are regarded with pride. They take care of the fire, tailor the clothes, patch the tents, and milk the goats. Their fervor is what the family's prosperity depends upon. They cook, clothe, heal, and oversee the daily chores. They are laborers, maidservants, but also warriors if the men are away from home. They live for their families, and will risk their lives if the family is in danger. From childhood, they are told that they shall love and honor their father, their husband, and their children, and to be ahead of them in death.

It is terrifying to see an inconspicuous woman mix with Anabaptists or walk through a market in Purgare, then detonate a hidden explosive, killing herself and countless enemies of her clan. There is no doubt she went to heaven. The abrami will tell his children and touch his beard with both melancholy and pride at the same time.

THE SARAELIS

The life of the saraeli is a stately one from birth. iconists praise them as holy, ismaelis lower their heads when they pass, and abramis fulfill all of their wishes. For Jehammedans, a saraeli is a vessel of God. According to Jehammedan scripture, one day, a saraeli will be chosen to give her body to God, and He will bestow upon her a glistening leader of fire and starlight—the Jehammedan Messiah! In order to offer only the best to God, saraelis are fawned over, kept clean, covered in the most wonderful scents, and wrapped in the most valuable cloths. Nobody ever disagrees with them, and within the family, their word is law. Even though they have no influence on the scripture interpretations of the iconists, they are on the same level as the abramis. Only during the annual rites, when the abrami become their bedmates, do they lower themselves to a carnal level for a short while. If a child comes of this union, it will be revered as

holy; girls become saraelis, and boys become isaakis. Saraelis who never bear children are seen as the most holy women of the caste, because they have remained pure to the end of their lives.

THE ISAAKIS

It was a long childless marriage, until God felt pity for Abraham and his wife Sara and blessed them with a son—Isaac. But did the love of the father for his son stand above his love of God? And so God demanded Abraham take Isaac to a remote place on the mountain and sacrifice his son for Him. Abraham's heart bled, but he did as he was told and led his son to the mountain. When God saw that Abraham was willing to perform the deed, he sent down an angel to stop the dreadful act before it had begun. Abraham had proven his willingness to sacrifice everything for his Lord.

The Jehammedans have to walk the same path every day—but they do not rely on the arbitrating hand of God. They send the blessed children of the abramis and the saraelis, the isaakis, into death day after day. In order to reward the isaakis for this fate, they are showered with love, dressed in the finest garb, and taught honorable arts by scribes. As soon as a child can walk, a saber is put in his hand and he is taught to fence. A few years later, his instruction continues as he sits straight in a horse's saddle, dashing through the forests of Balkhan and unerringly beheading the straw dolls hanging from trees.

The efforts of the entire clan are aimed at perfecting an isaaki, both as an intellectual and as a warrior. If the abrami can't afford the teachers, the ismaelis and hagaris of the family have to work harder. Nothing less is acceptable. To raise one's voice against a blessed son is a mortal sin, as is failing in the duty to prepare them for the world.

ICONISTS

The iconists are the heart and soul of the Jehammedans. These sacred men were originally isaaki who, victorious in hundreds of battles, have survived past the age of thirty. Once they eclipse thirty, an isaaki takes on the duty of spiritual leader and role model. Their task is to bring the sheep to gestation, find new watering holes for the herds, and determine which females are predestined by God to be saraeli.

An iconist is priest, judge, and jury all in one. They steer the masses and their word is law. No one is closer to God than they are.

THE SWORDS OF JEHAMMED

An ismaeli always gets stepped on; the most menial tasks are placed upon their shoulders. Faith and extraordinary humility are his only rewards in the face of society's shackles. This humility, practiced day after day, is easily turned on his enemy in the slaughter. When unleashed, he throws himself upon the enemy

lines leaving bloody slashes with his scimitar. His wildness is legendary. Even the Scourgers avoid open combat with a large number of ismaelis. They are the Swords of Jehammed, killing all non-believers in the name of the last prophet.

However, the feverish fighting of the ismaelis must be trumped by an isaaki, as he is the leader of the slaughter. From him, the unimaginable is demanded. He must ride, reckless and enraged, into the seemingly endless battle and offer himself as a sacrifice. His death is the torch that ignites the rage of his troops.

ICONS

Just like Abraham bargained with God to spare the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, iconists negotiate the future of the Jehammedans.

To commune with the Lord, an iconist retreats to his room, lights frankincense and sandalwood, then washes his feet and dries them thoroughly, following the strict old rites. He pours two cups of sweetened tea from a samovar and takes these to a low, round table in the center of the room. He puts one cup where he is going to sit and the other on the opposite side. In a low singsong praising the deeds of God, the Lord is asked to join the iconist at the table. The iconist waits patiently; sometimes for hours, sometimes for days. He waits until he feels the presence of God. When this finally occurs, the iconist places a small chest etched with gold in the middle of the table and opens it. Inside the chest, wrapped in velvet, is an icon, a symbol of the business at hand. The icon can take on many forms, as long as it tells a story and conveys a clear favor: the skull of a fallen Jehammedan, riddled with shrapnel, hints at retribution against the Scourger post responsible for the death; the severed hand of a thief from a nearby rebellious village asks that order be restored to the community; the shattered blade of a missing isaaki's saber pleads for the safe return of the warrior.

The iconist then lists all the sacrifices the community has to offer, and "buys" himself the symbolic value of the icon with them. Usually, the exchange ends with old saraelis dragging the unconscious iconist into the fresh air to let him come to his spirits again. Days of rest are required for the iconist to return to normal.

The community then plays the waiting game to see if the iconist was successful in his barter. It is up to the iconist to interpret the events that "result" from the trade and lead the community accordingly. Will the torrential rain turn into a disastrous flood? Will the leader of the revolt die by the hand of his bedmate? Are the Swords of Jehammed necessary to enforce the will of God at the Scourger post?

It often takes months or even years until the clan knows for sure. If the business has been completed successfully, the icon becomes a relic. If it was refused, God will have had his reasons to deny the iconist's wish.

THE WORDS OF JEHAMMED

Most Jehammedans cannot read or write. When they are young ismaelis, they spend their time on the pastures with their herds and don't have time to learn. Any youth who tries to learn the art of written language is viewed with scorn, seen as taking advantage of his abrami's trust and putting the burden of his work on others. Later too, when he would have the time to learn as the head of a family, he will refuse to be instructed by a scribe like a little child. And yet, he desires to own the words of Jehammed on paper and is willing to exchange dozens of his goats and sheep for it, should there ever be an opportunity.

Jehammed himself is said to be the author of the Scrolls of the Latter Days. The scriptures are inscribed on fibrous but well-conserved paper and stored, rolled up, in polished brass tubes. Only the abramis and isaakis are allowed to look at the holy scripture. Even if they don't understand the words, they don't get angry, because true belief is carried in the heart, not written on old papyrus.

THE HERD

Though the Jehammedans are absorbed in their spiritual pursuits, they cannot deny their earthly role as shepherds. The herds have always been at the center of their lives. An abrami feeds his family with his sheep and goats. The bigger and healthier the herd, the more ismaelis the father can put into the world to expand his wealth and influence. Having many children has always been considered the grace of God by the Jehammedans. Abramis who are blessed with many children are highly regarded in the cult. Even if they don't bestow an isaaki upon the community, they still strengthen the army with soldiers.

Without the herd, this wouldn't be possible. The meat of the animals strengthens the family, the milk quenches the children's thirst, the hagari make clothes from the wool. The fat is used for candles and torches, and the ismaelis make strings for their bows out of the intestines. Extracts from the organs are mixed with herbs to make tinctures that are supposed to strengthen the swords for battle as well as the abramis in their potency.

ARIES THE RAM

The legendary creature that once brought victory to the Jehammedans hasn't been seen in decades. However, the creature still lives in the hearts of the people and in their superstitions. When a mountain goat gets lost in a family's camp at night, this is ascribed to Aries. A surprising victory is attributed to the helping hand of the ram. Many iconists don't approve of these superstitions because the belief in Aries seems to be taking the place of the belief in God. Miracles are no longer ascribed to the Lord, but to the mystical leader in the battles of the past. For some tribes living in remote mountain areas of Balkhan, the words of Jehammed have been overtaken by those of Aries. The iconists wage a constant battle against the cancer of the ram beliefs. Sometimes, iconists banish dissenters or have them castigated as punishment for their heresy. However, even among the iconists, there are some that are not willing to brand Aries as a vicious idol and to deny his worshippers the mercy of God. This issue of Aries threatens to tear the cult apart.

THE ARIANOIS

After the battle in the Adriatic Basin, Aries and his newly recruited entourage disappeared without a trace. Rumors say that the man retired to Crete and that it has been his home ever since. These days, nothing good is heard from the island. Ram skulls, as well as skinned Africans on poles, should be warning enough for anyone thinking about coming close to the coast. It is said to be the Arianois, prophets of Aries that don't allow any stranger to touch their holy ground.

Reports by Neolibyans who had gotten lost on the dark shores of Crete at night paint a horrific picture of the isle. Inland near the temples and between the grotesque labyrinths of scraps and bones, bloody orgies take place. Squealing lambs, with their aortas cut open, stumble about among ram-headed creatures. The creatures then roll on the blood smeared ground, wildly copulating. For a long time, people laughed at a Neolibyan named Wamai who claimed to have witnessed this gruesome spectacle. Then the *Gimbya*, a five-hundred ton transport ship, ran aground near Tobruk on the Neolibyan coast. Nobody on board was alive. The Neolibyans and Scourgers had been gutted and skinned. Ram skulls lay on deck. The Neolibyans might be the rulers of the Mediterranean, but since then, they have not gone anywhere near Crete.

THE HOLY CITY

The roots of the cult are in Mecca, the city of the Kaaba and the revelation of Jehammed. However, Mecca is ruled by enemies. The land east of Anubia has been jealously guarded by the Africans. As long as the Jehammedans have been fighting the Africans on the Bosphorus, they have demanded the intruders' retreat from the promised land. But the jackals and hyenas just laugh in their faces.

LIFE RINGS

A Jehammedan is easily identified by his unique tattoos. From birth, they are extended every year until they cover the entire body on the most honorable men. They are symbolic life rings, pricked dots that document the experience of the bearer with every year of his life. But these drawings don't count just the years. The life rings depict a Jehammedan's entire development, with all their joys and deprivations. An isaaki who already has ritual tattoos all over his body while he is young is marked by great sacrifices, wisdom and strength, while an abrami who doesn't even have half of his body covered in life rings at an old age is identified as a lazy man.

Every spring, the members of a Jehammedan tribe meet for a seven-day long ceremony, called the *Bairam*, where everyone tells the others about his adventures of the past year. Based on these stories, the iconists choose the grade of the tattoos. Starting from the forehead, the left hip, and the calves, a complex patchwork depicting the life of the Jehammedan is written. It is regarded as an ornament and a sign of respect within the cult.

TEFILLINS

Before their prayers, the Jehammedans wrap *tefillins*, pouches filled with parchments of scripture, held in place with straps that wrap around their forearms all the way to the thumbs, around their ring and middle fingers, and back to their forearms. The thin leather band cuts deep into the flesh and the wound is considered a sacrifice to God, a sign to brothers and sisters: I am with God and his last prophet!

Blessed by the iconists, the tefillins provide a symbolic connection to their spiritual leaders while they are abroad.

62 LASHES

A lamb, the Jehammedan symbol for innocence, dies after 62 lashes—or so the legend says. In the belief of the Jehammedans, a man carries more sins in his heart than a lamb. In order to turn a delinquent among them back into an innocent lamb, convicts are punished with 62 lashes.

JEHAMMEDAN WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Everything has been said. Now is the time to let actions follow words. We will slaughter every single one of them, just they like they once massacred us in Purgare.

ANUBIANS

They defile dead bodies and decorate themselves with the bones. Desecrators of God's creation! They are also the leaders of that godless pack that streams into our country.

APOCALYPTIKS

They are of the devil. They lead us into temptation with intoxication and sinful flesh. We pay them back with our sabers!

THE ASHEN

They remain in their holes during the day. At night they fall over our herds like wolves! We can't convert them. It's too late for that.

CHRONICLERS

They pray to steel idols and want to raise themselves up to the level of gods with their fuss and noise. But whoever looks into their hearts sees only a lazy, moaning demon.

HELLVETICS

The mercenaries are honorable and strong, but their traditions and their tribal relations are chaotic. They resemble uprooted people who glorify their weapons as companions and look for peace in war.

MARSHALS

The words of Jehammed are full of soul and they promise salvation. On the other hand, the codex of the Marshals is dead and leads to tyranny.

NEOLIBYANS

They are the money collectors of the African terror! If we want to make peace on the Bosporus and in Hybrispania, we have to bring them down first. Without the support of the Neolibyans, the front of the Scourgers will soon start to crumble.

SCRAPPERS

What shall we do with them? They are without God and without hope. We share our bread with them in our camps and we watch them full of pity when they disappear again into the wasteland with their heads hung low. Then we thank Jehammed for showing us the right way.

SCOURGERS

They occupy our sacred sites and plunder the land of our ancestors. If only we could break their hold on the Bosporus!

SPITALIANS

These cowardly snakes support the arch-enemy in Purgare and pretend to be credulous in Borca. Don't trust them!

TRIBALS

Some of them have ancient traditions and long bloodlines, just like us. But they are all godless, praying to idols or rocks or trees. We tolerate them, but we don't respect them.

PERSONALITIES

GILEABOD RUBEN ABRAHAM, HEAD SHEPHERD OF OTTOMAN

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Jehammedan (iconist)

Characteristics: The ruler of Ottoman and keeper of the faith is possibly the most dangerous person in all of East Borca. The Anabaptists warn that he gathers an army of thousands around him, but these die away unheard west of the Reaper's Blow. The breath of the shepherd will soon sweep over the world.

SENKA, THE IMMACULATE ONE

Culture: Balkhani

Cult: Jehammedan (saraeli)

Characteristics: Senka has gathered a dozen Jehammedan tribes around her for the war for the Adriatic Basin. She is hard and relentless in her judgments and is loyally supported by the iconists of Balkhan.

ELIAS ISMAEL

Culture: Hybrispinian

Cult: Jehammedan (ismaeli)

Characteristics: Elias, Sword of Jehammed and resistance fighter on the front of Al-Andalus, comes from an unholy connection between a Jehammedan woman and a Tribal. His mother never had the courage to confess this to her community. Even today, the animal in him is still strong. Driven by base instincts, he rushes up against the Scourgers with his fighters.

MARSHALS

GAVELS OF JUSTICE

HOMELAND

The slick leather fedora cast his face into darkness. Dust lay on the brim like a fine red veil. Hollow cheeks balanced the round dark spectacles of his trade; his eyes vanished behind the ebony discs. His bandana hid a dreadful smile. It stretched uncomfortably across his tightly sealed lips—lips that spoke only death sentences or acquittals.

The Marshal ran his thumb around the brim of his hat and patted his mare soothingly on the neck. His saddle groaned and his leather duster creaked. The coat hung stiffly on his shoulders and split neatly across the horse's back. A gavel hung from one of the saddle straps, the metal of its head dull and crusted with dirt, but furnished with brilliant engravings.

Justitian. He was back in a place of order—the womb of a new civilized world. He had returned to the city of law, iron fist of the wasteland. The hooves of his mare fell hard and loud on the cobbled street; every stone an island in a sea of red dust. Dingy hovels huddled against one another, seeking sanctuary from the relentless dust storms. Wax-covered sheets draped across openings in the walls obscured the city's secret inner life. The Marshal took it all in. Nothing had changed during his month-long absence.

A pushcart loaded with rusty iron shards trundled by on the pavement. The Marshal rose in his saddle to see who was pulling the cart. It was merely an old Scrapper, his hair hanging in thick strands—dirty and gray. Uselessly, the Marshal urged his horse forward, but the cart filled the narrow lane. He was going to be delayed.

Irritated, he snapped open his hip pocket and pulled out a worn journal—the Codex. The words that give a

Marshal his sense of purpose. Justice and wisdom flow from it in densely packed run-on sentences. All Marshals know it by heart, yet they reach for it like a young lover, bathing themselves in its magical afterglow. His taut features relaxed perceptibly after a few moments of reading. Menace and anger lifted from him like a veil. The book absorbed his anger, returning his equilibrium.

The cart rumbled onto the next street, heading toward the local manufacturer. Flies gathered on a lump of dust-covered mucus. The smell of sweat and desperation filled the air. *Home sweet home*. He grinned. He brought his horse to a canter and turned onto a street booming with businesses.

People clogged the broad avenue and he swept them aside with his powerful gaze and rigid stance. Finally, he reached Court Avenue. He slowed his horse, reverently bowing his head as he made his way down the avenue. Giant statues depicting the Chief Marshals of his ancestors watched him critically, as he approached the courthouse.

Hundreds of Marshals waited for him on the steps of the courthouse. They all wore the uniform: hat, glasses, and coat. Hundreds of faces stared back at him; some old and leathery, some young and rosy—many sullen, most bitter. They melted into one entity, becoming indistinguishable.

This is the Chief Marshal and these are the Marshals. They wait patiently for his annual report on the state of Justitia. They may be individuals under their uniforms, but to the world, they must live as the embodiment of integrity. They are the hands and faces of justice, a virtue so noble they would gladly give their lives for it.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE

The years following the Eschaton were relentlessly cruel to the ravaged people of Europe. They fell on each other like a pack of savage dogs. They murdered their neighbors, plundered their homes and explained it all away as survival. They blamed their dire conditions, conveniently hiding their moral depravity under bloodstained carpets. It was as though centuries of ethical and moral tradition were simply swept away.

Bands of vigilantes formed in the small hamlets of the wasteland. They promised safety, but were only as strong as their undisciplined members. They often fell prey to the countless bandits who roamed the tundra and disappeared into the dust.

Individuality was generally scorned and dissenters found themselves expelled, lost, and unprotected in the wilderness. Bewildered refugees fled the obliterated cities into the vast emptiness, only to be hacked to pieces by the arbitrary violence that engulfed the region. Torture, rape, and murder ruled the land—mankind could stoop no lower.

The wasteland needed someone to lead the people back to a path of virtue. When he arrived, he called himself “the Marshal.” He first appeared in 2381 in a small, fortified village near the ancient ruins of Bochum.

The legend holds that he stopped an angry mob from torturing an abandoned gang member who had been injured in a raid. He tallied the man’s crimes, the least severe of which

was robbery, and led him from the pillory to an inverted iron bucket. With his boot on the criminal’s neck, the Marshal pinned his head on the dull metal basin. He hefted a massive sledgehammer and crushed the man’s skull with one blow.

The spectators were shocked. They had taken it all as a game, finding joy in the fear of the captive after all the suffering he had brought to their village. It never occurred to them he might be executed. The Marshal was unaffected by their revulsion. Now covered in blood and bone, he set his wide-brimmed hat straight, adjusted his weathered leather duster, and asked for a bowl of water. He sought to return the hammer to the farmer from whom he’d borrowed it, but the man stumbled backward refusing it in disgust.

From that moment on, the Marshal became a common sight in the area. He traveled from village to village, acting as mediator for an endless line of quarrelers. He calmly shouldered the burden for which he had become known: judging the guilty. The villagers waited for him with their prisoners and gave an account of their crimes. When he executed a troublemaker, he sinned in the people’s stead; he became their vicarious conscience. He brought them hope.

His sentencing was merciless but just; his executions brutal and horrible. His fedora, the glasses, the coat, and the gavel soon branded him throughout Borca. He stood for law, justice, and order. He became a living legend.

The Marshal tore a bloody trail through the landscape of lawlessness, and the gangs resisted. They set traps for him, ambushed him, and united to bring him down. But he was a cunning old bastard, always a step ahead of his foes. One by one, with a strike of his gavel, he let them feel his might. His brand of justice developed fans: young, enthusiastic people who were impressed by his work and helped him any way they could. Others followed him, protected him, and joined in his crusade for justice.

GUARDIANS OF ORDER

The Marshal’s apostles spread his word throughout the land of Borca. They wore similar hats and coats, and carried gavels in honor of his wisdom and deeds. The original Marshal became known as the Chief Marshal, and his followers dispensed his brand of justice with impunity.

Throughout the wastelands, criminals were hunted down like many dogs. The new Marshals were received as distinguished guests; they were brought dinners and offered homes in the community. Some of them accepted, but others kept the ways of the Chief Marshal and mimicked his eternal wandering.

No one noticed when the Chief Marshal disappeared. With bandanas over their nose and mouth, their fedoras and their glasses, it was practically impossible to tell the Marshals apart. Their mentor was lost among them. Still, they asked around for news of the old man, his latest deeds, where he dwelt, his state of health; no one knew what had become of him. It was months before the Marshals realized their founder was gone. With that, they realized they no longer needed him to carry on the crusade he had begun.

THE TESTAMENT

The night of December 15, 2409, was cold. Snow swept over the flat roofs of the city Exalt. In the distance, the dreamlike green glow of a bonfire pierced the white wall. Two Marshals waited in the central market square. They had raised their collars high around their necks and rubbed their hands together in the cold. Their suffering didn't last long, because the Chronicler, Metatag, arrived as planned. The mummified figure nodded to them and handed them a package wrapped in an oiled cloth. "The Testament," he screeched through an over-amplified speaker. He disappeared into the thick snow flurries without looking back.

The two Marshals stared in wonder at the Chief Marshal's travel diary. Tiny scrawls on cracked and aged pages revealed his experiences, aphorisms, and anecdotal lore. This was the wisdom of an entire lifetime—a testament to his followers. The book became the foundation for the Marshals. It is the firmament of their beliefs and code.

Soon every Marshal had a copy of the testament and used it as a guide for distinguishing between perpetrator and victim. Others analyzed the work, interpreted it, and completed the numerous unfinished sequences. Practitioners and theorists endlessly debated the will of the Chief Marshal.

JUSTITIAN: THE FIST OF JUSTICE

Not long after the Testament was discovered, the Chroniclers set history into motion again. They offered the Marshals and several civilized tribes from the north a home close to their Central Cluster. The arrangement suited everyone, particularly the Chroniclers, who benefited greatly from the fear inspired by the Marshals. The terms were accepted, and Justitian was built upon the Chroniclers' secret foundations deep in the ancient ruins of Dustlung.

However, not all of the Marshals were satisfied with Justitian. For the theoretical advocates, the great stone fortress was perfect for their needs. It contained everything they would need for their study of the Chief Marshal's writings. But for the Marshals of the old order, the protectors, the growing city was like a constrictive girdle. They made the best of it, even if the situation left a bad taste in their mouths.

The city grew and prospered. It was named after the goddess of justice, Justitia. This was another novel suggestion from the Chroniclers who seemed to be omnipresent. They interfered with everything. They were always sneaking into the assemblies and giving their advice without being asked. When a Marshal rose to power, they always had the Chroniclers' influence to thank.

Justus I was the first in a long and venerable line of Justitian Chief Marshals. He composed his own version of the Codex and made it a requirement that the other Marshals follow it. He used it to sharpen both the advocates and the protectors, giving each group different tasks: one composed new legislation while the other sought to enforce the law. Justus resolved disputes with a system of courts that mediated arguments and decided the validity of laws and regulations. He determined the ranking structure, which descended from judges to executors to vagabonds. Things would change in the coming decades, but the foundation was now laid; the only thing left was to erect a monument to it.

PROTECTORATE

The power of Justitian soon breached its walls and spread to the furthest reaches of Borca. After devastating wars annihilated cities like Exalt, thousands of refugees seeking peace and order flocked to the home of the Marshals. This great influx of willing subjects sparked the tremendous growth of Justitian, swelling it to many times its original size. Surrounding villages submitted to the Protectorate of the Marshals. They traded their freedom for law and order—not that they had a choice. The Protectorate now ranges over vast parts of northwest Borca.

STONE HEADS

It is a tradition among the Marshals to place the remains of a Chief Marshal in a giant stone head along with his verses from the Codex. On Court Avenue in Justitian, one can find 23 of these monuments. They stare at each new generation of Marshals with stern blind eyes.

DIVISION OF POWERS

Legislative, judicial, and executive branches—the three pillars that combine into a healthy and strong state. One makes the laws, one deems their worthiness, and the last enforces them. Each Marshal embodies all three pillars. It takes willpower, integrity, and discipline to resist the sweet temptation of this power.

The Chief Marshal exemplifies all of these characteristics. He could easily become a puppetmaster behind the scenes, making the cult members dance on his invisible strings, but his resolve is firm. He has not forgotten his purpose. He is one man in a crowd of hundreds, not a king. He is Chief Marshal simply because he sets the best example.

The other Marshals emulate him, but his actions are merely based on precedent. There is room for interpretation. Though the Marshals are forced to wear the same uniform, their *modus operandi* is completely up to them. Being creative with one's punishments is part of the job—within limits of course.

THE CODEX

Every Chief Marshal enters the highest office of the cult with his own version of the Codex. Generally, it is a revised version of the Codex used by his predecessor, adjusted to reflect the times. The first Chief Marshal used the Testament and matched it to his political climate, guiding the development of the cult through its infancy.

Every Chief Marshal since has followed suit—an enormous task. Advocates work day and night for months on the transcripts so that every Marshal can stay equipped with the newest laws. It has proven to be worth the effort. The writings are dear to the people. It's a contract between the Marshals and their constituents. It ties them together; it binds their fates.

The Codex has evolved, supplemented by the writings of the advocates. The longer a Chief Marshal maintains his position, the more complicated and intricate the web of rules becomes. Eventually, even its authors hardly comprehend it.

The oldest laws of the Codex include standard chestnuts such as, "You may not kill" and "You may not steal." Subordinate clauses detail the exceptions and degree of punishment for each. Then more laws, written over the years, follow in meticulous order. They cover disputes of every nature: adultery, treachery, robbery, abuse of office, among many others.

Portions of the Codex describe, in great detail, what to do regarding the world outside Justitian. It deals with sodomy, bestiality, and even guilt over an accidental death. It is a flexible and living document. Every possibility seems to be covered in its paragraphs.

The current Chief Marshal, **Archot**, has served longer than anyone prior to him. For over twenty years, he has held the office of Chief Marshal. His Codex has swollen to a monstrosity that no single tome can contain.

While the advocates scrawl away in their ivory towers, the protectors roam the streets of Justitian, resigned to a bleak future. Only a handful of elders remember the time when a tiny black leather book was enough to light their way. Now, the Codex drives them forward like an unstoppable freight engine. Whatever mysteries were hidden in the Testament, they have long since been nailed down. Because of the nature of the advocate's work, some of the best arguments and greatest insights have been stifled. There is no longer any flexibility in the written word; the law has become a burden.

INSIGNIA OF POWER

The Marshals carry the badges of their office wherever they go. The Codex represents the history and precedence of the judiciary. It is the source of their rulings. The long-handled gavel is the emblem of executive power. It allows them to act with decisive impunity.

A common misconception among the Justitian people is that every Marshal is equal. This suits the Marshals; however, most are not qualified to embody both judicial and executive branches. Each branch takes many years of study as well as an exhaustive examination before a committee of Marshals.

The shotgun is the only insignia given to every Marshal in the field. It doesn't give the Marshal any special power or responsibility, but it proves the Marshal to be an important protector, generally an executor.

TWO CAMPS

When the people speak of the Marshals, they are generally referring to the protectors. The protectors fight on the front against lawlessness and support the people with their wise counsel. They are the soldiers of justice and the people worship them. Despite their semi-divinity, they remain in the populace. They live and die amongst those they've vowed to guard.

Though the people follow the orders of the protectors, the advocates have great influence in Justitian. Their constant editing of the Codex keeps the protectors on their toes. They recruit gifted trainees who excel in the art of discourse. Unlike the protectors, an advocate carries a gavel only on ceremonial occasions and, therefore, never enforces laws or involves himself in fighting.

The advocates legislated the city of Justitian into a Protectorate—and as a result, they twisted the executive branch into an army of mercenaries. The protectors resent this flagrant abuse of power and each branch accuses the other of misconduct. The dispute between the advocates and protectors has generated great tension within the cult. But could the protectors separate themselves from the Codex should their displeasure with its direction become unbearable?

CHILDREN OF WRATH

Marshals recruit the bulk of their followers from children orphaned by war. These children, robbed of everything, find a new family with the Marshals. Aging protectors teach large groups of orphans about the strict world of the Marshals. They learn to respect the law and love Justitian. However, the injustice of their youth stokes the flames of their rage. This rage produces merciless agents of the law—its fire warms them on the coldest nights.

But wrath without discipline turns quickly into violence, so the young pupils endure a very strict upbringing. They are instructed in the art of psychology and receive a full education. They learn the history of Borca and Justitian in particular. At about fourteen years of age, the youths are initiated into the order. Their servitude to the scales of justice has begun.

They are now called *vagabonds*. They are not yet permitted to wear the hat, coat, or carry the badge of office. For the next few years, they are apprenticed to an experienced Marshal and observe his rulings and sentencing. It is a time of learning and physical conditioning.

At eighteen, they take their first exam and step closer to becoming a full Marshal. If they pass, they qualify for advanced training. They must now choose the camp they will settle into—advocate or protector.

THE MARSHALS' HORSES

Like the fedora, coat, and gavel, the horses are also a trademark of the Marshals. Only those who have passed the executor exams may ride horses. Therefore, it is primarily the protectors who ride and carry the law through the dusty streets of Justitian. Conversely, the advocates have a cultivated dislike for the snorting, stomping, and stinking animals.

The horses are housed in stalls directly connected to the protectors' barracks. Every Marshal is responsible for his animal; he must feed it, give it enough to drink, and brush it down.

THE EXAMS

It takes an extremely solid constitution to pass an executor exam. Besides a ten-kilometer long obstacle course, the program also includes a shooting contest against the candidate's instructor. Strength, reflexes, endurance, and technique are evaluated by a committee of three Marshals, called the tribunal. If the observers are unanimously impressed by the vagabond's performance, then the exam is considered a success. At the courthouse, located in the center of Justitian, the goliard takes an oath on the Codex before the Chief Marshal. He is then presented with his gavel, and officially declared an *executor*. His profession is now battle and punishment. However, he is still not permitted to pronounce a judgment.

The law exam requires little physical activity; rather it looks at the candidate's comprehension and learning aptitude. The vagabond undergoes a relentless cross-examination that tests his knowledge. It is impossible to succeed without memorizing every paragraph of the Codex.

Finally, the candidate adjourns to the Dust Dome, an open amphitheater in the eastern part of Justitian. The arena is filled with eager spectators. Performers step forward and act out fictitious cases as victim, perpetrator, and witness. The candidate strides from one actor to the next, probing, deliberating, and finally passing a judgment based on his knowledge of the Codex. If the ruling satisfies the tribunal, then the exam is successfully completed and the vagabond attains the rank of *arbiter*.

The vagabond is now ceremoniously accepted as a Marshal. The new graduate takes his vows, receives a copy of the Codex, and takes his position next to his esteemed colleagues. If he should pass judgment on a felon, an executor will stand by his side to carry out his sentence. So it is written in the Codex.

The graduation is a turning point in the life of a Marshal. The hostilities between the factions are broken open—undercurrents not seen by the lowly apprentice. The young Marshals soon realize they are the actors in a great production of intrigue. Mentors and friends are easily found; steadfast allegiances and eternal hatreds are born. The only thing impossible is neutrality.

EYE FOR AN EYE

The Marshals bring law to the land. They punish those who refuse to abide by the Codex, as a stern father punishes his unruly child. Punishment is not the ultimate end. Rather, it is a tool to terrorize the masses and lead them toward enlightenment. These solemn words were written by the first Chief Marshal and can be found throughout his original journal.

Guided by this core principle, Marshals developed a wealth of methods to indoctrinate insurgents, punish felons, and penalize every type of misdemeanor. The only punishment not employed by the Marshals was imprisonment. Justitian did not desire to sacrifice its wealth to house and care for prisoners.

Punitive practices were restricted by the virtual anonymity of the citizens of the Protectorate. Identification doesn't exist; the entire concept is foreign. If someone relocated inside Justitian's city limits, they could easily begin a new life.

The Marshals solved this dilemma by dealing out visible punishments: the hands and forearms of thieves are painted blue with a long-lasting dye; the lips of liars and traitors are marked with the same color. After several weeks or months, the dye fades and the social stigma is lifted slightly, giving the offender a new chance.

Repeat offenders do not get off so easily. The iron fist of Justitian demands a higher price. The Marshal's gavel shatters a knuckle on each hand of a habitual thief. Traitors' tongues are slit with a heated blade. They should have heeded their first warning.

Proceedings against murderers and rapists are automatically severe. The criminals are branded with the Marshal's iron. With this stigma on their forehead, they carry their guilt forever. If they are caught committing a capital offense a second time, the Marshals let the victims or their families decide on a fitting punishment. Crowd favorites include crushed limbs and amputations. In especially sinister cases, where execution is required, a hefty blow to the head seals the criminal's fate.

Many sentences, especially those for lesser crimes, offer an option. Either they accept their punishment, or they pay penance by spending a few days in Justitian's penal camps. They are directed to a barrack in one of the camps and are given over to a foreman where their faces are marked with red henna. For the next few days, they work to better the welfare of the city. They improve the roads, construct buildings, and remove waste. They fight, armed with spades, against the red dust, and labor on the colossal legacy of Archot.

If a convict attempts to escape and is caught, he should fear the worst, for the arbiters will try him as a hard criminal. Marshals view mercy as a weakness; something they cannot allow if they want to maintain control over their army of laborers. In two to three weeks, the color fades, after which, the prisoner is free to go. Some choose to stay. Shelter and two meals a day are more than they could possibly hope to earn in the wild streets of Justitian.

The sentences of the Marshals are reflected by Justitian culture. A trade is always closed with a handshake; both businessmen must remove their gloves. Unpainted hands

demonstrate the trustworthiness of a merchant or entrepreneur. If you hesitate in taking off your gloves in a Justitian market, you should count on being mistrusted. "Show me your hands" is a very common saying.

It is the same with the face. It is considered improper to hide behind a handkerchief or mask during a conversation. Hiding one's face is tantamount to lying whereas showing one's face equals honesty. Newcomers to the city, who are ignorant of Justitian practices, often find it difficult getting started in the Protectorate.

ASCENSION

The hierarchy of the Marshals is divided into four rungs. On the first rung are the vagabonds; next are the city marshals, then the lower marshals, and finally the high marshals. It doesn't matter whether only one or both exams were taken; executors and arbiters are equal. Still Marshals enjoy a higher level of respect when they swing their gavel as well as the Codex. People envy their independence.

City marshals comprise the bulk of the organization. They pull their recruits from among the vagabonds—every executor and arbiter becomes a city marshal if they pass their exams. As newcomers with limited experience, they are permitted to act only inside of Justitian. They secure the peace with their omnipresence and thorough intimidation. They are seldom involved in fights, because it is currently a time of peace. The tribes do not dare to attack the city after Archot's great cleansing.

To become a lower marshal, five years of service as a city marshal is required. Advancement requires the endorsements of at least two high marshals. Only those who demonstrate initiative and masterful political manipulation can ascend the ladder of power. A lower marshal inherits greater authority and autonomy; their jurisdiction covers the entire Protectorate.

High marshals are promoted by the Senate, the ruling body of Marshals. Only those who have accomplished extraordinary things, whose names have become synonymous with justice and loyalty to the Codex, are chosen. They are promoted after years of critical observation. As a high marshal, limits no longer exist. Many high marshals leave for the wasteland to win new areas for the Protectorate. Others remain in Justitian, escalating the political dance and tightening their grip over the turbulent social landscape.

ARCHOT'S OBSESSION

Chief Marshal Archot has achieved a great deal in his twenty-year term. He peacefully annexed dozens of villages and strengthened the power of the Protectorate. Over the course of several penal expeditions, he obliterated the Cockroach Clan, a group of amazingly well-armed degenerates. He is fully aware of his own greatness and deliberately conceals it under a façade of forged humility.

Archot's greatest fear is that he may be forgotten after his death. According to tradition, a stone head would be erected in his honor on the Court Avenue. This would scatter his great works among the anonymous Chief Marshals of the past. This thought is unbearable for him.

He has called upon his advocates and issued a new law. He desires an enormous monument, reflecting his great deeds, a testament that will inspire for countless ages—one from which he can continue to lead his people long after his death.

When the project is completed, a stone torso, about fifty meters high, will stand erect at the end of the avenue towering over the city; a wonder of the post-Eschaton era. Currently, the monument is a staggering thirty meters. The shape of Archot's sinewy throat and part of his chin are already distinguishable.

Everyday the prison laborers carry stones from the ruins to the site. They build scaffolding and hoist the boulders up in a cable pulley where they become part of a massive, gray puzzle. Accidents are routine. The cost of this project cripples the development of Justitian, but in this city, there is no way around Archot.

THE SENATE

The Chief Marshal has, under his charge, a Senate comprised of two houses, each with eight high marshals. One house is exclusively protector, the other exclusively advocate. Decisions that directly affect the cult are debated and resolved here. The protectors have authority over the executors and the advocates over the arbiters. It is rare, however, that political developments, both inside and outside of the Protectorate, affect only one group. All too often their paths cross, exploding into fierce debate, each side searching for an advantage. The Chief Marshal has the power to pull the bickering parties apart, but he loves these disputes—they often lead to fresh and surprising outcomes.

THE JURIES

The Protectorate grows faster than the number of Marshals needed to support it. This shortage of manpower poses a grave threat to the security of Justitian. Too many unpunished crimes will lead to anarchy and revolt. The Marshals fill the holes in their net with juries.

Generally, the juries are comprised of enclave leaders, local businessmen, or decorated veterans. They are permitted to examine a defendant and speak as a Marshal until a true arbiter arrives.

Should the jury's judgment be accepted by the arbiter, then it is legally binding and irreversible. Lesser punishments, such as hand and tongue painting, can be implemented immediately. More severe punishments require a protector.

EXPANSION

Security and expansion are the most important concerns of the Marshals. They supervise local business, organize expeditions, battle marauding clans, and escort influential tradesmen through the Protectorate.

While the residents of Justitian view them as a necessary evil, the people of the wastes see them as conquerors and extortionists. No village possesses the power needed to oppose the city-state, so they scratch their cross on the dotted line and seal themselves to Justitian. Charges are brought against anyone who dissents.

MERCENARIES OF JUSTICE

Unless the money is right, the Marshals stay out of affairs that don't directly involve the Protectorate. If they are paid to investigate the legality of a transaction, they are still required to end it with a ruling. Archot is an efficient and business-minded Chief Marshal. In fact, his monumental construction project would hardly be possible without the commercialization of the law.

INSTRUMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Years ago, the weapons manufacturers of Justitian produced arms solely for the Marshals. But Archot's ambitions shattered this ancient tradition. Now, a portion of every manufacturer's inventory is reserved for chosen mercenaries. The town's arms are becoming strained despite an old promise that the security of Justitian would always come first. Was this a lie or a calculated scheme?

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MARSHALS

The Testament was sprinkled with Latin and Greek. Many of the aphorisms were long and incomprehensible. The ancient languages were too strange. Although all of the secrets have been removed from the script and the cult has access to excellent linguists, the Marshals never felt impelled to adopt Latin as an official language of the court.

To bring the law to the people is a challenge in itself. The people must be able to understand the Codex in order to accept it. This is the opinion of the protectors. The advocates oppose this viewpoint and see it as a threat to their power monopoly. If the people understand and internalize the law, then what is the purpose of the Marshals? This conflict between protectors and advocates is as old as the cult itself and is the main topic of Senate discussions. Only one thing stalls their progress. According to tradition, the Chief Marshal prevents a decision by refusing to vote.

A few Latin terms have managed to enter the vocabulary of the Marshals anyway. The Chief Marshal is often referred to as “*primus inter pares*,” or “chief among equals.” A trial is held “*coram publico*” or “before the public.” Advocates of the opposition are jeered in the witness stand with “*audi-atur et altera pars!*” (“one should also let the other side be heard”), and the protectors are pepped before a coming battle with “*per aspera ad astra*” (“on unbeaten paths to the stars,” meaning “through battle to victory”). Some Marshals end their verdict with “*punctum!*” (“case closed!”), or a death sentence with “*mors certa, hora incerta*” (“death is certain, the hour uncertain”). Often the explanation of a judgment is peppered with a “*de jure*” (“rightly so”).

Several Marshals would feel naked if they couldn't cover themselves in a cloak of incomprehensible phrases. Others make do without the Latin expressions. The cult itself doesn't prescribe individual preferences.

THE COURTHOUSE

In the center of Justitian stands the Courthouse. This building, based on ancient Roman designs, houses the Marshals. The doors to the Courthouse open onto a broad staircase at the terminus of Courthouse Avenue. The doors are cut deep into the façade and flanked by two bronze Marshal statues, one of which wields a gavel; the other presses the Codex to his breast. They stare coldly across the courtyard toward the half-completed colossus at the other end of the avenue.

The Courthouse has a rectangular foundation eighty meters long and fifty meters wide. Thick walls and massive pillars support the enormous weight of its entablature. Arched windows with elaborate stained glass murals illustrate the virtues of the Marshals and the sins of the lawless. The roof is a broad, round fortification, fourteen meters high. Bunker-like towers squat at the four corners. Protectors patrol behind hulking canons, which stare threateningly at the visitors below.

Massive pieces of concrete rubble, remnants of the Eschaton, cover a small ancient building on the north side of the Courthouse. This is the Marshal's stable. It is said their horses live better than most of the citizens of Justitian.

Inside the Courthouse, the atmosphere is sacrosanct. Colorful lights from the stained-glass windows play across the floor. The Courthouse is alive with Marshals and Chroniclers headed toward the major offices of the southern wing. A courtyard, bordered by a cloistered walkway, lies at the center of the building. Protectors and advocates meet here for enriching debates or to watch the executors train. The Chief Marshal resides in the main hall, flanked by the Senate.

THE BARRACKS

The Marshals had barracks strategically erected throughout Justitian. They are home to the protectors. The barracks also provide stables and training grounds. The importance of the barrack generally determines the number of Marshals stationed there. Barbed wire fences protect them all, though major garrisons have underground arsenals, larger parade grounds, greater fortifications, and billeting for hundreds of Marshals.

TENSIONS

Tension is developing between Marshal protectors and the Spitalians. The Spitalians are autonomous and their influence in Justitian is strong. The Medics are very important to the Protectorate and, as a concession, the Marshals banned psychonauts and outlawed burn. The Spitalians, however, are not satisfied with the Marshals' results. They patrol the streets hunting for any sign of spores or the dreaded Primer. They commit numerous atrocities, undermining the authority of the Chief Marshal. Recent events have forced the advocates to listen more closely when the protectors tell them they are losing control of Justitian.

Relations with the Chroniclers, on the other hand, couldn't be better. Every transaction is stamped with business-like professionalism. Each benefits from the other's abilities: the Marshals require a functioning communications network and the Chroniclers need the protection of a well-fortified organization.

MARSHAL WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

These bastards control Liqua. If there is even a spark of truth to what the Chroniclers say about them, then we should keep our guns ready.

ANUBIANS

Who? Aha, Africans. They are not wanted in the Protectorate. Move on!

APOCALYPTIKS

Wherever the migratory birds land, trouble is not far off. If they start to pick at us, we will smoke out their nests.

THE ASHEN

They are a shady group of thieves, who sneak through the roads at night. They may be banished Apocalyptiks. We have our vigilant eye on them.

CHRONICLERS

This cult answers to the Chief Marshal. The Chroniclers bring us information and repair our technology. They are subservient spirits—or demons, if you go by appearances. The Chroniclers are everywhere with their tips. In the last few years, Chief Marshal Archot has tightened their reins a bit.

HELLVETICS

They are excellent soldiers. Luckily, they have no ambitions. They could easily control Purgare and southern Borca. They don't even control their own homeland due to everlasting debates.

JEHAMMEDANS

Anabaptists and Jehammedans blaze each other down, over and over again, all over the Protectorate. Thankfully, their aggression rarely spreads to the settlements. If they kill each other, that's fine with us. Jehammedans tend to keep their distance from us; we are too unrighteous for them.

NEOLIBYANS

Chief Marshal Archot added this to the Codex: no citizen of the Protectorate shall do business with Africans. This probably has something to do with the Chroniclers.

SCOURGERS

A bellicose tribe from Africa. Presumably, they are working for these Neolibyans. It is said that south of the Protectorate, behind the backs of the Hellvetics, they plundered some cities and set them ablaze.

SCRAPPERS

Don't ask any advocate about the Scrappers. In their eyes, these tattered beings mutilate the cityscape. They're all right though; they keep their mouths shut and abide by the rules. If they don't, they make great penal laborers, even though they often escape.

SPITALIANS

They knowingly undermine our rules. They mock the Codex and play us against one another. Even the advocates fall for the act.

TRIBALS

Chief Marshal Archot taught us the only language these wild beasts understand: violence.

PERSONALITIES

L AIKA, THE GOD-EHS

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Marshal (protector, high marshal)

Characteristics: Laika is the head protector of the Technikentrum and governs the scanner quarter with an iron fist. Additionally, she has assembled a group of especially brutal Anabaptists, called The Pack, as her enforcers. Laika, herself, is bitter and tough. It is said she personally tracks down and punishes anyone who crosses her. Scrappers are too terrified to attempt anything near the Technikentrum.

R UTGAR

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Marshal (protector, high marshal, senator)

Characteristics: Rutgar is the senior high marshal of Justitian, just after Chief Marshal Archot. As chair of the protector-led Senate, he is considered to be the unofficial leader of the protectors. This old wolf holds all the strings—and he knows how to use them.

PHILIPPE LAUTRECHE

Culture: Frank

Cult: Marshals (advocate, high marshal)

Characteristics: When a small settlement on the edge of Franka surrendered to the Protectorate, the Marshals sent Advocate Philippe Lautreche to teach them culture, law, and the wisdom of Justitian. He brought all of these things and more. The Frank air transformed the cool-headed advocate into a compassionless tyrant. Now, he governs like a god, con-demning those he deems unworthy.

NEOLIBYANS

THE CAPITALISTS

LICENSES

Steel blue sky—the sun burns down mercilessly on the dusty streets of Tripoli. A warm breeze wafts in from the sea, full of the tangy odor of rotting algae and heavy with salt. Later in the day, the wind will change direction and wash the unpleasant sea scents from the air, filling it with the muggy headiness of the rainforest. The Tripolitans who sit all day in front of the marble castles of the Neolibyan merchant bank are fond of both.

The Neolibyans that have rushed here today—like jackals attracted by carrion—are the richest of the rich. On the street curbs, beggars gather and wait. Africans clad in miserable rags stand amongst others dressed in splendidly colored raiment. They observe the wealthy Neolibyans with mock indifference.

Colorful ribbons adorn the rifles and hips of the petulant businessmen; similarly decorated sables wrap themselves around their master's necks. The spectator's scoff and snicker at turbans that taper into silken scarves—the skin of the wealthy must be softer and more sensitive than that of the common man.

A murmur of awe passes through the crowd when one of the Neolibyans reveals glittering greaves harvested from a slain machine man. It is rumored that it takes the lives of fifty Scourgers to kill one of these mechanical creatures. Once defeated, the creature can be cracked open like a lobster and its plate hide used as armor. This armor is reputed to be indestructible and protected by ancient incomprehensible runes. Whoever can afford such a treasure must be lavishly wealthy.

The crowd is secretly very impressed. The Neolibyans are completely oblivious to their presence. The only thing that matters to them is overshadowing the other members of their cult with splendor and opulence. Well-heeled slaves and young apprentices infiltrate the ranks of the businessmen in order to heighten the image of their liege. It is an ancient game that fools no one. The older Neolibyans smile knowingly at each other and watch the great and secret show unfolding beneath the veneer of friendship and camaraderie.

Today is the day when the future endeavors of a Neolibyan are decided for another year. But so much more depends on it: wealth, power, prestige, and everlasting glory. This is the day the trading licenses are assigned.

The sun is burning high in the noontime sky. It's time! The massive glass gate into the economic heart of Africa is pushed open by muscular Balkhani slaves. Cheered on by the spectators, the Neolibyans impatiently rush into the cool damp interior of the Merchant Bank. They pass through the hallowed lobby full of elaborate tapestries. The stream of bodies splits in half and rushes up the two staircases to the gallery.

Sheaths and rifles scrape against armor in the rush to secure a good position in the gallery. What sounds like combat echoes through the marble halls. Soon everyone has gathered upstairs, above the map room. Options for alliances are issued, conditioned promises are given from one side of the gallery to the opposite one. People bow over the balustrades, looking for their entourage or just trying to get a breath of air. Below them, the famous mosaic of Europe and Africa, which gave the room its name, is spread out across the floor.

Artfully assembled semi-precious stones form the regions and continents. Nails mark the towns, connected by colored threads that mark the trade routes. A dense network covers the massive sparkling map; all of the threads meet in Tripol. Small flags with the names of Neolibyans are tied to the threads. Many of the flags will be torn off today and replaced by others. Some Neolibyans will rise and others will fall.

The noisy debates subside to a tense murmur when the map-makers step onto the floor. They are followed by the auctioneer **Thabul**. After a career spanning decades, he has garnered the respect and admiration of all of the Neolibyans. He is as old as Tripol, people jokingly say, but his spirit is fresh and his eyes, black as marbles, miss nothing.

He begins the auction for licenses with an uninspired route between two Purgar Scrapper camps. The atmosphere is still cold; everyone is holding their breath waiting for the big fish: routes from Tripol to the rest of the world.

Some young Neolibyans lose their nerve and start a bidding war in the gallery; it escalates quickly into yelling and cursing. Thabul looks from one to the other, coolly tallying the bids, until finally a Neolibyan with red and blue sashes and a plain rifle wins the bid. Drops of sweat are on his face even though the map room is cool.

A brief moment of silence, a quick breath and the auction begins again. One route follows another, growing in quality; the pace quickens as the room warms up. Waves of outrage move through the entourages of the losers; the winners laugh out loud and shout their success to the assembled throng.

It seems as if the auctioneer was performing a dance, scampering across the mosaic floor, nimbly dodging obstacles, pointing to countries, calling out their trade volumes and advertising the advantages of cities and sea routes just like a carnival barker. The mapmakers at his side are in a frenzy, unerringly tearing off the little flags and replacing them with new ones. Thabul barely pauses for a breath, he rushes the tradesmen from route to route. As soon as there is a quiet moment he offers a more profitable route fueling the Neolibyans greed. It's a game of strategy and intrigue, with the world as the game board.

As the sun approaches the horizon, all of Tripol seems to have gathered around the Merchant Bank. Only those near the

front will get to spend the night reveling with slaves, wine, and delicacies from all over the known world. Scourgers can barely contain the writhing mass of people. Those in the first few rows stare impatiently at the massive glass doors. Soon the Neolibyans will rush through them, some depressed and unfriendly, others euphoric and generous. As is the tradition, the day's winners will be throwing massive parties for the townspeople.

TO THE TOP

The Neolibyans are tradesmen who seek nothing more than profit, influence, and possessions. Their lives resemble an all-consuming flame that casts its glow across the future, leaving the past lost in the shadows. Unfortunately, knowledge of history yields little that can be measured in dinars. As a result, there is no explicit history of the cult. Rather, there exists a massive archive of dusty accounts, records, and binders filled with trade agreements and contracts.

With some intuition and patience, it is possible to extract the history of the Neolibyans from these surviving records. They date back to about fifty years after the destruction of the African coastal region. The earliest documents were composed in ancient Arabic and are proof of extensive business activity throughout the African back country. The Libyan—it appears as if a single person that started it all—was a tradesman who, in a matter of years, had created an enormous network of contacts and had accumulated so much wealth that he must have already been a legend during his lifetime.

His trading posts along the African Mediterranean coast were the breeding grounds for new urban developments. One of them was Tripol. According to history, it is the hometown of this Libyan, built from the ruins of ancient Tripoli. All existing trade routes terminated here, or so the books say, and brought the city unforeseen wealth: tea, precious clothes, oil, grain. The spirits of the ancestors had blessed the city and Tripol thrived.

Eventually, the Libyan was no longer able to control his accounts by himself. The account logs report nearly endless lists of payments to an army of assistants; competitors who had lost trade bids to him were now in his employ and they strengthened his empire.

A surprising fact arises when these ancient records are examined: a large percentage of his profit was used to benefit the population of Tripol. Massive construction endeavors were instituted across the continent: land reclamation, road systems, canals and other infrastructure projects lifted Africa from its pitiful heritage of poverty. It was time for Africa to end its legacy of violence and desolation—they were prepared to succeed.

THE ABACUS IN ONE HAND ...

Two hundred years after the death of the legendary tradesman, his descendants called themselves Neolibyans. They hold true to the principles that he pioneered. Today, the Neolibyans support the African villages and cities and equip the Scourgers for their

expeditions. They are an aspect of the great symbiotic relationship between the African tribes.

Africa is no longer a continent characterized by civil wars and extreme poverty. This is thanks to the wealth of the tradesmen. Their trade connects thousands of clans, uniting them in a self-sustaining cycle of growth. Eliminate poverty and there is no longer a need for war. There is no mysticism involved, like with the Scourgers or Anubians. Everything can be expressed in numbers and rules. This is the world of the Neolibyans.

... THE SCOURGE IN THE OTHER

Trade is not the only thing that has guaranteed the Neolibyans' great success. A large part of their wealth stems from artifacts retrieved from the northern ruins. They travel in massive ships filled with Scappers and Scourgers along the coasts of Franka and Purgare. Their transports rumble on shore and unload their surge tanks, which escort the troops to distant quadrants.

Scourgers are indispensable for these pillaging expeditions, but they contribute to the negative image the Neolibyans have among the natives of Europe. While the tradesmen appear considerate, the warriors are violent in their campaign against the white man. They raid villages, plunder, and take slaves, stirring up opposition amongst the tribes. Hardly a night passes without fire arrows bouncing off of the steel skin of the surge tanks. The Scourgers sleep lightly due to constant guerilla attacks.

Franka and Purgare were the first countries to be hit by the onrush of Neolibyan aggression. Now, centuries later, the ruins have been looted, the maps are complete, the land has been completely ransacked. The Neolibyans are shifting their sights. Borca seems promising. The wars in Hybrispania and Balkhan are also expected to bring in large profits.

BEDAIN

Bedain, the Scrapper island with its legendary harbor town, Syracuse, is the doorstep of the African continent and stop-over point for Neolibyan pillaging expeditions. Here, looted machines are dismantled, repaired, and reshipped by experienced Scappers. The Neolibyan woman **Khadala** has declared Syracuse her home and has created an incomparably huge technological empire there.

SPLENDOR AND VANITY

Neolibyans have perfected the art of trade. They are the personification of capitalism. In their world, everything has a price and obstacles are nothing more than line items in their financial statements. People and their emotions become goods for sale. They snicker at human rights, ignoring them with impudence. Freedom is merely the condition one needs in order to purchase the bondage of others.

If you examine the splendid boulevards of Tripol—the richly decorated proud people and the colorful markets filled with art

from all over the world—and find yourself intoxicated by the overwhelming depth and complexity of the city, then you have glimpsed briefly into the soul of a Neolibyan.

Wealth and opulence, deeply rooted in self-confidence, are the Neolibyan pillars of life. Addiction to success and the ambition to become the richest citizen of Tripol forces them to work harder and harder every day.

The rifle is an ancient status symbol that has survived to this day. Weapons, just like clothes, are a display of Neolibyan wealth and affluence. The modern rifles are captivating with their slim, elegant shape and subtle embossed designs upon the barrels. It doesn't matter how well a rifle works in battle. Boring facts like speed or ammo capacity are grounds for immediate snubbing. All that matters are looks. Gold and precious stones are popular decorations—if they are in vogue.

Here too, in the world of style, Tripol is the driving force. Whoever wishes to avoid being labeled as a primitive or philistine has to adjust to the fickle tastes and whims of the metropolis. Promoting an air of affluence is paramount in order to maintain a hold over a prosperous trade route.

A Neolibyan has to pay attention to more than slipping into societal mediocrity. He must also keep his tradesmen and slaves from gallivanting in the streets like beggars or colorblind savages. They are tied to him and are a direct reflection of his status. Only outside of Tripol will decadence slowly transform into indifference. Beyond the city walls, people wear the colors that fit their mind and character, shaking off the heavy restraints of the market city.

CARTOGRAPHERS

Neolibyan cartography is second to none. The auctioneer will often order a cartographer to accompany an expedition in order to measure and record the topography of foreign lands. Licenses are issued according to the resulting map and auctioned off to the highest bidder.

The assets needed to purchase these high-profile certificates are beyond the reach of less-affluent Neolibyans. Many young Neolibyans will work as cartographers to build their wealth and influence. The position of cartographer developed more out of necessity than idealism.

Aside from drawing maps, cartographers also measure the land, record trade routes, and mark areas of political influence. Almost every pillaging expedition has a Neolibyan with a sextant, colored pens, and rolls of paper.

TRADE NETWORKS

The known world has long been divided up amongst the Neolibyans. Their unparalleled success is not due solely to the acumen of any one individual. Their wealth can generally be attributed to expansion of trade routes and free commerce between outposts—it is unseemly for a Neolibyan to hinder another Neolibyan's business.

To compare the cult with a sprawling slime mold might cause a Neolibyan to smile bitterly, but the analogy fits. Greedily, it

absorbs any nourishment it finds and only ebbs when it has devoured all of its resources. The Neolibyans are like a complete organism. They are not always at peace with each other and sometimes they resist cooperation, but the economic factors at stake repel dissent and hold the cult together. The values of the Neolibyans are omnipresent and repel corruption in even the most remote outposts.

The Mediterranean cities flourish in the protective and warming hands of Neolibyan wealth. They depend on it and could not survive otherwise. Goods from all kinds of countries have allowed these cities to blossom. They would fall back into meaninglessness if these goods ever stopped coming.

ORGANIZATION

The Neolibyans don't recognize strict hierarchies. Wealth is king. However, certain restrictions must be recognized if a Neolibyan wishes to extend his influence through the cult. Licenses of the Tripolitan Merchant Bank and contracts between the Neolibyans themselves must be strictly followed. To disrespect them is to be punished severely; assets are frozen, properties are seized, and memberships are revoked. The Scourgers, as the guardians of tradition, are happy to enforce these proclamations.

Who gets to decide what constitutes a breach of contract? In Tripoli, the auctioneer decides. Throughout the rest of Africa, an arbitration group is formed when a dispute arises. This

arbitration group consists of at least six Neolibyans, half of whom are appointed by the defendant and half by the plaintiff. They study the contract and the alleged breach, then arrive at a decision. There is no legal process or formality to these proceedings. There is, however, plenty of flattery, bribery, cajoling, reasoned debate, and violent raging arguments. Regardless of the methods used in reaching a verdict, one is always reached. Nobody supports a tradesman that breaks contracts, and their reputation will follow them forever.

THE SPIDER IN ITS WEB

Tripoli, as the seat of the Neolibyan cult, is the heart of the new Africa. In the Tripolitan Merchant Bank, the exploitation of the world is plotted and executed with surgical precision. The method is simple: once a year the available trade routes are auctioned off to interested Neolibyans. Whoever wins a bid controls the purchased territory until he loses it to a competitor. He alone is permitted to conduct business in this region. No one dares to dispute his authority; his word is law. Powerful monopolies are created, fall apart, and grow again every year.

Eastern European princes battle constantly with armies of Scourgers who happily indulge in bloody retaliation against the white men and their historic atrocities. On the coasts of Franka and Purgare, the Neolibyans are in absolute control of all trade.

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS THAT COMES AFTER THE MILLENNIUM
 THE DISEASES
 OF WATER, SKY,
 AND EARTH,
 WILL ASSAULT MANKIND,
 THREATEN HIS FUTURE
 HE WILL RESUSCITATE THAT WHICH HE HAS DESTROYED
 AND WILL WORK TO PRESERVE THAT WHICH HAS SURVIVED.
 HE WILL FEAR THE DAYS THAT LIE BEFORE HIM.
 BUT IT WILL BE TOO LATE.
 WASTE WILL COVER THE EARTH,
 AND THE WATER WILL FLOW DEEPER AND DEEPER.
 ONE DAY IT WILL SWELL
 TAKING EVERYTHING WITH IT,
A FLOOD OF BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS.
 BECAUSE OF IT THERE WILL BE NO FUTURE FOR THE EARTH
 AND THE AIR WILL DISSOLVE THE BODIES OF THE WEAK.
 [JOHN OF JERUSALEM]

NEW PATHS

The cult is growing, but the number of profit-yielding routes has stagnated. Many Neolibyans leave the annual auctions empty handed. Most of them become administrators or caravan leaders in the entourage of an even richer Neolibyan.

If a Neolibyan fails to secure a trade route during the auction, only a few options remain. There are free trade areas in Borca, Pollen, and Balkhan, but the profit potential is uncertain, the competition in these areas is fierce, and the territory is awash with unpredictable dangers. A second option is the African artifact grounds. These areas are jealously guarded by the natives. While the risk is enormous, the profit can be enormous too. An air of adventure and romance surrounds the infamous Neolibyans that scoff at the licenses and advance deep into enemy territory, seeking unknown glory.

In the meantime, troops of Scappers scour for relics of the European ancestors in the Borcan ruins. The Neolibyans are their captives, drivers, and leaders.

ORIGINS

Although the “libyan” in Neolibyan recalls the pre-Eschaton country of the same name, the tradesmen come from all regions in Africa—Berbers, Arabs, and Sub-Saharan Africans. All types of faces and skin tones exist harmoniously in the cult, from lightly tanned to ebony black.

The former conflicts between the clans has ebbed away. They are all African; no longer a Libyan, Swahili, or Tuareg. Xenophobia is restricted to the European tribes and is aimed at the hostile culture of the ancient oppressors. It is more a forced tradition than an emotion really felt by the rest of the Africans. If Neolibyans travel north without the Scourgers, they are generally more tolerant and cosmopolitan.

DEEPLY ROOTED

Once the Scourgers repelled their enemies after the Eschaton, then the true work of the Neolibyans and Scappers began. They had to rebuild a destroyed country and gather wealth during a time of great poverty and sadness. The people could look to the past and thank them for their achievements. They could be content with the sacrifice of the Neolibyans. But instead, they demand more.

Neolibyans have always been intrinsically tied to the village of their family. They are not leaders but providers. If they fail in their business, it's not only a personal failure but they also risk the social decline of their clan. Nobody in Africa wants to be the father, mother, brother, or sister of a loser. The competition between the villages is fierce, and the fight for status is waged on the backs of the Neolibyans. It would be a burden for them if they didn't enjoy their part in this performance.

The fate of their community lies in their hands, but the knowledge that they are the providers of a strong tribe won't allow them any room for self doubt. They can buy anything and sell it to anyone. They love the challenge. “That's impossible” doesn't exist in their vocabulary. Money is their god, and this god blesses their villages with luxury buildings, factories, power plants, schools, and libraries.

AUCTIONS

Traditionally, licenses are auctioned on the first day of the first month of each year. There were only a few exceptions in the long history of the cult. One of them was quite recently, when a storm over the Mediterranean kept dozens of Neolibyan ships trapped in Bedain. The auctioneer broke the tradition and postponed the negotiations for ten days. A Neolibyan should never rely on this, however. A Neolibyan who arrives late to an auction or fails to send a delegate to the Merchant Bank can expect to lose all trade licenses.

The wealth obtained through the auctions lands in the safes of the Merchant Bank and from there is passed to the accounts of the craftsmen who advance the expansion of Tripol. Large sums are also given to poor settlements in the outlying areas. Neolibyans hate poverty near their capital.

A DROP OF BILE

Scourgers put their lives in jeopardy during battle for a chance at wealth. The Neolibyans, however, are considered cowardly tricksters who like to hide behind high walls and let others do their dirty work. Although the Neolibyans are responsible for the wealth of their country, every Scourger—even the lowliest—is ranked above them in their hometowns. It's tradition—or so the warriors say—that they are entitled to whatever they want from their village, and by proxy, the wealth of the local Neolibyan. Indeed, the Scourgers are completely supported by the Neolibyans: weapons, vehicles, oil, food, accommodations. The Scourgers demand and they receive.

Though the Scourgers mistreat the Neolibyans in the villages, the situation reverses on the coasts of Europe. Outside of Africa, the Neolibyans smile down on a host of compliant slaves and inferiors. They are the absolute rulers of the Mediterranean towns. Monumental palaces of stone and scrap, filled to the roof with weapons, jewelry, tea, oil, coffee, and other goods, dot the Mediterranean coast and are evidence of the wealth of the Neolibyans. The Scourgers pause, feeling their influence decrease. Far from home, they turn from superiors into supplicants.

RECRUITMENT

Traditionally, the Neolibyans have schools built in their hometowns. Education is seen as the key to wealth and influence. Despite the ancient art of mural painting, which has conveyed the history and values of the Africans over the centuries, the modern written language is again flourishing. Arithmetic is also one of the important subjects of a well-rounded education.

Talented boys and girls are encouraged in their specific talents and their families are financially supported by the Neolibyans. By the age of eleven, the candidate can join the entourage of a tradesman to travel the world and gain experience. If he survives the experience, he must stand before the auctioneer in Tripoli when he is seventeen. After the mentor has listed the candidate's achievements, a diatribe about the principles of the cult, the importance of the licenses and a Neolibyan's responsibility towards his family follows.

If the auctioneer hugs the applicant, he is accepted. However, if he only shakes his hand, the candidate's achievements are insufficient to warrant acceptance into the cult. Another year of tutelage and experience is required before the candidate can once again apply for admittance.

IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

The Neolibyans control the Mediterranean—a stinking soup, thick with algae. Trade communities of up to ten Neolibyans maintain bulky transport ships. These rusted-steel monsters of the sea transport hundreds of African Scrapers and their equipment to the northern Mediterranean coasts and then return to Bedain loaded with artifacts.

Business is great and the risk is moderate. Amidst the hordes of heavily armed Scrapers and Scourgers, who never forget who their ticket home is, the Neolibyans can trade relatively untroubled.

The Neolibyans aren't popular in Borca, and yet the general populace does business with the dark-skinned strangers despite the warnings of the Chroniclers. Spices, tea, fruit, and most importantly oil are hot commodities in the inhospitable tundra.

The cult's relationship with Franka is considerably more relaxed. The ruins were looted long ago. Slavery, like in Balkhan, has never existed. The Africans became aware early on of the tendency for expatriate Franks to go irrevocably berserk and therefore they have avoided using them on their plantations. Trade flourishes between the two cultures, bringing prosperity to both.

Purgare is a double-edged sword. Although the west is almost completely uninhabited, except for some psychonauts and a few Purgar hermits, this swathe of land demands a great deal of resources. Acidic gases from volcanoes and the Reaper's Blow obliterate the respiratory systems of Scrapers as well as the delicate filtration systems of the surge tanks. These costs are not easily absorbed. Trade with the Psychokinetics is hardly worth the trip—they are much too shy and far too dangerous. East of the Apennines, the Anabaptist cities in the Adriatic lowlands wait for weapons and oil. War has always been good for business. Unfortunately, in this region, it's the only business.

Hybrispania and Balkhan are more problematic. Since the Scourger invasion, the Neolibyans have also become a despised enemy. Trade is difficult in such a negatively charged atmosphere. Mobs lie in wait for an opportunity draw Neolibyan blood, avenging themselves for centuries of anguish and misery. This is quite bad for business. Security costs are astronomical, profit projections are uncertain, and there is the danger of losing everything if the opponent proves superior. Yet where most fear to tread, a few bold risk-takers can profit immensely. With a powerful army behind him, a Neolibyan can return to Africa with a shipload of slaves who always seem to fetch a handsome reward.

The most risky and morally questionable business practice of the Neolibyans is that of selling weapons to their enemies. As much as they may stand to gain, these unscrupulous Neolibyans must be careful that their weapons aren't turned against them.

PIRACY

The Neolibyans assert their claim to the Mediterranean. Indeed, it is the key to their success. To maintain their dominance, Neolibyans without trade licenses are employed by the Merchant Bank to secure the coastlines. In huge rowboats, armed with torpedoes, they defend the sea that is their lifeline.

Friendly foreigners contracted to defend vital shipping routes can use the Mediterranean unchallenged. These allied ships receive passes that protect them from the slavery trawlers that roam the high seas.

Ships without the protection of the Neolibyans are asking for trouble. If the Scourger pirates track them down and force them to dock, the enslaving of the captured crew is imminent. The prisoners are bound, appraised, and sold by knowledgeable Neolibyans. It is difficult to hide one's birth and status in these situations—few understand human goods as well as the Neolibyans.

NEOLIBYAN WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Just as mad as all the other sects, but at least they're not obsessed with annihilating the Africans. We provide them with weapons for their battles against the Jehammedans.

ANUBIANS

They don't see the mathematical beauty of a balance sheet, the influx and efflux, how everything finds balance in the bottom line. Instead, they prefer to wave their chicken bones in the air.

APOCALYPTIKS

The only white people that seem to understand the principles of a market economy, though they hardly recognize it. They have the lack of scruples needed to make it in today's world and that's why they are our enemies.

THE ASHEN

We know little about them. They seem to avoid the big cities—just like we avoid the solitude.

CHRONICLERS

Damn bastards! When our new white slaves set foot on African soil, many drop dead from pure fear. It's the fault of these deceitful demons! They spread lies and incite the people against us.

HELLVETICS

A fascinating, easily bribed cult. Highwaymen who control our access to the north. There is no use in complaining. Our business arrangements are quite satisfactory.

JEHAMMEDANS

A sect that apparently sees it as their duty to fight Africans wherever possible. Where these goat shepherds got that illusion from is a mystery to us.

MARSHALS

Footmen of the Chroniclers. Guards obsessed with justice.

SCOURGERS

Little ignorant ghosts. They think they are above us! At home we let them be; we play the compliant servants. But what are they really: nothing more than cattle that we lead into battle with our enemies.

SCRAPPERS

A capable sort, who, just like us, don't get the attention they deserve.

SPITALIANS

The white Medics are the only ones capable of protecting us from the psychovors, but the Scourgers and their senseless hatred for all northern tribes will never allow that. Will it again be us who must save Africa?

TRIBALS

So many tribes across the country, it can make you dizzy. Where they unite, trade potential grows. We don't see them as humans as much as an economic factor.

PERSONALITIES

UKMENA

Culture: African

Cult: Neolibyan (cartographer)

Characteristics: As the daughter of a Neolibyan tycoon, Ukmema always got everything she desired. Slaves, luxury, recognition—but she had no self-esteem. She took unnecessary risks, assumed the identities of famous Africans, dressed like a man and masqueraded as a Scourger, was decadent one day and walked the boulevards of Tripol clothed in rags the next. She had no goals, which led her to depression. Then an abrupt change occurred. She changed her name and found employment on a ship of the Merchant Bank. There, she earned herself a reputation as an excellent cartographer. Since then, she has opened up a number of new and exciting trade routes.

EZENACHI

Culture: African

Cult: Neolibyan (writer)

Characteristics: Ten years ago, Ezenachi owned a number of profitable licenses. Then one accident happened after another: a transport ship was sunk by pirates, a surge tank disappeared in Borca, business partners broke their promises. He put his pistol in his mouth, but hesitated, and instead signed on as a writer with his former competitor. Since then Ezenachi has been working hard, not allowing himself a second of rest. He works ceaselessly collecting information.

CHEIKH

Culture: African

Cult: Neolibyan (tycoon)

Characteristics: Cheikh's properties are bigger than those of his brothers and sisters. He controls two factories and several Scrapper halls in Syracuse. He has turned dozens of villages on the African coast into flourishing cities. Cheikh is rich even by Neolibyan standards, and he always makes sure every-one knows it. He detests modesty.

SCOURGERS

AVENGERS OF AFRICA

HYENAS

Night. The cropped grass glowed blue in the iridescent moonlight. The dry ground, like shards of glass, lay cracked and broken as if pounded into submission by giant fists. Raucous voices and laughter floated on the night breeze. A dark figure, crouching in the shadows, turned and grinned to his waiting comrades.

Furtive warriors gamboled, dog-like, up the slope toward the unwary revelers. Moonbeams illuminated their steel helmets and oiled assault rifles. Kevlar flak jackets creaked and boots pattered stealthily in the darkness. Ahead of them, a score of Balkhani warriors laughed and fought around a modest campfire. Their faces, red with alcohol, twisted in the flickering flames. None of them noticed the noose being drawn about their necks.

A savage shout and ten bloodthirsty Scourgers leapt from the shadows. They reached the dumbfounded Balkhani in a few loping strides. The Balkhani screamed in terror as men in glistening skull masks descended on them. They thrust uselessly with their rifle butts and scrambled toward darkness and sanctuary; the Scourgers however, were not easily evaded.

Overcome with bloodlust and malice, the Scourgers tore through the Balkhani. Ragged bodies littered the hilltop, limbs lay strewn across the ground, and blood glittered black in the moonlight. The few remaining Europeans fought desperately against the vicious Africans. A lone pistol shot

rang out in the melee and a surprised Scourger dropped to his knees, a dark pool spreading across his chest—his attacker was disemboweled before the dying Scourger hit the ground. The howls of the dying blended maddeningly with the sharp hyena-like baying of the African marauders. Chaos and terror ruled the night.

The few Balkhani still trying to defend themselves were snared in giant nets of woven vines. Others, merely wounded, were tossed, kicking and screaming, into a heap. The electrified whips of the Scourgers subdued the writhing mass of blood and sweat. The victims screamed as the crackling whips burnt their flesh and singed their hair.

The battle was over almost as quickly as it had begun—too quickly for the Scourgers. Unable to suppress their battle lust, the African avengers tussled and laughed in the gore of their recent victory. Thinly veiled eroticism ruled their play and after a bit, they surveyed the hapless prisoners. The most beautiful became their personal slaves. The rest were sent away with the slave traders.

DRAWINGS

The ancient city has been abandoned for ages. As old as it is, it is a newborn compared to the pain of the African people—the bound lion. The apartment buildings have all collapsed, only their cement facades still stand. All the pain and humiliation, all the crimes of the Europeans, are eternalized in colorful murals painted on these walls. Every fresco details a different era in the history of Africa. From ancient past to recent calamity, the story unfolds as you walk through the ruins.

The journey through time begins in the center of town. The first painting shows fragile black lines spread across the great continent. Soon, however, legions of white lines cross the big waters and turn the seas red with the blood of the peaceful Africans. The dark lines are now broken and strewn across the remaining length of the first wall.

To follow the story further, you would have to climb over a hollow car body and push away part of a collapsed concrete wall. A layer of dust obscures the fresco. Wiping away the grime reveals pictures of giant cities on both continents, filled with black towers and surrounded by cornfields. Then, the cities burn. Black lakes spread from the towers, the white lines seem to feed on it, and carry the darkness back to their homes. Some of the white lines herd groups of dark lines across the waters—many fall along the way. The picture ends here. The story doesn't.

As the evolution of the story unfolds, strange figures reappear throughout. They are characters that seem tied to the story of the African people—shaping it and telling it simultaneously. These are the great ancestors.

There are eight of them and they adorn almost every wall. Sometimes they appear alone and other times they are all together or consorting in smaller groups. The ancestors are different from the other images: they are quite detailed and opulently decorated. The patterns on their clothing mark them as tribal leaders, yet their faces are always obscured by hideous death masks. These are the great spirits that guide

and protect the African people and they seek to lead their followers into a new age.

The coastal cities are still burning, but in the back-country of Africa armies of black and red lines gather. First, they are solitary groups, some led by animals or grotesque unnamed creatures, while others are surrounded by light. Eventually, they merge into one big billowing wave, encircled by the eight titan-like ancestors. They point beyond the devastation, past the marching hordes of white lines, to the point of origin: Europe.

The murals progress out from the center of town. We follow the story until we reach a dilapidated wall painted with the most impressive chapter yet. In this painting, a giant African with superb muscles and blazing eyes stands-off against a white man armed with a nine-tailed whip. The African overpowers the European and grabs the weapon from his attacker. Without hesitation, the African begins flaying the European with his own scourge. Black lines muster behind this powerful African and they drive the Europeans back across the great water.

As the white lines retreat, the red and black lines split. The red lines return to rebuild the cities on the coast while the black lines push on across the waters. Now it is the European cities that burn.

The tribal creatures and animals that aroused the fighting spirit of Africa gather in the conquered cities while the eight ancestors stay with the fighters. Now the scourge can be felt across the entire continent of Europe, it has been taken from the enemy and now seeks to enslave him.

In the ruined city, rain has come. Man and animal seek shelter from the relentless assault of the sky. Through the hollowed window of a barren building we catch a glimpse of a hunched figure who crushes roots into indigo pulp in a mortar. The story of Africa is far from over and only the future will show what story the blue dye will be used to tell.

THE LION'S CLAWS

Claws sharpened into deadly daggers by hatred and experience; claws sharpened to rend the soft flesh of the white Europeans—the Scourgers attack with the massive forepaw of an angry continent. The bonds have been broken; the arrogance of Europe fanned away like annoying insects. The tables have turned. Africa has found its liberators in the Scourgers.

The Scourgers are the warrior caste of the African people and at the same time the guardians of their traditions. Battle is the center of their lives; a Scourger's life is regarded as the only tribute appropriate for the ancestors. A constant regiment of exercise conditions their bodies—the temple of the ancestors. It is the Scourger's joy and sacrifice.

The Scourgers love to show off their taut muscles. They flex and tear their clothing in the mirrored windows of the sedans of the bloated Neolibyans. Soft, shapeless bodies are despised by the Scourgers, because having a lust for fatty meat and alcohol is what made it possible for the whites to enslave the proud Africans in the first place. Turning from the ancestors and to capitalism is what sealed the fate of the black continent. The

Neolibyans have difficulty standing up to the Scourgers. If only the African people hadn't adopted the beliefs of the warriors! Even though the Neolibyans bring wealth to the villages, the Scourgers are the ones the people truly respect.

THE WHITE ENEMY

The conflict between Africa and Europe is glorified by the Scourgers as a cosmic conflict between black and white. They see the Europeans as born oppressors that can only be kept at bay through their ultimate destruction. When they go into battle, they wear their traditional death masks—grinning skulls that fill their enemies with terror. They seek to repay the agony that the Europeans once brought upon the Dark Continent in the form of slavery, epidemics, exploitation, and oppression. Packs of Scourgers advance far into the forests of Hybrispania, free Borcan ruins from local Scrappers, and wage bloody battles against Balkhani voivodships. Their prisoners become slaves that work off the centuries-old debt in the African fields. The Africans don't see anything wrong with this; it is merely compensation.

LIVING HISTORY

The frescos in Agadesh are the only ones known at this time, but hardly any Scourger ever visits this ancient city of ruins. The past is alive for the warrior cult, and one must learn it directly from the mouth of a master storyteller. It is only through a powerful

orator that the spirits of the ancestors can pass their wisdom. Stories about the history of a clan often turn into ecstatic celebrations where the participants fall into a trance through hours of dancing to monotonous drum beats. The revelry leads them down a path directly to the darkest depths of their soul.

After the dancing, they crowd around the oldest Scourger present who has opened the gates of his mind by chewing intoxicating plants. His narrations are strange and he speaks in tongues or falls into a strange sing-song, but on a subconscious level everybody understands him. Awareness seeps through their pores. They feel and experience the story, understanding the deeper meaning of the tale without having understood a single word.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

It was the spirits of the ancestors that formed the lion from a lump of clay. Its wrath has spread across the savannah all the way to the northern lands where the white man trembles in fear. The ancestors view their work with pride.

The Scourgers represent tradition and the willingness to die for their country and their way of life. They remind the people in the villages that every stone, plant, and animal is inhabited by spirits both good and evil. It is important not to anger these spirits through carelessness. Respect is given to the plants of the fields, stones

are laid gently aside, and the butchered antelope is thanked for letting the hunters kill it. Every step in an African's life is marked by caution.

The Scourgers are famous for their wood carvings of complex family trees. The spiritual as well as physical relations are shown on them. Most Scourgers can trace their lineage back to one of the eight ancestors. In African villages, artful ebony boards are in front of every building, telling strangers the family history. Wood carving is the only kind of work the Scourgers choose to do; agriculture or work in the oil fields is considered dirty and contemptible. Battle and hunting are suitable vocations for the traditional Scourgers; everything else is slave work.

THE EIGHT ANCESTORS

In Africa, the curse of Babylon has slowly been losing its grip. A rapidly increasing number of Africans speak in a common, though bizarre language. This is particularly true amongst the Scourgers. Though they come from many different regions and tribes, their differences seem to melt when they get together. Words and syntax disappear and are replaced with strange clicking and scratching sounds. Though their language seems unintelligible, the people seem to understand it on a level deeper than any words could normally convey.

The cause of this phenomenon is still a mystery and might have something to do with the strange plants of the southern jungles. The Scourgers view this shift in communication as a divine act of the ancestors. They view the ancestors as omnipresent, capable of absorbing an individual's thoughts and changing them into the language of the soul. Whatever the cause, the effect is apparent: Africans are coming together.

FOREIGN ARSENALS

Scourgers strive for neither wealth nor luxury. They live off what nature offers and take only what they are given. When a Scourger peeks into a dim hut, the occupant offers them everything they have. As warriors, their time on earth is limited, so the people of Africa feel obliged to make their lives as comfortable as possible. Nothing is denied them.

Even with this great freedom, there are boundaries that even a Scourger should not cross. For example, if a Scourger is suspected of greed—hoarding wealth or demanding gifts without fulfilling his obligations—he is taken care of without discussion. Wherever he is found indulging in excesses, be it lavish Neolibyan dinner parties or extravagant deviancy in a seedy brothel, he is dragged by his peers into the street and savagely beaten. In the country, he is tied to a stake, beaten, and left to swelter under the oppressive African sun. The humiliation and pain serves the Scourgers well, though. It purifies their minds and souls and reminds them of who they are: the claws of the lion.

With pure mind and spirit, a Scourger only requires one thing: the tools of war. The arsenals of the Neolibyans are open to them. Armaments common in Scourger hands are assault

rifles, grenades, machetes, and bolo nets. They also favor the electrified whip, or scourge, for which they are named.

Koms are the vehicles of the Scourgers. These buggies have metal cages installed in the beds that are well suited for carrying slaves back to Africa.

All these items are found in the over-grown military bunkers in the mysterious back country of Africa. Their retrieval is usually the first adventure in a young Scourger's life.

PATRIARCHY

Countless communities and cultures have contributed resources and fighters to the Scourgers' ranks. The dominant culture of the cult has changed numerous times, but one thing has remained constant: the cult is exclusively male. Women are not allowed into the Scourger ranks. The Scourgers claim many reasons for this—physical inadequacy in fights, the fact that their mere presence makes the men's blood boil with passion, or that jea-lousy might turn the men against each other. Regardless of their rationalizations, in the end it is simply dictated by tradition.

CONTRASTS

The contrasts between life and death, black and white, joy and sorrow are deeply rooted in the myths of the cult. The cult sees itself as part of the African trinity: Neolibyan, Anubian, Scourger. The spiritual levels on which the other two African cults operate is quite different from that of the Scourgers. The Neolibyans are capitalists and the Scourgers take what they need from them. Anubians save people whereas the Scourgers die for them. They don't regret this, however. They relish it.

Contrast is also visible in their appearance. They wear flak jackets and steel helmets but walk barefoot across blistering terrain. They carry modern firearms as well as the traditional African oval shield. They thunder across the steppes on their *koms*, but keep hyenas with them as their constant companions.

FAR FROM THE FRONT

Scourgers only experience peace in death. Even when they convalesce at home, far from the front lines, Africa still needs them to ply their trade. The people can send them into the jungle at any time to kill wild animals. Neolibyans use them as protection for their caravans. If a slave escapes, Scourgers are immediately dispatched. Peace is only found during walks through the jungle or moments of respite on the battlefield.

Everyone loves them for their commitment, though. At night they are asked to join family dinners and retell their adventures. Children crowd around them, climb on their laps, and beg to see their bulging muscles. This is followed by arm wrestling and a lot of laughter until late at night. Meanwhile, the Neolibyans grimly watch the festivities. They are ever on the outside, watching the villages squander their wealth and idolize the Scourgers.

THE PACK

Scourgers never stay home for long. After a few days in their tribal enclave they are back on their way to the steel ramps of Neolibyan transporters. The days of the crossing can be peaceful if the pecking order didn't have to be checked.

Scourger packs don't have a military structure with a ranking system that would allow promotion for good achievements. Rather, a natural order is established through wrestling matches and trials of strength. The strongest dominates

the pack and decides what is to be done and how to punish misbehavior. He is called *chaga*, which means "dominant." The weakest, however, has to be content with the name *dufu*, African for "fart."

Chagas that have been able to maintain their dominance over their pack for long periods are called *dumisai*. They aren't treated any differently because of this name, but competition ceases and the pack submits to the *dumisai* until he retires or dies. Submission like this is rare and a sign of the highest respect.

UNTIL DEATH

Becoming a Scourger is not determined by birthright, nor is it achieved through heroic deeds. It is the mother who decides whether her child will become a warrior. At age twelve, the child must prove his bravery and value to the cult when it comes to fighting. Depending on where the youth is from, this test can look quite different. Near Gibraltar, the Scourgers free a slave that the young African has to catch and wrestle. The cultists in Tripoli demand that the youngster kill a wild animal with a spear.

After his initiation rite, the youngster is introduced to his village as a new Scourger and from that point may live off of the local Neolibyans. However, he still must recover his helmet and flak jacket from an old military base within a month's time. If he fails, he will lose his prestigious status. In some regions, he is also required to carve a death mask for himself out of a piece of ebony. This allows an ancestor to enter the Scourger's soul.

Between twelve and twenty-eight, all Scourgers are considered warriors and are provided for by the village. They are not allowed to marry because their death would rob their wives of any financial support. This doesn't seem to have any effect on their sexual appetites, however.

After the age of twenty-eight, they celebrate the detachment ritual vow, a dedication to use their heads more than their fists and granting them the status of elder. This does not mean they abstain from fighting, but they are generally found behind the lines, planning forays and orchestrating the foot soldiers.

Scourger elders are allowed to get married—as many women as they are able to provide for on their own. However, the Neolibyans are only required to support the warrior himself. For his family, the Scourger has to find other sources of income. Unfortunately, he is still not allowed to work so he generally supports himself by selling slaves to the Neolibyans. Even if they do succeed in establishing a family, they can never escape the fighting.

If a Scourger survives past his forty-fifth birthday, he is regarded as a very wise man and begins to manage the affairs of his village alongside the local Neolibyan. They act as lawmen or grow closer to the ancestors by becoming shaman hermits. Their number is quite small, as the demanding life of a warrior leaves very few alive past forty.

DREAMERS

Africa is a continent filled with myths, many inspired by climate changes and the advancement of the psychovors. Some legends seem to have become reality. At night, the ancestors appear in the dreams of the Scourgers, pulling them into the glory of their untainted souls and speaking to them quietly about important events. In Europe, the spirits are too quiet and far away to be understood. But the farther south a Scourger travels, the more intense the dreams become.

The dreamer sees visions of bloodshot eyes and evil grinning masks. Drums, rattles, and other percussion instruments play a complex rhythm that resounds in their subconscious. The Scourgers embrace these bizarre images because through their dreams they are close to their ancestors. This is how they absorb the power the ancestors seek to bestow upon them.

SCOURGER WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Apparently a warrior clan of the white people. So far, they haven't turned against us, but the wings of the Crow will only be permanently broken when they too have become slaves.

ANUBIANS

We bow our heads to those that know what was and what is going to be. The Anubians are our brothers in spirit, their thoughts lead our Scourgers.

APOCALYPTIKS

Beautiful and sensual whites that fetch quite a price in the Tripol markets.

THE ASHEN

Like worms, they hole up in the earth. It must be a disease that forces them to lead this life far away from the populated camps. They are outcasts who satisfy their hatred for the healthy through bloody cruelty.

CHRONICLERS

It is said they speak in enigmas like ancient spirits that have survived the eons. As long as our paths don't cross, we will continue to avoid them.

HELLVETICS

We can't joke or laugh with them, but they are good friends. They have always stood between the big Lion and the skimpy Crow, and they watch us. They are the gatekeepers between two worlds—sometimes in the way, but considerate when our Neolibyans unload the oil barrels.

JEHAMMEDANS

To stand up to the Jehammedans is like advancing into the heart of Africa naked: one returns scratched and bruised.

MARSHALS

To hunt in their territory can cost you your head. Obstinate, they line up along the borders of their empire and dare to threaten us! The cowardly Neolibyans go along with this. They even do business with them. If we didn't depend on the fat tradesmen's surge tanks, we would have turned the Marshals' arrogance into bitter humility on our plantations.

NEOLIBYANS

Fat cows with big udders that can be milked until they are drooping and wrinkly.

SCRAPPERS

They are like pigs digging in the dirt. They want to make a profit for themselves. What an arrogant attitude. We spit on them.

SPITALIANS

They are the white shamans—many times they have called evil spirits on our pack. Kill them quickly and burn their bodies before the pestilence escapes from them.

TRIBALS

Migrating families are easy prey. The quality varies but considering the small risk, it's a good deal.

PERSONALITIES

AYUBU THE BLOODHOUND

Culture: African

Cult: Scourger (dumisai)

Characteristics: Ayubu dealt the Hybrispanians a heavy blow when he and his pack discovered three guerrilla platoons in the streets of Valencia and dealt with them bloodily. Since then, he has been regarded as a dumisai. Every day he proves again that he deserves the title—he never allows himself or his pack a moment of rest. He constantly advances into the Hybrispanian forests to fight the arch-enemy of Africa.

EPHREM

Culture: African

Cult: Scourger (dufu)

Characteristics: Ephrem is a hermaphrodite—half man, half woman. This makes him a nobody in the eyes of the Scourgers. Therefore, he wrathfully thrusts himself into dangerous situations. He wants to impress others with his deeds and advance in the pecking order of the pack. All without success. He is always going to be a dufu.

AGU

Culture: African **Cult:**

Scourger (warrior)

Characteristics: Agu's eyes are sharp and his hands are steady; his blood is hot like an ox's. He is a good warrior, but Hybrispania has broken him. Agu is tired of war. He hates the impenetrable forests and constant gunfire. He wants to come home, look for a wife and settle down. If only he hadn't lost his heart to a female slave in Al-Andalus—a slave that's already the second wife of a Neolibyan.

SCRAPPERS

THE DIRT DIGGERS

FOR A HANDFUL OF SCRAPS

The wind hisses, driving dust and ice into her face, piercing it like a thousand needles. Her skin is porous and leathery, her eyes lie deep in their sockets. She peers furtively through small slits in her meaty eyelids. Her brows, lashes, and long, flowing hair are caked with snow. Her breath condenses above the spotted linen scarf that covers her mouth and nose. A patchwork cloak made with layers of leather, plastic, and hemp fibers lies heavily on her shoulders. She must weigh as much as a cow.

The mammoth she rides stomps blithely through an abandoned ditch. Rats flee to every side. The huge beast's shaggy red coat swirls around the legs of the Scrapper on its back.

Her hands are buried in the thick, wooly undercoat. Her tiny eyes flit over the remains of houses that teeter on the edge of the chasm. She reads the runes engraved on the broken walls, scanning the obliterated hamlet for clues. Gently, she coaxes her mount onward through the desolate streets.

Her raspy scream paralyzes the monster in mid step. It swings its huge head involuntarily from side to side, grinding its massive curved tusks over the snow-covered asphalt.

The woman fixates on something in the ruins to her left. She dismounts and hurries over to a pile of asphalt without losing sight of her target. Sinking to her knees, she grasps a break in the cement roughly the size of her fist and flings the rubble aside.

Digging and panting, she rips through the debris, revealing pipes and black hoses that twist and merge like a den of asps. Deeper and deeper she digs. The labyrinth of rubber and metal converges on a square metal machine covered in ancient forgotten symbols. Truly a great find! With her last bit of strength she rips the six-hundred-year old generator from its brittle anchor and drags it out of the ruined pump house over to the mammoth. For the animal, the generator is just another burden.

Human and beast—they are not the only ones sifting through the debris for relics. Three blocks away, another Scrapper has laid his outerwear aside so he can climb through a narrow opening into an ancient abandoned basement. A few kilometers away, yet another Scrapper, this one young and inexperienced, succumbs to shock as she lies in a collapsed sewage tunnel, her leg crushed by falling concrete. Thousands of Scrappers have followed the calling and comb through the ruins of Europe. They scour the dusty ruins in search of lost technology or deadly weapons. It is a profession that has invigorated the imaginations of adventurous spirits for centuries.

While the Scrapper profession is an ancient one, they are an endangered breed. Strangers come from far to the south, beyond the great sea, and they threaten the sanctity of the lifestyle. The strangers travel in groups, attack the land from their foul transporters, and rob it briefly of loneliness and permanently of artifacts. They are loud and jocund; the exact opposite of the silent and quirky European Scrappers. They are the fearsome Scrappers of Africa.

LOST KNOWLEDGE

The cities of the ancestors were deserted. All that remained were vague indications of a high culture that stretched into the sky. Twisted steel girders and brittle crumbling walls hinted at their history. Between the ruins, dunes of red crater ash accumulated. It consumed concrete, flesh, and bone. Rotted scraps of clothing fluttered dismally in the wind. A new brand of human arose from the dust—the Scrapper. He fled from the gleaming clouds of ash, refusing to be disheartened by the ubiquitous destruction. With a keen eye, he appraised the ruins, ignored the pale bones of his predecessors, and dug deep into the dirt to reveal the shining, metallic artifacts of the ancestors. The times called for careful scrutiny of every discovery. Even though a Scrapper might know what something was and what it did, if it couldn't be used immediately, it was tossed aside for later generations to treasure.

In those desperate years after the Eschaton, the Scrappers were known by many names: treasure hunters, mechanics, or seekers. They were men and women who felt obligated to their community and moved out into the surreal and obliterated world to gather replacement parts for machines vital to their community's survival. They had no time to place their hope on the success of one individual, so they swarmed over the dusty plain like scraps of paper from an overturned waste basket.

Many dangers awaited them: unstable buildings, poisonous gas leaks, and marauding gangs. It was a new world—a world where only the strongest and most cunning could survive. Many Scrappers paid the ultimate price, for they were the first to experience the land in its early, untamed state.

Eventually, most of the region's alliances, born of convenience, broke down due to internal discord. Leaders were revealed as imposters and exiled to an uncertain future in the wastes. Communities were in desperate need of guidance. They courted the Scrappers, vying for their favor. They were, after all, the only ones who knew how to navigate the landscape. For their tales and equipment, Scrappers were offered food and a place to sleep. But the long, lonely weeks in the ruins gradually alienated them from the other survivors. They opposed the insincerity of the villages and their dependence on the remaining functional equipment. They served the camps, villages, and cities, but their home remained out in the wastes.

Similar developments occurred simultaneously in Africa. The large coastal cities were destroyed by tidal waves and the excavation began almost immediately. However, very little was salvageable. It quickly became clear that rebuilding the cities of the Mediterranean coast was not a worthwhile endeavor.

Finally, the surviving tribes gathered and headed toward Franka. When they arrived on the coast, they found more devastation. The hinterland, however, was a treasure trove. Steel girders, generators, and other artisans' needs were abundant in the wastes. They loaded vehicles and a myriad of technological artifacts onto their bulky transport ships. They even managed to salvage Frank production sites, shipping the factories in sections back to their homeland. Africa prospered, while Europe spiraled downward into a second Stone Age.

THE LUST FOR THE PAST

The centuries tugged mercilessly on Europe. The artifacts became objects of fascination. To operate them was a privilege few cults could afford. The knowledge of electricity and simple mechanics disintegrated through apathy. These were hard times for Scrappers. The demand for artifacts declined; a steel bar was worth more than a perfectly preserved laptop. But the Europeans couldn't surrender their fascination with technology completely. Sects emerged from nowhere with other ideas. They propagated the magical myths associated with the relics. Their cult halls resembled prehistoric scrap yards; everything was collected and worshipped. Their superstitions fostered a medieval view of the world—rusty objects became relics of a golden age. Other sects had a completely opposite world view. In their eyes, artifacts were responsible for the downfall of humanity and were considered wicked. This was no time to be a Scrapper.

Not everyone's views were so extreme, however. The pendulum eventually swung the other direction. Individual settlements learned how to restore less complex devices to functionality. Pumps needed water, gas, and diesel motors, and though they burned up the last of their fuel reserves, they managed to give the people energy and warmth.

APPEARANCES

To shovel centuries of dirt off old basement steps is a hard and dirty task. Crawling into a buried crypt is a challenge even wearing the hardest rags, and freezing to death is an ever-present danger. Therefore, the clothes of a Scrapper must be practical and durable. Leather patches on the knees and elbows, reinforced by plates or pins, are a must when one rakes through the ancient layers of earth and debris.

Camouflage is also vital when traveling alone in the wasteland. Gray, and mostly dark heaps of rags obscure a Scrapper's shape, obscuring them from the greedy eyes of cannibals, bandits, and other sinister characters. Those who fail to learn this lesson do not survive for long.

African Scappers are an exception. They travel in groups and are not at risk like the European loners. They reflect their individuality by wearing brightly colored clothes. Details of their rank and disposition, as well as where they come from, are encoded in the lively patterns that adorn their outfits.

In the raw climate of Europe, Scappers must wear protection over their eyes and mouth. The harsh winds and ever-present dust are constant hazards. Gas masks, goggles, and all sorts of protective equipment are salvaged throughout the ruins. Their ancestors were well prepared.

SHORTAGE OF RESOURCES

African Scappers were faster than their European counterparts at scavenging ruins after the Eschaton. The great cities of Franka were quickly pillaged. The industrial facilities of Franka were already transported and operational in Tripol or Bedain before the first European Scappers even stepped out of their bomb shelters.

Once Franka was plundered, the Africans turned to Pugare. Soon their relentless convoys thundered over the brittle streets of Naples on the way toward Rome. African Scappers hung onto the sides of the intimidating surge tanks like insects on decaying flesh. They scanned the villages, biding their time, searching for something better than the meager bits they discovered. The morale was excellent, because they shared a common goal worth the toil. Africa, oppressed for centuries, had broken its shackles and was picking over the carcass of Europe.

CHRONICLERS

The Chroniclers became for the Europeans what the Neolibyans were for the Africans. The cult of technophiles swarmed out from Borca towards Franka and Pugare, searching hungrily for any uncovered relics. When the Scappers found out about the Chroniclers' lust, they carted their finds to the monosyllabic strangers, who offered them valuable information in return. The Chroniclers later established the chroniced, the first and only stable currency since the cataclysm. The Chroniclers' new currency caused a frenzy among Scappers. Thousands streamed from the settlements into the ruins seeking fortune.

LONE WOLVES

For a Scrapper, life in the community is hard—small groups are at the mercy of larger gangs. One alternative is to sacrifice freedom for a certain degree of protection under the monolith of Justitian. For most Scappers, however, solitude is the best option. While an individual may be weak on his own, he is also better equipped to flee from danger. Loved ones become a liability. Egotism and severity are the principles of a Scrapper's instinct.

For weeks they wander alone through the ruins, lost in the majesty and history of the dilapidated buildings. Who might have lived here? What were his worries, his joys? Of course, the ancient cities owe the Scappers nothing and this serves to intensify their loneliness. Most Scappers are used to the dreary burden of solitude and continue on indifferently. However, some cannot deny their social nature and choose a dog for a companion. Others talk to themselves or speak to whatever half-rotted corpses they might run into.

When they return to civilization, it is only to deliver their collected scraps and stock up on provisions. It is also an opportunity to take advantage of the more sensual offerings of the Apocalyptiks.

METHODICAL PROCEDURE

Scappers don't just scramble after every glistening object they see. Their methods are meticulous. They mark off a promising area, comb through it, and then move on to the next area. If their customer has a particular demand, such as a pump motor, a wrench, or a ball bearing, they search in the ruins of a garage or a gas station. If they are to deliver weapons, they look for sport shops in market streets and scour through forests for old hunting blinds. Axes and crowbars can sometimes still be found in the debris around hardware stores or firehouses.

If the Scappers weren't so ragged and eccentric, the world would hail them as experts of the prehistoric era—as archaeologists.

STRENGTH IN THE COMMUNITY

For the African Scappers, it is an honor to set out in the name of their village to increase the prosperity of the community. The Scourgers treat them like dirt, and the Neolibyans view them as simple farmers, but they tolerate this abuse. They know their importance. African Scappers are idealists.

During an expedition, the community always remains at the center of their thoughts. Their journey is as much about family as it is about finding a valuable piece of salvage in the inhospitable fields of Europe. At night, after a long day in the dust, they laugh and carouse, sharing stories of their homeland to cure their homesickness. Among the ruins, they watch out for each other and work together. Individual wealth and glory is not their concern, only the prosperity of Africa.

TOWARDS THE NORTH

The path of an African Scrapper generally begins in Tripoli where the Neolibyans restock their ships and recruit. Although the demand for Scappers is enormous, the Neolibyans will not just take anyone off the street. The Neolibyans must be very careful how they man their expeditions since there are great financial risks in the way of supply purchases, vehicle leasing, and similar costs, all reliant on the capabilities of the Scappers. An inept Scrapper could severely unbalance the rest of the team. Recommendations from prior successful expeditions are highly prized.

Once an African Scrapper makes it onto the payroll of a Neolibyan, a long sea voyage and a murderous climate await him. Until this journey, many young Africans can't even imagine that water could freeze outside of a freezer or that layers of thick cloth are necessary just to survive the night.

Lately, the torturous conditions haven't been paying off. The wages are a pittance. Most Neolibyans allow Scappers to take a few items of lesser value home with them to make up for the currently dismal pay scale.

WARM EMBRACE

After months in the cold, the bones of even the heartiest Scrapper ache and their skin is chapped. Their gums bleed due to scurvy, a widespread problem among all Scappers. They must return to civilization or perish.

In the currency exchanges of the Chroniclers, Scappers sell their goods for handfuls of ragged chronicreds, which they promptly spend in the bathhouses, bars, and Apocalyptik whorehouses. Warm water, warm food, warm skin, and the bite of alcohol liberate their souls from hoarfrost. Their tongues loosen and they forget their troubles for a while. News and rumors make the rounds, maps of ruins are exchanged, and warnings to avoid certain dangerous areas are issued. Occasionally, a Spitalian, Apocalyptik, or Marshal will wander into the midst of a Scrapper gathering in search of fearless people for a message run, a smuggling operation, or an adventurous expedition.

Scappers have to muster all their courage to return to the cold beyond the settlement gates. Many eventually choose to remain within the warm embrace of a settlement, trading the potential riches in the artifact collection game for the meager security of a job in the Scrapper halls appraising or repairing scrap.

One day, however, the pressure will be too much. All the people scurrying about will grate on their nerves, and the noise of the city will become unbearable. When that day comes, a Scrapper simply packs their belongings and goes.

BACK HOME

After the return from the cold north, African Scrappers have little time to rest. They must unload ships, repair vehicles, and sort the scrap. Valuable written commendations are given to those Scrappers who go above and beyond, repairing, upgrading, and testing as many relic components as they can.

African Scrappers have proven themselves to be very handy in the field of mechanics. Combustion engines present no problems to a veteran African Scrapper. However, the mastery of electronic equipment proves elusive to them, since very few African Scrappers possess the skills and knowledge needed to use these artifacts.

Once an expedition comes to an official close, African Scrappers join the ranks of the unemployed and begin the hustle to secure another expedition all over again. Steady work is a rarity.

RUNES

Parents live on through their children, war generals through their victories, and heroes through legends. European Scrappers simply disappear. No one will recall Gram, who wandered through the tunnel system below the streets south of the Technikentrum his entire life; or Toktok, who searched for vestiges of refugees in the mountain caves east of Dustlung.

Despite their reservations toward society, the notion of anonymity is appalling for many Scrappers. To combat this they have developed their own language of runes. The runes are mostly made up of simple lines that are easy to scratch into a wall with a knife. Many Scrappers have their symbol tattooed on their forehead or the back of their hand as a sign of their individuality. They mark the ruins they've scanned with their rune. Other symbols serve as guideposts (arrows and triangles), warnings (jagged lines), or possible indications of fresh water (three horizontal lines). The meaning of the runes is different from region to region. There is no standard alphabet.

African Scrappers know nothing of this type of communication. They exist in a living community that prefers the spoken word.

OLD AGE

Few European Scrappers retire. Well into old age they continue to comb through ruins, searching for the one find that would lavish them with riches. For many, it's an addiction. Most obsessive Scrappers eventually perish in the wasteland. At some point, they just never reappear in the cities.

Some old timers find a home in the Scrapper halls. The Chroniclers will employ a veteran so he can pass his experience on to lower-level members of the order.

There is no other social safeguard. The usual contract between generations does not apply since most Scrappers have no children. Some are lucky enough to have a familial Scrapper help them along, but this is rare among this cult of outsiders.

For African Scrappers, old age is much different. The clan takes care of their elderly and treats them with respect. Children relish the stories told by gnarly old Scrappers. When death finally comes for an African Scrapper, the passage is one of dignity.

SECRET VAULTS

Like burros, European Scrappers trudge across the land. Some fasten their finds onto their clothing—beginners, who draw outlaws with their clatter. Those with more experience pile their artifacts onto a carrying harness made of tubes welded together. Others tug sleds or one wheeled wagons behind them.

Oftentimes, the burden becomes too great and a Scrapper needs to bury the fruits of his search in an inconspicuous and hopefully safe place—an old sewer system, the hollow space beneath collapsed concrete, or buried in a dust dune.

Parting with their haul is torture. When they finally complete the trek to the next city with the relics they could carry, their heart is heavy. Most return to their stash quickly, relieved to find their things untouched. Some, however, never return to claim their loot or find their treasures stolen. Scrappers refer to these hiding places as “vaults.” Many Scrapper vaults become the stuff of legends. There's Frahn, who bragged of his great find, then clenched his chest suddenly and dropped dead from his barstool; or old Tiber, who whenever he was short of cash took a valuable piece from his vault. Establishing a secure vault is an art; an art that many Scrappers have to learn the hard way. Scrappers are always on the lookout for vaults and have no reservations picking through another Scrapper's find and taking the best loot for themselves.

STEAL OR DEAL?

Few European Scrappers can assess the value of a find with any certainty and are dependent on their main buyer, the Chroniclers. Although the Scrappers consider this a nuisance, they have no choice but to trust them. The Chroniclers have developed the appraisal of artifacts into a science. They examine it on all sides, poke at it with diagnostic equipment, or scan it with a crackly box. Relic inspection may take a few seconds or possibly hours—either way, it makes no difference in the price. Scrappers have no choice but to accept the offer, sometimes annoyed, sometimes euphoric. Either way, they'll be back.

ALL OVER THE WORLD

In Europe the ancestors are omnipresent. Giant fields of debris cover the land; between them lie the remains of asphalt streets, rusty car frames, disintegrated gas stations, and dilapidated houses. Artifacts are everywhere. Initially, this land was a Scrapper paradise, but many regions have been completely pillaged. Despite the slim pickings in Europe, Scrappers can be found within the borders of each culture group.

> BORCA

In West Borca, finding an untouched spot borders on the miraculous. Things are different beyond the Reaper's Blow. The fields of debris there were conquered by nature and are considered cursed by the superstitious nomads.

In recent decades, several West Borcan Scrappers wandered off into the vast woods and pulled many valuable artifacts out of forgetfulness and into the daylight. However, the closest Chronicler clusters were hundreds of miles away—across a volcanic, ever-shifting earth that can only be bypassed by going through a Helvetican fortress. The journey is treacherous and discourages most Scrappers. Today, there is only one major Scrapper clan left in the region.

> FRANKA

The Africans had already emptied the Frank ruins long before the locals could even comprehend the worth of the artifacts. The cities on the southern coast in particular were almost completely depleted. Whoever wishes to find even a screw must be prepared for great adventure. Only in the structurally unsound basements that have remained buried for centuries is there still a chance for a fruitful discovery.

The Scrappers of Franka are bold figures who have stared death in the eye at least a thousand times. They are soldiers of fortune and the heroes of countless Frank legends, but they are rarely employed. Franka, with its functioning system of manufacturers, is no longer dependent on artifacts. The influence of the Chroniclers is limited to a smaller area, the only cluster being located in Aquitaine. Artifacts are mostly used for jewelry or are exported to Borca.

> POLLEN

The impact of the Pandora asteroid tore the land to shreds. Only in heavily reinforced cellars was it possible for artifacts to endure. There is not enough here to support a Scrapper culture like the one in Borca. Scrappers in Pollen are mostly mechanics who can repair a cart or build a pump out of a few screws and some wire.

> BALKHAN

For a long time, the ruins belonged strictly to the wild growth of nature. There were more important things to accomplish than digging for the past. Additionally, the intense community life of the Balkhani stands in opposition to the reclusive lifestyle of a Scrapper. However, a recent obsession with the stories of clammy crypts holding great fortune and powerful weaponry has developed. Now, local Scrappers search valiantly for superior weapons they can use to drive the intruders out of their land. The voivods expedite this search by employing experts to examine and buy salvaged relics. An interesting Scrapper economy exists within Balkhan. While discovered weapons fetch handsome rewards, electronic marvels are usually tossed aside as useless trash.

> HYBRISPANIA

War rages. The old cities in the south are lost. There is very little of value amidst the ruins. However, no one is interested in the old technology. They take what they need from defeated intruders.

Despite this, a Scrapper community does exist. They don't follow the dictation of the market and comb through northern Hybrispania while running from the war. As clever technologists, they use their finds for survival. They are weaklings in the eyes of the freedom fighters.

> PURGARE

Purgare has been thoroughly pillaged by the Africans. House facades and rubble are all that remain. Search concessions for Purgare from the Merchant Bank of Tripol fall in price every year, purchased only by young, inexperienced Neolibyans. These bargain-basement concessions never lead to riches.

The native Scrappers are becoming extinct. Only west of the Apennines will a Scrapper be able to find treasure. Unfortunately, the search conditions have become fatal as the land is filled with toxic gas clouds, burning lava streams, and scorching geysers. The few who remain are highly specialized treasure seekers with remarkable equipment and an unmatched survival instinct.

> AFRICA

The African hinterland is deficient in old technology. Prior to the Eschaton, the coastal cities came close to reaching the technological level of the European civilizations. However, these cities were cleaved into the Mediterranean by the flood. African Scrappers are travelers, and their destination is always the north.

SCRAPPER WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

Virtuous farmers who hide their simple nature behind manufactured symbolism and confusing doctrines. Most of the time, they don't really understand who, or what, they're worshipping.

ANUBIANS

Their beauty is often staggering. They are sublime despite all the surrounding squalor, but also a little batty.

APOCALYPTIKS

After weeks of loneliness, good burn works wonders. And after the burn, the whores! If there is anything that makes our kind homesick for the big cities, then it's the offerings of the Apocalyptiks.

THE ASHEN

Their bunkers must be filled with priceless treasures, but they deny access to all. Strange figures, the Ashen. Not to be trusted. Never turn your back on them for even a second.

CHRONICLERS

They don't speak much. Probably wouldn't have much to say anyway. They must be deformed freaks if they keep hiding behind those masks. That said, they pay well for scrap, and that's all that really matters.

HELLVETICS

Impressive gear they carry around. Would keep my shit straight for many winters. They don't cause any trouble if you stay out of their way.

JEHAMMEDANS

As pristine as they would have you believe they are, their souls are as foul as everyone else's. Why should we keep our distance from the pleasures of the Apocalyptiks? If they don't watch it, somebody's gonna piss on their leg without asking them first.

MARSHALS

They might be good people, but what they stand for rubs me the wrong way. I take care of myself. The people of Justitian probably see things differently.

NEOLIBYANS

The Chroniclers spread all kinds of horror stories about the African traders—that they steal our children, gut them, and use their innards for fish bait. It's not like the Chroniclers to talk shit. There must be a reason for their intense hatred.

SCOURGERS

You have to be on your toes around Scourgers. They're no more aggressive than the other idiots in this god-forsaken land, but they'll snatch your freedom. That fact alone makes them more dangerous than a perfectly aimed gunshot right between the eyes.

SPITALIANS

We see it in their eyes. They think we're meager rag collectors, but at least we are free. They are smug and self-righteous, consumed by the needs of their cult. I'd rather be dead.

TRIBALS

In a barrel full of insects, there's bound to be one or two that will sting you. That's the way it is with the tribes. Some are peaceful and help you with water and a strip of beef. Others will take a slice of you and cook it till it's well done.

PERSONALITIES

LOBO

Culture: Purgar

Cult: Scrapper

Characteristics: As a Caucasian among Africans, Lobo is unique in Syracuse. In the Scrapper metropolis, however, other rules exist, and he knows how to exploit them. With a crooked smile, he sells equipment that was looted and cannibalized by the Neolibyans back to Europeans—and so, occasionally, there are artifacts among his finds that actually should have made their way back to Africa.

HESTA

Culture: Hybrispinian

Cult: Scrapper

Characteristics: Digging in the dirt might be a pleasant life-style for some Scrappers, but it's not enough for Hesta. She doesn't just want to dwell in the dusty interiors of old cellars; she thirsts for the world. All of Europe is her playground, collecting information about grand treasures or delivering packages on her way from Borca to Hybrispinia. Apparently, she's even a darling of the Africans.

THE CRANIUM COLLECTOR

Culture: Unknown

Cult: Unknown (suspected Scrapper)

Characteristics: A headless body lies on a street in the city of Justitian: the remains of a female Scrapper. The score of the Cranium Collector is now 29 to 0 against the Marshals, and they are still without a lead. Perhaps the murderer is protected from the top, as many presume.

SPITALIANS

DEFENDERS OF THE WORLD

STERILE

Bald figures dressed in white scamper down the dusky corridor, their clothing rustling with every step. Doors branch off into libraries, sleeping quarters, and laboratories. Proclamations scribed high on the walls scream, “Never forget!” “Cleanliness!” “For the world!” The hallway’s overhead lights flicker, cooling to a smoldering red before radiating into a gleaming white light. The generators are causing problems—time to let the Chroniclors into the facility again.

In the main corridor, two hygienists in dark neoprene suits and white protective gloves decontaminate the Spitalians coming in from the outside, taking their clothing and monitoring their showers. The cleansed Spitalians wait as the hygienists analyze their test results. Only when approved will they be discharged and allowed passage deeper into the complex.

The biting odor of disinfectants lingers in the air. A labyrinth of lanes and tunnels snake through the windowless barracks.

Giant letters spell names in the concrete blocks. Spitalians stream through the buildings like an army of ants, disappearing into this or that

doorway or vanishing down ramps into the darkness with purpose.

Their heads and shoulders are splotchy and pale—bleached by lime.

Their eyes sit deep in

their sockets. They’ve seen too much for their age. Some of them wear matte-black suits split by a wide white stripe down the center. They carry tall staves with folded blades at the base and glass cylinders filled with a cloudy fluid adorning the top.

One Spitalian looks up as he passes close to a meter-high wall made of interlinking concrete blocks that looks as if it had been constructed rapidly. Fully equipped Spitalians patrol above:

heavy gas masks, bulldog style, with filters at the cheeks; backpack radios complete with shaky antennas; and smoldering flamethrowers held loosely in the crooks of their arms. Their stature is intimidating.

Outside these walls, long lines of people march in determined, orderly rows toward the complex. They are sick or injured. Many are doomed to die. Moans and screams carry over the walls, enveloping the Medics who care for the legions of the ill. Chronicreds, furs, flashy junk, oil bottles, and other semi-precious items pile up before the Spitalians—gifts from the sickly who wait for their treatments to begin. Some will be treated with scalpel and saw, others with just a simple prescription. The Spitalians are like gods to these poor people.

Several hundred kilometers away from the Spital, in the land of Pollen, a black stallion shakes his head in irritation, trying to peel an enormous gas mask from his head. The stallion's master, a preservist, rubs her hand soothingly on the beast's neck. The horse scrabbles with his hooves and neighs tensely under his mask. He's nervous. The preservist tightens the reins. With a detached glance she surveys the massacre that her Spitalian troops have committed against the Strange Ones—grotesque figures that seem to have sprung directly from Hell. The world is now better, cleaner.

Spitalians. They are everywhere; they roam the entirety of Europe. They overrun "impure" settlements. They plunder, pillage, and purge with flame. The wounds they cause will heal. Eventually.

AFFLICTION

In an abandoned wing of a dark and dusty hospital, behind a door barricaded by rusty bed frames, the history of Borca's oldest cult resides in old hanging files, scribbled on narrow scraps of paper tucked between patient charts and lists of the dead. Brush the ashes coating the brittle pages away (a last testament to the Great Fire of 2499), and an inglorious chapter of early Spitalian history is revealed. The words are broken and choppy, like the panting of a hunted man.

Following a bloody revolt in the Wupper Valley, streams of sickly refugees surged toward the Southern Ruhr Region Crisis Center located in Dortmund. The facility was unwillingly transformed into an overrun military hospital. The foul odor of death wafted through the streets. The physicians here were poorly equipped to deal with the sudden and desperate influx of refugees.

Within the walls of the crisis center, human beings became nothing more than statistics. The medics, nurses, and doctors were overwhelmed. Eventually, they had to develop a method of patient evaluation to determine who would receive treatment and who would be turned away. Scores were issued to all patients for their conditions, and only those who reached a certain level were seen. The rest were left to suffer.

THE SECOND WAVE

Four years after the Eschaton, the situation at the crisis center normalized. Former UEO troops served as police to the physicians and kept the area secure. The troops dispersed restless crowds; martial law was invoked liberally. Vast areas of Dortmund resembled a necropolis—skeletons in flittering rags lined the streets, carelessly swept aside by bulldozers. Dogs, rats, and insects ripped the last of the flesh from fresh cadavers. The wind brought the red crater ash along with it. The ash laid over the pain and lingering illness, burying this part of history completely.

During that time, the flow of refugees dwindled to a mere trickle. The situation became manageable. Yet no one was safe; one last danger remained. The physicians trembled with hope that HIVE, the notorious malady from Africa making its way to the cold north, would subside. But this fantasy led to disappointment. The doctors barricaded themselves behind the walls of the hospital when the disease first surfaced in the Ruhr Region. Members of the crisis center, who made it to the complex too late, suddenly found themselves before closed gates. Those in the military camps, awaiting their cures, were told to leave the region, as the hospital would be closing, "effective immediately." A surge of anger rose from the helplessness and desperation, spurring acts of violence and chaos. But the HIVE was already raging among the attackers, thinning their ranks. Clubs and knives slipped from the hands of the ailing. The revolt was broken before it had begun. The medical staff watched the horrifying episode unfold before their walls from barred windows and high rooftops. The desperation of the ill was reflected in their gaze. Sympathy and sense of duty waged war against self-preservation and sanity—some doctors and nurses broke down and plunged to their death. Still others vowed never again to turn their backs on the world.

NEW PURPOSE

It took more than a decade for the medics and physicians to push open the doors of their refuge and step into the changed world. During their exile, they had time to ponder their deeds and goals and begin anew, building a new foundation. No history of this process and its trials remains. The Great Fire destroyed these documents, robbing the Spitalians of an important piece of their genesis, including the secret of how they managed to survive in their meager hospital for so long without any outside source of food.

News of the reopening of the hospital spread like a wildfire through the Borcan tundra. At first, only a few flocked to the fortress walls, throwing wary glances at the figures in gas masks and dull black suits, but whomever sought aid was treated. The daunting outer appearance of the medics was deceiving. Over time, the facility became known as *the Spital*. The river of diseased and crippled grew, just like the delusion that the Spitalians were omnipotent. Camps shot up like mushrooms from the ground, sprawling wildly, until they finally thronged the Spital on all sides. Once again, the stench of death and disease filled the air. Once again, calamity threatened to throttle the land.

The influx could not be managed. New epidemics gorged themselves on the legions of those seeking aid and ultimately

latched onto the doctors and nurses as well. The circle began to close as the first of the medical staff fled—the old story simply must not be allowed to repeat itself. Quick Decisions were needed. And so, at last, the Spitalians swarmed out of the Spital, driving the diseased away and baptizing the land with cleansing flames. Quarantines were erected all about the Spital, fortifications drawn up and tightened. A new era had begun.

IN THE LIGHT OF SALVATION

The influence of the Medics, as they came to be known, in West Borca was impressive. They chose who lived and who died. They decided to give one settlement an advantage while ensuring another's demise. Medicine had come a long way from its origins; it had fallen into politics.

At first, the growing power of Justitian bound the will of the Medics. In 2513, the Spital surrendered itself to the shelter of the Protectorate. The Spitalians appeared to be submissive, but they were aware from the beginning of their importance to the Justitian Protectorate. Without them, the city would be a filthy rat's nest; pest and plague would wield the scepter. Only through their efforts was humanity to rid itself of the old fetters of cholera and typhoid fever. Justitian would not grow without them.

Disease would not remain the Spitalians' worst enemy for long. The Foulness was a new breed of hazard—anonymous and omnipresent. It was the source for burn; the drug of the people. Cheap and potent, it seemed to carry negligible side effects, at least nothing that would justify its prohibition at the hands of the Spitalians. It didn't take long for that opinion to change.

In 2221, the Spitalians documented the strange mutations caused by the Foulness in Pollen, but panic didn't set in until the mutations emerged in Borca as well. Throngs of vermin muddled about the land, invading orifices, stinging, biting, and laying eggs. Spore fields blossomed everywhere, taking over land mass after land mass. The mother spore fields in Pollen and Balkhan united in the east and formed a border that cut Europe off from Asia. The people did not awaken to this danger because their minds were eaten from the burn.

At last, in the year 2300, the Spitalians awoke from their lethargy and swore to stop the corruption. A crusade of unfathomable proportions commenced. Psychonauts and their raptus were studied. New technological developments like the noumenon vocalizer enabled contact with the hive mind of the Earth Chakras and a theory on Primer was posited. It was determined that burn made people more susceptible to spore infections, and thus it was damned. At that moment, every Spitalian knew that humanity's place at the top was in jeopardy and that Homo degenesis was poised to steal the crown and place it upon its own crooked skull. The Medics built the first and only line of defense against this—the front. If they should fail, so would all of humanity.

When a mother spore field developed in Menden twelve years later, the Spitalians were ready. Their pyrrhic triumph created the Festering. But the fight wasn't over. In Pollen and Franka, the struggle had barely begun. The forces they had at their disposal were nowhere near strong enough to destroy every spore field scattered across Borca, but all were marked. Warning signs were posted everywhere and the regions were put under quarantine.

PROTECTORATE

In the year 2513, the Spitalians officially joined the Protectorate of Justitian, but fought for privileges that made them practically independent. The Marshals weren't given any rights to the Spital grounds, allowed only to enter the outer ring. Additionally, the Spitalians demanded a say in the hygienic care of the city and the defense of the city gates and insisted that the persecution of psychonauts and the spore-addled be left solely to them. A compromise was reached and so the Medics received their post as requested, but those they caught would be judged according to Justitian law. The Spitalians consider this a silly ruling that they ignore quite frequently, for the spreading of a pestilent para-site in Justitian is not a crime. Disputes between the agents of order and the Medics was all but ensured. One possible solution might have been for the legislators of the city to customize the Justitian Codex, but the legal wrangling was a welcomed charade, allowing the Protectorate to mock the Spitalians' competence and once again defer to the advance of a mercenary army.

SAVIORS OF HUMANITY

In the Spitalians' minds, they are the last obstacle the Primer must overcome to enslave the world and drown it in a stream of infected seeds. If they are met with disapproval or adversity, their critics are seen as nothing more than idiots and are impatiently made to see the truth behind the Spitalians' doctrine. All discussion on the matter thereafter is dropped.

Who understands the nature of the Primer better than those who discovered it in the first place? The barbarians of the wastelands? They haven't a clue. The Chroniclers? They allow themselves to be distracted from the truth by rusty artifacts. In the eyes of a Spitalian, only one question matters: "Do you side with us or the psychonauts?" If a person stands with the psychonauts, then he is against all of humanity. They believe there is precious little time before the final battle ensues. Closing the deep gap between the two extremes is not an option.

HYGIENE

The fear of bacteria and its spread has deep roots in the organization's history. One shudders at the memories of the old days when the doctors could do nothing but watch as their friends and colleagues succumbed to HIVE—their blue, swollen tongues, red spotted faces, and bloodshot, pleading eyes. The horror of those days carved festering wounds in the conscience of the survivors and determined the path of their future. Today phrases like "Never forget!" and "Carelessness was their end!" are etched in large letters on the walls of the Spital corridors to commemorate those fateful years that were very close to being the last.

A great phobia of germs and their agents grew from knowledge of the Earth Chakras and its plagues, as well as the countless diseases that lurked in the wasteland. Hygiene has determined the routine of the Spitalians ever since. The full baths and decontamination rituals they perform upon entering

the Spital are part of their heritage. A stranger would think this process torture: the outer cleansing begins with a shave and ends with the sanitation of the entire body. The distillate used for this burns the skin and reddens the eyes. The specially trained hygienists monitor the process, examine excrement, and, if anything odd should surface, report to their superiors. The procedure is exhausting, but the Spitalians cling to it like salvation. The process removes fear from their hearts and loosens the knots of insecurity in their breasts. The danger of being labeled a sporeling (the Spitalian's label for a spore-infested person) looms over them all.

THE OUTER RING: APPENDIX

The lives and promising strength of the Spitalians is a glowing hope on the horizon for the people, luring them to the cult like moths to the flame. Every city and village has a great repertoire of stories about miraculous recoveries at the hands of the celebrated healers. Heartened by desperate faith in the omnipotence of the Medics, many of the sick from remote regions make their way down the arduous paths to the Spital—a pack of stooping figures, branded by illness.

Their destination lies in the eastern reaches of Dustlung in the middle of a field of ruins. Debris and wreckage have been cleared from many of the access routes as penance and thanks by those who had been cured. Miniature altars line the lanes. Offerings of bled rats or chains or laurels made of lichen and technical scrap are a sure indicator that the Spital is near. For those who became lost, signs were erected in the area with images of the Spitalian Cross and arrows to point travelers through the labyrinth back to one of the main roads.

No one can say for sure where the wasteland ends and the outer ring begins, nor how far the Spitalian area reaches into the field of ruins. Suddenly, one is standing in the midst of panting, ragged figures, surrounded by tents. The stench of vomit and rotting flesh is overwhelming. The Spitalians call this zone *the Appendix* with a cool tone. It is an unloved add-on. They can cut access to the rest of the Spital simply by bolting the fortress gates of the inner ring.

Lime-washed Spitalians patrol in full gear, register every newcomer, make an initial diagnosis, quote the cost of the treatment, and motion for them to wait in a section of the vast Appendix, which is organized by illness. It is strictly divided into sectors for each disease and ailment.

The ruins of the ancients are once again occupied—filled with jittery, sickly life during a rush; a necropolis stinking of

putrefaction. Some of the dark buildings that once rose into the heavens are endowed with signs of warning, coarsely painted in red on their facades with large brushes. Others are nothing but charred concrete skeletons, cleaned out by germs or blasts from Spitalian burners. Tents and huts made of metal scrap sprout from the ground. No one dares to leave the sector to which they were assigned.

As bizarre as it seems, among all of the tattered, dying figures, there is normal life in this city of the damned: Families dwell alongside the patients, simply looking for work to be done. Beggars press themselves against walls and plead for something to eat and perhaps some water. Businessmen holding wet towels over their mouths and noses solicit fruits, tubers, and lichens at marked up prices.

The options of the Spitalians in this zone of sickness are limited, and many of the travelers from afar die miserably while they wait for the overwhelmed physicians to treat them. On nights when the wind blows from the southwest, the screams and the wails of the dying carry to the distant technical center, but it is hardly perceived as more than a fearful sigh.

No one in the Appendix can be sure they won't perish in the same way as those in neighboring huts. Only goods and trade elevate the chance of survival, allowing quicker passage through the bolted gates and into the Corpus.

PRIMER KNOWLEDGE

The people put their faith in the wisdom of the Spitalians when it comes to the Primer, the Foulness, and the psychonauts. In Borca, when a Medic suspects an insect might be a spore carrier, mobs break out, bent on exterminating all of the tiny and mostly harmless bugs. But what do the Spitalians really know? A difficult question, since the Spital doesn't really appreciate people viewing its cards. It keeps the myth that it is omniscient under a veil of secrecy. Of course, the lower ranks, famuli and physicians, know only the essentials: the connection between the Primer and Foulness, the basics of the metamorphoses of spore fields, and the ways they spread. The consultants and some elders are privileged to more information, but keep it under lock and key.

THE INNER RING: CORPUS

In the Corpus, only the screams that blow over the walls remind one of the suffering and chaos in the Appendix. The Spitalians in this zone set a demanding regimen. They're nervous and overworked, but not haggard and distressed like their colleagues in the Appendix. A maze of barracks, small roads, tunnels, caverns, and a few large open areas cover the compound. In the center reigns the dirty concrete blocks of the Spital. Everyone knows their way, and follows it as confidently as an ant following the pheromone tracks of its queen. Never will a stranger endure the humiliation of trying to find his way through the Corpus, since the few patients who purchase superior treatment will be taken

immediately into the barracks by the gates, where they will stay until their recovery is complete. It is in their best interest to comply with the house arrest—the Corpus is a dangerous place for the uninitiated.

The effects of epidemics are tested on animals in numerous high security laboratories. Underground storage facilities for spores and victims of plague can also be found here. No other place in the wasteland possesses as much potential to bring everlasting death to humanity as this one: cholera, typhoid fever, dysentery, and many other disease samples are kept here, carefully secured by the oaken spiders. A protective mask is required and, after leaving the cavern, one must submit to a complete decontamination of equipment and exposed skin in a distillate bath.

THE SPITAL

The Spital—a bank of infinite knowledge. Recruits and caregivers work wistfully toward the day when they may finally enter its long, brightly lit and limed white halls. But it is also a place of arrogance and lust for power.

The complex contains finely organized libraries, laboratories, generators fueled by bio-gas and peat, production lines, and the sleeping quarters of the Spitalians. The entryway, as well as the passage to the heart of the Spital, was converted into highly technological sluices equipped with decontamination chambers—no one may enter or pass by the hygienists without a urine test, a negative result, and a full cleansing. These hygienists are the ones who provide the freshly cleaned individuals their sterile clothing in shrink-wrapped packaging. This clothing must be worn in the Spital at all times.

THE OAKEN SPIDER

The blood-red arachnid, the size of a human palm, has been crossbred with other spiders by the Medics since the Spital's establishment. The result is a breed of spider capable of rapidly spinning a strong web, discharged as a white milky fluid that has qualities similar to vitamin C. It slows decomposition and can be useful in the treatment of deficiency symptoms.

Thousands of oaken spiders were introduced in the caverns of the Corpus, quickly spreading over the entire Spital and ravishing the insect population. Today, there is hardly a cockroach or moth to be seen in the hallways.

However, the intended task of the arachnids was completely different. They spin diseased corpses securely in their webs and preserve them for later examinations. The bodies to be stored are thrust into a tube with about two hundred oaken spiders and the opening is closed with a membrane. After three days, the cadaver is encased in a sticky silk cocoon and can be taken to the caverns and hung on the walls with hundreds of other bodies. The energy it would take to run a cold storage to store these samples would far exceed the Spital's capabilities.

The number of oaken spiders has since become unmanageable. Apparently, their large webs have been spotted in the ruins near Justitian.

THE SPITAL: CORE

Deep in the bowels of the Spital lie the offices and laboratories. They are considered the heart of the cult and are referred to as the Core. The high-ranking consultants reside here in luxurious apartments and dedicate themselves to their research in annexed laboratories. Only the finest and most sanitary are given access. Others fail because of the disinfection air-locks or the preservists.

In the Core, the future of the Spitalians is determined and the progress of the war against the Primer is planned. The Spital's electron-scan microscope and MRI, whose function has been restored with the help of the Chroniclers, is also found within the Core. These high-tech devices are probably responsible for the periodic voltage fluctuations of the power grid.

FIELDWORK

The attire for physicians in the field is an impermeable neoprene suit. Spaces at the inside of the elbow, upper arms, and throat, which are closed off by a membrane, make it possible to inject medicine without having to disrobe. The suit allows physicians to traverse through infected atmosphere without risk of conta-gion. Urine flows through a tube into a bottle fastened to the upper thigh, allowing it to be tested later for spores and germs. In places with high danger of contamination, disinfecting lime is obligatory, and can be applied to the whole body, especially to exposed areas such as the skull.

BLOOD AND SWEAT

No other organization in the wasteland is as dependent on young and intelligent recruits to fill their ranks as the Spitalians. The tedious work in the Appendix, the daring experiments with unknown viruses in the Corpus, and the chaotic work abroad, all hold unpredictable risks yet are deemed vital by Spitalian leadership. However, these risks lead to long casualty lists among the lower ranks of the Spitalians. The cult is always in dire need of fresh recruits.

The first step for a prospective Spitalian is to fill the lowest ranks as a caregiver assistant. This will convey a sense of the duties and responsibilities a fresh recruit will need to learn to ascend the ranks. As a rule, assistants must work 18-hour shifts. They care for simple ailments, bring food to patients, collect payment, organize the cremations of the deceased, and remove decaying body parts and contaminated fluids from the barracks. Under such conditions, it is difficult to retain good recruits. However, if they stay, the offer is always the same: an opportunity to break from a senseless existence and to embrace a life in the service of humanity. Fame, gratitude, a daily ration of medicines, and a strong community await those with the perseverance to make it through the Spitalian ranks.

Even with this promise in place, the demands of life within the cult ensure that few make it beyond an initial meeting and sign on with the Spital. Squeamish individuals have no place in the Appendix. Whoever wears the Spitalian suit must justify the symbol of omnipotence it boasts. The fight begins the day the recruits attest their resolve by scratching a cross on the employment form.

THE LIFE OF THE RECRUIT

In the first semesters, young recruits perform the lowliest tasks in the Appendix with an experienced caregiver at their side. They are intimate with suffering in all of its facets—blood, pus, and Foulness accompany them everywhere they go; the screams of the dying echo in their heads.

Heavy gasmasks and airtight suits encumber their weary bodies. Biting disinfectants constantly irritate their eyes and skin. The exhausted recruits meet nightly for seminars where merciless drills are taken to another level. Whoever cannot master the written language flawlessly in two semesters fails and receives a dishonorable discharge. Ignorance is an illness for which there is no treatment. The pupils, feverishly taking their notes, are reminded of this by their instructors over and over again. Failures are atrocities to the Spitalians. They bring down the whole and keep the more competent aspirants from advancing. The pressure is exceedingly high. Red, droopy eyes are the evidence of long nights of studying and illness marks their sapped bodies. Many can't take it and drop out. Only a small number of recruits, those most dedicated to the fight, make it to the exams following the fourth semester.

CAREGIVER

After days of examinations that test proficiency in the written language, the basics of diagnostics and hygiene, and the cleansing and bandaging of wounds, the successful recruits may call themselves *caregivers*. Only a few fail after the first four hard semesters. Whoever has made it this far has already proven their determination and endurance. Only now is the recruit a true Spitalian.

The work of a caregiver is only slightly different from that of a recruit. In addition to their duties as a recruit, there are now also technical tasks in the Appendix. Caregivers use rules and guidelines to negotiate the costs of board and treatment with those seeking assistance. The recruits trade the profits later in guarded depots.

The number of patients under a caregiver's care varies depending on the workload, but each caregiver, with a small team of recruits, cares for sixty to one hundred patients. The caregiver is responsible for their comfort and medical treatment. Making rounds with the food cart is as much a part of the daily routine as disinfecting the camp, suturing wounds, and prescribing drugs.

ENCLAVE MEDICS

The Spital consumes enormous amounts of provisions and energy just to maintain the medical facility in the Appendix. The fees charged for services rendered cover the costs but don't turn a profit. Of course, the Justitian Protectorate would like to take over the maintenance of the Spital—completely for selfish reasons—but so far the Spitalians resist giving in to the Marshals.

Enclave medics allow the Spital to keep control of the facility's maintenance. The Spital dispatches enclave medics to foreign villages and towns to perform services there in exchange for food, oil, handymen, and mercenaries.

Spitalians regard enclave service as punishment. The threat of working among all the uneducated, vulgar, wild people is enough incentive for many Spitalians to work harder, scrupulously attempting to outdo their competitors. Those who fall behind in their studies or who hold questionable opinions quickly find themselves in a distant village, far away from worthy company.

RESIDENT

After four more semesters of practical study, caregivers win the right to begin a course of study in medicine to obtain the rank of *resident*. They then transfer to the Corpus where they receive new quarters. Once in the underground caverns and labs of the Spital, an aspiring resident finally witnesses the true extent of the Spitalian's power.

Many are traumatized by the flood of misery, the screams, and the chaos they encounter on a daily basis in the Appendix. The Elysian calm and concentration in the Corpus seems like an unreal farce—even more so when a resident realizes how much easier it would be in the field to combat sickness if given full access to the abundant resources of the Spital. A bountiful supply of antibiotics waits in the underground warehouses, and yet the all-powerful consultants hold the medicines under lock and key without giving an understandable reason.

For many residents, this issue is a tightrope walk between conscience and respect for authority. Should they acknowledge the infallibility of the powers at the top of the Spitalian hierarchy and shrug off their own doubts as ignorance? Or should they protest and fight for the opening of the gates to those in need—and risk banishment? Those who take the latter route are viewed as messiahs in the villages—once proud figures, now possessed by a flickering madness, who weather the stinginess of the godless Spitalians.

The number of residents who are true to the cult is great. Like drones they plunge into their work so that they may one day understand and justify their choice. Determined concentration and the renunciation of the outside world are necessary

if one wants to clamber up the next step in the hierarchy. Physicians and consultants observe and document their every move, every treatment, every expression. They study, assist others, and work hard. Only upon the recommendation of a physician will a consultant contact a resident and test him in all areas of medicine, promoting the student to the rank of physician should they qualify.

From the ranks of the residents, hygienists and enclave physicians are recruited. The latter are often individuals for whom no bright future awaits, be it because they lack discipline or humility.

PHYSICIAN

They've worked hard and, in the course of their miserable lives, have acquired a broad spectrum of abilities and knowledge. A *physician* has finally gained access to the halls of the inner Spital, wrought with mystifying legend. It is said that in the sealed labs of the Core, there are dozens of research projects underway, advancing with relentless efficiency. Each one has several physicians working on it, each being trained as specialists.

REGISTRAR

The *registrar* works under the consultants and watches over the labor of the physicians in the Spital and the Core. His primary concern is to see that all follow the Spital's moral and ethical code. His qualifications in this area are parallel to those of an experienced physician. If a consultant should die or retire, the registrar takes over this position, and a physician, appointed by a consultant, moves into the free post left by the registrar.

CONSULTANT

Eight *consultants* stand at the top of the Spitalian hierarchy and are viewed as indisputable sovereigns. They determine the path of the cult and its research and see to it that order is maintained. The consultants pull strings behind the scenes without divulging their motives. Their ultimate goals and plans to achieve them remain a mystery.

ELDER

The title of *elder* can only be reached after sixty years of arduous labor. Elders are authorized to name a deputy for stressful tasks and field work. Five of the eight consultants are elders.

PRESERVISTS

Despite their clinical scientific facade, the Spitalian organization is the breeding ground for numerous legends. One, dynamic and true, is that of the *preservists*. Seated on black stallions and wearing gas masks, they lead the hordes of Spitalians in the battle against the Foulness. They are dark figures who demand death's respect. If a person meets them, they should be submissive and reverential, bowing their head as a sign of esteem for their deeds and out of fear of their power.

Preservists obey their own laws and do not submit to the direction of the consultants. They make up their own clique within the organization of Medics, independent but still tightly linked to their leadership. Whatever it is that gives them this privilege and status, it isn't an official order in the hierarchy of the Spitalians. No one in the lower ranks knows; the consultants remain silent.

The fact is the preservists are the Spitalian military elite. The name of each of its members is connected to legendary battles and grand discoveries. They coordinate and command all troops outside of Borca and are the tip of the spear in the fight against the psychonauts.

MOLLUSKS

The Foulness attacks organic tissue and soaks through it using its villi. As soon as the mycelium network reaches critical mass in a human being, changes begin to take place—people lose their identity to the Earth Chakra. The Spitalians take advantage of this by taking strands of muscle from the dead and mixing it together with active Foulness spores in a nutrient solution. The broth needs a few days to mature and then the infected muscle is placed in jars with a fresh solution. A thin membrane is stretched over the opening that allows later injections of fresh nourishment so that the tissue remains alive.

An ignorant person won't see the value of the cramped mass swinging back and forth in the fluid—dubbed a “mollusk” for its resemblance to a snail—however, it is far more than a bizarre experiment. When psychonauts or spore-infested creatures near a mollusk container, the mollusk suddenly begins to spasm. Again and again, it hits the glass as though attempting to break free. The dull banging rises to a frantic staccato the closer one comes to the active spore source. The fluid is whipped to foam by the shaking tissue. There are limits, however. The mollusks only react to life forms that have opened a channel to an Earth Chakra through their spore infestation.

SPITALIAN WORLDVIEWS

ANABAPTISTS

They have the same ends as we even if they come to it from a misunderstanding. They die for us on the Purgar front. As long as this keeps up, we will remain good friends.

ANUBIANS

They twist the holy principle of healing. Poison and death is their profession, embellished by esoteric hocus pocus.

APOCALYPTIKS

They bring burn and the Primer into our cities. They conceal the grimacing face of death behind a mask of merrymaking. Of course, there are exceptions, but sometimes one has to damn the innocent in order to serve the common good.

THE ASHEN

Cowardly, hollow-eyed, and sickly figures who crawl into their holes as soon as danger nears. What does one expect after years of incest? They block our path to the hated Balkhan. Lucky for them they have a purpose, otherwise their bunkers would have been smoked out long ago.

CHRONICLERS

They may be wise, but they conceal their greatness behind mounds of scrap. We see right through them. They pull the strings from behind the scenes, forcing the Marshals and Scrappers to dance to their rhythm. For now, we can only watch; the strings in our own ranks must be cut before they can be expelled.

HELLVETICS

Modern bandits who have secured themselves a good standing in Europe. They strive for no higher purpose than to act as instruments for money. Extraordinary tools with proper morals!

JEHAMMEDANS

Another sect that believes they have found the meaning of everything in the ideas of some cockamamie messiah. Unfortunately, this does not weaken them. On the contrary, the madness drives them to grotesque acts. Bestial fools! They pose a severe threat to our strongholds in Purgare.

MARSHALS

Who are they anyway? Men in long cloaks and funny hats. Should we be impressed? The people may tremble before them, but for us they are gawky figures, exasperatingly predictable, blindly following their Codex. Even if their power is monumental and constricting, it would be quite simple to dispose of them.

NEOLIBYANS

Their influence in Borca is still marginal, but we know all about their endeavors in Hybrispania. On the surface, they are merely tradesmen, but one shouldn't underestimate their drive to conquer. As long as we share a common enemy in Balkhan, there is no need to keep them in their place.

SCOURGERS

Belligerent barbarians with respect for neither body nor the life of Borcans. They are only admirable in their atrocious effectiveness.

SCRAPPERS

They are miserable figures to whom we promise the mercy of healing for the cost of a few swaps. They are simply unimportant.

TRIBALS

Sad remnants of a once-glorious civilization. Incestuous family ties have distanced them from any culture they once had. They are better suited to the animal kingdom. Meaningless.

PERSONALITIES

NIKOLAI WORSCHEK

Culture: Pollener

Cult: Spitalian (preservist)

Characteristics: Years ago, Nikolai was the strict head of the commandos in Danzig. He was known as one of the first pioneers who dared to explore the heart of Pollen. Once steady-fast and notorious for his intuition in the discovery of spore fields and psychonauts, today his insides are eroded by his burn addiction. He manages to keep this habit hidden from his inferiors, but it is a dangerous game.

ALMA MARTINOVA

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Spitalian (resident)

Characteristics: Alma was punished by the elders after she refused to carry out a command to raid a Borcan spore-reeling colony. But the decision had advantages for both the Spitalians and Martinova. Since then, the young resident joined the Frank resistance in Sufferance, where she organizes hits against the footmen of the ruling pheromancers and scratches at the power structure of the crater metropolis.

DR. HERNEZ VASCO

Culture: Hybrispanian

Cult: Spitalian

Characteristics: Vasco has been in flight since the Pandora Expedition of 2562. During his last review, he demonstrated great strength and agility. He's disappeared into the great tundra of Pollen. Rumors surround the evasive doctor. From achieving immortality to dealing with the satanic Primer, the stream of legends is never-ending, especially among the younger Spitalians.

TRIBALS

RULERS OF THE WASTELAND

OLD PATHS

Ahmahdee, the giver of life and father to all nations, paused at his zenith and smiled down on his creation. The heavens surrounding him were a thin and shallow shade of blue on this particularly dry and hot day. The intense weather was no rarity here in the lowlands east of the rocky Darfur Mountains. Clouds collected beyond the jagged horizon, forming a dark front. Lightning bolts flashed, ominously silent, joining heaven and earth in dazzling discharges.

Chisulo listened, waiting for the thunder, for the drumbeat of heaven. What he heard was the soft rustling of the sea of grass, rocking to the tempo of a silent melody. The air shimmered from the heat. Insects chirped lazily. A concrete pipeline ran through the green fields like a deranged sea snake, its chapped back occasionally braking through the Earth's dusty surface.

The proud Maasai sat high above, finding solace in the calm grandeur of the scene. His eyes were closed. He gazed inward, conflicted by inflamed passion, reluctance, and pride. His eyelids quivered and released burning tears. His soul twisted with shame and uneasiness, agonized by a morass of tradition, searching for an escape that had been invisible to a thousand shamans before him.

A burst of defiance blossomed for a moment, obscuring his despair, but he saw through the temptation—a deceptive path to freedom. He could flee with his wife to the Anubians in the east or the Neolibyans in the north, burning all the bridges behind him. They would never find him. They would never try. He would be shamed, his wife too. His mother, who had always watched her third son with tender eyes, would turn her back and spit on his memory. She would never be able to shear his head in the Eunuto ritual. She would never experience her son's promotion to the circle of elders.

He had made his decision. His long braids rustled with the rhythm of his breath.

Ahmahdee had yet to reach the far-off mountains when he noticed an athletic young man in red rags dotted with colorful beads and braided cords running back toward his village. The youth clenched his bright birchwood spear tightly; an AK-47 was thrown across his back. He ran unerringly toward his village—the community to which he owed everything.

Chisulo is not alone. All over the world, sons and daughters break the conventions of their clan only to land right back in its lap. As different as they see themselves, they have one thing in common: they are the strength of their tribe.

SURVIVORS

The Eschaton killed without discrimination and forced those whom it spared into the shelter of bunkers, basements, and caves. There they waited for the end. Whoever wanted to survive stayed close to family or found a similarly sympathetic group; loners had no chance. “You only have two eyes and both of them look forward,” the elders used to say. That meant that one was incapable of watching their own back.

The groups moved together, whether it was the barbarian tribes at the Ice Barrier, the Purgar families, or the African clans. Traditions once believed lost were remembered in these dark days. The frivolities of youth broke under the heavy wisdom of elders and shaman. Every person was delegated tasks that suited them regardless of their gender or age. Whoever opposed the will of the elders endangered the state of the clan and was summarily punished. The tribes discovered within themselves the true order of nature and inherited the ways of the beasts.

The dust storms passed, the sky cleared, and the earth settled—the tribes had made it. They had mastered the challenges of a shattered Earth and they were changed. They were stronger and united. They stood in the light of the post-apocalyptic world with their heads held high. They were no longer desperate individuals clinging together for shelter; they were families. Clans. Tribes.

COMMUNITY

The smallest tribe begins with a breeding couple. Soon it sprouts and blossoms as children beget children. Hierarchies and histories emerge and the course of the clan is forged in its traditions. In one community, the elders dominate the social sphere of the tribe, deciding its future. In another, the women dominate the men, permitting only the most powerful under them to mate. In yet another tribe, the shaman listens reverently to the jabbering of children, interpreting it as holy directions. The same dance around power, sex, age, and survival shapes the structure of each post-Eschaton tribe.

Everything that defines a tribe is twined around the core ideal of the family. Kin relations shape the actions and traditions of all clans. It is the one thing they all share. Bonds of blood have

proven stronger than money or oaths of allegiance and ensure the survival of the clan by negotiating complex rituals and inter-tribal marriages.

Clans that have existed long enough have grown beyond the basic core of kinship. Over the centuries, they have bonded with other tribes and formed into vast cultures with changing mores and traditions. The blood ties that once linked multiple clans together has thinned over the generations. For many of these tribes, holy sites, religious views, or common practices unite the people into an inseparable group.

NOMADS AND SETTLERS

Surroundings strongly influence the development of a community. When the land is fertile, then the clan settles there to farm and raise animals. Their lives are thus concentrated on the fertility of the earth and the women who bear the offspring to work it.

Mistrust of strangers can lead to a tribe’s isolation, yet many of these clans have managed to thrive. Today, countless camps and villages dot the map of post-Eschaton Europe. Many have developed thriving economies based on industries such as iron crafting and pottery.

In regions of Northern Europe, the ground is frozen and not suited for farming. Breeding livestock is also difficult since the sparse vegetation in the tundra takes a long time to recover from grazing. This is the land of the nomads. They wander with the few belongings they have and hunt from dawn to dusk for the clan’s dinner.

A nomad’s culture is defined by the seasons, the migrations of the large herd animals, and the strength and potency of their men and women. They interpret the habits of the wind and clouds and read the future from the desiccated bowels of a bull. They would consider a Chronicer a god. They view the written language of this ancestral cult as a magical language that only the shamans of the clan may hope to master.

HUNTERS AND PREY

The clan is a community focused on survival. Within a tribe, each member adheres to the responsibilities of their position as prescribed by precedent, the environment, and their leaders. While some are happy to work honestly and modestly as farmers or hunter-gatherers, others wander from village to village, slaughtering defenseless residents and consuming their remains.

These rogues are like beasts, greedy and uncivilized. They sleep with rats in damp canals, hiss at gendos, and battle constantly to prove their superiority. Their numbers are legion. They dot the wastes of Europe, ever agitating the feeble scar tissue of the developing world.

Entire villages have fallen victim to these cannibals. The Marshals are unable to contain this threat and merely pace the deadly lanes of their Protectorate, shocking the cannibals out of their sleep and striking them down with their gavel.

MIRRORS OF THEIR CULTURE

Unlike the more powerful cults, tribes are small and insignificant. Their influence only extends locally. They control their tribal land and perhaps also the water sources in the region. They might gather at a legendary building of the ancestors or absorb other local camps into their sphere of influence. However they develop, they always mirror the culture in which they live.

> AFRICA

The African tribes have a long history of tradition. They are splinters from a past era, never integrated into the larger community of a united Africa. Far from the great settlements on the coast and the oil cities, they lead a life which celebrates the memory of their ancestors.

Generally, these clans are animists, believing in the energy and interconnection of all living and non-living things. A few have even preserved the Koran and its teachings.

As great as the diversity of the African tribes might appear at first glance, they are rapidly being absorbed. Entire tribes vanish daily in such melting pots as Tripoli. They trade in their traditions for the fast life of the big settlements.

The elders see their future evaporating and bind the young tribals to the community more tightly than they had ever dared to in the past. They are kept far from the corrupting influence of the coastal cities.

MAASAI

For a long time the Maasai were the only human survivors in Central Africa. The land belonged to them and their cattle herds. At holy sites, they practiced their ancient rituals, making warriors out of children and elders out of warriors. Mothers were highly honored and watched their sons through to maturity. Then came the psychovors.

These diseased and monstrous plants threatened to drive the Maasai away from their ancestral territory, but the tribe stood up to the approaching green wall. They threw their machetes into the wild undergrowth, set massive fires, and fought without reserve. Finally they understood the nature of the dark jungle.

What exactly the forest said to them, they weren't able to pass on to those who had not lived through it themselves. They have a subliminal connection to the psychovors. The plants seem to accept the tribe, as strange and unprecedented as it may sound. There is no other explanation for the sudden halt to their advance into the Maasai region. The mutating plants in the border region wither suddenly and rot.

Now, the Africans view the Maasai as mediums between the human world and the world of the psychovors. To the Maasai, the plants are animated by the spirits of the ancestors. They surge to the north in order to stand by their children in the final battle against the white oppressors.

> BALKHAN

Balkhan is quarrelsome and short-tempered and so are its tribes. They've been able to assert themselves across the land despite the voivods' reign of terror. They stand against every attempt to subdue and enslave them. It is wise for the voivods to accommodate the tribes since they need powerful forces to battle their enemies and guard against threats from the southeast. With gifts of weaponry, food, and women, they ensure the good will of the tribes.

While some families flirt with the dangerous voivods in their cities, others moved back to the rugged mountains. They dwell in grottos, pray to a god with a ram's head, and wage wars on their neighbors.

USUDI

The Usudi reside in the hidden grottos of the Balkhani mountains. The center of the tribe's activities is the "eternal fire" that lies buried deep in a rock dome and can only be reached through a complex labyrinth of passageways. Also found in the clammy darkness of these passages are the tombs of the ancestors. There, skeletons are piled along with fresh cadavers. The stench overwhelms the senses. In the tribe's mythology, the corpses of the elders grant their strength to the tribal youth and bless their weapons with unnatural abilities. This is illustrated in the etchings found littered about the grotto's walls.

The Usudi push their spears into the bloated, decayed bodies of their elders and hope for such a blessing. In reality, the spear is tainted with bacteria from the corpses and becomes a sinister instrument of death that inevitably kills anyone pierced by the jagged spearheads. If someone survives the initial attack, their bodies are eventually consumed by pus-filled inflammations. Perhaps this is the reason the farmers of the region have given the tribe such a grisly nickname—Usudi means "devil."

The tribe has no name for itself, because they don't speak. Many people speculate that they lack the ability to even think. Something in the mountains has changed them. They have degenerated into grunting beasts.

KRAJNI

They emerged from their crypts of immortality centuries too soon. They should have been the last, but were among the first. Had their gods abandoned them? Not even the elders can answer this riddle.

They didn't just lose their home, but also their history, written language, and technology. They were only able to hold on to one tradition from the ancient past. The elders have a tattoo on the back of their hands—a vertical dash followed by three circles.

This symbol has become the center of the barbaric Krajni tribe. They tattooed themselves and replicated the symbol on mountain sides with white pebbles. Whoever wanders into their territory inevitably finds themselves wandering through such marked ruins.

Heritage is extremely important for the Krajni. Only those who can trace their roots back to a distant ancestor are worthy of the sacred tattoo. For this reason, strangers aren't usually accepted into their ranks.

The tribal chiefs are four mythical figures, whose essences are transferred onto four worthy Krajni warriors during a secret ritual. The chiefs then retire to the depths of their ancestral home and lead the tribe by calling their directives through airshafts and sewer openings. No Tribal will ever see the faces of the chiefs again.

> BORCA

The Dustlung region, which includes Justitian and its Protectorate cities like Liqua, Ferropol, and A235, is densely packed with people and their wealth. Countless clans roam this area. Oftentimes, it is merely a pool of outcasts—the rejected scum of the enclaves. Like animals, they stalk merchants in the shadows of the ruins, then pounce and disappear with their stolen loot into the wasteland.

East of the Reaper's Blow, individual nomads roam according to the migratory habits of the bison and mammoths. They track them through the eastern woodlands, weeding out the feeble and sick animals. The rusty red hide, bones, and teeth are completely worked over; waste is sin.

Near Ottoman, one will find farming clans. Long ago, these sedentary people were nomads who hunted during the warm seasons and returned to their own herds only in the winter. They have long given up their wild habits and have submitted to

the requirements of the metropolis. They grow corn and wheat for the thirty ruling clans of the city.

EAST BORCA: STORSKIS

In wheezing locomotives, the Storskis rumble over the desolate railway system of East Borca. The steel tracks are rusted and overgrown; entire branches have disappeared. Still, they trundle on—a sooty cloud cutting through the woods.

Belching thick white steam, the trains are viewed as gods or demons by the wild clans. The ignorant superstitions are a good defense for them. However, they would be foolish to rely on this defense alone. Thus the trains are built into fortresses weighing tons, with steel plates and fenders in front of the wheels and chain battlements on the roofs.

Every Storski on guard duty has a face blackened by soot. Their leather suits, accentuated by bawdy aprons, are as black as a locomotive. If a wild clan attempts to ambush them in the forest, the watchmen repel their attackers by hurling glowing coals from the battlements.

To strangers, the Storskis seem fierce and unrelenting. Their knowledge of steam technology gives them influence throughout a region in which fashioning an arrow is considered high tech. Only within the protected train cars can they discard their black exteriors and show their more pleasant side.

Among old arm chairs, antique oil paintings, busts, and other ancient artifacts, they listen to the rhythm of the engine, play, and talk together. Elders teach the children the wonders of technology through story and show them how to make toys from gears and springs. The chief mechanic is the head and heart of the clan. She has the last word in all decisions.

The Charburners are cousins of the Storskis. At certain railroad crossings and train stations they build small shantytowns. The dust from the coal they process shimmers in the air on a dry day and coats the towns in a viscous black veneer when it rains. Life in the camp is very unhealthy. Despite wearing gas masks, their lungs rattle and whistle like the locomotives of their nomadic cousins. They don't have a choice, for without their coal, the Storskis would have long ceased to exist and chaos would rule the forests.

WEST BORCA: THE INSECT CLANS

The expansive ruins of the former Ruhr region are home to many clans, but nourishment is scarce and forces them to clash on a daily basis. Some attack the heavily guarded trade convoys of Justitian and risk their life for food and weapons. Others wage bitter battles in the fruitful regions where there is abundant wildlife.

It is said that the insects of this region have special abilities since they continue to spread without hindrance despite the frosty climate. The clans identify with the teeming vermin and admire their resilience. They name themselves in homage: the Cockroach Clan, the Dragonflies, the Swarmers, and the Flesh Eaters, to name a few.

The insect clan numbers have been cut drastically over the last few years. The Chief Marshal of Justitian leads a relentless war against the tribes in Dustlung. He has practically exterminated the Cockroach Clan and is calling for the heads of the Dragonflies. One must be much more cautious in the region now.

WEST BORCA: THE ENEMOI

The Enemoi travel from village to village in the area stretching from the territory of the Helvetics to the Ramein Region. They bring the law to the people beyond the Justitian Protectorate with their fleet of armored vehicles. In their wake follow the Crows, retired veterans who execute the Enemoi's sentences in exchange for a warm meal.

In the course of their travels, the tribe has been able to spread considerable knowledge about ancient law-making as well as the principles of electronics and mechanics. Here the reports become bizarre: apparently, the Enemoi knowledge is acquired from two machine men the tribe possesses, known as Acolytes.

The Chroniclers have tried to court the Enemoi to join their ranks on several occasions, but the tribe has consistently dismissed the offers, which explains the outright envy and threats of embargo by the Chroniclers. Villages that allow the Enemoi safe passage are soon abandoned by the Chroniclers and left to wallow in poverty and misery.

> FRANKA

Frank tribes live far from the great Pheromancers in Sufferance or Aquitaine. After the Eschaton, many families returned to Franka to rebuild what had once belonged to them. Their properties in the overgrown marshlands have since become ancient relics. Many of them are still in good condition but others are difficult to distinguish from modest caves. The floors have crumpled under the weight of time, and ivy and grass have grown around the openings of their hovels.

The condition of their tribal roundhouse is the ultimate linchpin of a clan's prosperity. As a crown is to a king, so the roundhouse is to the elders. It cements the tribe's territorial claim to rule and indicates the social status of the clan. If it begins to collapse, then the solidarity of the tribe might also break down.

In the struggle against the psychonauts, the Spitalians recruit anyone who is capable of doing any damage to the vicious monsters. The Frank clans suit this need perfectly. They live unchallenged in the lion's den, speak the national language, and due to their seclusion are minimally exposed to the Pheromancers' sickening influence.

While trading for medicine, many clans have become smugglers for the Spitalians. The Medics need weapons and medicine in the Frank border towns so they can wage war against the vile psychonauts. The risks are minimal, the victories modest, but the rewards are enough to feed the hungry mouths of their tribe.

THE RENAISSANCE

Monet, de la Tour, Delacroix, Renoir—true artists who shaped the culture of this land with their immortal works. France is an oil painting crafted by the hands of these masters. Unfortunately, none of it remains.

The oppressive chemicals of the Pheromancers jam the brains of the Franks, muting any creative output. No great thinkers or poets have emerged in hundreds of years. Ultimately, culture is what's missing from the society created by the Pheromancers and this drives the people silently insane.

There are those who reject the void of their artless society. They call themselves "The Renaissance" and formed shortly after the rise of the psychonauts. They are dreamers and idealists, railing against a reality they don't understand.

An intense love of art binds them together, and their level of education, knowledge, and sensitivity determines their rank. Based in former Belgium, they organize looting runs on museums and wealthy Frank villages.

> HYBRISPANIA

Many travelers from Borca or Franka assume that the entire population of Hybrispania has risen up against the African invaders. There's rage everywhere. But the image is deceiving.

The Hybrispanian forests provide many hiding spots where tribes flee from the eternal fighting. Such tribes are despised by the guerrillas, even more than they despise the Africans. On the other hand, whoever lives on the Castilla Plateau must always be prepared for battle and must not hesitate to reproach the enemy.

The clans here are proud of their noble ancestry and count the family tree among their most prized possessions. It is generally seen as a matter of courtesy to support the guerrillas in their cause. All tribes of the plateau send their children off to the training camps of Madrid, so that they may one day confront the invaders side by side with their folk heroes.

THE CORREDORES

The Corredores are the greatest Hybrispanian tribe and have been able to secure an enclave of peace for themselves in a land riddled with crisis. They live by the Atlantic in the northwest, in what used to be Portugal—their homeland since the beginning of time.

It is said the Corredores are under the protection of the Paragnostiks. They are informed of approaching danger by the psychonauts so that they can quickly hide in the forest. If they don't want to be found, it is virtually impossible to track them. In past centuries, they have been successful in avoiding the recruiting techniques of the guerrilla alliances.

MATADORES

For centuries, they have wandered from city to city on the Castilla Plateau in a caravan of fine bulls and colorful wagons. They are show fighters who dare to enter the stalls of the wildest animals and, at the same time, challenge the local townspeople to wrestle with their bulls.

People crowd around. Wagers are placed. The day of the fight allows the people to forget, for a moment, the desperate war of their brothers and sisters in the southern forests.

> POLLEN

The tribes of Pollen are nomads in the purest sense. Constant shifts in the weather and environment, usually for the worse, make perpetual wandering a necessity. They are mobile, resilient, and the perfect survivors. Wherever they travel, they wrench nourishment from the earth: insects, moss, fibrous roots. Nothing is beneath contempt. They are closer to nature than any other tribes.

THE PURE

Resisting the taint of the spore fields in Pollen is an art that only the purest of mind, body, and spirit can master. The tribe known as the Pure look with pride upon a long and pristine family tree. It is unclear whether their genetic disposition or their prudence has kept their bloodlines free from psychonauts.

The Spitalians have taken a great interest in the Pure. The legends surrounding this tribe are widely known, but their exact location is an ever-changing mystery. The Pure scouts lead anyone looking for them away from the tribe and on a wild goose chase. This has aggravated the efforts of the Spitalians for generations.

LAZARES

They were once dead, yet they refused to leave the land of the living. Their history is fragmented and can only be traced back to a Pollener family of refugees who had escaped from a Neolibyan plantation deep in Africa. These escapees ran into

a forest of psychovors and died unbelievably agonizing deaths. Strange venom dripping from the barbs of the evil plants dissolved the skin from their bones.

When they awoke, it seemed as if it had all been a dream. Their outward appearances were unchanged, however, they had been reanimated with an inner fire that showed them the way back to Pollen and gave them unnatural strength to make the long trip home.

The clan has since grown significantly and lives far from the well-traveled paths of Pollen, deep in the Rotten Root forest. They survive on insects and can be recognized by the paint on their faces, which resembles naked and bleached skulls.

> PURGARE

Most of the tribes in Purgare limit their migration to the Apennines mountains. To the west lies a desolate desert of debris inhabited by deadly psychonauts. To the east, in the Adriatic lowlands, the purifying flames of the Anabaptists await any who defy them.

The tribes wander in small groups through the ruins of ancient Italy. They set up camps, but never stay for long. At some point, perhaps this generation or the next, they will complete their migration and return to the crypts of their ancestors. The tribals are very reserved among strangers, fearing they might betray the location of an old camp and subject the tribe to robbery of both history and wealth.

The tribes of Purgare are scarce because the large families divide the region amongst themselves and then guard it jealously. Drifters and nomads are not welcome in the tightly knit social enclaves.

FLAYERS

The Flayers are a small group of fanatic Christians who protest the decline of their god by publicly whipping themselves. They can trace their ancestry back to a pre-Eschaton religious order.

The disparate sects of this tribe each flock around their padre. He is their father and his word is law. Their mothers lie under his authority and teach their children to carry out the padre's wishes.

Although the Flayers keep near Perugia, thus poaching the land of the Anabaptists, they are allowed to keep their customs. The Purgar people despise these degenerate figures who flay their backs bloody with a cat-o-nine tails and who wander through the villages preaching the virtues of the one and only god. The religious rantings and social disturbances of an ever-inebriated padre could easily mean the end of his incestuous family.

ROMANOS

Besides the African invaders and the psychonauts, the Romanos are the only sedentary population in western Purgare. They are the rulers of Rome—or at least that's what they think. They live in prehistoric monuments, decorate their gas masks and clothes with gold and silver, and have somehow avoided being deported to the African plantations by the mercy of the Neolibyans.

Their esteemed positions are due to their importance on the Neolybian freighters. The Romanos are the deckhands of the merchants. They unload the ships and keep the lower decks, where food and fuel are stored, in top order.

TRIBAL WORLDVIEW

ANABAPTISTS

They help us on the field like good comrades. Through them, the world will shine in the old light once again. Hail to the Anabaptists!

ANUBIANS

The Jackals cure the land from the poison of the past and the people from the poison of the present. They have knowledge of all eras, the beginnings and what will come. As children of Anubis, they will guide us safely into His world.

APOCALYPTIKS

The raven always keeps his nest clean. Whoever dirties it had better quickly seek distance. And never return.

THE ASHEN

What sort of being is it that is driven away from mother sun? They stand in alliance with the devil! They shall be burned by the light of day, before they perish at the hands of our children!

CHRONICLERS

They are the maggots in the bowels of the machine gods—demons! Beware of them, because with just one touch they will rob you of your vitality.

HELLVETICS

They took our mountains and won't let our herds through the passes anymore. We are powerless against them. Since then, the clan has been divided. The shepherds under Koski have probably settled to the north, while we have remained behind. Maybe we will get enough money together to pay for the passages.

JEHAMMEDANS

They accept us because we're talkative workers with a strong tradition, but we fear them. They talk incessantly about the teachings of their messiah and that we should adopt their beliefs, but we don't want to anger our own gods. The bearded, old Jehammedans say we have one more night to abnegate our idolatry. We will resist.

MARSHALS

Murderers. Many of my brothers are gone now. The ruins have become unsafe. We will return. Then the Marshals will bleed.

NEOLIBYANS

These lard asses shower us with gifts and want to buy our friendship. How stupid they are! The Scourgers, on the other hand, sacrifice themselves for us against the enemy. We love them, we only use the Neolibyans.

SCOURGERS

They came in the night to our village and carried off my siblings. My parents are heartbroken. Mother has cried for days. Tomorrow the remaining fighters will take up the search for them and every one of these bastards will be slaughtered. Then it will all be okay.

SCRAPPERS

They are even poorer than us. Robbing them is good sport, but it doesn't help to fill the bellies of our women. It is better to not bother with them.

SPITALIANS

They buy miscarried fetuses, stuff them in old boxes. They take the other children too. For this we receive aid when we need it.

PERSONALITIES

ULKAR

Culture: Pollener

Cult: Tribal (champion)

Characteristics: When he puts his left hook to use, the spectators scream with glee. Ulkar is a pit fighter and a mighty one at that. For years he has wandered West Borca, hiring himself out in the arenas where he pounds the local favorite into the dust and moves on. For him, fighting is neither art nor entertainment. When he is victorious, no emotions awaken in him. He fights to survive.

FREKKA OF THE FLESH EATERS

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Tribal (Flesh Eaters, shaman)

Characteristics: Those damned cockroaches, worms, and flies! Spawn of the devil! These corpse-eating vermin rob the Flesh Eaters of the bodies of unfortunate Scrappers who have met their end in the black pits of Borcan ruins. Ah, what a feast, when these fleshy wanderers flounder into the realm of the Flesh Eaters. The shaman Flekka knows the old rituals that will transfer the soul of the deceased to the warriors of the clan. Being eaten and absorbed must surely be better than disappearing into the void of death.

LUREN

Culture: Borcan

Cult: Tribal (Pneumant, leader)

Characteristics: He was sent with a Mechan to negotiate a pact between the rulers of the Ramein Region and Justitian. Unfortunately, the Mechan died of fever, and Luren was forced into the role of courier. Before he returns to Ramein, he wants to expand his knowledge of the Pneumantian equipment under the guidance of the Justitian Scanners.

BOOK 2:

CATHARSYS

2

AUTUMN

The deep droning of the signal trumpets echoed harshly over the softly curved hills. After many days, the rain had finally paused and allowed the sun to turn the leaden gray sky a dull yellow. Nik stood in the middle of a group of dirt-covered Anabaptists, all equipped with rusty swords. In the past few weeks, the rivets studding their leather armor had turned from polished heads into brown crusts. Their boots were caked in mud. Coughs and sneezes came from all around, and next to Nik someone spit a chunk of slime into the grass. Nik didn't look away—disgust was a luxury that he had divested himself of weeks ago.

"Pitiful," he mumbled, thinking back on how proud they had looked thirty days ago when they had left the bastion in the proximity of Bucharest. They were all rookies who had just learned how to hold a sword, and now they wanted nothing more than to ram them into the bowels of their enemies. The Stauffer Pack, as their troop was called, however, didn't need a battle in order to be defeated. Nik knew this as he looked into the dull, ring-encircled eyes of his comrades.

A new round of fanfare rang out from over the hills. This time it was a high howl in three short bursts, one after another—the signal for the left flank under Orgiast Garmon to march forward. Nik relaxed. Their time had not yet come.

Nik carried their banner, a red scrap on a three-foot pole, fastened with loops to his back. The pole bothered him, and he let it roll due to his discomfort. Immediately there was movement between the piles of dead. The men looked excitedly at the red cloth, ready to march.

"Stand still!" cursed Stauffer, the leader of the company. Nik hadn't noticed that he was standing right next to him—just another tired, unshaven face.

"Never have I had such a shitty standard bearer." Stauffer didn't look at Nik. He said it to himself. He said everything to himself.

"Don't piss me off," Nik whispered, looking grimly straight ahead. His face was frozen. Water drops ran from his hair down his forehead, tickling his left nostril and catching on his lips. Salty.

"What was that?" Out of the corner of his eye, Nik noticed Stauffer turn toward him. The old orgiast barely reached Nik's shoulders. Once upon a time, he would have taken Nik by the nose ring and yanked him to the ground. Now he had more than forty winters behind him, every one leaving its mark on his face and in his bones. The way that he rubbed his hands told Nik that his gout had become his master. There is no honor in kicking an old dog, but Nik thirsted for someone to answer for the many days of deprivation.

"No strength left in your bones?" Nik looked coolly at the old orgiast, nodding towards the knotted hands he massaged. Amazement bloomed on Stauffer's face for a brief moment, making him look old, weak, and beaten. Then something sparked within, igniting him like a stuttering, rusty motor and pushing the strength back into his extremities. Stauffer tightened himself. His eyes narrowed, and with lips sealed he ripped his sword from its sheath. Nik took a step back, instinctively throwing his arms out to block a strike, the flag swaying and rattling above him. Stauffer stood unmoving, sword lowered, looking at him derisively.

"Our loudmouth seems nervous."

A rash sequence of brassy signals swept over their heads. Two high, short tones—heavy infantry in the first line: march! The call to arms was followed by a deep droning. Nik's mind raced. His call had come! Then a final higher blast of sound—the signal for a complicated scissor maneuver by the two flanks. The Stauffer Pack would have to wait briefly, even if their fighters were tearing at the leash like hungry dogs. The Anabaptists stared at Nik with anticipation, their swords and holy relics unsheathed, fear and euphoria glimmering in their eyes. The smell of sweat and urine was suffocating now that the rain no longer washed it away.

"Our signal," whispered Nik, unsure and surprised by his daring. Then louder: "Our signal!" The men roared, raising swords and fists into the air. Their faces had become gruesome grimaces. The wait was finally over. A prickle ran from Nik's neck down to his tailbone. Power. Glory. He grinned at Stauffer tauntingly, full of malicious glee.

“Yes, I am a loudmouth, but who’s the nervous one now?” His words were lost in the tumult, but Stauffer understood him. Like a withered statue, the old orgiast stood amidst his riled fighters, who waited only for the standard carrier to lead them forward.

They stormed down the slope. For a moment, everything was splashing mud, tense faces, rustling weapons, stamping feet, and steamy breath. Nik was aware of his fear as he strode ahead of his pack. The weight of the sword in his hand, the earthy smell of the wet grass—all the colors were more intense, the smells around him streamed directly into his brain. He greeted the fear as a good friend who sharpened his vision and hardened his muscles into steel. Then the others caught up, panting and sweaty with excited faces. Nik’s moment of solitude on the battlefield grew into an unbelievable sense of belonging. Like a herd, they rioted against the enemy in order to trample him under their hooves. All their hearts beat together.

The western and eastern flanks of the Anabaptists had ripped the army of the voivods in half. The Stauffer Pack pressed forward into this break as though a sea of teeming spears parted before them. Down the hill they went, climbing first over hacked-up corpses and then up the bloodstained ground of the commander’s hill. Up there waited the voivod guards and the darkening sky, still blue but turbulent. No more than twenty breaths separated the Stauffer Pack from their battle. Only fifteen! They panted, having misjudged the distance—and their enemy. The voivod guards, bearded giants with black breastplates and swaying black kilts, held their weapons ready. Then fingers bent on their triggers.

Dozens of cracks rang out. The Anabaptists ran into a lightning storm. The bullets impacted their bodies with dull thuds, ripping through flesh and slamming them to the ground, where they were trampled into the mud by the next wave of comrades. Now, however, nothing could stop them but death. They ran on, screaming, not worrying about the friends at their side. No turning back. Victory or death. The attackers’ swings sliced down the first row of the defenders. Swords rose up in the air that they might find their conclusion in sliced flesh and crushed bones.

Nik was among the first to reach the crest. He gasped from exhaustion, yet felt peculiarly vital. Everything seemed so clear. The sky was bluer than normal, and the flag rattled excitedly above him. Two of the Balkhani seemed so close that he could see the sweat oozing out from the pores on their skin. He rammed the first to the ground with his left shoulder and then stabbed with his sword. Blood ran hot over his hands as he pulled out the blade and swung it in a wide arc towards the second Balkhani, who was aiming his automatic rifle. The weapon was diverted toward the sky, firing shot after shot into the air, before leaving its owner’s lifeless hand.

Nik was already past. The Anabaptists were like rabid wolves in a herd of sheep, attacking and ripping apart their enemies, refreshed by their blood and torment. They didn’t notice that comrade after comrade fell. Drunk on blood. No sense of time. Hearts racing, painfully throbbing.

Nik slid back into reality, and the cries of those fighting and dying pressed agonizingly into his awareness, as though through a thick film. His sword was broken and his arm hurt from exertion. Balkhani and Anabaptists lay wrenched on top of one another. Broken eyes stared at him. What a senseless slaughter! Was this it? Living only for the brief, glory-filled moments of danger and victory? Yes, it was.

“Jebacu te!” The words erupted from a vengeful throat as though vomited, painful and vicious. Like in a nightmare, the voivod stepped over the corpses, his body steaming from the fresh blood covering him. He pointed his gun at Nik and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Nik stormed forward, sliding and falling on the slippery ground, bumping into the voivod and knocking them both to the ground. The pistol landed a step away in the mud. The voivod landed a glancing blow across Nik’s temple. In response, Nik rammed his elbow into the bridge of his enemy’s nose. With a muffled gasp, the voivod collapsed. Nik reached into the mud and found the cold metal. The pistol was so absurdly small for the power it contained. Nik placed it against his enemy’s head. The voivod’s expression was caught somewhere between suffocation and disbelief. Nik pulled the trigger and, this time, the pistol didn’t jam.

CHAPTER 4

GAME CONCEPTS

CATHARSYS

Degenesis uses a new, exclusive rules system called *CatharSys*. While the majority of a game session will unfold through the imaginative interaction between the players and the gamemaster, there are many times when the action will be decided by a random roll of the dice.

Will you scale the crumbling canyon wall before the approaching Spitalians torch you alive? Does your last remaining bullet hit the slaving psychonaut between the eyes or does the crazed fiend dig its claws into your face before you have the chance to fire? Can you decipher the pre-Eschaton symbols scrawled onto the disheveled map and discover the secret cavern exit or will you have to wander the passageways aimlessly for hours, hoping to get lucky? When danger arises, combat ensues, or a situation is just too juicy to not involve a little randomness, it's time to break out the dice and put *CatharSys* to work.

CatharSys uses ten-sided dice (D10) for all game mechanics. In this system, a roll of "0" counts as a 10.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A CHARACTER

ATTRIBUTES

All characters have five attributes: **Agility (AGI)**, **Body (BOD)**, **Charisma (CHA)**, **Intellect (INT)**, and **Psyche (PSY)**. These attributes represent the *natural* abilities of the character. All attributes have a rating between 1 and 10, with 10 being the highest possible natural rating in an attribute. In special circumstances (drug use, biokinetic mutation, nanotech enhancement, etc.), an attribute rating can exceed 10 or be reduced to 0. The average human attribute rating is 4–5 for player characters.

Agility (AGI)

Agility determines the character's ability to react, along with speed, balance, and manual dexterity.

Body (BOD)

Body designates a character's physical strength, constitution, and stamina.

Charisma (CHA)

Charisma is a measure of a character's social prowess, leadership, and power of personality. Physical attractiveness plays only a small part, as notions of beauty vary greatly from culture to culture.

Intellect (INT)

Intellect encompasses a character's raw intelligence, the ability to learn, and the ability to think logically.

Psyche (PSY)

Psyche embodies the strength of the character's will, perceptiveness, ability to empathize, and the ability to accurately assess other people.

Attribute Notation

For ease of reference, attributes are listed by their three-letter designation followed by the attribute rating. For example: AGI 3, BOD 4, CHA 5, INT 6, PSY 7.

SKILLS

Skills represent the *learned* abilities of the character. All skills have a rating between 1 and 10, with 10 being the highest possible rating in a skill. All skills are linked to one of the five attributes. Throughout the life of a character, skill ratings may be raised through gained experience and new skills may be acquired. A list of the current skills in *Degenesis* can be found on p. 217.

Skill Notation

Since skills are linked to attributes, they are sometimes listed as an extension of their linked attribute followed by the skill rating for ease of reference. For example: BOD + Toughness 4, AGI + Unarmed Combat 6, or INT + Artifact Lore 3.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Specializations are the *finely-tuned* abilities of a character. The specialization's rating is used as a modifier that lowers the Difficulty (DIF) of an action (see *Difficulty*, p. 210). All specializations are directly linked to the skills they modify. Specializations are created by the players and the gamemaster, providing an excellent opportunity to construct truly unique characters. A character may have more than one specialization per skill. Some examples of specializations can be found in *The Skills*, p. 212.

Note that specializations may vary in focus and depth, as agreed upon by the gamemaster and player. For the skill Geography, for example, one could have the specialization Borca (a region) or Justitian (a city in that region). A character with the Borca specialization would know what routes traverse the region and where some small towns are, but she wouldn't know the neighborhoods and specifics of Justitian like someone with that specialization would.

Specialization Notation

Specializations are always italicized, lower case, and listed following the linked skill and attribute. For example: BOD + Toughness > *immunity to fire* 2, AGI + Unarmed Combat > *chokeholds* 2, INT + Artifact Lore > *iPods* 2.

ACTION VALUE (AV)

Before any dice can be rolled to determine the success or failure of an action (see *Skill Roll*, p. 210, the **Action Value (AV)** must be calculated. Thankfully, advanced trigonometry is not required to calculate the AV for an action. The formula is a simple one:

$$\text{Attribute Rating} + \text{Skill Rating} = \text{Action Value (AV)}$$

As you can see, the AV combines a character's natural abilities (attributes) and learned abilities (skills) into one value. The AV represents the chance a character has of successfully handling a challenging or stressful situation.

Attributes: The *natural* abilities of a character: Agility (AGI), Body (BOD), Charisma (CHA), Intellect (INT), and Psyche (PSY).

Skills: The *learned* abilities of a character. All skills are linked to one of the five attributes.

Specializations: The *finely-tuned* abilities of a character. Specializations are linked to skills. They represent expert training a character possesses in a specific skill. Specializations lower the Difficulty of an action by the rating of the specialization.

Skill Roll: A die roll with 2D10. For an action to succeed, the Skill Roll must be *above* the Difficulty and *equal to or below* the Action Value (AV).

Action Value (AV): Attribute rating + skill rating. For example: AGI 5 + Firearms 5. The AV of an attempted action is the number you must roll *equal to or below* in order for a Skill Roll to succeed. **Difficulty (DIF):** The Difficulty of an attempted action is the number you must roll *above* in order for a Skill Roll to succeed. Difficulty is determined by the gamemaster.

Vitality (VIT): An expendable, derived stat that represents the limits to which a character can push herself physically. By spending Vitality, a character can *increase her initiative, reduce the Difficulty of an action, or increase a dice roll in combat.* If Vitality reaches zero, a character collapses from exhaustion and must rest until at least one point of Vitality is regained.

Vitality = BOD + Stamina skill.

Initiative (INIT): This value determines the order of action in a combat round. The character with the highest Initiative has the opportunity to act first, followed by all others in descending order of Initiative. **Initiative = AGI + Reaction skill.**

Inertia (INRT): This value determines the difficulty of performing multiple attacks with a weapon. The lower the weapon's Inertia, the easier it is to perform multiple attacks with the weapon.

The lower the AV, the harder it will be for a character to perform the specific action. The higher the AV, the easier the specific action becomes.

Example: Nemerov, an especially foul-tempered Pollener Marshal, plans to use his meaty fists to rearrange the face of the smarmy Hybrispanian Apocalyptik named Brakka. Nemerov has BOD 7 and the skill Unarmed Combat 7. His Action Value (AV) for the attempted pummeling is 14 (attribute + skill = AV, 7 + 7 = 14). The face bashing has a pretty decent chance of success.

Example: Brakka, utterly thrashed by the mighty Nemerov and cowering alone in the bushes, needs medical attention. Unfortunately, no one with any real medical skill or power of intellect is around, so he has to patch up his face himself. Brakka has INT 3 and the skill First Aid 2. His Action Value (AV) for the attempted action is 5 (attribute + skill = AV, 3 + 2 = 5). Hmmmm; looks like Brakka ain't gonna be lookin' too purty.

Damage Rating (DAM): The Damage Rating (DAM) of a weapon consists of two numbers. The first number, known as **Potential**, determines the number of dice used when rolling for damage. The second number, in parentheses, is the **Penetration**—you must roll *equal to or below* the Penetration in order to successfully damage an opponent. An example of Damage Rating notation is as follows: DAM 5 (7)

Flesh Wound: A surface wound that is not life threatening. The Toughness skill increases the amount of flesh wounds a character can sustain in a particular region of the body (head, torso, or legs) before they become life threatening.

Trauma Wound: A life-threatening wound. Unconsciousness—or even death—is imminent.

Concept: The character's formative story.

Cult: The group to which a character belongs.

Culture: The character's ethnic heritage.

Gamemaster (GM): The person who leads a *Degeneration* game, describes the world, and controls the non-player characters.

Player: A game participant who controls a player character.

Player Character (PC): A character who is controlled by a player.

Non-player Character (NPC): A character encountered by player characters and controlled by the gamemaster.

Campaign: A string of several adventures that combine to form a larger story.

Adventure: A single story arc in which the player characters are active participants. There are several acts in an adventure.

Act: A section of an adventure that can be completed in one or two evenings of play. There are several scenes in an act.

Scene: A short episode of action.

AV	Description
0–4	Clueless: The character has little or no practical experience in this skill area and a poor physical condition. She will surely fail.
5–7 practical	Dabblers: The character possesses limited experience. Her chances are slim.
8–12	Experienced: Even in stressful situations, this character keeps her cool. She is likely to succeed.
13–15 character	Expert: Even in life or death situations, this character knows what she is doing. She knows her work will be successfully finished.
16–20 Only	World Class: To fail here borders on impossible. extreme resistance or very bad luck could explain it.

DIFFICULTY (DIF)

The **Difficulty (DIF)** of any attempted action is determined by the gamemaster. The higher the difficulty, the harder it will be for the character to succeed with the action.

If the Difficulty of an attempted action is greater than the Action Value, the character has zero chance to succeed with the action on her own. Remember that an applicable specialization can lower the Difficulty of an action, however, making an action that was impossible prior to the specialization modifier possible. The following table provides guidelines for determining the Difficulty of an action.

Difficulty	Description
4	Easy
6	Tricky
8	Hard
10	Very hard
12	Barely possible
14	Nearly impossible
16	Miraculous

Example: Zogineesh, a Balkhani Jehammedan, is in some trouble—an agitated Scrapper holds a knife to his throat. Zogineesh cost the Scrapper a shot at a valuable load of tech, and she is not pleased. Fortunately, Zog is an extremely charismatic fast talker: CHA 5 and the skill Negotiation 4. He tries to calm the Scrapper down and convince her to let him go. His AV for the attempted action is 9, but the gamemaster gives the situation a Difficulty of 6 because the Scrapper is extremely agitated and also happens to have a particular disdain for the philosophies of the Jehammedan. The attempted action is still possible, since the Difficulty did not exceed the AV, but the odds of success on the Skill Roll have dwindled considerably.

SKILL ROLL

Any time a character attempts an action, the gamemaster may call for a **Skill Roll**. To make a Skill Roll, roll two ten-sided dice (2D10) and add them together, producing a result between 2 and 20. The result of the Skill Roll is compared to both the Action Value and the Difficulty of the attempted action. If the result is *lower than or equal to* the AV and *higher* than the Difficulty, then the action is a success. Otherwise, the attempted action fails.

If the failed Skill Roll is lower than the Difficulty, the skill of the character would have been enough, but the circumstances proved too challenging. If the circumstances change, the character may make another attempt.

If the failed Skill Roll is higher than the AV, the character has exceeded the limits of her ability. The character may not make another attempt at the action until she learns more about how to deal with the situation.

Skill Roll Notation

To easily identify which skill and attribute are used to determine the AV for a Skill Roll, they will be listed in the format of “skill

+ attribute.” For example, an unarmed melee Skill Roll would be noted as: AGI + Unarmed Combat. If the ratings for the particular character making the roll are known, these will also be listed, followed by the AV in parentheses: AGI 5 + Unarmed Combat 3 (AV 8). If the Difficulty for a particular Skill Roll is also predetermined, it will also be listed in parentheses following the AV: INT 4 + Artifact Lore 3 (AV 7, DIF 5).

WHEN TO MAKE SKILL ROLLS

Below are some guidelines for a gamemaster to determine whether or not a Skill Roll would be appropriate for an attempted action. Of course, the final determination is always up to the gamemaster.

Stress

If a character finds himself in a stressful situation or under the pressure of time, the gamemaster should call for a Skill Roll to resolve any actions.

Example: Brakka falls into a raging river. Though he has the skill BOD + Swimming 4, the gamemaster determines the water is moving with sufficient violence to warrant a Skill Roll for him to swim safely to shore. Had Brakka fallen into a calm lake, the gamemaster could have allowed Brakka to swim to shore without a Skill Roll.

Consequences

If an attempted action will produce interesting consequences, depending on its success or failure, the gamemaster should call for a Skill Roll.

Example: Grendoltok, a particularly industrious Scourger, wants to construct an improvised ranged weapon from a rusty pipe, wire, and a couple of tightly wound springs. He is in the middle of nowhere, however, without his trusty tools. The gamemaster determines the workmanship on the weapon could be potentially shoddy (or even calamitous, causing injury) due to the work environment and calls for a Skill Roll. If Grendoltok was attempting to construct the weapon in his fully equipped workshop, the gamemaster could have forgone the Skill Roll.

Unskilled

If a character lacks a certain skill or their level in a skill is deemed too low to execute an action without incident, the gamemaster should call for a Skill Roll. In this case, the character's Action Value simply equals the appropriate attribute, since they lack the skill.

Example: Brakka, Zogineesh, and Nemerov come upon a cliff. Brakka, consistently a burden on the group, is the only one without BOD + Climbing. The others scale the cliff without problems and without a roll. Brakka, however, must make a Skill Roll using only his BOD attribute, since he lacks the Climbing skill.

CRITICAL SUCCESS

If the Skill Roll is a success and you roll doubles (both dice show the same number), the action has an exceptionally positive outcome.

Example: Nemerov is attempting to decipher a series of pre-Eschaton scribbles on a cave wall. He has INT 5 and Written Languages 5, giving him an AV 10. On the Skill Roll, Nemerov rolls 4 and 4 for a total of 8. The action is a critical success since the Skill Roll was below the AV 10 and both dice came up the same number. Not only does Nemerov decipher the basic context of the writing, he uncovers a secret meaning behind the phrases.

CRITICAL FAILURE

If the Skill Roll is a failure and you roll doubles (both dice show the same number), the action has an exceptionally horrendous outcome.

Example: Poor pathetic Brakka. Swept away by the raging river, he struggles to swim back to shore. He has BOD 5 and Swimming 4, giving him an AV of 9. The gamemaster assigns a Difficulty of 6. On the Skill Roll, Brakka rolls 2 and 2 for a total of 4. The action is a critical failure since the Skill Roll was below the Difficulty of 6 and he rolled double 2s. Brakka is swept up in the violent current. Not only is he unable to reach the safety of the river bank, but his head bashes against a boulder and now he must fight to remain conscious.

TEAMWORK

If two or more characters are collaborating on an action (such as repairing a device together), one of the characters is considered the primary actor. The supporting characters each make a Skill Roll, and for each one that succeeds, the AV of the primary character is raised by 2. The primary character's Skill Roll determines whether the action succeeds or fails. A maximum of 4 characters can provide support to the primary acting character, for a maximum AV bonus of +8.

Example: Brakka and Zogineesh are both attempting to repair an ancient device. Zogineesh has the higher Tinkering skill (4), so he is the primary actor. Brakka makes his own Tinkering Skill Roll with his Agility 4 + Tinkering 3 (AV 7) against the gamemaster-determined Difficulty of 4. He rolls a 6 and succeeds. This adds 2 to Zogineesh's Skill Roll, who rolls Agility 5 + Tinkering 4 for an AV of 11 (4 + 5 + 2). Unfortunately, he rolls a 12, so he fails despite Brakka's help.

OPPOSED SKILL ROLL

Any time a character attempts an action that is opposed by another, an **Opposed Skill Roll** is made. Each participant makes a Skill Roll using the appropriate skill. If only one participant succeeds, the opposed action is decided in her favor. If there is more than one successful roll, the character with the highest result succeeds, unless someone else rolls a critical success—the person rolling a critical success triumphs over the others. If more than one critical success is rolled, the person with the highest value wins. In the case of a tie, the gamemaster simply determines what happens: everyone may succeed, fail, or the contest is unresolved and must be continued (calling for another Opposed Skill Roll).

Example: Brakka is forced by Nemerov and Zogineesh to take the late guard duty shift for their camp. In the night, a Scourger spy attempts to sneak close to the camp to determine the strength of the group. Brakka and the Scourger each perform an appropriate Skill Roll. Brakka rolls PSY 3 + Perception 4 (AV 7). The Scourger rolls AGI 5 + Stealth 4 (AV 9). On the Skill Roll, Brakka rolls 3 and 4 for a total of 7. A success! The Scourger, however, rolls 5 and 3 for a total of 8. Since the Scourger also succeeded but with a higher result, his attempt to remain concealed wins out.

TEAMWORK AND OPPOSED SKILL ROLLS

When two or more characters are collaborating on one side of an Opposed Skill Roll, the gamemaster can simply use the teamwork rule described above. Alternately, the gamemaster can allow all of the cooperating characters (to a maximum of 5) to make the Skill Roll, and simply use the highest successful roll result from the bunch.

Example: Zogineesh joins Brakka on guard duty for a minute. Seeing this, the Scourger spy attempts to sneak away. In this case, Zogineesh and Brakka are using teamwork to spot the spy, so the gamemaster secretly rolls for both of them. The Scourger rolls a 7 against his AV of 9. Brakka rolls a 6 against his AV of 7—a success but not high enough—but luckily Zogineesh rolls an 8 against his AV of 9 (PSY 5 + Perception 4). Zogineesh spots the Scourger as he tries to slip away, so he quickly sounds an alarm!

THE SKILLS

AGILITY SKILLS

Aircraft

Airplanes and helicopters died along with the ancients. Their steel skeletons rust away on overgrown runways across the continents. Should a working model—or a reproduction—be found, however, a character with the Aircraft skill could get the thing off the ground.

Possible Specializations: *blimps, gliders, helicopters, planes*

Armed Combat

Whether your weapon of choice is a Pollener stone axe, a Frank long sword, or a Jehammedan scimitar, there is no disputing the ironclad foothold melee weapons have at the pinnacle of post-Eschaton arsenals. Society has devolved into a brutal struggle for survival, and those who can beat their foes into submission with whatever is at hand have an undeniable advantage over those who don't know a blade from a twig.

The Armed Combat skill enables a character to wield all varieties of melee weapons with flair and deadly efficiency.

Possible Specializations: *two-handed weapons, one-handed weapons, axes, clubs, whips, knives, swords*

Firearms

For a Hellvetic, firearms are a given, a birthright. For a Pollener, a gun is a rare artifact, an oddity that is feared but also wields great power within their borders. The Firearms skill allows a character to use a firearm with lethal proficiency. Without this skill, a character risks blowing her own fingers off instead of putting a bullet between the eyes of the enemy.

Possible Specializations: *pistols, rifles, shotguns, quick draw*

Heavy Weapons

Heavy machine guns, mortars, rocket and grenade launchers, flamethrowers—who doesn't love the big guns! With the Heavy Weapons skill, a character can operate the big guns with confidence.

Possible Specializations: *flamethrowers, cannons, machine guns, launchers*

Land Vehicles

The Land Vehicles skill provides a character with her license to drive. If a form of transportation has wheels or a chain drive, it is considered a land vehicle. The covered wagons of the Polleners, the motorcycles of the Apocalyptiks, and the buggies of the Scourgers all fall into this category. Of course, those without the skill can—and often must—attempt to pilot a land vehicle, but just be prepared to find yourself overturned in a ditch or crashed into a tree.

Possible Specializations: *off road, motorcycles, racing, specific vehicles, personal vehicle*

Projectile Weapons

Significantly more common than firearms, ranged weapons such as bows and crossbows are valued and used by all cults

and cultures. The Projectile Weapons skill allows a character to wield these weapons with accuracy and speed. Without it, an errant arrow shot into your own foot is a definite possibility.

Possible Specializations: *longbows, short bows, crossbows, harpoon guns, slingshots*

Reaction

He who lands the first blow is closer to victory than the person struck. Fighters who take this to heart will do well to work on their Reaction. Otherwise they may never have the first strike and should get used to being on the defensive. Reaction is used to calculate the character's Initiative score (see *Calculate Initiative*, p. 242).

Initiative = AGI + Reaction.

Possible Specializations: *quick draw*

Stealth

The world is a dangerous place. It is often better to slip into the shadows or blend in with your surroundings than to confront an enemy head on. When you need to make yourself scarce, the Stealth skill is a necessity.

Possible Specializations: *disguises, shadows, camouflage*

Thievery

It takes a subtle hand to lift the key from the jailer's belt without her noticing or to slip something into the folds of your jacket while "perusing" the marketplace. The Thievery skill provides you with the nimble touch needed for all varieties of the five-fingered discount.

Possible Specializations: *pickpocketing, coin tricks, shoplifting, sleight of hand*

Thrown Weapons

Though many consider it the most primitive form of ranged combat, a thrown knife can be just as deadly as a slash of the sword. With the Thrown Weapons skill, spears, knives, and even stones transform from melee weapons to accurate and deadly projectiles with just a flick of the wrist.

Possible Specializations: *spears, grenades, knives*

Tinkering

Theory alone is not enough to construct a device or repair a relic of the ancients—nimble hands are also required. The Tinkering skill represents a character's manual dexterity when creating or repairing mechanical objects or constructing buildings or other structures. Combined with the Dynamics or Engineering skill, a character possessing the Tinkering skill is an extremely valuable asset.

Possible Specializations: *armor, melee weapons, construction, firearms, artifacts, vehicles, computers, machinery, electronics*

Unarmed Combat

While a weapon can be disarmed or destroyed, fists and feet are always available. Lightning quick jabs, skilled throws, and devastating kicks—this is the vicious language spoken by those who have developed their bodies into weapons. The Unarmed

Combat skill is a must for any character who loves the savage art of the brawl.

Possible Specializations: *disarms, throws, blocks, specific fighting styles*

Watercraft

The giant transport ships of the Neolibyans rule the Mediterranean. With the Watercraft skill, these giant steel buckets—as well as smaller craft—can be safely guided into harbor and steered through shoals.

Possible Specializations: *barges, sail boats, motor boats*

BODY SKILLS

Climbing

The Climbing skill allows a character to scale or descend challenging vertical surfaces.

Possible Specializations: *mountains, structures*

Mobility

Mobility is the character's capability at traversing difficult terrain and obstacles like ice, sand dunes, or thick brush. The Mobility skill also increases the distance a character can cover in one combat round (see *Combat Movement*, p. 243).

$AGI + \text{Mobility} =$ a character's maximum movement in meters per combat round.

Possible Specializations: *uneven ground, icy terrain, sand dunes*

Riding

The Riding skill allows a character to control a mount under difficult circumstances. While those without the skill may still be able to ride a horse or other beast, any distress with the beast will be quite hard for them to handle.

Possible Specializations: *horse, other specific animals, personal animal*

Stamina

The Stamina skill represents raw physical endurance. It is also used to calculate the amount of Vitality available to a character (see *Vitality*, p. 242).

$BOD + \text{Stamina} = \text{Vitality}$.

Possible Specializations: *distance running, holding breath*

Strength

The Strength skill increases the amount of damage a character inflicts in close combat as well as the maximum amount of weight she can carry.

Possible Specializations: *lifting, prying, throwing*

Swimming

The swamps of Franka, the icy waters of Borca, the foul broth of the Mediterranean—most of the waters of the known world don't exactly lend themselves to swimming. The Swimming skill, however, enables a character to traverse the more treacherous waters of the realm with at least

a degree of safety. Doggy-paddling will undoubtedly lead to a watery grave when confronted with severe conditions.

Possible Specializations: *diving, rivers, lakes*

Toughness

A character with the Toughness skill can withstand more physical punishment than the average person. Toughness increases the number of flesh wounds and traumatic wounds a character can sustain before falling unconscious.

Possible Specializations: *pain resistance, fire resistance, cold resistance*

CHARISMA SKILLS

Domination

Sometimes, rational debate is not sufficient to get your point across. Employing the Domination skill is the equivalent of wielding a psychological sledgehammer. It is a form of brute force that breaks the will of an adversary and delivers it to the assailant in a quivering heap. Emotions such as fear or lust are the tools of domination.

Possible Specializations: *interrogation, intimidation*

Etiquette

Many cultures and cults romp about on the map, all with their own viewpoints and goals. It isn't easy to stroll between their different worlds, striking the proper tone with each. That which opens the door in one place may count as an insult in another. With the Etiquette skill, a character can navigate the intricate cultural landscape and not only remain inoffensive in social situations, but can also gain the trust of the locals by following their customs and demonstrating respect for their traditions.

Possible Specializations: *diplomacy, any specific cult or culture*

Leadership

She is the shepherd, the folk are her herd. Those who wish to lead a small unit into battle or a people into an unknown future must possess the Leadership skill. With it, you can inspire people for your cause, self-assuredly holding lofty speeches, even when unsure of the outcome.

Possible Specializations: *military, civil*

Negotiation

War or peace? Freedom or slavery? Victory or defeat? The art of negotiation can be a much more powerful tool than the fist when trying to settle these matters. With the Negotiation skill, a character can turn a tense situation to her favor through careful words and promises. This skill is also invaluable in financial matters.

Possible Specializations: *haggling, rhetoric*

Seduction

In the eyes of the Apocalyptiks, the ancient game of lust between the sexes is an art from which a very good living can be made. With the Seduction skill, a character is adept at playing the game and employing all its techniques—revealing wardrobe, flattering words, alluring glances, and beguiling scents.

Possible Specializations: *dancing, apparel, flirtation*

INTELLECT SKILLS

Accounting

In business dealings, one who understands the bottom line and how to manipulate numbers has a clear advantage. The Neolibyans and Chroniclers are the last true experts and view the Accounting skill as a large part of their success, since most people of the post-Eschaton world do not even know how to count past 20.

Possible Specializations: *fraud, bookkeeping, mathematics*

Artifact Lore

The world of *Degeneration* is littered with technological relics and other artifacts from the time of the ancients. For most, these objects are nothing more than curiosities: rusted trinkets and plastic shapes only useful as exotic jewelry. Their true value, however, is apparent to those with the proper knowledge. The Artifact Lore skill is used to identify artifacts, estimate their value, determine their function, and eventually learn how to operate or repair them.

Possible Specializations: *computers, household appliances, watches*

Biology

The knowledge of terrestrial life forms, along with the macro and microscopic affairs within them, falls under the Biology skill. Those who wish to understand Foulness, Primer, and their effects on flora and fauna should apply themselves to this study—know thine enemy.

Possible Specializations: *flora, fauna, primer, homo sapiens, homo degeneration, paleontology*

Chemistry

The study of chemicals is a dangerous undertaking. The lost knowledge of the past can only be regained through experimentation—usually of the explosive variety. The Chemistry skill is used to determine which chemicals can be safely combined and which combinations should be avoided. It also incorporates the identification and creation of alcoholic beverages (through distillation or fermentation), medicines, and drugs.

Possible Specializations: *explosives, fuels, acids, ammunition, alcohols, drugs*

Dynamics

Any character attempting to construct a device or build a structure must be versed in the principles of physics. The Dynamics skill is used to evaluate physical laws and their effects on reality. This understanding of the universe's fundamental mechanics is necessary for civilization to flourish.

Dynamics is a purely theoretical skill. To put such ideas into practice, the Tinkering skill is needed. The Dynamics skill allows a character to understand *why* something works, whereas Engineering provides knowledge of *how* it works.

Possible Specializations: *construction, mechanics, electricity*

Engineering

To use and manipulate the relics of the ancients, a comprehension of how such devices work is essential. Characters with

the Engineering skill are able to understand and design plans for a variety of mechanical and electrical devices. Generators, pumps, and motors hold no mystery for the skilled engineer. Engineering is purely a theoretical skill, however—in order to repair or build a device, one must possess the Tinkering skill (p. 212).

Possible Specializations: *armor, melee weapons, firearms, artifacts, vehicles, computers, machinery, electronics*

First Aid

The First Aid skill is used to prevent a wound, illness, poisoning, or spore infestation from worsening. Wounds can be cleaned and dressed, the effects of a poison slowed, and the symptoms of sickness or spore infestation reduced. See *Healing*, p. 251 for detailed rules on using First Aid.

Possible Specializations: *wounds, illness, poison, spore infestation*

Geography

In the fifth post-Eschaton century, traveling from settlement to settlement is an adventure. The old tarred roads lead to nowhere, and the rusted metal signs of the ancients are no longer decipherable. Only those who truly know the landscape are able to follow the correct path and keep the journey short and safe. The Geography skill is used when reading a map, surveying the landscape to create a map, or when there is no map and an instinctive feel for the land is needed.

Possible Specializations: *mountain regions, Justitian, Tripol, Africa, cartography*

Law

Imposing the rule of law on the wilderness is a difficult task, demanding a firm hand and clear instruction. Even those ignorant of the basic codes understand that no one is beyond the law, including the Marshal themselves, and that the law should be dependable and predictable. The Law skill not only covers the knowledge of law but also the ability to interpret its nuances and exploit its loopholes.

Possible Specializations: *Justitian Code, Jehammedan Penitence, Anabaptist Charter, Word of the Raven (Apocalyptic Law), Tripolitan Mercantile Law*

Legends

The legends of the past circulate in people's minds, influencing their actions and attitudes. What is the source of the Spitalians' phobia of germs? Why do Africans seek such fierce retribution against the peoples of Europe? The Legends skill allows a character to recall and decipher the legends of a cult or culture in order to gain a better understanding of them. This can be a distinct advantage when dealing with an ally or adversary of a particular background. Only the shortsighted curse legends as meaningless fairy tales. The wise listen intently and seek the truth written between the lines.

Possible Specializations: *the ancients, storytelling, any specific culture or cult*

Medicine

When a compress is no longer sufficient to stop severe bleeding or herbal tea is too weak to knock out an illness, a deeper knowledge of medicine is required. A character with the Medicine skill can attempt to cure serious diseases, neutralize the effects of poison or spore infestation, and heal traumatic wounds. Limited medical resources or a particularly grievous medical issue should increase the Difficulty of the Medicine Skill Roll. See *Healing*, p. 251 for detailed rules on using Medicine skill.

Possible Specializations: *traumatic wounds, disease, poison, spore infestation, surgery, veterinary medicine*

Military Tactics

Leading troops into the heat of battle requires a certain pathos, confidence, and strategic mind. Those with the Military Tactics skill have a greater sense for superior position on the battlefield, predicting enemy actions, and timing assaults.

Possible Specializations: *urban warfare, guerrilla tactics, siege warfare*

Psychology

The Psychology skill deals with understanding the human mind and how to manipulate others.

Possible Specializations: *psychosis, phobias, propaganda, spore mind*

Spoken Language

Over the centuries, the cultures of post-Eschaton Europe and Africa have developed their own languages and dialects that are a potpourri of the many languages once common to a particular region.

The Spoken Language skill imparts an ability to grasp or convey *the basics* of any spoken language (in other words, it allows the character to get the gist of what's being said or to get her intentions across, even if she doesn't understand particular words or speak fluently). In order to properly use and understand a spoken language, the skill must be further developed as a specialization in that language.

Every character begins with Spoken Language 4 and a specialization in the language of her native culture at 2.

Possible Specializations: *African (High Arabic with some French), Balkhani (a mix of Russian and Balkhan dialects), Borcan (German with French and English influences and simplified grammar), Frank (well-preserved French), Hybrispinian (Spanish with minimal Balkhan influence), Pollener (a mix of Polish and Russian), Purgar (Italian strongly diluted with Borcan), specific languages of the ancients*

Survival

Even half a millennium after the Eschaton, large regions of the globe are still dominated by rugged wilderness and wastelands. The Survival skill gives a character a chance to survive in the harshest of conditions. Understanding what foliage is edible, how to construct a shelter, and identifying the warning signs of inclement weather can be the difference between life and death when beyond the safety of a settlement's walls.

Possible Specializations: *trapping, hunting, fishing, gathering, tracking, weather prediction*

Writing

Though the written word has lost much of its meaning to the masses, those who possess the Writing skill have a powerful advantage over those who are illiterate. Ancient texts are valuable and rare, and those who can decipher their secrets are held in high regard. Cults such as the Spitalians and Chroniclers are dependent on their libraries, powerful stores of information waiting to be queried.

Possible Specializations: *poetry, ancient letters*

PSYCHE SKILLS

Empathy

Truly understanding the feelings of another, to really slip into their skin, is a gift that few possess. What is your opponent thinking? What are her motives? Can you decipher her strengths and weaknesses? Is she afraid or do you sense she believes she has the advantage? The unspoken private language of the heart is open to those with the Empathy skill.

Possible Specializations: *animals, any of the cultures or cults*

Faith

Faith is the refuge of the soul, whether it is embodied in the zeal of the Anabaptists or the promise of the Jehammedans. The Faith skill allows a character to tap into the depths of their soul when it seems there is no hope and rise to meet a challenge. In situations when the humanly impossible is called for or the spirit is locked up in the face of horror, faith can offer a way out. The Faith skill can be used to combat the creeping mental disintegration of spore infestation.

Possible Specializations: *fanaticism, spore resistance*

Feigning

Everyone wears a mask behind which their true person resides. Whether for roleplaying, self-protection, or just out of habit, the Feigning skill enables a character to effortlessly trade one "mask" for another and still seem trustworthy.

Possible Specializations: *acting, impersonation*

Gambling

Though the Apocalyptiks are considered the true masters, games of chance are loved everywhere. A character with the Gambling skill has an instinctual feel for gambling.

Possible Specializations: *cheating, specific games*

Music

Music is a part of every culture and a mirror to their circumstances and dreams. A character with the Music skill has a fundamental understanding of music, able to carry a tune and play a variety of instruments. This talent can be used to both inspire and annoy.

Possible Specializations: *singing, composing, specific instruments*

Perception

A priceless artifact in a sea of dust, the glimmering of a telescope lens in the distance, or the shadowy scheme flickering behind someone's eye—noticing these at the proper moment can give you a distinct advantage. The Perception skill provides a character with a heightened ability to detect the subtleties of her surroundings and to discover that which is hidden to most.

Possible Specializations: *eavesdropping, specific senses, spot hidden*

Self Mastery

A character with the Self Mastery skill can keep a clear head during volatile confrontations and survive stressful situations with dignity. Like the Faith skill for religious characters, Self Mastery can also be used to keep the more debilitating mental effects of spore infestation at bay.

Possible Specializations: *spore resistance, enduring pain*

SKILL LIST

AGILITY

- Aircraft
- Armed Combat
- Firearms
- Heavy Weapons
- Land Vehicles
- Projectile Weapons
- Reaction
- Stealth
- Thievery
- Thrown Weapons
- Tinkering
- Unarmed Combat
- Watercraft

BODY

- Climbing
- Mobility
- Riding
- Stamina
- Strength
- Swimming
- Toughness

CHARISMA

- Domination
- Etiquette
- Leadership
- Negotiation
- Seduction

INTELLECT

- Accounting
- Artifact Lore
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Dynamics
- Engineering
- First Aid
- Geography
- Law
- Legends
- Medicine
- Military Tactics
- Psychology
- Spoken Language
- Survival
- Writing

PSYCHE

- Empathy
- Faith
- Feigning
- Gambling
- Music
- Perception
- Self Mastery

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTER CREATION

AT THE BEGINNING

Player characters are the protagonists of *Degenesis*. Therefore, they should be more than an accumulation of statistics. They need to have depth and emotion—something that compels them through the world. Before the players establish their characters, three matters should be addressed:

WHAT IS THE STORY?

Degenesis offers an immense world that includes a wide array of regions, from frigid Borca to spore-infested Franka to boiling Africa. This allows players to choose from a staggering array of cultures and character concepts. To make sure that these possibilities don't hinder the game, you must familiarize yourself with the following framework:

- Do your players want to move about in the world of *Degenesis*, or do they want to become embroiled in the local politics of their region?
- Do you or your players find some cultures more interesting than others?
- Do the players find a specific conflict more enticing than others?
- Which missions or tasks would challenge your players the most?

Taking into account the wishes of all players, you can establish a road map for the future—which will invariably include delays or spontaneous changes. A short outline can be extremely beneficial but do not plan too far ahead. For many players, goals and themes evolve as the game progresses. Grant them a lot of liberty and compel them to explore their characters fully.

WHY THIS GROUP?

Humans rarely venture out of their own enclaves or social safety nets and would never think of adventuring through the wilderness with a group of strangers. Don't let this confine the scope of your game—along with the other players, develop a motivating story that holds the gang together. Are they friends? Are they related, even if only remotely? Have they known each other since childhood? Did they escape the Scourger slave camps together, barely surviving to see the free barrens of the north?

Your job will be easier if the players agree on some way in which they are connected. Should they not be able to come to any consensus, unite them against a common enemy. Your options are limitless.

WHAT IS A BALANCED GROUP?

A group of player characters should comprise a number of specialists that complement each other. This will allow each player to excel at certain tasks.

A typical group consists of one or two fighters who protect the others from attacks. Scourgers, Hellvetics, and Tribals are well suited for this task, as are warring sects such as the Jhammedans or the Anabaptists.

A group should also have a medic. Generally, Spitalians and Anubians are good choices, though healers can be found in every cult and culture.

Additionally, having an expert with special knowledge in the group, perhaps a Chronicler, a Marshal, or even a Neolibyan can enhance the adventure.

Characters with a set of specialized non-combative talents are fun as well. They might not have common skills, but may provide valuable assistance to their fellow players. The Scrappers and Apocalyptiks fall within this category.

You may choose to focus on a group in which all of these roles are filled, ensuring that each player contributes equally to the adventure. If it appears that the group is unbalanced—perhaps there are too many fighters or too few healers—the gamemaster must adjust the game scenario to fit the circumstances of the group.

You can introduce non-player characters to provide healing or a warrior for defense. For example, a band of Chroniclers could hire a Hellvetic for protection. Neolibyans can always find Anubians and Scourgers to accompany them on their forays.

THE BIRTH OF A CHARACTER

An interesting character often develops from a simple idea. Simple, however, does not mean one-dimensional. Try to think of who you might want to embody in a world gone mad.

There are two approaches to developing an interesting character. First, imagine yourself in the world of *Degenesis*. Which abilities would be of advantage to you, and how would the struggle to survive have changed you? The second option is to take the reverse approach: how would it feel to play a persona that is completely different from you—a human whose ideas and values are entirely unlike your own?

Should this not be of any help, recollect the heroes of your favorite books or movies and transport them into the world of *Degenesis*. How would they act?

THE 3 C's

Now that you have established a rough outline of the character itself, it's time to determine the specific qualities of your character. CatharSys character creation is a three-stage process. First, you choose the character's **culture**: the people or region to which your character belongs. Then you select a **concept**, which establishes the life circumstances of the character's childhood and early adulthood. Finally, you determine the **cult** to which your character belongs. During each of these steps, the character gains skills that represent everything she has learned so far.

ESTABLISHING BASE ATTRIBUTES

Since the protagonists of *Degenesis* are particularly gifted and thus stand out from the crowd, every player character's attributes start with a value of 5 (the average human only possesses a value of 4).

Attributes can be raised by taking points from other attributes. No attribute can fall below 1 or exceed 10. The point trade works at a 1-to-1 ratio until an attribute reaches a value of 7. To raise an

AN OVERVIEW OF CHARACTER CREATION

1. ESTABLISH ATTRIBUTE VALUES

All character attributes begin with a rating of 5. Points can be swapped between attributes on a 1-for-1 basis up to a rating of 7. Two points are required for each rating point above 7. No attribute can fall below 1 or be raised above 10.

2. CHOOSE A CULTURE

Distribute 5 points among skills. Cultural skills (defined in the Culture Table, p. 223) may be boosted by a maximum of 3 points. All other skills can only be raised by 1 point.

Choose one principle from the Culture Table.

3. CHOOSE A CONCEPT

Distribute 7 points among skills. Concept skills (defined on the Concept Table, p. 225) may be boosted any number of points, up to a maximum skill rating of 5. All other skills can only be raised by 1 point.

Choose one principle from the Concept Skills Table.

4. CHOOSE A CULT

Distribute 9 points among skills. Cult skills (defined on the Cult Skills Table, pp. 226–227) may be boosted any number of points up to a maximum skill rating of 6. All other skills may only be raised by 1 point.

Choose at least one cult principle.

5. **ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS** Calculate the Flesh Wounds, Trauma Wounds, Vitality, and Maximum Spore Points values of the character.

Flesh Wounds:

All Flesh Wound values are rounded down.

Head: $1 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$

Torso: $3 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$ Legs:

$2 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$

Trauma Wounds:

Trauma Wounds = BOD +

Toughness

Vitality:

Vitality = BOD + Stamina

Spore Infestation

Maximum Spore Points = PSY + Self Mastery or PSY +

Faith, whichever value is higher.

6. RANK AND EQUIPMENT

Determine the starting equipment and rank within the cult.

attribute above 7, the point cost is doubled. An attribute value of 8 would cost 4 points total ($5 + 1 + 1 + 2$), an attribute value of 9 would cost 6 points total ($5 + 1 + 1 + 2 + 2$), and an attribute value of 10 would cost 8 points total ($5 + 1 + 1 + 2 + 2 + 2$).

Example: Sage can't quite visualize her hero yet, but she knows that she has to be fast, agile, and must possess a certain charisma. She proceeds by first reducing her INT by 1 point and her PSY by 2 points, thus accumulating a credit of 3 points. She then allocates 2 of those points to AGI and the third to CHA, leaving BOD unaltered. Her attributes are now as follows:

AGI	BOD	CHA	INT	PSY
7	5	6	4	3

Her character—whom she calls Salender—is as smart as anybody else, very fast, physically in shape, possesses extraordinary charisma, and lacks only in willpower.

CHOOSING A CULTURE

Over the centuries, different nations came together to form new cultures. Each one of them molds and affects its offspring in different ways.

CULTURAL ATTRIBUTE BONUSES

Every culture has attribute bonuses that raise two attributes by one point each. Remember, attribute values cannot exceed 10.

CULTURAL SKILLS

Every culture develops specific skills known as **cultural skills**. These skills are listed in the Culture Table (p. 221).

During the culture step of character creation, the player distributes 5 points among any skills of her choosing. Cultural skills can be raised to a maximum value of 3, as they are relatively easy to gain since the character grows up in an environment that fosters the development of those skills. The player may choose skills not associated with their culture, however, these skills can only be raised to a maximum value of 1.

CULTURAL PRINCIPLE

Every culture adheres to one or more principles. These principles shape the ideas and moral views of those who grow up within this culture. The player must choose one cultural principle.

These principles give shape to the character—but it is up to the player to make the character come to life. Should the player adequately portray their character's cultural principle, she may receive bonus experience points from the gamemaster at the end of a game session.

The principles of *Degeneration* are not meant to be shackles. There are no set rules to govern them. They are only meant to serve the flow of a good roleplaying game.

Example

Sage has decided to make Salender a Hybrispianian. After applying the cultural attribute bonuses and choosing her cultural skills, Salender possesses the following attributes, skills and principle:

AGI	BOD	CHA	INT	PSY
8	5	7	4	3

Skills:

Armed Combat (2)
Unarmed Combat (1)
Survival (1)
Toughness (1)

Principle:

Pride

From her early childhood, Salender was a survival artist who was apt at making it on her own. Being a Hybrispianian, her pride is delicate—to insult her might rouse her anger!

CULTURES AND CULTS

Not all cultures feature the same cults. The Culture Table provides suggested cults for each region. While these suggestions are not binding, a player should have a solid explanation for their character's unusual culture/cult combination if they choose to create one, like an African Jehammedan.

CULTURE TABLE

CULTURE	CULT	ATTRIBUTE BONUS	CULTURAL SKILLS	CULTURAL PRINCIPLES
Africa	Anubian	+1 AGI	Armed Combat	Bonds of Kinship
	Neolibyan	+1 BOD	Faith	Child of the Earth
	Scourger		Firearms	Hedonistic
	Scrapper		Heavy Weapons	Proud
	Tribal		Leadership	Traditional
			Negotiation	Vengeful
Balkhan	Apocalyptik	+1 BOD	Armed Combat	Ferocious
	Ashen	+1 CHA	Domination	Proud
	Hellvetic		Geography	Quarrelsome
	Jehammedan		Reaction	Unsteady
	Scrapper		Strength	Vengeful
	Tribal		Toughness	
Borca	Anabaptist	+1 INT	Artifact Lore	Acquisitive
	Apocalyptik	+1 PSY	Perception	Child of the Ancients
	Chronicler		Survival	Content
	Hellvetic		Toughness	Loner
	Jehammedan			Reclusive
	Marshal			
Franka	Anabaptist	+1 CHA	Negotiation	Addicted
	Apocalyptik	+1 PSY	Projectile Weapons	Dual Natured
	Chronicler		Self Mastery	Lethargic
	Hellvetic		Writing	Rebel
	Marshal			
	Scrapper			
Hybrispania	Apocalyptik	+1 AGI	Armed Combat	Ferocious
	Ashen	+1 CHA	Firearms	Militaristic
	Jehammedan		Projectile Weapons	Proud
	Scrapper		Strength	Sense of Danger
	Spitalian		Survival	Xenophobic
	Tribal		Thrown Weapons	
Pollen	Anabaptist	+1 BOD	Armed Combat	Bonds of Kinship
	Apocalyptik	+1 PSY	Mobility	Child of the Earth
	Chronicler		Perception	Content
	Scrapper		Stamina	Protective
	Spitalian		Strength	
	Tribal		Survival	
Purgare	Anabaptist	+1 AGI	Armed Combat	Bonds of Kinship
	Apocalyptik	+1 INT	Faith	Chosen
	Hellvetic		Legends	Fanatical
	Scrapper		Stealth	Merciless
	Spitalian		Thrown weapons	Rebel
	Tribal			Tradition
			Vengeful	

CHOOSING A CONCEPT

The next step addresses the views, morals, and conditions that have shaped the character. Someone who, in her youth, toiled on a Neolibyan plantation will have had a different experience than somebody who grew up comfortably sheltered behind the walls of a village.

CONCEPT ATTRIBUTE BONUS

Every concept has an attribute bonus that raises a single attribute by one point. Remember, attribute values cannot exceed 10.

CONCEPT SKILLS AND PRINCIPLE

Every concept has a set of skills associated with it. These skills are listed in the Concept Table (p. 223).

During the concept step of character creation, the player distributes 7 points among any skills of her choosing, including the skills chosen during the culture step. The player may choose to acquire or raise skills not associated with their concept, however, these skills can only be raised by one point. Concept skills can be raised to a maximum value of 5. No skill can exceed 5 during this step of character creation.

The player must also choose one concept principle during this step.

CONCEPTS

COMPULSION

Rules and regulations divide humans into conformists and troublemakers—a middle ground is not an option. Early on, children are taught the rules of the community in order to shape them into loyal, useful members of society.

Given the great number of laws, punishment is generally unavoidable, and so it becomes imperative to integrate into the societal machinery as soon as possible. Individual thoughts and actions are a wickedness that quickly brands a rebel as a mischievous outsider.

Children easily adopt this kind of thinking and inherit the biases of their parents.

DECAY

Strength and an iron resolve once brought riches to this region, but human viciousness destroyed this fortune. Grudges and petty quarrels drove this once strong community into anarchy. This decay is a tragedy for a society that once considered itself the apex of all post-Eschaton cultures. Memories of a glorious past are still painfully fresh.

A few left the region and never turned back. The majority of the populace accepted their fate and established miserable settlements among the once magnificent buildings of their fallen society. Ruined people living in ruins, these folks care little for their lives.

Children face a difficult situation. To reach the top of the food chain, surrounded by a jungle of violence and danger, they join gangs. These gangs become their substitute families and attempt to guarantee a comfortable, and certainly criminal, future. The bands of rogues provide support and a perspective—and never release those incorporated into their structure.

LUST

Life is like a carousel. Sometimes it shudders, almost falling apart and shaking off its passengers. Recklessness, envy, and fortune rush past while humans desperately try to grab whatever they can. They would trade anything for a better life and often enough, their souls are lost in the bargain.

Many of the gamblers, trench warriors, and fortune hunters are not fit for this tumultuous ride—they risk everything to win big in the arenas, dingy pubs, and market places of the broken world. Whores flank the streets, demanding their part of whatever fortune can still be extracted from the ruins of human society.

A feverish intensity seems to illuminate a wasteland settlement from within, consuming itself and its inhabitants. Without this human fuel, this place would be little more than ashes blown about by the wind.

MADNESS

Religious indoctrination and the incessant preaching of sect gurus twist the malleable minds of the young. As they age they pursue some doubtful enlightenment with the same zeal as their ancestors did in ages past. It becomes imperative to walk the path of deprivation. Self-castigation and degradation rituals in the face of god are a part of daily life, interrupted only by hard labor and war.

In their young years, novices are shaped by the lifestyles and values of their sects. Only slowly and with great effort can they distance themselves from the past, eventually rupturing their mental bonds and undergoing an independent mental development.

Children rarely know their parents. They are born in the street and left behind like bothersome ballast. Older children take in these orphans and feed themselves by begging and thieving.

PAIN

Very few families can escape the near constant violence of the post-apocalyptic wastes. Relatives are kidnapped, sold into slavery, or killed while desperately defending their homes. It takes a steadfast and determined individual to handle this deadly dance. They lead lives of extremes, committing themselves to hatred with the same passion with which they allow themselves to love.

The union of two humans was considered an impenetrable fortress, a sanctuary in a mad world. The fruits of such relations were cared for and defended with one's life, yet the upbringing is tough. Motherly sing-song does not forge steel.

PEACE

These humans accept one another. Problems are always addressed in order to avoid a negative effect on the community. The only problems that emerge are minimal: the loss of some crops or small thieveries. These are addressed with firm justice. This is a perfect environment to raise children—here, social interaction will get them farther than blunt violence.

QUARANTINE

There are places that should be avoided. Warning signs or mounds of corpses mark their borders. Only the most bizarre cults and most desperate travelers dare to enter these desolate regions.

CONCEPT TABLE

CONCEPT	ATTRIBUTE BONUS	CONCEPT SKILLS	CONCEPT PRINCIPLES
Compulsion	+1 PSY	Domination Empathy Self Mastery Stealth	Elitist Indicter Paranoid Reclusive Xenophobic
Decay	+1 BOD	Armed Combat Firearms Heavy Weapons Projectile Weapons Stealth Thrown Weapons Unarmed Combat	Lethargic Masochistic Opportunistic Rebel Sadistic
Lust	+1 CHA	Gambling Seduction Stealth Thievery	Addicted Decadent Gambler Self-Destructive Wasteful
Madness	+1 PSY	Domination Faith Self Mastery	Astraphobic Fanatic Self-Castigator
Pain	+1 AGI	Reaction Stamina Toughness	Emotionally Scarred Lethargic Merciless
Peace	+1 CHA	Accounting Biology Negotiation Psychology Writing	Elitist Mediator Moralistic Pure
Quarantine	+1 BOD	Domination Survival Toughness	Content Elitist Fanatical Loner
Wealth	+1 INT	Accounting Engineering Leadership Negotiation	Arrogant Elitist Greedy Obsessed with Status

The life of the children who grow up in such a forbidden region is extremely difficult. Not only are they forced to witness their parents battle against the horrors of the land, they are constantly forced to face their own fears. Should they ever leave their place of birth, they would certainly be considered strange and barbaric. Their young lives are consumed by the struggle for survival; their social interaction is limited to arranging the next guard shift and posing as a domineering individual. They are like a pack of wild dogs, always hungry and battle-ready.

WEALTH

Only a few settlements could ever claim real wealth. Yet, those who can are forced to secure their riches behind massive fortifications if they want to repel the multitudes of scoundrels, impoverished mercenaries, greedy clans, and sycophants.

Be it water, vaults full of chronicreds, or a mass of looted relics, fortune means nothing and is impossible to maintain if not secured by discipline, strong leadership, and a culture capable of forming a strong community. If this wealth endures, the children grow up in a rigid and deep community, which

raises the young ones with the awareness that one day they will be the guardians of property. They are raised in a strict and conservative manner and taught many things that were forgotten in the wasteland, such as writing and the knowledge of numbers.

Example

Sage decides that Salender grew up in an environment where love is false and always for sale. She chooses the concept Lust. After applying the concept attribute bonus and choosing her concept skills, Salender now possesses the following attributes, skills, and principle:

AGI	BOD	CHA	INT	PSY
8	5	8	4	3

Skills:

Armed Combat (2)
 Seduction (1)
 Stealth (2)
 Survival (1)
 Thievery (4)
 Toughness (1)
 Unarmed Combat (1)

Principles:

Pride
 Gambler

By now, Salender has learned that it pays to take advantage of people's good faith, twisting them around her little finger. She is a skilled thief who will blow her loot on a seedy card game in the next tavern.

CHOOSING A CULT

The third step of developing a character requires the player to choose one of the thirteen cults. The character is a part of this organization, embedded in its rites and influenced by its views, goals, rights, and duties. The cult will also determine what sort of equipment and how many chronicreds or dinars the character will receive at the beginning of the game.

CULT SKILLS AND PRINCIPLE

Every cult develops specific skills known as **cult skills**. These skills are listed in the Cult Table (at right).

During the cult step of character creation, the player distributes 9 points among any skills of her choosing. Cult skills can be raised to a maximum value of 6. The player may choose to acquire or raise skills not associated with their cult, however, these skills can only be raised by one point. No skill rating may exceed 6 at this point.

The player must also choose one cult principle during this step.

ANABAPTIST

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Child of the Earth
Faith	Chosen
Firearms	Fanatical
Heavy weapons	Indicter
Legends	Merciless
Riding	

ANUBIAN

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Child of the Earth
Biology	Elitist
Chemistry	Merciful
Domination	Pure
Empathy	Seductive
Faith	Traditional
Reaction	Unscrupulous
Word of Law	
Writing	

APOCALYPTIK

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Addicted
Feigning	Bonds of kinship
Gambling	Gambler
Land Vehicles	Hedonistic
Music	Seductive
Reaction	Self-Destructive
Riding	Unsteady
Seduction	
Self Mastery	
Stealth	
Thievery	
Unarmed Combat	

ASHEN

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Agoraphobic
Domination	Astraphobic
Empathy	Loyal
Engineering	Nocturnal
Firearms	Secretive
Leadership	
Music	
Perception	
Stealth	
Thievery	
Tinkering	

CHRONICLER

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Accounting	Acquisitive
Artifact Lore	Loyal
Engineering	Machine Lust
Negotiation	Obsessed with Status
Self Mastery	Secretive
Tinkering	Technophile
Writing	Union with the stream

CULT TABLE

HELLVETIC

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Accounting	Mediator
Artifact Lore	Merciful
Engineering	Militaristic
Firearms	Obsessed with Status
Leadership	Protective
Military Tactics	Social
Stamina	
Tinkering	
Toughness	
Writing	

JEHAMMEDAN

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Chosen
Domination	Fanatical
Faith	Loyal
Legends	Pure
Projectile weapons	Self-Castigator
Riding	Xenophobic
Stamina	
Strength	
Toughness	

MARSHAL

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Addicted
Domination	Arrogant
Firearms	Elitist
Leadership	Good Samaritan
Legends	Indicter
Perception	Righteous
Self Mastery	
Stamina	
Strength	
Toughness	
Word of Law	
Writing	

NEOLIBYAN

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Accounting	Decadent
Artifact Lore	Good Samaritan
Chemistry	Greedy
Domination	Obsessed with status
Engineering	Proud
Geography	
Land Vehicles	
Negotiation	
Watercraft	
Writing	

SCOURGER

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Child of the Earth
Empathy	Ferocious
Firearms	Loyal
First Aid	Merciless
Leadership	Proud
Perception	Vengeful
Reaction	
Stamina	
Strength	
Survival	
Toughness	
Unarmed Combat	

SCRAPPER

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Artifact Lore	Acquisitive
Engineering	Addicted
Geography	Child of the Ancients
Negotiation	People
Perception	Content
Reaction	Greedy
Stamina	Loner
Stealth	
Strength	
Tinkering	

SPITALIAN

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Arrogant
Biology	Obsessed with Status
Chemistry	Paranoid
First aid	Pure
Medicine	Unscrupulous
Self Mastery	
Writing	

TRIBAL

Cult Skills	Cult Principles
Armed Combat	Content
Faith	Ferocious
Projectile weapons	Hedonistic
Stamina	Sense for danger
Strength	Traditional
Survival	Xenophobic
Thrown weapons	
Toughness	
Unarmed Combat	

Example

Sage decides to make Salender an Apocalyptik and chooses the principle Self-Destruction. After choosing her cult skills, Salender is now complete and possesses the following attributes, skills, and principles:

S A L E N D E R

Culture: Hybrispania

Concept: Lust

Cult: Apocalyptik

AGI	BOD	CHA	INT	PSY
8	5	8	4	3

Skills

Armed Combat (2)
Empathy (1)
Firearms (1)
Land Vehicles (2)
Music (1)
Reaction (1)
Seduction (1)
Stamina (1)
Stealth (3)
Survival (1)
Thievery (6)
Toughness (1)
Unarmed Combat (1)

Principles:

Gambler
Pride
Self-destruction

SPECIAL NOTE: TRIBALS

Tribal is a generic term that refers to all small clans, tribes, or groups that either move through the wilderness as nomads or who have settled in one place. Should a player choose to make her character a Tribal, then she and the gamemaster need to work together to create the tribe from which the character originates.

A tribe usually consists of less than 100 members and there is often no clear-cut gender division. Rights and duties are distributed in many different ways. Keep in mind, it is up to the player and gamemaster to decide what the tribe's taboos and mores will be.

The following questions will help you create a tribe:

- Who founded the group and why?
- In which area does the group reside?
- How do the Tribals sustain themselves? (hunting and gathering, agriculture, livestock, thievery, extortion)
- Does the clan control valuable resources? (rich hunting grounds, coal and ore mines, old weapon stashes)
- Who leads the clan?
- Is there a division between religious and secular leadership?
- What are the typical rites of the group? (coming of age, rites of passage, weddings, hunting, burial ceremonies)
- What aspects of the old, pre-Eschaton world have made their way into the mysterious world of the clan's belief system?
- Does the clan have enemies or is it threatened?
- Why is the clan still in place and why have the members not joined another faction?

THE FINAL TOUCHES

If you have not done so already, then you should copy the character sheet from the back of the book and fill in the appropriate boxes. Attributes and skills will not change any more until you finish an adventure. Now, only a few calculations remain along with determining starting equipment before your character is ready to enter the world of *Degensis*.

CALCULATE FLESH WOUNDS

A good physical constitution allows a character to sustain damage without hitting the floor immediately. *CatharSys* simulates this by allowing a certain number of **Flesh Wounds** before critical levels are reached. Should the character sustain damages beyond that point, then the excess is counted as trauma damage—and death isn't far away.

CatharSys divides the human body into three zones: head, torso (including arms), and legs. Each zone has a number of Flesh Wounds equal to a basic value modified by BOD + Toughness. For every 5 points in BOD + Toughness, each body zone can absorb one additional damage point. If the character does not have the Toughness skill, then only the BOD attribute is used to determine the additional points.

Flesh Wounds

All Flesh Wound values are rounded down.

Head: $1 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$

Torso: $3 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$

Legs: $2 + ((\text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}) \div 5)$

Example

Salender has BOD 5 and Toughness 1 for a total of 6. Dividing this total by 5 and rounding down, she adds 1 to the Flesh Wound value for each body zone, giving her Head 2, Torso 4, and Legs 3.

CALCULATE TRAUMA WOUNDS

The higher the number of Trauma Wounds, the longer the character can stay alive after sustaining life-threatening injuries.

$$\text{Trauma Wounds} = \text{BOD} + \text{Toughness}$$

CALCULATE VITALITY

Vitality (BOD + Stamina) represents the reserves available to a character when they need to perform an extraordinary feat during combat.

$$\text{Vitality} = \text{BOD} + \text{Stamina}$$

CALCULATE MAXIMUM SPORE POINTS

Spore infestation caused by the Foulness is a constant threat. The **Maximum Spore Points** allowed before a character goes insane is represented by PSY + Self Mastery or PSY + Faith, whichever value is higher.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Maximum spore points} = \\ & \text{PSY} + \text{Self Mastery, or} \\ & \text{PSY} + \text{Faith,} \\ & \text{whichever value is higher.} \end{aligned}$$

RANK AND EQUIPMENT

What is your character's place within her cult? *CatharSys* answers this question by assessing the skills of the individual: a Chronicler with advanced technological knowledge will have made it far in the cluster; a clever Neolibyan with good negotiation or bartering skills will have amassed a respectable pile of wealth; a Scourger who is experienced in battle will have secured a high position

in the hierarchy. Many cults consider rank when distributing equipment.

In this last step of character creation, you must determine rank, cult-specific equipment, and money—Europeans use chronicreds, while Africans use dinars.

It is possible for a higher-ranked character to possess equipment that is generally appointed to a lower rank.

ANABAPTIST

Anabaptists focus on their charismatic emanations. Anabaptists can only ascend in the cult if their beliefs have been adequately tested and confirmed by the Emanation Commission. Ascetic or

orgiast, every emanation must have its foundation in the Faith skill. With every level in the Faith skill, the character receives confirmation of two emanations.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Recruit	None	Long sword	20
Anabaptist	Faith (1)	Two-handed sword	300
Emissary	Faith (6)	Flamethrower	1,500

ANUBIAN

The seven circles of the Anubians are also the seven steps on the ladder to the top of the cult. An initiate starts on the seventh and outermost ring. Masters of ceremony, guides of the dead, and healers are on levels five or six; jackals are on the fourth or

fifth. A hogon determines the other member's positions within the cult. Keep in mind, you won't make it far if you reject the influence of the Anubis seeds.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Dinars
Initiate	None	Anubis mask	5
Master of ceremony	Domination (2) Faith (4)	None	50
Guide of the dead	Domination (2) Empathy (1) Faith (4)		50
Healer	Biology (4) Chemistry (2) Domination (2) Empathy (2) First Aid (2)	Healing tinctures	50
Jackal	Armed Combat (4) Domination (2) Legends (4) Writing (2)	Finger of Anubis, sickle sword	200
Hogon	Domination (6) Engineering (3) Leadership (8) Legends (6) Writing (6)	Sickle sword	5,000

APOCALYPTIK

Apocalyptiks travel the land in large groups, free of societal pressures and boring hierarchies. Whoever contributes to

the community and takes on difficult tasks is respected and earns renown.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Finch	None	None	50
Crow	Unarmed Combat (4)	Apocalyptik blade bracelet	200
Magpie	Thievery (4)	Stiletto	400
Vulture	Survival (4)	Apocalyptik blade bracelet	600
Cuckoo	Feigning (4)	Stiletto	200
Albatross	Leadership (4) Swimming (1) Watercraft (2)	Catamaran	2,000
Seagull	Armed Combat (2) Swimming (1) Watercraft (4)	Catamaran, harpoon gun	1,500
Owl	Stealth (3) Unarmed Combat (4)	Apocalyptik blade bracelet	600
Woodpecker	Stamina (3) Tinkering (3)	Long sword	200
Stork	Climbing (2) Mobility (2) Thievery (3)	Apocalyptik blade bracelet, net	300
Raven	Domination (4) Law (2) Leadership (3) Self Mastery (2)	Shotgun, motorcycle	5,000

ASHEN

The Ashen have no rigid hierarchy. Impressive demeanor and a strong voice is what matters. The internal pecking order can be easily determined by the level of Domination or Seduction skill. A value of 10 in either of these skills grants the character the

title of demagogue. Should the player aim to become a demagogue, she must first choose a type of domination. Solars and wakers are ranks outside of the general hierarchy.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Ashen	None	None	0
Solar	Engineering (5)	Basic tools	10
Waker	Legends (5) Survival (5)	Illuminator, automatic handgun	200
Demagogue candidate	Domination or Seduction (5)	Eye of the Sun, automatic handgun	20
Demagogue	Domination or Seduction (10)	None	30

CHRONICLER

Access to deeper levels of the cluster is directly tied to the rank of a Chronicler. As a guideline for character creation,

add Engineering and Artifact Lore to establish the rank of the Chronicler.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Agent	None	Vocoder	2,048
Mediator	Engineering + Artifact Lore (8)	Chronicred printer	4,096
Streamer	Engineering + Artifact Lore (16)	Streamer glove, shocker	8,192
Fragment	Engineering + Artifact Lore (20)	None	16,384

HELLVETIC

The lower ranks of the Hellvetic army are determined by the amount of battle training the character has received. During character creation, this is determined by the Firearms skill.

Early in her career, the Hellvetic must choose which military branch to serve in: fortification, intelligence, or infantry. Further advancement is dependent on certain abilities. While fortification and infantry troops still place great value on battle

skills, the intelligence troops require the Engineering skill for advancement. Each level beyond private first class requires an improvement in an applicable skill.

The more advanced NCO ranks of quartermaster, sergeant major, and warrant officer are only partially dependent on skill values. Success during game play is more pivotal to advancement.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Soldier	Firearms (1)	Trailblazer, 5 rounds	50
Private	Firearms (2)	10 rounds	200
Private First Class	Firearms (3)	20 rounds	500
Corporal	Fortification and infantry: Firearms (3) Leadership (2) Military Tactics (1) Intelligence troops: Engineering (3) Leadership (2) Military Tactics (1)	30 rounds	800

JEHAMMEDAN

If you live among the disciples of Jehammed, you were born into a caste from which you can never escape. Within this caste, there is little opportunity to rise—only the ismaeli are capable of improving their status through marriage. It is also possible

for an old isaaki to receive the position of an iconist. Except for these rare possibilities, one is forever tied to one's position in this rigid cult.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Ismaeli	None	Dagger	5
Sword of Jehammed	Armed Combat (4) Strength (2)	Sword	20
Abrami	Leadership (3) Legends (5)	None	500
Isaaki	Armed Combat (4) Faith (4) Strength (3) Toughness (3)	Riding horse	100
Saraeli	Domination (4) Faith (2)	None	0
Hagari	None	None	50

MARSHAL

The Marshal cult is divided into two factions. The character must decide if she will join the camp of the protectors or the advocates. This does not influence her rank, but will most certainly affect her life.

Before any decision is made, however, she must first pass the executor and arbiter examinations. With Law (4), the character is able to enter the ranks of the advocates, and with Stamina (4), the character may become a protector.

After a number of years in the cult, it is possible to rise to the rank of lower marshal. Executors must attain Firearms (4), whereas arbiters solidify their knowledge by attaining Law (6) and Domination (3). To ascend to the office of the high marshal requires a nomination by the Senate.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Vagabond	None	None	50
City marshal	Arbiter: Law (4) Executor: Stamina (4)	Arbiter: Arbiter frock, Codex, Marshal musket Executor: Codex, glasses, Marshal hammer, Marshal hat, Marshal jacket, Marshal musket	500
Lower marshal	Arbiter: Domination (3), Law (6) Executor: Firearms (4)	Riding horse	2,000

NEOLIBYAN

The height of the pile of dinars in a Neolibyan's treasure chamber directly correlates to the respect she receives from her cult. A successful Neolibyan with one or two trade contracts will possess about 300,000 dinars by the age of 25; an exceptionally successful Neolibyan should in the same time-span amass about 1 million dinars. This money must pay for

writers, guards, mediators, and ship crews, as well as slaves and other minions.

Nobody asks a Neolibyan for her professional qualifications, so long as she keeps increasing her wealth. It is also their duty to display such financial blessing with expensive clothing, richly decorated rifles, and well-fed and seemingly happy slaves.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Dinars
Student	None	Accounting journal	500
Writer	Accounting (2) Writing (2)	None	1,000
Trader	Accounting (3) Negotiation (3)	None	10,000
Seafarer	Accounting (4) Watercraft (2)	Transport ship (200 ton)	50,000
Magnate	Accounting (3) Negotiation (6)	Transport ship (1000 ton)	1,000,000
Tycoon	Accounting (2) Leadership (4) Military Tactics (2) Engineering (2)	Surge tank	200,000

SCOURGER

This must be the only military organization in this world that functions without a set rank order. At the age of 12 to 28, men are simply warriors. Afterwards they are counted as elders. Scourgers

with exceptional battle skills rank above their weaker comrades. Advanced age, however, can even out this imbalance. If you want to lead a pack, you better develop the Leadership skill.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Dinars
Dufu	None	Scourge, Scourger flak jacket, helmet	50
Warrior	Unarmed Combat (2) or Armed Combat (2)	Assault rifle	50
Chaga	Unarmed Combat (5) or Armed Combat (5) Leadership (4)	Kom (Scourger vehicle)	5,000
Dumisai	Unarmed Combat (6) or Armed Combat (6) Leadership (4)	None	1,000

SCRAPPER

Scrapers are not organized, so there is no hierarchy to follow. Still it is quite possible for individual Scrapers to rise above the other dirt diggers. Should their luck and wealth become legendary, then they and their runes will be known throughout the

cult. The Perception skill and the Artifact Lore skill play key roles in a Scrapper's reputation. Both values are added together to determine the rank.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Novice	None	None	20
Dirt digger	Perception + Artifact Lore (5)	Carrier frame, Scrapper club	50
Scrapper	Perception + Artifact Lore (10)	Trolley, shotgun	200
Tracker	Perception + Artifact Lore (15)	Pocket light, e-cubed	1,000
Legend	Perception + Artifact Lore (20)		5,000

SPITALIAN

A Medic ascends the hierarchy in regular intervals, so long as she has the necessary professional qualifications. The offices of the registrar and consultant can only be obtained through

connections and relations with important people in the cult. For most characters, the level of medical knowledge is a good indicator of rank.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Recruit	Writing (2)	None	0
Caregiver	Biology (1) Medicine (2) Writing (2)	Spitalian neoprene suit	50
Resident	Biology (2) Medicine (4) Writing (2)	Splayer with mollusk	200
Physician	Biology (3) Medicine (6) Writing (3)	Fungicide rifle	700
Hygienicist	Biology (4) Chemistry (4) Medicine (6) Writing (3)	ABC weapon suit, chloride gas grenades	700
Consultant	Medicine (8) Chemistry (6) Biology (8) Writing (3)	None	10,000

TRIBAL

The great number of tribes and different habits and hierarchies make it impossible to generalize about the ranks of a Tribal within her community. The gamemaster and player need to work together to decide where in the hierarchy the

character is located, how many chronicreds or dinars she receives, and what sort of equipment will be given to her by the tribe. The table below gives an example for both a warrior and a hunter.

Rank	Requirements	Equipment	Chronicreds
Whelp	None	Slingshot	
Warrior	Armed Combat + Strength (5)	Stone club, traps	10
Hero	Armed Combat + Strength (10)	Sword	200
Leader	Armed Combat + Strength (15)	Musket	1,000

DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIENCE

During the course of the game, characters develop their attributes and learn new skills and specializations. Experience points (XP) simulate this development. Experience points are related to the applicable attributes as follows: if a character undergoes many physical hardships, she gains XP for the attributes BOD and AGI. Should the character advance socially or intellectually, she will gather experience points for the attributes CHA and INT. If she proves to have a strong will, the XP for PSY may increase.

At the end of each game session, the character receives XP for the various attributes, marked down next to the attributes on the character sheet. Each game session should earn the character 2 to 6 experience points. Experience points can also be awarded for good roleplaying: to earn this bonus, the player must demonstrate a profound understanding of their character's principles. If an act, an adventure, or a campaign ends, characters may receive additional XP. The gamemaster determines to which attributes these bonus points are applied.

Experience points can also be used to increase the skills of the character. Skill advancement occurs as a serial progression. Raising a skill from 4 to 7 requires the character to first reach levels 5 and 6.

The cost in XP for advancement is determined by multiplying the new value of the attribute, skill, or specialization by a specific factor. The following table lists the formulas for calculating the cost to increase attributes, skills, and specializations:

Type of increase	Cost
Attribute	New attribute value x 5
Skill	New skill value x 3
Specialization	New specialization value x 2

Experience points can only be used to increase skills associated with the attribute that received the XP. For example, XP awarded to the BOD attribute cannot enhance skills connected to the CHA attribute.

As attributes and skills increase, the Action Value (AV) increases as well. If a character raises an attribute, the AV for all of the associated skills will also rise. However, if the value of a skill is elevated, then only the AV for the specific skill is affected.

It is not possible to naturally raise attributes, skills, or specializations above 10.

PRINCIPLES

ACQUISITIVE

Be it valuable artifacts or useless junk, some people can't live without their possessions. This is only a problem if they find themselves constantly on the move.

ADDICTED

Addiction is the embodiment of compulsive behavior. Be it excessive drug or alcohol use or a dependence on gambling or sex, the burden of addiction has many faces.

AGORAPHOBIA

All one has ever known are narrow hallways and rooms with low ceilings. Large spaces and the open sky cause uneasiness and fear.

ARROGANT

After the Eschaton, many people found great inner strength. Many were corrupted by their successes and ruined by blind arrogance. Some bad character traits last for centuries.

ASTROPHOBIC

Those who have never gotten to know the skies think of stars as blazing torches that hover over their victims waiting for some moment of carelessness. A night out in the open is agony.

BONDS OF KINSHIP

Family lies close to your heart. You would do anything for them. In return, the family will do anything to support you.

CHILD OF THE ANCIENTS

For many humans, the past is the key to the future. When others try something new, the children of the ancients search for understanding in the testimony of the elders.

CHILD OF THE EARTH

The earth is constantly communicating with those who will listen. Much can be learned. This is not simply psychic intuition; imagination and experience play key roles as well.

CHOSEN

Be it religion, ancient doctrine, or sheer imagination, some people believe themselves to be chosen by some divine universal energy. Trying to convince them otherwise is a practice in futility.

COMBATIVE

Some people like to quarrel; a reason is not always necessary. It is as satisfying to bash each other's heads in as it is to get drunk together afterwards.

CONTENT

Chronicreds or dinars, artifacts or food: only the bare necessities are taken along. Accumulating riches is far from one's mind.

DECADENT

A decadent person must always have the most expensive clothing, the most precious jewelry and the most delectable food. Flaunting their wealth has become an obsession.

DUAL NATURED

Some people seem perpetually subdued and calm. However, if their circumstances change drastically enough, they become berserk animals capable of horrible deeds.

ELITIST

In a world of decay, hunger, and agony, the smallest advantage can turn an average person into an elitist. Be it membership in a cult or unique personal skills, it's a simple task to invent any number of entitlements.

EMOTIONALLY SCARRED

An entire life of death and violence has injured the child's soul, never to heal again. Now one fears all that is violent and attempts to escape this dreadful past.

FANATIC

Fanaticism, in one form or another, is common in a world that offers little else to its citizens. Many cults add fuel to the fire by using fanatical ideas for their own benefit. No one is more loyal than a fanatic henchman.

FEROCIOUS

There are warriors who live and die for battle. Like animals they lunge at their enemies.

GAMBLER

No wager can be refused.

GREEDY

Amassing a fortune can win you many bad friends. Yet, those who never share anything will soon be very lonely. The greedy one is also slave to greed itself, for she recklessly takes on dangerous tasks if there's even the slightest hope of increasing her wealth.

GOOD SAMARITAN

You help wherever you can. Personal well-being takes a backseat. Thankful glances are usually the only reward.

HEDONISTIC

Life has much to offer: love, lust, and passion—embrace it with both arms. Save for the future? Never.

INDICTER

For some, the temptation to rise in the ranks is a compulsive behavior. Sully the reputations of others is often the only way to divert attention from one's own inadequacies. This type of behavior is often found in groups with rigid power structures.

JUST

Many parade their morals, but few think of justice as an actual necessity. Instead, it has become a demonstrative habit. However, the truly just extend their virtue beyond their own immediate interests.

LETHARGIC

A life with few comforts, which pummels those who attempt to rise up, eventually causes lethargy. It numbs the character and destroys the will.

LONER

Be it from fear or disgust for other humans, or perhaps, due to bad decisions made in the past, some people are better off walking the Earth on their own. There is no one else to consider and no one to disappoint.

LOYAL

Absolute obedience is a virtue as long as the leader is an upstanding individual and not a tyrant. The loyal follower is equally responsible for the commander's deeds.

MACHINE LUST

Some young disciples of technology nurture an almost erotic love for machines; a specific artifact has gained a place in their hearts.

MASOCHISTIC

Some take pleasure in being tortured.

MEDIATOR

In earlier times, these people were called diplomats. Without these people, communication would be much more complicated than it already is. These individuals are often drifters and considered traitors by their kinsmen.

MERCIFUL

Mercy is a virtue only few afford themselves, yet it is a character trait that is highly regarded among the weak.

MERCILESS

Those who have never experienced mercy are unlikely to offer it to others.

MILITARISTIC

Only the military can establish and maintain order. Nobody else possesses the necessary strength of character or discipline.

MORAL

Those who subscribe to rigid values and high-minded ideas find that life can become very difficult. Moralists can't abide gray areas or indecision, and often find themselves backed into an idealistic corner.

NOCTURNAL

The night offers more comfort than the day. Shadows provide security. The bright light's honesty is merciless and generally avoided.

OBSESSED WITH STATUS

Some cults promise a certain status. Doctors, for example, were esteemed even before the Eschaton, and they enjoy a high social position today. Many use this leverage to elevate themselves above others.

OPPORTUNISTIC

Only your interests matter. Any opportunity must be taken advantage of even if this means that you have to neglect your friends and allies.

PARANOID

Paranoia is a real burden. It won't let you sleep at night. By day, it turns every shadow into an assassin. Yet, if one is really being pursued, this trait may become life insurance.

PROTECTIVE

Humans with a protective instinct would move mountains to protect the people around them, be it their family or their region.

PROUD

You can be proud of many things: your place of birth, your town, family, friends, and most of all yourself. Beware those who speak badly or disrespect the things you hold dear.

PURE

Purity becomes an obsession when it knows no limits and fails to relate to actual reality. Curiously, there are humans who cavort in the most unimaginable filth and see themselves as having a more pure spirit or genetic background than their fellow neighbors.

REBEL

You turn against that which has shaped you, against your family and their world view. Living opposed to what others expect has become a part of who you are.

RECLUSIVE

Torn between a hopeless future and dreary past, one must choose one's own path in life. It is destined to be lonely and will end in oblivion and silence.

SADISTIC

The sadist distinguishes herself by finding fulfillment in the pain of others.

SECRETIVE

Some veil themselves in mystery. Know one else will ever know what exists beneath the surface of secrecy.

SEDUCTIVE

Some have it in their blood to confuse and seduce those to whom they are attracted.

SELF-CASTIGATOR

Self-castigators desire to punish themselves for any type of sin, even those committed by others. It is not a rare mania in the world after the Eschaton.

SELF-DELUSION

Gazing backwards into the past, a large part of the population stumbles along a destructive path of self-delusion. Children starve, their bellies empty, while their parent's pockets are filled with useless artifacts.

SENSE OF DANGER

Dangers too numerous to mention lurk in the jungles and wastelands. Those who are aware of them are destined to be successful. Is it a blessing or mere paranoia?

SOCIAL

There are individuals who have both the desire as well as the gift to strengthen the social fabric and hold together the community. They will always try to reconcile quarreling groups and establish harmony.

TECHNOPHILE

No matter what the form, technology is always an object of desire. Often it is the center of your life and impedes relationships with other humans.

TRADITIONAL

Ancient customs have existed since the ancestors. Now their descendants maintain the sacred flames. To neglect tradition would be to uproot the past and lose everything.

UNION WITH THE STREAM

For the Chronicler, there is no greater life achievement than union with the Stream. Some view the Stream as a never-ending source of knowledge, whereas others see it as a divine principle that permeates everything, even one's most primal nature.

UNSCRUPULOUS

Doing good, doing evil—you could care less.

UNSTEADY

Just a minute ago, you were of one opinion—now you believe the opposite. You can't seem to make up your mind.

VENGEFUL

The need for payback can quickly become an all-consuming rage. The smallest infraction is sufficient to create lifelong enemies.

WASTEFUL

You cannot seem to hold on to chronicreds or dinars for very long. You blow everything you have on fleeting pleasures or short-lived goods.

XENOPHOBIC

Religious zealotry, small-mindedness, and never-ending warfare result in a hatred for all things foreign.

CHAPTER 6
COMBAT

Violence and armed conflict are rampant in the world of *Degeneration*. Few regions allow governments to impose peace. Guardians of law and order are a dying breed. Differences of opinion are usually settled by physical force and vigilantism. Welcome to the world of Primal Punk!

Catharsys resolves combat situations quickly and comprehensibly. As long as the characters do not fight an overwhelming number of enemies, an ancient psychonaut, or a marauder, they can usually survive the first hit from a firearm or melee weapon. Every subsequent hit can easily acquaint them with death, though. Retreat is sometimes the best option.

THE COMBAT ROUND

Combat is divided into rounds. Each combat round lasts 3 seconds. Unless affected by special circumstances, each combatant can perform at least one action during a combat round.

COMBAT ROUND SEQUENCE

Calculate Initiative

At the start of the combat round, calculate the Initiative for all characters, non-player characters, and creatures involved in the fight.

$$\text{Initiative} = \text{AGI} + \text{Quickness}$$

Initiative determines when a character will act within the combat round. The character with the highest Initiative is the first to act. The rest of the combatants perform their actions in descending order of Initiative. If two combatants have the same Initiative, their actions occur simultaneously.

All combatants have the opportunity to spend Vitality at the start of each combat round to temporarily increase their Initiative for that round (see *Spending Vitality*, p. 242).

Declare Actions

The character with the highest Initiative declares her action for the combat round. If a character wishes to attempt multiple

attacks during her action, she must declare so and apply the appropriate modifiers before any of the attacks are resolved (see *Multiple Attacks*, p. 246).

Resolve Actions

Resolve the actions of the acting character before moving on to the character with the next highest Initiative. Once every combatant has had an opportunity, in turn, to declare and resolve their action within the combat round, the round concludes and the combat round sequence starts over again from the beginning.

VITALITY

A fleeting moment of heightened mental acuity combined with a herculean burst of physical prowess can often be the difference between victory and defeat in the heat of battle. The derived and expendable attribute Vitality (BOD + Stamina) represents the reserves available to a character when they need to perform an extraordinary feat or when they need that extra something to gain the upper hand. **Vitality** can be spent to allow a character to exceed her normal limitations.

If a character's Vitality ever reaches zero, she falls unconscious due to exhaustion. She must then regain Vitality before she is able to take any actions (see *Regaining Vitality*, p. 242).

SPENDING VITALITY

Vitality can be spent to *increase Initiative*, *reduce the Difficulty of an action*, or *increase a die roll during combat*. A character *cannot* reduce their Vitality to zero through expenditure.

Increase Initiative

At the start of every combat round, all combatants (including those controlled by the gamemaster) secretly wager the amount of Vitality they wish to spend on increasing their Initiative. Each combatant's wagered Vitality is then revealed simultaneously, deducted from her current Vitality and added to her Initiative. The order of action then proceeds according to these modified Initiatives.

Example: Nemerov, Brakka, Zogineesh, and Grendoltok decide to settle their differences the old fashioned way—a battle-royale pit fight! Nemerov has an Initiative value of 13 (AGI 7 + Quickness 6 = 13), Brakka 12, Zogineesh 10 and Grendoltok 8. Before Vitality is spent, the order of action for the first combat round would be:

13 Nemerov
12 Brakka
11
10 Zogineesh
9
8 Grendoltok

For the first round, the combatants wager Vitality. Nemerov wagers 2 Vitality in order to secure the highest Initiative; Brakka is bordering on exhaustion with only 3 Vitality left, so he chooses to wager 0 Vitality; Zogineesh wagers 4 Vitality; Grendoltok wagers 3 Vitality. When the wagers are revealed, the final order of action for the combat round is set:

15 Nemerov (13 + 2)
14 Zogineesh (10 + 4)
13
12 Brakka (12 + 0)
11 Grendoltok (8 + 3)

Nemerov maintains his position as the first to act in the round, Zogineesh moves up to act second, Brakka drops back to third, though he didn't waste any Vitality. The big loser is Grendoltok. He wagered 3 Vitality, but remains the last to act in the round.

Reduce the Difficulty of an Action

Before any Skill Roll is made, a character may declare they are spending Vitality to reduce the Difficulty of the attempted action. Every point of Vitality spent in this way lowers the Difficulty of the attempted action by one.

Increase a Die Roll during Combat

After a Skill Roll is made during combat, a character may declare they are spending Vitality to increase the total of the die roll. Every point of Vitality spent in this way increases the Skill Roll total by one.

Vitality can be spent by both combatants during an Opposed Skill Roll as well. Once one combatant has declared they are spending Vitality and how much, the other combatant has

an opportunity to “outbid” their opponent. Bidding Vitality in this way can continue until one combatant decides to no longer increase their Vitality bid or the bid would reduce a combatant's Vitality to below 1. Remember, a character *cannot* reduce their Vitality to zero through expenditure.

REGAINING VITALITY

In order to regain Vitality, a character must forfeit all of her actions in a combat round. Next, she must make a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll (DIF 0). If the roll is a success, the character regains one point of Vitality. If the roll is a critical success, the character regains Vitality equal to the number rolled on a single die (*not* the total).

Vitality can only be regained in this way when it is voluntarily spent. Vitality loss due to injury cannot be regained until the injury is healed (see *Vitality Modifiers*, at right).

Example: Nemerov is chasing down Brakka, intent on pummeling him for falling asleep while on guard duty the night before. Brakka has already spent 4 Vitality during the last combat round to increase his Initiative so he could get a head start on fleeing. Currently, he has 1 Vitality left—he is almost exhausted! However, knowing Nemerov is afraid of heights, Brakka scrambles up a tree, buying some time to rest. In the next round, while Nemerov makes a Skill Roll to see if he can overcome his fear of heights, Brakka forfeits all his actions to try to regain Vitality. Brakka

has PSY 4 + Self-Mastery 4 (AV 8). He rolls two 4s, a critical success! Brakka regains 4 Vitality.

VITALITY MODIFIERS

Trauma Wounds

If a character suffers trauma wounds, they immediately lose an amount of Vitality equal to the number of trauma wounds suffered. Vitality lost due to trauma wounds can only be regained when the injury that resulted in the Vitality loss has been healed.

Encumbrance

In CatharSys, every piece of equipment has a specific weight. The total weight of all the equipment carried by a character is called Encumbrance. If the Encumbrance value exceeds a character's BOD + Strength, she is encumbered, and the difference is subtracted from her Vitality while she remains encumbered. Outside of combat, the gamemaster may allow characters to carry more than allowed by BOD + Strength, though the Vitality penalty will still apply. When combat begins, an encumbered character must drop any equipment in excess of BOD + Strength in order to avoid losing Vitality. Dropping equipment is *not* considered an action.

Example: Nemerov has BOD 7 + Strength 4. His armor has a weight of 8, his gun has a weight of 2, and his backpack containing the rest of his gear has a weight of 5, bringing his Encumbrance to 15 (8 + 2 + 5 = 15). Since his Encumbrance (15) exceeds his BOD + Strength (11), his Vitality is temporarily reduced by 4. However, if combat begins and Nemerov drops his backpack (weight 5), his Encumbrance (10) will drop back below his BOD + Strength (11) and his Vitality will no longer be affected by the Encumbrance modifier.

COMBAT MOVEMENT

During a combat round, a character can move *up to two meters* without increasing the Difficulty of any subsequent actions.

If a character wishes to move a distance greater than two meters, she can move up to her AV in AGI + Mobility, but any subsequent actions in the combat round will suffer a Difficulty modifier. (see *Combat Difficulty Modifiers*, below)

COMBAT ACTIONS

In every combat round, a character is allowed one action. With that action, a character may make a single attack, attempt multiple attacks, or perform a non-attack action. A declared action must be able to be performed within 3 seconds, the length of the combat round. It is up to the discretion of the gamemaster whether or not an action is plausible in 3 seconds.

NON-ATTACK ACTIONS

Trying to open a door, cover a comrade, reload a weapon, or drop a backpack and search for ammo are all examples of **non-attack actions**. Since *CatharSys* provides no specific rules for the myriad of non-attack actions a character can attempt, it is up to the gamemaster to determine whether or not a non-attack action is possible during a combat round.

What is possible in three seconds? Certainly, you can drop a backpack in no time, quickly shout an order, or reload a firearm by dropping the magazine and putting another one in. But how long does it take to insert bullets one by one if there is no magazine available? One bullet per second? A muzzle-loader would take even longer to reload, perhaps two full combat rounds for even the most experienced rifleman.

ATTACK ACTIONS

When declaring an attack, follow this sequence:

1. Determine the AV for the Attack

Choose the appropriate skill for the attack. There are six attack skills, all linked to AGI—Unarmed Combat, Armed Combat, Firearms, Projectile Weapons, Thrown Weapons, and Heavy Weapons. AV = attribute rating + skill rating.

2. Declare Target Zone

The attacker must declare what area of the opponent's body they are targeting; this determines the base Difficulty of the attack:

head (DIF 4), torso (DIF 0), or legs (DIF 2). If the attacker does not declare a target body zone before the Skill Roll for the attack is made, the attack is directed at the torso.

3. Modify the Difficulty of the Attack

All modifiers applied to an attack affect the *Difficulty* of the attack. After the target body zone has been declared, determine the other Difficulty modifiers that may apply. Difficulty modifiers include range, movement distance, attempting multiple attacks, specialization, and defensive stance (see *Combat Difficulty Modifiers*, p. below)

4. Make the Skill Roll for the Attack

The attacker makes a Skill Roll with 2d10 as normal. If the result is lower than or equal to the AV and higher than the Difficulty, then the attack hits the target. Otherwise, the strike misses.

5. Determine the Damage of the Attack

If an attack succeeds, a test is made to determine how many wounds are inflicted, rolling a number of dice equal to the attack's *damage potential* (see *Damage*, p. 246). The AV for this roll equals the attack's *penetration* (see *Damage*, p. 246), while the Difficulty is determined by the armor the opponent is wearing on the targeted body zone (see *Armor*, p. 246). Each die is considered separately (they are not added together). If the result is lower than or equal to the AV and higher than the Difficulty, then a wound is inflicted (see *Wounds*, p. 247). The total number of wounds from the attack is then tallied and applied to the target.

COMBAT DIFFICULTY MODIFIERS

There are several factors that can raise or lower the Difficulty of an attack. Combat Difficulty modifiers are *cumulative*.

SPECIALIZATION

If a character is specialized in the weapon or attack type she uses, the Difficulty of the attack roll is *lowered* by the level of the specialization.

Example: Nemerov has Firearms 4 (*pistols* 2). Whenever he uses a pistol during a ranged attack, the Difficulty of the attack will be lowered by 2.

MOVEMENT

The Difficulty modifier for movement is equal to the total distance moved in the combat round if that distance exceeds 2 meters.

Example: Brakka declares a move and an attack against Nemerov, who is 5 meters away. Brakka has AGI 5 + Mobility 3 (AV 8), so he can move a maximum of 8 meters within the round. When Brakka makes the Skill Roll for his attack, it will be against DIF 5, the total distance traveled during the round.

RANGE

Ranged weapons have three ranges: close, medium, and long. Attacks made at a weapon's close range do not suffer a Difficulty modifier. Medium range attacks have DIF 4, and long range attacks have DIF 8. Though the range thresholds for every ranged weapon will differ (see *Ranged Weapons*, p. 275), the Difficulty modifiers for each range are always the same: close (DIF 0), medium (DIF 4), long (DIF 8).

MULTIPLE ATTACKS

When attempting multiple attacks, the **Inertia** of the weapon is taken into consideration. A weapon's Inertia is used to calculate the Difficulty modifier that is added to *every* attack made with the weapon for that round, *including* the first. However, to calculate the total Difficulty modifier for an attempt at multiple attacks, multiply the Inertia by the number of attempted attacks *beyond* the first.

The intention to perform multiple attacks must be declared at the start of the character's action in the round.

Example: Zogineesh is attempting three attacks for the round, armed with a weapon that has Inertia 5. The total Difficulty modifier for every attack will be DIF 10 (Inertia 5 for the second attack + Inertia 5 for the third attack).

DEFENSIVE STANCE

At the start of a combat round, a character may declare she is entering a defensive stance. While in a defensive stance, all attacks made against the character are modified by DIF 5 and all attacks made by the character are modified by DIF 5. A character cannot enter a defensive stance if surprised by an attack.

UNEQUAL COMBAT

If a combatant is at a disadvantage versus her opponent (for example, unarmed versus a weapon, low ground versus high ground, prone versus upright), the gamemaster may increase the Difficulty of any attacks made by the character until the circumstances of the battle are equalized. The severity of the Difficulty modifier should reflect the severity of the combat disadvantage.

Example: Nemerov is in trouble. He has lost his weapon and is flat on his back. The mighty Zogineesh stands above him, brandishing a two-handed sword. When Nemerov declares his attack, the gamemaster assigns a DIF 4 to the attack because of the extreme disadvantages Nemerov faces against Zogineesh in the combat round (prone and unarmed versus a weapon). If Nemerov were standing and unarmed, the gamemaster might only assign a DIF 2 to his attacks against Zogineesh.

DAMAGE

Every weapon and attack has a Damage Rating (DAM). The Damage Rating consists of two numbers. The first number, called damage potential, determines the number of dice to be rolled when making a Damage Roll. Each die represents a chance to inflict a wound.

The second number, always listed in parentheses, is called damage penetration. A die must be *lower than or equal to* the damage penetration in order to inflict a wound. Damage Ratings are listed like the following example: DAM: 5 (7).

POWER

The damage penetration of some melee weapons is based on the wielding character's might. For simplicity, this is referred to as Power, or POW. Power is equal to the character's (BOD + Strength) ÷ 2, rounded down. If a character does not possess the Strength skill, then simply divide BOD by 2 (rounding down) to determine Power. Melee weapons with damage penetration based on Power will have Damage Ratings listed like the following example: DAM: 5 (POW).

Example: A punch has DAM: 2 (POW). If a character has BOD 5 + Strength 3, the Damage Rating of her punch would be DAM: 2 (4). If she did not possess the Strength skill, the Damage Rating would be DAM: 2 (2).

ARMOR

Armor serves as the Difficulty for the Damage Roll. Armor Difficulty scores are listed for each piece of armor by the target body zone they protect (**ARM:** head/torso/legs).

For example, if an attack hits a character wearing a leather vest (**ARM:** 0/2/0) in the torso, the Damage Roll for the attack will have DIF 2. If the attack hit the head or legs, the leather vest would not provide any protection. A Damage Roll must be *higher than* the Armor Difficulty in order for damage to be inflicted.

If the Armor Difficulty is *equal to or greater than* the damage penetration of the attack, the attack cannot do damage at that particular body zone.

If several pieces of armor overlap in one body zone, the highest Armor Difficulty is used and each additional layer (not counting armor layers with a value of 0 in that body zone) increases the Armor Difficulty by 1.



Example: Nemerov fires his pistol at the charging Zogineesh, aiming for his torso. Nemerov succeeds with his attack and now makes a Damage Roll. The pistol uses 9mm rounds, DAM: 5 (8). Zogineesh has two layers of armor protecting his torso: a leather jacket (ARM: 0/2/0) and a makeshift vest of metal plates (ARM: 0/3/0). The total Armor Difficulty for Nemerov's attack is DIF 4 (3 for the highest value, 1 for the additional layer).

Nemerov rolls 5 dice and each die has a chance to cause a wound. In order to cause a wound, a die must be *greater than* the Armor Difficulty modifier (DIF 4) and *lower than or equal to* the damage penetration (8). Nemerov tosses the 5 dice with the following results: 2, 4, 6, 8, 9. Two successes! The attack causes 2 wounds to the torso of Zogineesh.

ARMOR PROPERTIES

Certain types of armor have special properties that resist a particular type of damage more efficiently. Armor properties have a rating (X) that enhances the Armor Difficulty modifier against the appropriate damage type.

Bulletproof (X)

Bulletproof armor absorbs the kinetic energy of blunt projectile weapons. However, bulletproof armor will not enhance the Armor Difficulty against a piercing projectile weapon such as an arrow.

Fireproof (X)

Flamethrowers can cause horrible damage, and only fireproof armor can provide an Armor Difficulty against a flame attack. Regular armor is useless against fire.

Rigid (X)

Rigid armor is particularly useful against bludgeoning weapons.

Unstable (X)

Unstable armor can suffer damage when hit. When successfully hit by an attack, the wearer rolls a D10. If the result is lower than the Unstable armor property rating, the armor value in the zone hit by the attack is reduced by 1 until repaired or reinforced.

CRITICAL SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

If the Skill Roll for an attack is a critical *success*, the attack has penetrated the armor of the target, and armor is not applied when determining damage.

If the Skill Roll for an attack is a critical *failure*, the attacker suffers some sort of misfortune. It is up to the gamemaster to determine the consequences of a critical failure. The attacker's firearm might jam, she may drop her melee weapon, or she may lose her balance following a wild swing and fall on her face. Whatever the decision, the gamemaster should be careful not to make the consequences too dire. Combat is deadly enough without a critically failed dice roll being the reason for a character's demise.

WOUNDS

There are two types of wounds: **flesh wounds** and **trauma wounds**.

FLESH WOUNDS

Each body zone (head, torso, legs) can sustain a certain number of flesh wounds before a character suffers more serious trauma wounds. For every flesh wound a character suffers to a specific body zone, reduce that zone's maximum flesh wounds by 1. When a zone's maximum flesh wounds are reduced to zero, the character is severely injured and will suffer trauma damage the

next time that area suffers damage. Maximum flesh wounds are listed on the character sheet as **Flesh Wounds**: Head 3; Torso 5; Legs 4.

TRAUMA WOUNDS

A character can sustain a number of trauma wounds equal to BOD + Toughness. Maximum trauma wounds are a total for the entire body and therefore are not associated with body zones. Maximum trauma wounds are listed on the character sheet as with the following example: Trauma Wounds: 12.

Trauma Roll

Any time a character suffers one or more trauma wounds from a single attack, she must make a Trauma Roll with an AV of BOD + Toughness and a Difficulty equal to the number of trauma wounds she has suffered (including those from the current attack).

If the roll succeeds, the character stay conscious. If it fails, she falls unconscious and her Vitality drops to 0. A critical failure on the Trauma Roll means that the unfortunate soul suffers a trauma that instantly kills them. They collapse, dead, and even the most experienced Spitalians cannot revive them.

Unconsciousness

An unconscious character has a chance to wake up every round. This requires a successful PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll with a Difficulty equal to the number of trauma wounds she has suffered. If the roll succeeds, she awakes, her Vitality is restored to 1, and she can take action on the next combat round. If the Difficulty equals or exceeds the character's PSY + Self Mastery, she is in a coma and requires medical aid; she will not be able to regain consciousness on her own.

Bleeding Out

If trauma wounds are not treated quickly (see *Healing*, p. 251), a wounded character will suffer an additional trauma wound every minute (every 20 combat rounds), indicating that she is bleeding to death.

Difficulty Modifiers from Wounds

A character traumatized by injuries will find it more difficult to act. Increase the character's Difficulty scores by the number of trauma wounds she has received.

DEATH

If a character is inflicted with a number of trauma wounds that exceed her BOD + Toughness, she dies painfully from her internal wounds.

WEAPON PROPERTIES

Certain weapons have special properties that inflict a particular type of damage or have a unique effect during combat. Some weapon properties have a rating (X), while others just have an effect.

Armor Piercing (X)

A weapon with the Armor Piercing property reduces the Armor Difficulty modifier of a Damage Roll by the value of the Armor Piercing rating.

Biometric Coding (X)

This weapon was made for a specific user and it cannot be used by anybody else. The only way to

circumvent this is to reformat or override the security codes, which requires an able technician and an electronics workshop. The rating of the weapon's Biometric Coding is used to determine the Difficulty of the INT + Engineering Skill Roll needed to disable the biometric lock or change the user.

Boomerang Effect

Weapons with the Boomerang Effect property could potentially harm the attacker. If an attack with a weapon possessing this property misses, the attacker must immediately repeat the Skill Roll for the attack (but with a Difficulty of 0) in order to catch the weapon when it returns. If she fails, she is hit in a random body zone (1–2 head, 3–6 torso, 7–10 legs). The Damage Roll is performed normally.

Delicate (X)

Some high-precision weapons are very sensitive to impact, rough handling, or damage in general. Any time a weapon with the Delicate property is dropped or struck, the character using the weapon rolls D10. If the roll is lower than the Delicate rating, the weapon is damaged and attacks with it suffer a DIF 2 modifier until repaired. The Difficulty modifier is cumulative if the weapon suffers additional damage.

Double Barrel

A weapon with two barrels can fire the barrels separately or simultaneously. If simultaneous fire is used, only one Skill Roll is made for the attack. If the attack succeeds, however, two Damage Rolls are made.

Explosive

Ammunition with the Explosive property detonates upon impact, potentially damaging everything within a certain radius (see *Explosives*, p. 250).

Fatal

Weapons or devices with the Fatal property are extremely rare but they do exist. The result of an attack with one of these doomsday devices is obvious: inescapable death.

Fire

Weapons or ammunition with the Fire property can set a target ablaze (see *Fire*, p. 250).

Fragile (X)

Weapons with the Fragile property may shatter, crack, or bend following a successful attack. The wielder of a weapon with the Fragile property must roll D10 following every successful attack with the weapon. If the result is lower than the Fragile rating, the weapon breaks and is no longer usable. Some fragile weapons may be able to be repaired, at the discretion of the gamemaster.

Jamming

The bane of every marksman, a firearm with the Jamming property is prone to malfunction after every shot. Every time a weapon with the Jamming property is fired, the attacker must roll a D10. On a result of 1–3, the weapon is jammed and can only be fixed on a successful AGI + Tinkering Skill Roll. An attempt to unjam a weapon takes one full combat round.

Loud

Weapons with the Loud property generate a thundering boom that can be heard over great distances. Creatures with sensitive ears within 50 meters can hardly bear the sound, causing them to flee if they fail a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll. Humans within 5 meters of the weapon are hard of hearing for D10 combat rounds, unless they protect their ears.

Minimum Strength (X)

A weapon with the Minimum Strength property requires a certain amount of physical power to wield. A character must have BOD + Strength equal to or greater than the Minimum Strength rating in order to use a weapon with this property.

Muzzle Loader

A weapon with the Muzzle Loader property requires two rounds to load the ammunition and gun powder properly.

Snare (X)

A weapon with the Snare property can ensnare an enemy, taking away her actions until she is able to free herself. When successfully struck by a weapon with Snare, the target must immediately make an AGI + Unarmed Combat Skill Roll against a Difficulty modifier equal to the Snare rating of the weapon. If the target fails the Skill Roll, she loses any remaining actions for the current combat round. She also cannot take any actions in subsequent rounds until free of the snare by succeeding with an AGI + Unarmed Combat Skill Roll with Difficulty equal to the Snare rating.

Spread

This weapon shoots dozens of small projectiles that spread out in a cone shape to cover a wide area and catch the target. Shotguns with pellet ammunition are a standard example. While this attack causes devastating wounds at close range, the effectiveness decreases drastically with increasing distance.

The Damage Rating listed for a weapon with the Spread property only applies to short range. At longer ranges, the damage penetration decreases by 2 per zone (medium –2, long –4). At the same time, the probability to hit increases with distance. Weapons with this property do not suffer Difficulty modifiers due to range (see *Range*, p. 246).

Stun

A weapon with the Stun property does not cause flesh wounds but instead drains Vitality. The Damage Roll is made normally and the results are applied as Vitality loss instead of wounds. If a character loses all of her Vitality due to a stun attack, she falls unconscious immediately (see *Unconsciousness*, p. 247).

Superstition (X)

Flashing lights, speech-based maintenance functions, bizarre shapes, devastating damage, unknown material—many inhabitants of the badlands approach weapons with the Superstition property with caution.

To use a weapon or item with the Superstition property, a character must succeed with an INT + Artifact Lore Skill Roll. The weapon's Superstition rating is used as the Difficulty of the Skill Roll. If the Skill Roll fails, the character is suspicious of the artifact and is not prepared to use the item. A critical failure causes her to flee away from it. The character may attempt the INT + Artifact Lore Skill Roll as many times as necessary to overcome her fear, but only once per week. Once a character succeeds, she no longer needs to make the Skill Roll to use the item. She has overcome her superstition.

Unpredictable (X)

A weapon or item with the Unpredictable property has a tendency to fire without warning or suddenly cease working. Any time an Unpredictable weapon or item is dropped, struck, or used, the wielder must roll a D10. If the result is below the Unpredictable property rating, the weapon fires wildly with a chance to strike the nearest target or ceases to function, whatever the gamemaster deems appropriate.

FALLING

A fall from a great height can be even deadlier than a cleave from a two-handed sword. When a character falls from any height over one meter, she suffers a Damage Roll to the body zone she landed upon, determined randomly by the gamemaster (1–2: head, 3–5: torso, 6–10: legs). The damage potential and damage penetration of the Damage Roll are equal to the height of the fall in meters. For example, a fall from 2 meters is relatively harmless: **DAM:** 2 (2). However, a fall from 10 meters can prove deadly: **DAM:** 10 (10). The gamemaster should decide whether or not to apply an Armor Difficulty modifier to a Damage Roll due to a fall.

TUMBLING

In order to reduce the impact of a fall, a character can attempt to tumble, making an AGI + Toughness Skill Roll against a Difficulty equal to the height of the fall. If the Skill Roll succeeds, the height of the fall is reduced by half when determining the Damage Roll.

If the Skill Roll is a critical success, the character tumbles gracefully and suffers no damage. A critical failure, however, and the character lands directly on her head.

EXPLOSIVES

The Damage Rating of an explosive is the same as any other weapon. However, in addition to damage potential and damage penetration, the Damage Rating also determines the radius of a blast, equal to the damage penetration. For every meter a character is away from the center of the blast, the damage

potential and damage penetration decrease by 1. Explosions damage every body zone, so there is no need to declare a target body zone when attacking with an explosive.

Example: A heavy stick of dynamite has DAM: 8 (8) and therefore a blast radius of 8 meters. However, a character 3 meters from the center of the blast would only suffer DAM: 5 (5).

EXPLOSIVES DAMAGE RATINGS

Gunpowder: 1 (1) per 200 grams

Dynamite: 1 (1) per 100 grams

C-4: 1 (1) per 50 grams

Example: 800 grams of dynamite would have **DAM:** 8 (8), but 800 grams of C-4 would have a far deadlier **DAM:** 16 (16).

FIRE

Any time a character suffers damage from fire, they will catch fire and start to burn, causing additional damage every round until the fire is extinguished. Even if they are wearing armor with the Nonflammable property, they will still catch fire if the damage exceeds the fire resistance of the armor.

A character on fire suffers the fire's Damage Rating at the beginning of every combat round. If the fire was started by a weapon with the Fire property, the fire's Damage Rating is the same as the weapon. An action spent on putting the fire out reduces the fire's damage potential by one die; when reduced to 0, the fire is extinguished. Flame-quelling foam or a jump into water stop the fire immediately. If the character is hit by another flame attack or does not attempt to put the fire out, the damage potential increases by one die per round.

Fire damages armor. For every combat round that armor is burning, it permanently loses one armor point (from the body zone area on fire) until either the fire is put out or the armor is consumed by fire (reduced to 0). If there are several layers of armor, the armor burns down from the outside first.

FIRE DAMAGE RATINGS

Torch/Flame: 2 (5)

Napalm: 5 (7)

Example: Vasco is hit in the chest by a Tribals with a flaming torch. He is only wearing a leather vest (torso armor 1). The Damage Roll of the torch (damage potential of 2, damage penetration 5) results in 2 and 7. That's one flesh wound inflicted on Vasco, who is now on fire. The leather vest is burning — but not for long. In the next combat round it will be consumed by fire and the damage potential will rise to 3 unless Vasco decides to roll around in the dirt and put the fire out. Vasco decides to take an action extinguishing the fire, which reduces its potential to 1. That is still enough to ruin his vest and potentially harm him, but thankfully Vasco's comrade also steps in and takes an action to put the fire out. This reduces the fire's potential to 0, and the flames are extinguished.

DROWNING, SUFFOCATING, AND STRANGLING

Sometimes characters run out air, such as when they are trapped underwater without scuba gear or when they are strangled.

Every character can hold her breath for (BOD + Stamina) x 2 combat rounds. Beyond this point the lack of oxygen dulls the senses and the character starts to suffocate. For every 2 combat rounds that pass once she runs out of air, she loses 1 point of Vitality. Vitality may not be regained while suffocating. Once Vitality is reduced to 0, the character suffers 1 trauma wound every 2 combat rounds until she is saved or dies.

A character holding an enemy in a headlock can also try to strangle her victim into unconsciousness. First, the character must successfully grapple her opponent, which requires beating them in an Opposed Skill Roll of AGI + Unarmed Combat. The character can then take her next action to choke them. In this case, the victim does not have a reserve of air to rely on and she immediately begins suffocating and losing 1 point of Vitality every 2 combat rounds as above. When Vitality is reduced to 0, the victim suffers 1 trauma wound per 2 rounds until dead.

Each round the victim has the chance to free herself from the deadly embrace, which requires winning an Opposed Skill Roll of AGI + Unarmed Combat. In this case, however, the victim faces a Difficulty of 4 due to being restrained. Once her Vitality reaches 0 and she falls unconscious, she can no longer resist and suffocates if the attacker does not let loose.

Trauma wounds from suffocation regenerate more quickly than normal damage. These wounds should be marked separately on the character sheet. Once the victim can breathe again, she regenerates one point of trauma damage per minute.

HEALING

The First Aid and Medicine skills can be the difference between life and death. They can heal or stabilize many injuries.

- **INT + First Aid** can only be used if the patient's wounds are not older than one hour. The number of trauma wounds or flesh wounds—whichever is higher—counts as the Difficulty for the Skill Roll. A successful Skill Roll can stabilize trauma wounds so that the character is no longer bleeding out (p. 247). Alternatively, it can heal one flesh wound. Flesh wounds may only be healed if the character has no trauma wounds. A critical success (doubles) heals either 1 trauma wound or as many flesh wounds as the number rolled on one die (not both added together). First Aid skill may only be used once per body zone. If new wounds are acquired, it may be used again, but only applied against the new damage.
- **INT + Medicine** is used to treat trauma wounds. A successful Skill Roll with Difficulty equal to the number of trauma wounds heals one wound. A critical success heals as many trauma wounds as the number rolled on one die (not both added together). Medicine skill may be used to treat a character once per day.

NATURAL HEALING

Characters without access to healers may hope to regenerate their health over time. Natural healing requires that the character care for their wounds (change bandages regularly, etc.) and gets adequate rest.

- Flesh wounds heal quickly. Every day that a character recuperates, one flesh wound is healed for each body zone—but only if the character does not suffer from trauma wounds. All trauma damage must be healed first.
- Trauma wounds heal slowly. After a number of days equal to the total number of trauma wounds, one wound will heal.

Example: Vasco was heavily wounded in his last battle: He suffered 6 points of trauma damage. After 6 days of rest, he will heal 1 trauma wound, leaving him with 5 points of trauma damage. After another 5 days, he will be down to 4 wounds, and so on. After a total of 21 days (6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1), all of his trauma wounds are cured. His flesh wounds now heal at the rate of one point per day for each body zone.

RADIATION

The ticking of the Geiger counter reveals silent death, which the nomads simply know as “the Curse.” It lurks out there in the badlands, in the bunker complexes, and the great domes. It lurks for all those who dare to disturb the resting places of the Ancients.

The knowledge of radioactivity is long forgotten. Only the technologically advanced cults such as the Spitalians, who still use x-ray machines and have lead vests in their stockpiles, as well as the Chroniclers and the Hellvetics know the true nature of this curse. It would make sense to educate others about the nature of radiation if there was a lot of it, but there isn't. The most likely place to encounter radiation is in old surgeries—a danger that should not be underestimated, but which only poses a fatal threat if one spends long periods of time in immediate proximity of the source. Much more dangerous, but absurdly seldom, are sundered nuclear reactors. In Borca one will hardly find such a monstrosity and even in Franka one would have to look hard. In Balkhan, however, the chance to find the remains of a nuclear reactor within dense and irradiated woods increases significantly, though here too they are rare.

Characters in irradiated areas must mark a point on their radiation scale every minute, hour, day, or week, depending on the level of radiation of the location, as determined by the gamemaster. Each time they gain a new point, they must make BOD + Toughness Skill Roll with Difficulty equal to the current number of radiation points. If the roll fails, they suffer 1 trauma wound.

Tissue damaged by radioactivity regenerates very slowly. Radiation levels drop by one point every 10 days once the character is no longer exposed. Trauma wounds from radiation heal normally.

POISON AND DISEASE

Many creatures in the wasteland are poisonous. Epidemics can depopulate whole regions. Even if many people have built up a certain immunity against the more deadly parts of their environments, there are still many invisible dangers.

The Damage Rating of diseases and poisons resembles that of weapons, listing both the damage potential and the damage penetration. It also lists a **timeframe**: the interval at which the effects are applied to an exposed character, and an **effect**: the actual wounds or other effects are inflicted.

EXPOSURE

When a character is poisoned or infected, the gamemaster makes a Damage Roll and the player marks the resulting points in the poison/disease scale on her character sheet. If the character had some sort of immunity or defense, such as a serum, this would be applied as a Difficulty to the Damage Roll, the same way armor works against normal damage.

EFFECTS

From that point on, the character must make a BOD + Toughness Skill Roll at each timeframe interval with the current poison/disease points on the scale as the Difficulty. If the character is also suffering from any trauma wounds, apply these as a Difficulty modifier. If the roll is successful, the points on the poison/disease scale are reduced by 1. If it fails, the victim suffers the effect as listed.

If the poison/disease points exceeds BOD + Toughness, the character can no longer fight off the effects. She is going to suffer and die unless she swallows an antidote or finds a cure.

Example: Draan is a contact poison that is made from a Frank swamp plant. It has a Damage Rating of 8 (6), timeframe of 1 minute, and effect of 1 trauma wound. The gamemaster rolls 1, 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, which results in 5 poison points.

After 1 minute, the player now has to roll BOD + Toughness with a Difficulty of 5. If she succeeds, the poison points decreases to 4. If she fails, she suffers 1 trauma wound. She must continue rolling every minute until the poison points are reduced to 0 or until she dies.

ANTIDOTES AND CURES

Each dose of antidote or cure reduces a character's poison/disease points by its detox rating.

SPORE INFESTATION

Primer spores attune the human spirit to the call of the Earth Chakras. For most sporelings (spore-infected humans), this is evident as a slight background noise, permeated by distant whale songs or Kafkaesque dreams and out-of-body experiences. Only a select few will ever briefly experience the fusion of their consciousness with that of an Earth Chakra. Even in the best cases, such an experience will be confusing, maddening, and filled with emotion. The sporeling will be haunted afterward by the feeling that, for an instant, she was completely deprived of her individuality. While Homo degeneration is woven into the reawakened consciousness of the Earth and the spores of Foulness have opened the gates to the very spirit of the psychonauts, the genetic makeup of Homo sapiens acts as a natural barrier. The price for overcoming this barrier is usually one's sanity. Nonetheless, spores allow a glimpse through the rift into a world in which the hive mind is distributed equally. Black, glittering chitin bodies raising their antennae towards the moon; spiders weaving fractals around the globe; psychonauts in strange masks swaying to inaudible music; seven glowing stars on the body axis of the first and the last human ... The visions are estranging and completely incomprehensible for those affected by the spores — if they even have any sense at all.

In CatharSys, spores are handled similarly to trauma damage. Exposure to spore infection results in spore points, which are entered on a scale. Each time the character is exposed to spores, she must make a PSY + Self Mastery or PSY + Faith (whichever value is higher) Skill Roll with a Difficulty equal to her current spore points. If it succeeds, nothing happens; the victim may not even notice the spores. Failure, however, means that the sporeling's consciousness is touched and engulfed by an Earth Chakra. She will experience visions and other phenomenon based on the amount of spore points she has accumulated and her proximity to the closest Earth Chakra. This glimpse into the hive mind lasts around half an hour per spore point. During this experience, the sporeling is unable to act and can only lay on the floor, eyes twitching.

BEARERS OF THE SEED

The rapturing visions from spore infestation weaken the immune system. The accumulated spores use this opportunity to morph. They gather in the sinuses, loosen their mycelia, and spread. Then they wait. Once the sporeling awakens, she will be close to suffocation as throat and nose are filled with spores. She will cough and sneeze in order to be able to breathe—and thus spread the seed to new spore fields.

“GOD
SHALL EAT UP THE
NATIONS HIS ENEMIES,
AND SHALL BREAK
THEIR BONES,
AND PIERCE THEM
THROUGH
WITH HIS ARROWS.”
[4. MOSE 24:8]

WHEN THE MILLENNIUM THAT FOLLOWS THIS MILLENNIUM ENDS,
 MEN WILL HAVE FINALLY OPENED THEIR EYES.
 THEY WILL NO LONGER BE IMPRISONED IN THEIR HEADS AND CITIES,
 BUT WILL BE ABLE TO SEE FROM ONE END OF THE EARTH
 TO ANOTHER, AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
 THEY WILL KNOW WHAT MAKES ONE SUFFER, HURTS ANOTHER.
 MEN WILL FORM ONE HUGE BODY OF WHICH EACH WILL BE A TINY PART.
 THERE WILL BE A COMMON LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY EVERYONE, AND THUS, FINALLY, A GLORIOUS
 HUMANITY WILL COME INTO EXISTENCE ...
BECAUSE WOMAN WILL ARRIVE TO REIGN SUPREME;
 SHE WILL GOVERN THE FUTURE AND DECREE HER PHILOSOPHY TO MAN.
 SHE WILL BE THE MOTHER OF THE MILLENNIUM THAT FOLLOWS THE MILLENNIUM.
 SHE WILL, AFTER THE DAYS OF THE DEVIL, RADIATE THE
 GENTLE SWEETNESS OF A MOTHER.
 SHE WILL, AFTER THE DAYS OF BARBARITY, EMBODY BEAUTY.
 THE MILLENNIUM THAT FOLLOWS THE MILLENNIUM,
WILL METAMORPHOSE INTO AN AGE OF LIGHTNESS:
 MEN WILL LOVE EACH OTHER, SHARING EVERYTHING, DREAM, AND DREAMS WILL TURN INTO REALITY...
THUS MAN WILL HAVE HIS SECOND BIRTH.
 SPIRIT WILL POSSESS THE MASS OF MEN,
 WHO WILL BE UNITED IN BROTHERHOOD. SO AN END WILL BE PROCLAIMED TO BARBARITY.
 IT WILL BE AN ERA OF A NEW STRENGTH OF BELIEF.
 THE DARK DAYS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MILLENNIUM THAT FOLLOWS THE MILLENNIUM,
WILL BE ENSUED BY DAYS OF JUBILATION:
 MEN WILL ONCE MORE FIND THE RIGHTEOUS PATH OF HUMANITY,
 AND EARTH WILL FIND HARMONY ONCE MORE...
 THERE WILL BE ROADS THAT CONNECT ONE END OF EARTH, AND THE SKY TO THE OTHER;
 THE WOODS WILL ONCE MORE BE DENSE, THE DESERT WILL ONCE MORE BE IRRIGATED, AND THE
WATER WILL ONCE MORE BE PURE.
THE EARTH WILL BE LIKE A GARDEN:
 MAN WILL TAKE CARE OF EVERY LIVING THING,
 AND HE WILL CLEAN EVERYTHING HE DIRTIED,
 HE WILL UNDERSTAND THAT THE WHOLE OF EARTH IS HIS HOME,
 AND HE WILL THINK WITH WISDOM OF THE MORROW.
MAN WILL KNOW EVERYTHING ON EARTH AND HIS OWN BODY.
 DISEASES WILL BE CURED BEFORE THEY ARE MANIFESTED,
AND EVERYONE WILL CURE THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER.
 MAN WILL HAVE UNDERSTOOD THAT HE HAS TO HELP HIMSELF TO STAY UPRIGHT;
AND AFTER THE DAYS OF RETICENCE AND AVARICE,
 MAN WILL OPEN HIS HEART AND HIS PURSE TO THE POOR;
HE WILL DEFINE HIMSELF CURATOR OF HUMAN SPECIES,
 AND SO, FINALLY, A NEW ERA WILL BEGIN.
 WHEN MAN HAS LEARNED TO GIVE AND SHARE,
 THE BITTER DAYS OF SOLITUDE WILL BE AT AN END.
HE WILL ONCE MORE BELIEVE IN THE SPIRIT,
 AND BARBARIANS WILL ONCE MORE BE UNHEARD OF...
BUT ALL THIS WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE WARS AND THE FIRES.
 AND THIS WILL ARISE FROM THE ASHES OF THE BURNT TOWERS OF BABEL.
AND A STRONG HAND WILL BE NEEDED TO BRING ORDER TO CHAOS,
AND TO PUT MAN ON THE RIGHT PATH.
 MAN WILL LEARN THAT ALL CREATURES ARE BRINGERS OF LIGHT,
AND ALL CREATURES MUST BE RESPECTED.
 MAN, IN HIS LIFETIME, WILL LIVE MORE THAN ONE LIFE,
 AND WILL LEARN THAT THE LIGHT NEVER GOES OUT.”

[JOHN OF JERUSALEM,]
 THE BOOK OF PROPHECIES

PERMANENT SPORING

Why is it that Spitalians burn sporelings instead of de-sporing them? Because of permanent sporing, which occurs if spores accumulate in a body over time and enter into symbiosis with the host. Whenever a character's spore points equal or exceed their PSY + Self Mastery or PSY + Faith (whichever value is higher), and stay that way for at least one day, one of her spore points becomes *permanent*. Nothing and no one will ever be able to remove it. She will be a host to the Primer forever—a tool of the Earth Chakra that has infected her. If permanent spore points ever equal or exceed the total of PSY + Self Mastery or PSY + Faith, the character succumbs entirely to the infection and insanity. They become a mad creature, a pawn of the Primer, and may no longer be played as a player character.

NANITES AND ENTROPIC EXCRESCENCE

The negative side of the excessive use of nanites right before the Eschaton became painfully apparent to a group of survivors in the year 2119. While looting a hospital in East Borca, a gang of thirteen teenagers came upon a sundered storage tank in the hospital's air raid shelter. There were no warning signs, only the Recombination Group logo could be seen on the blue plastic pieces that were scattered all over the room. The upper half of the tank must have literally exploded; the lower half was veined with cracks. A milky liquid had flown out of the tank and solidified on the walls and ceiling. Crystallized foam and bubbles gave the impression that time had suddenly stopped right after the blast. A few drops had fallen to the ground and were lying there as perfectly round, white orbs. As the looters inspected the phenomenon more closely, they noticed the white dust that had gathered on the wavy landscape. No one had entered this cellar in an eternity. The horror commenced when one of the teenagers traced the round contours of a frozen mass on the ceiling with his finger and pensively drew a line in the dust. Within a fraction of a second, the entire white mass liquefied and fell to the floor, where it seethed and spread. The

looters were not quick enough to retreat and the white liquid flowed over their feet ... then moved up their legs. As it surged up their bodies, it rapidly crystallized. At first, this mutating substance had the consistency of cotton and crackled when one rubbed it off. Then it became as hard as stone. Only one of the teenagers broke free; the others became trapped, their legs frozen in place, the substance spreading further up their torso and arms. The boy fled in panic—followed only by the screams of his companions.

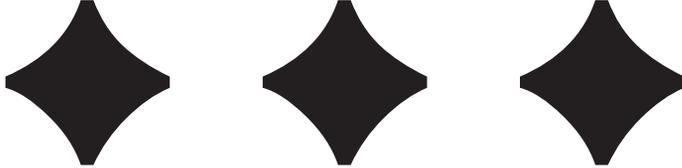
In the time of the ancients, nanites were the holy grail of medicine. Like many things that have great potential, it is unwise to have forgotten about them. Five centuries later, the pendulum has swung—from life to death. The micromolecular machines now pose an unfathomable threat. Many have lost their programming that once directed them to enter human cells in order to make repairs, fight viruses and bacteria, and cleanse the body of toxic substances. Now they are nothing less than bubbling entropy; parasites that draw energy from their host in order to destroy it.

Once a creature has been afflicted by so-called “wild” or “entropic” nanites, the wheels of fortune start turning. Anything is possible. The palette of horror ranges from slight nausea to horrible and bizarre growths to the complete petrification of the body. The only predictable factor is the death of the victim.

The technology to reprogram or counteract the nanites once existed, but after eons of technological decline hardly anyone is capable of even identifying such a tool, much less operating it effectively.

The good news is that nanites never travel far from their source. Recombination Group facilities, bunkers, arms depots, and sleeper dispensers are possible locations to encounter nanite infestation, but they are unlikely to be found in the ancient ruins that litter the landscape or even the inhabited regions such as the Justitian Protectorate. Unless, of course, a good-for-nothing Scrapper carries one of those damned nanite cartridges to the next market.

The gamemaster should use nanites carefully. Non-player characters or animals that fall victim to the nanite trap due to carelessness or pure ignorance should be warning enough for the players.


**WHOEVER SURVIVES
IS RIGHT!**
[ANJUK]



BOOK 3:
ALMANAC

WINTER

The monumental portal doors slammed shut behind Nik's large frame. He paused and sucked in the cool morning air, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the refreshing lightness of a city covered with snow. He shuddered, noticing with disgust that the musty smell of the committee's old men stuck to him like cattle fart. The hardened leather pads of his armor softly scratched against each other.

Ten winters had passed since his first fight in Balkhan. His face was furrowed just as his old squad leader Stauffer's once was. He had come a long way, making up emanation after emanation. He enjoyed inventing more and more preposterous visions for the committee each year. They had to love him because his visions of the burning and speaking thorn bush would give their rotten religion new impetus. The scribes would probably write a book on him. He laughed dryly.

Yet, there was a pall of boredom that covered everything he did these days like mildew. When he was young and starting as a foot soldier, he had charged into every battle possible. He had slashed open the paunches of Jehammedans with their own scimitars and smoked out nests of sporebeasts. Everything had its charm—for a while.

After that, he had led entire squads, gathered followers around him, instructed recruits. Everything began repeating itself at some point and everything new was spoiled by an unpleasant taste all too soon.

Lost in thought, he brushed back his hair and tightened his headband. Oil stuck between his fingers. He examined the liquid for some time—it was so cold that it thickened and flaked—and rubbed it off on his thigh plates as he had a thousand times before.

Now he could descend in to Domstadt, warm himself at the crackling fire in his low-ceilinged stone building, and wait for

the next day to come. Or, for the first time in his life, he could dare going back in time, into his past.

* * *

Three black horses dashed through the knee-deep snow towards the sunset. Their horsemen were wrapped in coarse brown cloth that fluttered as they progressed. Since he alone knew the way, Nik rode ahead. Always at the front, always towards to enemy. This time, however, his sword would not serve him well. His horse raced over rocky ground and swirling powdered snow. The two Anabaptists that followed him kept a respectful distance. They were his disciples and bodyguards.

Nik hadn't been much older that these two were now, back when the three ritual circles were tattooed on his brow, pledging his body to the cult. He had been an ill-mannered and ill-bred child, full of wrath and anger and thirsting for action. Much of this he had preserved in his heart, but the fortress walls that kept his soul imprisoned were fissured and cracked. Otherwise he would have left the horses in the stables and celebrated in the next orgiast's party.

It had to be here. Nik reined in his horse, which snorted and stopped. Both Anabaptists closed up.

"Jader." He took a quick glance at the rider to his left and pointed at the mountain chain in front of them. Jader knew what he was supposed to do, pulled out the field glasses from under the cloak and, through them, observed the rugged peaks. "Well?"

"Three columns of smoke, probably several smaller campfires." He said excitedly. Nik knitted his eyebrows, heavy with ice, doubtfully. "We'll see. Ho!"

The horses dashed off, up the gentle slope to the pass. As they crossed the high stony slopes, they were embraced by heralds

of the forthcoming night. The hoofbeats were echoed by the mountains. The exit was a light opening at the end of a dark tunnel. Before long, they had passed through and were back again in the dim winter light.

Nik had returned to the place where everything had started. The forests at the mountain slopes that had once been cleared by the Anabaptists had recovered and were now powdered white. Up there at the slopes he saw the massive buildings in which the chiefs of the village resided. There was no light to be seen in the windows, however, and the trail up towards it was covered by an untouched expanse of snow.

Fear grabbed his heart. Jader pointed to the hollow but Nik had already spotted the three campfires amidst the devastated huts. "Stay here," he hissed, spurring his horse forward. He drove the beast relentlessly, as if this was their last battle. He felt the lathering body tremble.

Some figures were sitting by the fires. When they saw him rushing up like a horseman of the apocalypse, they rose. Nik jumped off his horse, drew his steel sword, and stumbled towards the scared men and women.

This couldn't be true. He knew them all. He had forgotten their names just as he had forgotten his old life. Now his memory returned with a violence that made him quiver.

There was Dona with whom he had tilled the fields. A small child hid behind her skirt. Then there were Jannek and Thaleb, the brothers from next door who had once trapped him inside a hollow tree. Next to them was Luna, daughter of the seeress. There were others outside of the fire's glow. For a brief moment, Nik felt at home, felt that he had reached his destination. The eternal quest for all-consuming emotions had lured him away from this place and away from the love of his life. What a fool he had been! Now, everything could be right again.

"What do you want, Master?" Nik grew stiff. The feeling of security gave way to gloomy void. They did not recognize him. They had changed as well. Their eyes were reddened, their complexion blotchy. Calling their clothes tatters was too kind. Some rested upon gnarled branches. They looked old and weak. The girl started to cry.

He looked around. The old huts were gone. The well had collapsed. Muddy trails led to the ruin and up to the caves.

Tears ran down his cheeks. "Do you know a Nebe?" Every single word was sheer torment.

Dona spat and rubbed her swollen nose. "That damned whore? Hooked up with everyone here."

"Dona, you cannot blame her." A man detached himself from the darkness and touched the woman's arm soothingly, but she pushed him away.

"Leave me alone! You're one of those who succumbed to her charm."

"Woman!" His voice was as harsh as a drunk's could possibly be. "She was just seeking solace. First in schnapps," he looked at Nik, "then in other men." Nik felt a sudden nausea, but he did not turn his face away. Not this time. "Are you a suitor, master?"

"No, not a suitor." He said in a strangely soft voice.

"What do you want from her then?"

Nik ignored him. "Where is she now?"

Dona smiled a death's head's smile. "We refuse funerals to the dishonored. Go and look for her bones in the fox's dens."

Time seemed to stand still. There only was this obscene chuckle that seemed to cry for his sword to destroy it. Yet the cold sword slipped out of his fingers. Almost soundlessly, he sank to the snowy ground. "Why?" Nik could only whisper it, but the hag seemed to hear it all. He knew the answer. But he refused to hear it.

7

CHAPTER
BAZAAR

CULTURAL OBJECTS:

TOOLS OF FANATICISM

ANABAPTIST

TWO-HANDED SWORD

This two-handed weapon, as tall as a man, is the traditional weapon of the orgiasts. Every seasoned warrior carries one of these massive blades. The weapon features a dagger which, hidden in the shaft, can be released through a twisting mechanism.

FLAMETHROWER

“The breed of decay shall burn,” say the orgiasts. Their flamethrowers are fueled with high-percentage alcohol, making each flame burst expensive but also incredibly deadly. These burners are feared all over Europe and are a good reason to remain friendly with Anabaptists.

POLEARMS

Not all Anabaptists carry a two-handed sword into battle. Ascetics or newcomers must content themselves with the weapons of the peasantry: pitchforks, scythes, hooks, claws, and clubs are dangerous weapons if a strong hand commands them.

ANUBIAN

ANUBIS MASK

Symbolically, an Anubian takes on the identity of Anubis if she dons this mask and blackens her body with tree sap. In this guise she is unapproachable and, according to legends, possesses god-like powers. All important rituals include the use of this mask.

MORTAR

Anubian healers crush herbs and plants in these jet-black stoneware containers to produce potions and ointments. Supposedly, these vessels are crafted from meteorite rock.

SICKLE SWORD

The Anubian sickle sword has a bent shape, more like a scimitar than a sword. However, in contrast to the scimitar, the blade is located on the inside of this slick weapon.

Anubians rarely carry a weapon other than this, for it plays an important role within their mythology. They think of it as a sacred tool that is used to sever the life strain of their opponent, not just a blade.

APOCALYPTIK

BLADE BRACELET

Blade bracelets, commonly studded with metal pins or thorns and adorned with basic patterns, are a popular weapon among the Apocalyptiks. Most are designed so that six blades protrude from the center of the wristband to

form the shape of a star. More elaborate constructions feature folding blades.

HARPOON CROSSBOW

This crossbow launches a barbed harpoon with incredible power—the arrow plunges deep into the flesh and can penetrate enemy armor. A rope securely links the crossbow to the projectile. The crossbow can be connected to an Apocalyptik's motorcycle, allowing her to pull opponents to the ground and drag them behind the vehicle.

MOTORCYCLE

The motorcycle is the pride of any Apocalyptik. Few can afford this vehicle, but any Apocalyptik who wants to count for something better start saving money. These machines are always modified: tuned engines, unusual designs and weapon attachments prevalent. The motorcycle is a well-maintained piece of equipment, although the appearance of its owner would suggest otherwise.

CHRONICLER

CHRONICRED PRINTER

This is the money printing machine of the Chroniclers. Fragments determine the maximum amount to be printed each month and limit these machines to an amount that depends on the level of the user. The artifact must be reset within the cluster for further use, should one exceed this limit.

To activate the chronicred printer, the Chronicler must enter her personal code as well as a secret PIN number. The currency will be released after the amount has been entered and confirmed through a rapid input of a succession of numbers.

STREAMER GLOVE

Similar to the chronicred printer, the streamer glove has become a symbol of the Chroniclers—a raised pinky demands respect, for everybody fears the painful electrical discharge that shoots out of the tip of the finger. The weapon consists of a non-conducting synthetic glove and an electrode attached to the little finger. An e-cubed battery by the wrist provides energy for the device.

ASHEN

EYE OF THE SUN

The Eye of the Sun is a night vision device. Over the centuries, the Ashen have decorated and engraved these gadgets with delicate patterns. A stylized sun is a recurring symbol, representing the idea that the Ashen use this artifact to “scour” the night using “the sun’s eyes.” Eyes of the Sun are very valuable. Ashen demagogues will only lend these tools to those who embark on special missions.

LIGHTING RODS

LCD and LED displays may brighten the inside of their bunkers, but as soon as an Ashen warrior enters a dark hallway or travels through the starless night, she is as blind as any regular human. Hence, many carry old flashlights wrapped in strips of leather and sacred fabric, enhanced with old parts from the tool shop: additional condensers, pieces of old relays, or shards of broken mirror glass. Due to their robust construction, lighting rods make excellent clubs, which is often their only purpose since the supply of electrical power is problematic. The e-cubed batteries that power these flashlights rarely hold a charge, and the charging stations within the bunkers are long out of use.

MACHINE PISTOLS

The former guardians of the Sleepers were equipped with automatic handguns. Centuries later, these weapons have fallen into the hands of the Ashen. With a silencer and bayonet blade attached beneath the barrel, this small weapon is ideal for battle within small rooms and tunnels.

SHOCKER

Chroniclers generally avoid battle. However, if a Chronicler travels through dangerous regions, they often carry a shocker, which has a more powerful electrical charge than the streamer glove. The weapon is roughly a meter long and spiked with dozens of e-cubed batteries that release their energy into the body of an opponent at the push of a button, leaving the smell of burning flesh to waft over the field.

VOCODER

The vocoder is an integral part of the Chroniclers' intimidation tactics. This device is a sound modulator, distorting a Chronicler's voice into an eerie machine-like warble. The microphone attaches to the mouth area of the leather mask while the modulators and speakers strap to the chest. The volume of the vocoder can be adjusted on a sliding scale to emit a sound at any level, ranging from a quiet whisper to an infernal booming. Additional knobs can be tweaked to add echo or other effects, alter the frequency, or combine the sound with screaming feedback. If used wisely, the vocoder is the most effective weapon at a Chronicler's disposal.

Vocoders are not used while inside the cluster.

HELLVETIC

TRAILBLAZER

Hellvetics have a close relationship with their weapon, viewing it as their best friend. The trailblazer is a Sagur 11 full-automatic rifle with three 5.45 mm barrels and an underbarrel grenade launcher. The ammunition feeds into the weapon either through a magazine or an external ammo belt. Thanks to its ingenious construction, the shoulder stock of the rifle converts into a bayonet, close-battle knife, or bipod gun support.

Following the strict philosophy of rationality and efficiency that is part of the Hellvetic culture, quartermasters regularly check these weapons to monitor and evaluate ammunition use and maintenance cycles.

HARNESSES

After the trailblazer, the Hellvetic harness is the most important piece of equipment for a Hellvetic. This set of full body armor was perfected during the time the bridges were constructed and improved upon by adding another layer of technology to this vital device: fireproofing. Nowadays, the harness not only provides excellent ballistic protection, but also compensates for the infernal heat the Hellvetics have to endure within the tunnel passages.

JEHAMMEDAN

SCIMITAR

The richly decorated, mighty scimitar is the most popular weapon among the Jehammedan. Their artisans have reinvented the technique of Damascene forging, producing blades that sport the intricate streaking of folded steel. Considering the artistic adornments on handle and sheath, many consider these scimitars to be the most impressive blade weapons of the known world.

BOTTLE GRENADES

The bottle grenades of the Jehammedan are comparable to the pre-Eschaton Molotov cocktail. If a battle or task hinges on a bloody breach in enemy lines, the bottle grenade quickly becomes the preferred weapon of the Jehammedan.

SOUL BURNERS

The soul burners of the Marauders are the only known energy weapons. They are legendary when it comes to their destructive force. It is said that many high-tech accessories exist for these devices, including night-vision goggles, laser sights, automated aiming systems, and remote-control trigger mechanisms. A biometric identification system supposedly allows only individuals with the correct genetic fingerprint to employ the soul burner. One disadvantage of this weapon is its large energy consumption, which makes it necessary to carry along a heavy battery backpack.

MARSHAL

MARSHAL MUSKET

The tool shops of Justitian now manufacture these weapons, which were originally developed in the 17th century. These weapons are single-shot rifles that must be front-loaded with gunpowder and lead shot. All Marshal muskets are adorned with the cult's emblem and are immediately distinguishable as Marshal equipment. Another standard feature on these weapons is a compartment in the stock of the gun, referred to as the "hammer trap." It contains maintenance materials and spare parts.

MARSHAL HAMMER

The original Marshal established the tradition of righting wrongs with the Marshal hammer, and this tradition has lived on ever since. Each executor receives a Marshal hammer during her initiation. Marshal hammers follow a very practical design, featuring an unadorned cylindrical head and a steel neck about a yard long. Like the musket, the Marshal hammer is engraved with the cult's emblem.

NEOLIBYAN

HUNTING RIFLE

Each one of these precision weapons, manufactured in African tool shops, is crafted by hand and unique in its opulence.

The splendor of a Neolibyan's hunting rifle directly relates to the status of its owner. Some Neolibyans adorn their rifles with gold and silver while others prefer diamonds or ivory. Common to all hunting rifles, however, is the name of the owner engraved in the stock of the gun. Those who can afford it attach artifacts such as laser sights or scopes.

CURVED DAGGER

Similar to the hunting rifle, the curved dagger is also an obligatory piece of equipment for any Neolibyan. Also indicative of status, diamonds and precious metals decorate these daggers. The weapon hangs by the belt buckle for all to see.

LEDGER

This thick notebook is an important tool for the business-minded Neolibyan, decorated with lock of lion hair and metal ornaments. It holds business concessions, protocols of important trade deals, maps, bills, and receipts. Those who can afford it add electronic devices such as calculators, miniature computers, or fingerprint scanners. Many Neolibyans secure their ledgers with locks or even traps. Neolibyans almost always keep these precious objects on their person.

SURGE TANKS

Surge tanks are the giants of all post-Eschaton vehicles. Rolling on massive treads through the ruins of Europe, local tribals have no way of stopping these behemoths. Surge tanks serve as a mobile base that is crucial to the extensive plundering of enemy land. Tons of artifacts can be stored in the tank's cargo space and up to twelve koms fit into the garage. The equipment ranges from practical to luxurious.

SCOURGER

DEATH MASK

The death mask symbolizes the close connection between Scourger culture and death, and it further serves as a means of intimidation. Outside of Africa, you will never meet a Scourger without his mask; to wear it in

SCRAPPER

SCRAPPER RIFLE

A Scrapper's rifle is as unique as the Scrapper and her runes. Many dirt diggers mistrust weapons found in the ruins, so they weld and screw together their own rifles, using whatever materials they find on their travels. The final product is rarely pretty, but it definitely bears the stamp of its owner. Most Scrapper rifles are front loaders, using gunpowder and lead shot, but it is said that variants exist that use refurbished Old World ammunition. They are often equipped with detachable blades and spikes to aid the Scrapper in close combat.

SCRAPPER CLUB

As is the case with rifles, a Scrapper also manufactures her close combat weaponry by reusing and patching together pieces of discarded artifacts: saw blades, bolts, pieces of glass—the more menacing the better. Scrapppers are not warriors, so scaring off an enemy is often preferred to fighting them. To be fully prepared, some improve their clubs by adding simple exploding mechanisms—a barrel filled with gunpowder can provide crucial seconds of confusion to allow for a quick disappearance.

CARRIER FRAME

Animals and vehicles, when used by Scrapppers in the ruins, have a low life expectancy. The ground is too uneven and too many jagged holes hide beneath the rubble, waiting to break a foot or cut open a tire. The dirt diggers had to find other methods of safely removing their findings from the ruins. Over time, they developed various sorts of carrier frames and wheelbarrows, perfecting them further and further. Today, the size and level of luxury of these constructs can reveal the success of the Scrapper.

battle is considered a duty to the cult. Each Scourger crafts his mask from a piece of wood and paints it according to what his father taught him. Losing this second, fearsome face is considered a bad omen—Death now knows who is acting in his name.

SCOURGE

The scourge is a shock whip, consisting of an insulated handle and a bundle of barbed fibers that transmit nasty electrical shocks. To Africans, the scourge is both weapon and symbol: the scourges were taken from European slave owners and turned against the former oppressors, eventually overcoming the enemy.

KOM

Anybody that has ever met a Scourger gang will also know their vehicles. Koms are buggies sporting dragnets in the front and a cage in the back, awaiting its human cargo. Koms are lightly armored and specially equipped to fulfill the mission at hand. Therefore, the cage may be swapped for a machine-gun turret.

SPITALIAN

SPLAYER

The Spitalian splayer is a long staff that sports a hinged triple blade on the lower end. The middle is studded with sockets and a lever attached to a kinetic mechanism. The top end is threaded so that a device or attachment can be screwed on. Spitalians often attach mollusk containers to the upper end of the shaft. Though rarer, fluorescent light tubes are also used for specific tasks or special missions.

The original version of this weapon was used by UEO crowd control troops. The actual purpose of the sockets is unclear, but some may have been a control interface for the AMSUMO machine men (p. 318), whereas others likely served as compressed air intakes. The only part of the original weapon that is still used is the kinetic chamber that is charged by pumping the lever. A button releases the pressure, letting the two outside blades snap up against the middle blade, like scissors, with a great deal of force.

FUNGICIDE RIFLE

To defeat the outgrowth of the Primer, it takes a weapon that can be modified according to the situation at hand, and the fungicide rifle fits the bill. At first glance, this weapon appears to be a modern flamethrower, but thin tubing and external tanks allow this device to fire various chemicals. Be it pesticides, fungicides, two-component burning fuel, or chemical warfare—the arsenal of the Spitalians is impressively unhealthy.

FIELD KIT

At least one physician of any Spitalian platoon will carry a field kit. These emergency packs contain first aid kits, surgical and laboratory tools, fungicides, pesticides, and medicines. Some field kits also include noumenon vocalizers, allowing communication with the Earth Chakras.

SPITALIAN SUIT

The neoprene suit is not only a trademark of the Spitalians, it is vital to their work. It is absolutely airtight and bacteria-proof. Along with a gas mask and lime-smeared heads, these suits provide complete security for Medics, even in the most contaminated areas. The suit is equipped with a urine bottle to ensure that the exploring individual can avoid any contact with the outside world, even during long expeditions. Thin membranes in the lower-arm area make it possible for the person inside the suit to receive injections.

TRIBAL

STONE CLUB

Tribals rarely possess the knowledge of iron purification, and are thus dependent on primitive weapons such as the stone club. The handle of such a weapon consists of pipes or pieces of wood found in the ruins; old baseball bats are preferred due to their stability. The head is made of concrete or bricks, but at times, tribals also fashion them out of the hard quartz stone that can be found in the mountains.

Tribals often create their own unique set of symbols and decorate their weapons with them. Some attach the hair of defeated opponents or tie animal teeth and claws to the clubs.

SPEAR THROWER

Similar to stone clubs, spear throwers are simple tools that are easy to manufacture. Exploiting leverage, sharpened spears can be propelled with greater speed so that these projectiles travel farther, and with greater momentum, than if thrown by hand.

BODY PAINT

For many tribals, body painting remains a tradition. Be it the Maasai or the Polleners, they decorate their bodies with traditional patterns before going into battle, conducting a ritual ceremony, or embarking on stealth missions. For this purpose, many tribals carry small bags with plant and animal-based pigments, always prepared to paint their bodies according to the demands of the situation.

TRAPS

Hunting with spear or bow does not always yield enough to feed a clan. Tribals would not have survived if the huntsmen were not also excellent trappers. The need for protection against wild beasts or warriors from rival tribes also results in a ghastly array of well-placed trap systems.

HARDWARE

SURVIVAL TOOLS

TECH LEVEL

The Tech Level of a community determines its stage of technical development. The higher the level of technology, the more capable a community is of producing advanced and complex devices.

TECH 1: PRIMITIVE

This community is primarily nomadic hunters and gatherers. They have no knowledge of the purification of iron ore. Their weapons are whatever they can salvage from the ruins. Preferred materials are bone and stone.

TECH 2: MEDIEVAL

It is possible for this community to melt junk metal and forge simple weapons or constructions. A great achievement is the iron nail—with it, stable scaffolding and ships can be built. They practice agriculture and settle wherever the soil is fertile. Three-field economics and crop rotation raises the yield and supports larger communities. Fortified cities can be built.

TECH 3: ADVANCED

Forges produce quality steel that can be used to fashion simple rifle barrels, and gunpowder can also be manufactured. Cannons guard the entrances to their cities and armor does not rust. Tool shops combine the skills of many specialists to

develop a product. Countless inventions and technical developments can be produced. The veil of superstition lifts itself and reveals a clear, deterministic world.

TECH 4: INDUSTRIAL AGE

The industrial production cycle has taken over traditional manufacturing shops. Plastics and alloys allow for phenomenal technical developments. Electronic devices invade many different aspects of life.

Tripoli, as well as some other Neolibyan cities, have successfully achieved a new Industrial Age, though they do try to hide the advance of modernity behind colorful cloth and glittering ornamentation.

TECH 5: TRANSHUMAN AGE

Computers are an integral part of everyday life, acting constantly in the background. The Stream connects humans to a global superbrain. Only the Awakened are able to start a Tech 5 settlement.

TECH 6: WONDERLAND

A Tech 6 community would be capable of world domination with a mere flick of the hand and would prove a formidable adversary to the Primer. Currently, there are no known Tech 6 communities in the post-Eschaton world.

MANUFACTURING PROCESS

A community can produce all objects equal to or below its Tech Level, provided they have access to the necessary materials. For example, a small Tech Level 3 village with a forge and a capable chemist would be able to produce Tech Level 1, 2, and 3 objects. All objects that demand a more advanced technical finesse to produce can only reach the community through traders or junk collectors. Subsequently, these objects are very valuable and can be bought only at a price that is far above market value—generally double their regular price.

On the other hand, objects below the community's Tech Level can be bought at especially low prices, generally at a discount of 60 to 80%.

CURRENCIES

Two types of currencies have emerged over the last few centuries. The chroniced of the Chroniclers dominates trade in Borca, Pollen, Purgare, and Franka, while the Neolibyan dinar is the currency of choice in Africa and southern Hybrispania. Over time, the exchange rate has leveled out at 1:1 due to the Chronicler's mindful and cautious trading policies. The cult thus prevents the people of Europe, who are mostly unfamiliar with arithmetic, from being cheated when exchanging money with the Neolibyans.

Neither of these currencies prevails in Balkhan. Each voivodship prints their own money and thus restricts their subjects' movement to within that domain. Trade among the voivodships is therefore limited and relies on exchange posts and bartering.

THE ART OF THE TRADE

From the ledge of Matabi

Some of us are overly anxious, almost taken by fever, when trade licenses are put up for auction. Badly afflicted by this addiction to gain, some focus on factors aside from the profitability of the route—a fatal mistake! Yet, the loss of the incautious is the gain of the professional, and so, occasionally, even we buy from these dogs, as we call them. And dogs they are, for they fill their bellies until they are immovable, arms and legs weak, incapable of anything but a numb grunt.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A TRIP

The proper preparation for a long-distance trip is of the utmost importance to the success of any trade expedition. First, one must determine where the travels will lead: further into Africa or beyond the waters into the region of the Crow. If the latter, will the expedition end at the port city or advance deep inland? Will encounters be peaceful or will the journey lead into a warring region? Each variation demands a different approach.

For trade routes within Africa, nothing but a simple convoy is needed to bridge the kilometers between cities. Bringing along Scourgers is unnecessary, unless one expects a Crow attack from the sea or the expedition crosses through lands that are home to many potential slaves—the oil fields are

an especially fruitful breeding ground for unrest in an otherwise peaceful land. Simple weaponry should suffice to disperse gangs.

If the destination lies to the north, a number of preparations must be made. A ship must be chartered and a crew must be hired, though it is always wise to stick with men who regularly operate the vessel—no one else will be more interested in safely returning the ship to the port of Tripol. Here is a rule of thumb: every 100 tons of cargo will necessitate 10 men, each of them earning about 50 dinars per day. Further, 3 rations of 200 grams per person, per day, are necessary. A healthy mix of salted goods and fruit keeps disease at bay and workers happy! For the protection of the vessel, enlist Scourgers, but be cautious not

to hire the conceited ones. Customarily, they demand more and better food than the regular crew, so you should divide up your supply and label one of them as "good quality." This should sufficiently flatter such vainglorious individuals, should you happen to hire them.

Though it is wise to defer to the steersman concerning fuel, here is a simple calculation for fuel consumption: multiply the cargo weight by .0008 to determine consumption in tons for 100 km of travel.

A small 200 ton ship would therefore consume 160 liters. Do not forget to add the fuel used to the weight of your cargo!

Once out on the water, not much can happen—we dominate the seas. Crows that seek to interfere with your travel can be eliminated using the ship's cannons.

After the vessel has reached its port, cleared its cargo, and hit the sea again, the only important thing to keep in mind is the flooding of the tanks with bilgewater.

Expeditions into the Crow's Nest are of an entirely different nature—it is imperative that one dominates! Scourgers should arrive equipped with their koms and ought to detach the silencers from their exhaust pipes—the noise will drive the rabble away. Don't sneak around, stride away! A crow flaps its wings, a lion roars. Keep this in mind when those pale people come squirming from the ruins like maggots.

Surge tanks are a necessity if is embarking on a truly grand expedition. These vehicles are booked in Syracuse, for this is where they are built. They may be acquired whole or disassembled into smaller parts. A surge tank is an enormous weight for any type of ship, since these giants weigh 600 tons and more. An army of mechanics is necessary so that the coughing, wheezing engines don't die of pneumonia, and this monster sucks up oil faster than a single slave can pour it in. It is these behemoths, however, that conquer the land for us! These machines are both impregnable fortresses and proof of African superiority. Lion, be proud of what you have achieved! These tanks will serve as your headquarters (the luxury of their cabins is no less than that of the best houses of Tripol), armory, kom garage, and freight space.

If you happen to lease or purchase one of these vehicles, you will notice that insurance providers smile mildly as they lower your policy cost. Such a vehicle makes for a feeling of safety; it will even be easier to maintain control over the Scourgers. Don't forget: the massive costs of acquiring a surge tank can be deducted and used as a credit against future trade licenses.

ABOUT THE TRADE WITH FRANKA

The only Frank cities of any interest to us are the coastal cities of the Mediterranean Sea. Thanks to our dedication, these cities have well-built and improved port structures, particularly **Toulon** and **Perpignan**. The latter, situated on the road between Sufferance and Hybrispania, has recently gained a bad reputation as a resting place for crazed goat herders. Until the Scourgers have defeated this outpost, a physical representation of the European craze for self-reliance, it would be wise to refuse with a smile any offer of trade agreements for this region.

The Siphon, a 14,000-ton vessel, and the Kashka, a 200-ton armed catamaran, became victims of the '52 partisan attack, both sunk in the navigation channel. The oil still lingers heavily on the beaches of Perpignan. In retaliation for this disaster, the enraged local population charged at the victorious partisans and drove them into the black broth, where they died miserably. The beak of one crow in the eye of another is a good thing.

Toulon, on the other hand, is a good place for business. The mushroom colonies of our lands, a potent medicine in cases of poisoning or infection, sell rapidly. It seems that the Frank medicine is as bad as what our Scrapplers manage to extract from the land. In regards to steam boilers and tools, the demand has been decreasing for years. Industrialization steadily advances and makes many of our deliveries unnecessary. Yet, everybody needs oil, and since the decline of Perpignan, Toulon is the last link in the supply chain that connects Franka's rising economy and our oil fields. The docks have been secured, however, as some of our brothers and sisters occupy a surge tank there that is in disuse. The queen of the human hordes, the infatuating **Jaquiera** (be prepared to use marduk oil to withstand her flattery, for she is a Pheromancer), traditionally supplies a small army for us to use. We should think of ourselves as welcome guests, but do not behave that way. We should not swear brotherhood or ally ourselves with the crows because of these good relations.

MODERN HIGHWAY ROBBERS

The fortress of the Hellvetics demands respect and their technology ranks with ours. Yet, this does not at all conceal the true nature of the Hellvetics: they are way-layers. It is their fortune that they inhabit such a prominent location in the heart of Europe. One could easily become rich just by gripping a weapon in one hand and holding out the other to every traveler that happens by. It is now too late for any sort of confrontation. These dogs have entrenched themselves and dug in their heels. We must approach them with open arms, dragging behind our carts with goods. The most popular commodities include ammunition, food, and unbelievable amounts of oil. Here, we bargain for more than just a mere passage through Hellvetic tunnels. We also receive orders for tons of potash saltpeter, supplied by the Anubians. It is said that surge tanks coming from the old city of **Genoa** have ground a 130-kilometer long groove that leads all the way to the Hellvetic portal, leading local tribals to believe that a giant worm is writhing out of the ocean towards the cool mountains.

Aside from letting us pass, what do the Hellvetics have to offer us? They are not soldiers or craftsmen, one would think. But the appearance is deceptive. Their service as guards is irreplaceable, especially if one of our surge tanks advances into the northern regions. Further, the Hellvetics are capable engineers. Bridges, bunkers, and fortifications bearing the mark of the cult are solid, long-lasting constructions. Do not engage in trade with them unless you are willing to accept services as pay!

FROZEN HELL

Borca is as uninviting a region as any of us can imagine. The cold is biting, the food bad, and the most important tradesmen, the Chroniclers, won't open their mouths. They prefer to cut the deal with just a few monosyllabic exchanges. They have zero passion for the trade. They don't gesticulate and don't bicker over price. The Chroniclers are as sober and cold as the land

itself. The warmth of a companion would do them good. The customer is not king, oh no, she is subject. It is amazing this cult has risen to the top of the tech trade with such a sales tactic. This is exactly why you also won't be able to avoid them.

The Chroniclers understand their profession. An assortment of sensors waits in the back of their shops, eager to nose, prod, irradiate, and examine an artifact using every thinkable method of investigation. It would be too much to expect the Chroniclers to awake from lethargy. Instead, they patiently wait for the metallic beeping of their examination devices, afterwards slowly reattaching the next suction bell.

ABOUT PURGARE

Purgare is in a miserable state. The greatest wealth of this people is its faith, and turning this resource into money is about as hopeless an endeavor as going to the market in Tripol and selling air in bottles to the crazy. What exactly does wretched Purgare have to offer us? For one, there are the cheap ports. No place is a more homely haven than the various Purgar city ruins. But what is an advantage to the spy may well be economic death to a traveling salesman. With no one to buy your goods, you may as well consume the commodities you brought yourself. Surely, there is no gain to be made here on the west coast. Goods that spoil over time should best stay in Tripol. Weapons and textiles ought to be brought along, but really they serve as not much more than glass pearls thrown before the barbaric people, making them smile. Of course, we are no saints, and so in exchange we demand marble stone that is of a quality not found anywhere else in the world. The price is laughable since inland populations have virtually no use for this material. More important than the stone, however, are two things.

First, Purgare is the gateway to the regions east of the Reaper's Blow. If one were to land in the west, the ragged pass through the Hellvetic tunnels would be the only access. For large expeditions, this arrangement would be far too pricey to afford! Second, there are the ruins of Purgare, which have been searched almost entirely—almost. Real treasures can still be found under the layers of ash and sulfur, especially in the contaminated areas. The extreme wear on any sort of equipment, however, could consume the entire gain of the expedition. Only the bold or the reckless will go on such a mission.

SPORE WALKERS

You will meet the strangest clients if you land on the Balkhan coasts, sitting in the midst of the psychovors. They communicate with us only via radio; the specific frequencies are written on billboards and facades that sit by the shore. The process of trade is always the same—after establishing contact, the faceless client warns us not to approach any further. This should not be taken as a threat, but rather as a warning against the dangers of the psychovors. Who of us has not already lost a good friend to the pestilence! The

captain of the ship should take care not to move too far into algae carpets. Swimming spore packs can stick to and block the vessel's propeller. Without any sort of drive, one could be pushed against the shore. Those who don't believe me may look upon three wrecks of Neolibyan ships sitting on the green bubbling beach where, according to old maps, a city called **Antalya** used to exist.

The people you will communicate with only speak one of the Balkhan dialects, are not interested in any news or information about the outside world, and are just as reluctant to talk about their own lives. They have a unique taste in technology, ordering only the highest quality condensers, resistors, cables, old circuit boards, and pieces of dismembered machine men. In return, the mysterious people offer us highly effective medicines, which possibly use psychovor materials as a base ingredient. This commodity is not intended for the common African, and it should be hidden from the Scourgers. These mysterious drugs deliver huge profits when sold to rich Neolibyans who, sweating and in agony, resisting the ancestor's call, cling to every last drop of life. However, at this point we still have not engaged in any trade. The goods must still be put into a dinghy, which will then be sent to float with the current. At some point, it will grind to a halt against the beach sand, but we will have already left. Surely, this business interaction is based on trust and belief. We pick up the goods days later just off the shore, tightly packaged and tied to a faded-orange buoy that can be seen for kilometers. So far, the strangers living among the psychovors have not disappointed us.

CONDUCTING WAR

Whoever claims that war is good business identifies himself as a barbarian. The toll of war, costing us sons and daughters as well as material, is frightening. Anyone who had sat down and done the math from the beginning would have been startled by all of the red ink. We traders are hit especially hard. We owe it to our ancestors to supply the demanding Scourgers with weapons, food, and shelter. So it should be no surprise that trade licenses to Hybrispania and Balkhan rarely find a willing party. It is a known secret that the Neolibyans only agree to an expedition into these extremely dangerous areas if the Scourgers promise to fetch a set amount on slaves. Often, Scrappers accompany the traveling group, since both Hybrispania and Balkhan are great sites for rummaging. You should immediately discard any thoughts of negotiating with the local populace, however! Not only would this make you a traitor to the African cause, but the savages that inhabit these regions are all too eager to crush your skull.

MEASURING DAMAGE

In *Degensis*, the ammunition used by the weapon determines the Damage Rating it causes. The weapon itself determines Inertia and range.

Caliber	DAM
.357	7 (6)
.44	8 (9)
.45	8 (7)
.50 GL	9 (9)
12 mm bullet	8 (9)
12 mm shot	10 (6)
4.6 x 30 mm	8 (8)
5 x 30 mm caseless	7 (9)
5.56 mm flechette	10 (9)
5.56 x 45 mm UEO	9 (7)
5.7 x 28 mm	7 (8)

GAS CARTRIDGES

The Spitalians command a fearsome array of chemicals used in their fungicide rifles. Two of the most well-known examples are SP 4016 TH and Fire Dust.

SP 4016 TH

This black, foul-smelling fungicide is used to kill the Foulness. The high sulfide content decimates the spore fields, while hazardous materials added to the chemical prevent any renewed spore growth. Sprayed regions dry out and die within a matter of a few hours. SP 4016 TH decomposes very slowly, delaying the regrowth of spores by months, if not years.

Effects

Spores turn black and wither away. Humans whose skin comes in contact with the fungicide suffer a Difficulty modifier of 3 on all actions for one day. During this time, the body is covered with red cysts and the skin itches. There are 20 spray bursts per cartridge.

FIRE DUST

This white powder consists of a coated phosphor substance that ignites about a second after contact with oxygen. The result is an eruptive reaction, not unlike a giant explosive flame.

Effects

Fire dust burns like a flamethrower (**DAM:** 6 (8)). The wielder must be careful not to ignite themselves or catch any rebound fire. There are 5 spray bursts per cartridge.

RANGED WEAPONS

THROWN WEAPONS SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range (S/M/L)	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Bola		10	5/10/15	3 (POW)	1	Boomerang Effect, Snare (6)	1	2	20
Harpoon		8	10/20/30	6 (POW)	1		1	2	50
Slingshot	Stone	8	10/20/30	3 (POW)	1		1	1	5
Spear sling	Spears	8	20/40/100	5 (POW)	1		1	1	20
Throwing axe		8	5/10/15	5 (POW)	1		2	1	50
Throwing knife		8	5/10/15	4 (POW)	1		2	1	30

PROJECTILE WEAPONS SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range (S/M/L)	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Blowgun	Darts	4	10/20/30	2 (POW)	1		1	1	10
Bow (basic)	Arrow	8	POW x 4/POW x 8/POW x 12	5 (POW)	1		1	1	100
Bow (carbon fiber)	Arrow	8	POW x 4/POW x 10/POW x 16	6 (POW)	1		4	1	2000
Crossbow	Bolt	10	10/30/100	5 (7)	1		2	2	200
Heavy crossbow	Bolt	10	10/40/150	5 (8)	1		2	3	300
Repeating crossbow	Bolt	10	10/30/100	5 (7)	8		4	2	2000
Harpoon crossbow	Special	10	10/25/50	6 (7)	1		3	2	600

FIREARMS SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range (S/M/L)	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Assault rifle	5.56 x 45 mm	4	20/100/600	9 (7)	35		2	2	3000
	5 x 30 mm	3	30/200/1000	7 (9)	50		2	2	3000
Flechette rifle	5.56 mm flechette	3	40/300/1500	10 (9)	50		2	2	6000
Fungicide rifle	Special	10	2/4/10	Special	Special		2	2	1000
Heavy pistol	.50	6	5/20/80	9 (9)	12	Loud	4	1	1500
	.44	6	5/20/80	8 (9)	12		4	1	1500
Hunting rifle	.357	7	20/100/500	7 (6)	4		2	2	2000
Light machine gun	5.56 x 45 mm	3	40/300/1500	9 (7)	Ammo belt	Minimum Strength (6), Jamming	2	2	2500
Machine pistol	5.7 x 28 mm	3	5/20/80	7 (8)	30		1	1	2000
	4.6 x 30 mm	3	5/20/80	8 (8)	35		1	1	2000
Marshal musket	Lead ball	10	10/40/100	7 (7)	1	Muzzle Loader	2	2	1000
Neolibyan rifle	12 mm bullet	10	20/60/300	8 (9)	1		2	2	1400
Pistol (automatic)	9 mm	5	5/20/80	8 (7)	15		4	1	1000
	5.7 x 28 mm	5	5/20/80	7 (8)	20		4	1	1000
	.45	5	5/20/80	8 (7)	15		4	1	1000
Pump-action shotgun	12 mm bullet	7	5/20/80	8 (9)	4		2	2	1500
Revolver	.45	6	5/20/80	8 (7)	6		4	1	1200
Scraper rifle	Lead ball	10	5/15/40	7 (7)	1	Muzzle Loader	2	2	800
Shotgun	12 mm shot	7	5/20/40	10 (6)	2	Double Barrel, Spread	2	2	1500
Signal pistol	Special	8	5/20/80	2 (9)	6	Fire	4	1	1000
Sniper rifle	5.56 x 45 mm	7	40/300/1500	9 (7)	6	Delicate (6)	2	2	4000
Soul burner	E-Cubed	5	100/400/3000	12 (9)	60	Biometric Coding (14), Superstition (12)	2	2	9000
Trailblazer	5.56 x 45 mm	3	20/100/600	9 (7)	35		2	2	3500

HEAVY WEAPONS SKILL SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range (S/M/L)	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Flamethrower	Gasoline	4	2/4/10	6 (8)	15	Fire	3	3	1000
Grenade launcher	Grenade	10	20/200/600	8 (8)	4	Explosive	3	3	1500
Heavy machine gun	5.56 x 45 mm	2	40/300/1500	9 (7)	Ammo belt	Armor Piercing, Jamming, Minimum Strength (8)	4	4	4000
Rocket launcher	Rocket	10	30/50/80	9 (9)	1	Explosive	3	3	1500

MELEE WEAPONS

UNARMED COMBAT SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Fists		5	1	2 (POW)					
Brass knuckles		5	1	3 (POW)			1	0	10
Claw glove		5	1	4 (POW)			1	0	20
Blade bracelet		5	1	4 (POW)			1	0	25
Streamer glove	E-Cubed	5	1	4 (7)	30	Stun, Superstition (8)	5	1	

ARMED COMBAT SKILL

Weapon	Caliber	Inertia	Range	DAM	Rounds	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Axe		7	1	6 (POW)			3	2	200
Battle knife		6	1	4 (POW)			3	1	100
Broken bottle		6	1	3 (POW)		Fragile (5)	1	0	
Chain		8	2	5 (POW)			3	2	200
Club		6	1	3 (POW)			1	1	10
Curved dagger		6	1	4 (POW)			3	2	100
Flail		8	2	5 (POW)			1	2	180
Lighting rod		6	1	3 (POW)			4	1	200
Marshal hammer		8	2	7 (POW)		Minimum Strength (8)	2	3	350
Nail club		7	1	5 (POW)		Fragile (3)	1	2	120
Pickaxe		8	2	8 (POW)		Minimum Strength (10)	3	3	400
Polearm		8	2	6 (POW)			2	2	250
Rifle butt		6	1	3 (POW)					
Scimitar		7	2	6 (POW)			3	2	250
Scourge	E-Cubed	7	2	5 (9)	40	Stun, Superstition (5)	7	1	1200
Scraper club		7	1	5 (POW)		Fragile (2)	2	2	150
Shocker	E-Cubed	8	2	5 (9)	20	Stun, Superstition (8)	8	1	2000
Sledgehammer		8	2	7 (POW)		Minimum Strength (10)	8	3	300
Spear		8	2	6 (POW)		Fragile (1)	1	2	200
Splayer		8	2	6 (POW)			8	2	800
Stiletto		6	1	4 (POW)			3	1	80
Stone club		7	1	5 (POW)		Minimum Strength (8)	1	3	100
Sword		7	2	6 (POW)			3	2	250
Two-handed sword		8	2	8 (POW)			3	3	450

TYPES OF AMMUNITION

.357

In earlier times, this caliber was used by hunters and security personnel. Hence, gun shops will still carry some old stock.

.44

A very strong round that was developed for the hunt. However, this ammunition does not compare to the penetrating power of the .50 GL.

.45 ACP

Despite its long history and numerous redevelopments, the .45 was the standard ammunition for American pistols and always a mainstay of any European gun shop. In terms of penetrating power, it compares to the 9 mm.

.50 GL

A very heavy caliber with extreme penetrating power. The gas pressure of the fired round can destroy low-quality firearms and should therefore only be used in refurbished pre-Eschaton weapons.

4.6 x 30 MM

The standard round of NATO, later used by the UEO for pistols and machine pistols.

5 x 30 MM CASELESS

A caseless round with very good ballistic properties. The projectile sits in a block of pressed and hardened powder that burns completely when the weapon is fired.

No known tool shops so far have been able to produce this type of ammunition, so one still relies on finding these caseless rounds inside of military bunkers.

5.56 x 45 MM UEO

This is the standard caliber of 21st century NATO. The UEO used the body of cartridges that were already in existence and changed only the acronym in its name from NATO to UEO. The round is of the same type and can be used in weapons of both organizations.

The 5.56 x 45 mm UEO cartridge is very effective against unprotected human targets, but has difficulties with long ranges if the target is armored.

5.56 MM FLECHETTE

Flechettes are needle shots with excellent penetrating power. They reach very high muzzle speeds. The bodily damage caused by flechettes, however, led the international community to ban this ammo from battlefields. This did not keep some Western nations from using them for crime- and terror-related combat, and some bunker crews were equipped with weapons using this ammo.

While conventional bullet casings can be reused at least partially, flechettes cannot. For one, the needles deform when traveling through the target. Further, they are tightly fitted into a drive cage, which in turn is wrapped with plastic. The level of technological precision that is necessary to employ flechettes is a thing of the past. Before the Eschaton, a number of weapons could employ these rounds. The current lack of such widespread sophistication may account for the very low chances of finding, this type of ammo.

5.7 x 28 MM

This is a relatively small cartridge that sets itself apart by sporting a very high muzzle speed, often used in pistols and

automatic handguns. By its specifications, it competes with the 4.6 x 30 mm round, but the latter prevailed. In France, however, this round almost completely pushed the 9 mm UEO off the market.

9 MM UEO

Before the Eschaton, this ammo was used worldwide for sport, by police officers, and the military. Only shortly before the catastrophe was the UEO standard for pistols and machine pistols changed to employ the more effective 4.6 x 30 mm round.

12 MM SHOT OR BULLET

In pre-Eschaton times, there used to be a wide array of ammunition to choose from—not much of it is left. Most of what one can still find is either rifle ammo that propels a lead weight into the target or shot.

E - CUBED

E-cubed batteries are not actually ammunition but a power cell that is used in energy weapons such as the soul burner or the scourge. E-cubed batteries are very rare and valuable, and only a few cults can use them. Neolibyans, Chroniclers, and Hellvetics know how to recharge these artifacts.

LEAD BALL

It does not take much to produce a lead ball. All that is needed is liquid lead and a tall tower. On top of the building, the lead is poured through a screen, in flight the liquid shapes itself into a ball, hardens, and hits draped cloth covers. The lead shot must simply be swept up and it is ready to use.

The gunpowder is a mix of saltpeter, coal, and sulfur and is usually carried along in a little leather pouch. To prep the weapon, the wielder stuffs the front loader with gunpowder, packs it tight with a long stick, and inserts the lead ball, which is also squeezed tight into the barrel. The load is ignited using a fuse or a hammer trigger.

AMMUNITION

Ammunition is rare—and the time to learn how to make it even rarer. The following table indicates availability and value.

Item	Availability	Tech Level	Cost
.357	Common	4	30
.44	Uncommon	4	40
.45 ACP	Uncommon	4	40
.50 GL	Rare	4	50
4.6 x 30 mm	Rare	4	50
5 x 30 mm caseless	Very rare	5	60
5.56 mm flechette	Very rare	5	70
5.56 x 45 mm UEO	Uncommon	4	40
5.7 x 28 mm	Rare	4	50
9 mm UEO	Common	4	30
12 mm (bullet)	Common	4	30
12 mm (shot)	Common	4	10
Arrow	Frequent	1	5
Bolt	Frequent	1	10
E-cubed	Very rare	6	1,000
Canister of alcohol	Common	3	300
Canister of gasoline	Uncommon (frequent in Africa)	3	500 (5 in Africa)
Grenade	Very rare	4	400
Lead ball and gunpowder	Frequent	3	20
Rocket shell	Very rare	5	800

ARMOR

In the wasteland, people will use any manner of materials for protection, sewing them onto clothes and wearing armor in a piecemeal and patchwork fashion. Each type of material has an Armor value, properties, Tech Level, and cost. The following table gives a rough overview.

Armor Material	Armor Value	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
AMSUMO machine man casing	4	Fireproof (4)	6	3	2,000
Brine-soaked cloth	1	Unstable (8)	1	2	20
Ceramic	4	Fireproof (2)	5	4	1,000
Cloth	0		1	1	10
Composite	5		6	3	2,000
Leather	1		1	2	50
Metal pieces, chain	2		2	3	200
Protective fabric (Kevlar, etc.)	4	Bulletproof (1)	5	4	1,500
Steel plate	3	Rigid (1)	3	6	500

Each worn armor item is assigned one of these materials. A helmet could be constructed from protective fabric or composite materials, for example, and a vest could be fashioned from chainmail or pieces of metal. A single worn item can cover one or more body zones. A long leather coat, for example, could protect both the torso and legs with an Armor value of 1. If more than one armor item covers a zone, the highest Armor value applies, +1 for each additional layer.

To determine the total weight of an armor component, count the weight for each material in each body zone. Cost is determined in the same manner, counting the cost value for each material in each body zone.

Example: The Apocalyptiks hope to sell some items from their recent robbery to Vasco. He discovers a heavy hooded coat with inserted metal plates. The leather is a good quality and the metal turns out to be valuable steel. The Armor value amounts to 4 for both the head and torso (3 for the steel plates, +1 for additional leather armor), 5 against a hit by blunt weapons (due to the Rigid property of the steel plates). The coat is heavy, however, with a total weight of 16: 6 in each zone for the steel plates and 2 in each for the leather). If the Apocalyptiks know what they are doing, they will demand at least 1,100 chroncreds for the find.

CULT ARMOR

Some cults provide their members with special armor, listed in the table below.

Armor	Armor Difficulty (Head/Torso/Legs)	Properties	Tech Level	Weight	Cost
Hellvetic harness	(2/3/3)	Nonflammable (4)	5	11	4000
Hellvetic heavy armor	(4/4/4)	Nonflammable (4)	5	12	6000
Marshal jacket	(0/2/2)		3	6	800
Preservist suit	(0/3/3)		4	6	1500
Scourger flak jacket	(0/4/0)	Bulletproof (1)	5	4	2500
Spitalian suit	(0/1/1)		4	4	500

Optional: Quality

A high Armor value and low weight are not everything. The quality of the armor is also important, with lower quality translating into a less stable protective outfit. A poorly manufactured piece of armor will have the Unstable property at a value between 6 and 8. Unusually high-quality armor will lack the property completely or have it a small value (1 or 2). Most armor will be somewhere in between, with an Unstable rating between 3 and 5.

Quality, however, has its price. Armor that lacks the Unstable property costs double. Each point of Unstable reduces the cost by 10%. Hence, Vasco's jacket from the previous example would cost 2,200 chroncreds if it lacked the property. If it had Unstable (2), however, it would cost only 1,800 ($2,200 \times 20\% = 400$; $2,200 - 400 = 1,800$).

Keep in mind, cost calculations are an art form. Many factors may affect a cost, such as local availability, Tech Level differences, current events, the mood of the seller, and the desperation of the buyer. Nobody in the wastelands is particularly exact about numbers, except perhaps the Neolibyans. The costs and formulas provided here should serve only as reference points.

SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT

A well-stocked backpack can be your best friend out there in the wilderness. Listed in the table below are some of the common survival items available post-Eschaton.

Item	Tech Level	Cost
Backpack	1	20
Binoculars	2	300
Blanket	1	20
Camouflage net	2	80
Camouflage paint	1	10
Candle	1	5
Carrier frame	1	50
Compass	2	100
Cooking utensils	2	10
Fishing gear	1	2
Flashlight	4	200
Flint and tinder	1	10
Insect net	2	50
Lighter	3	200
Lockpick	2	40
Matches	3	80
Oil lamp	2	20
Pushcart	1	80
Radio	4	1000
Rope	1	30
Skis	1	40
Sleeping bag	1	60
Snow shoes	1	20
Tent	1	60
Tools	3	400
Torch	1	2
Trap	2	50
Water bottle	1	5
Water filter	3	100

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

ANTIBIOTICS

Spitalians are the only Europeans who can produce antibiotics in large numbers and of reliable quality. Medics going on missions are always well-equipped with antibiotics, but handing it on to others is forbidden, as this would drastically lower the horrendous prices charged in the Spital. When ingested, antibiotics eliminate the Difficulty modifier on any BOD + Toughness rolls to resist or cure illness. It is ineffective against all other pestilences.

BASIC MEDICAL INSTRUMENTS

Spitalian surgical instruments, stethoscopes, and blood-pressure readers make the life of any doctor quite a bit easier. For each different instrument used during an INT + Medicine or INT + First Aid Skill Roll, the Difficulty is reduced by 1.

DISTILLATE

Many praise its intoxicating properties. Others use it to disinfect their wounds or to fuel engines. This liquid has always been versatile, and nearly everybody is able to produce it. The best distillate, and also the most potent, is that of the Spitalians. Behind their backs, it is said they are their own best customers.

If a wound is disinfected with distillate, the Difficulty of the INT + Medicine or INT + First Aid Skill Roll is reduced by 1.

However, excessive oral consumption can raise the Difficulty of all actions by 1 to 3.

EX

This is probably the greatest achievement of the Spitalians: a drug that binds Foulness spores within the human body and flushes them out. The procedure is pure torture. The drug is injected as a solution and causes extreme nausea that can climax in vomiting and diarrhea. To prevent dehydration, the patient must drink a lot of water.

Each treatment lowers the character's spore points by 2. It can be applied twice a day.

FIRST AID KIT

A standard first aid kit will include 5 plastic-sealed gauze bandages, a small bottle of distillate (10 applications), a needle, thread, and a small knife. Using a first aid kit reduces the Difficulty of INT + First Aid or INT + Medicine Skill Rolls by 1.

HEALING HERBS

Tribal shamans know about the secret healing effects of herbs, roots, and ground-up small animals. Villages that use this medicine either for detoxification or to advance the healing process are treasure troves.

Detox potions have varying degrees of strength, depending upon the ingredients used and the knowledge of the shaman. Potion strength ranges from 1 to 5 and reduces the Difficulty of BOD + Toughness rolls against poison or disease by the strength value of the potion.

Regenerative herbal mixtures lower the Difficulty of INT + First Aid or INT + Medicine Skill Rolls by the strength of the mixture.

Item	Tech	Cost
Antibiotics	4	100
Distillate	1	40
Basic medical instruments	3	100-300
Ex	4	200
Healing herbs	1	20 per degree of strength
First aid kit	3	300

VEHICLES

Broken asphalt, collapsed bridges, a landscape in ruins—not an ideal surface for vehicles. Along with a shortage of fuel, this has resulted in a decay of the car culture. Only the Neolibyans

are still capable of putting up grand fleets of all-terrain vehicles. Far behind them rank the Apocalyptiks and their motorcycles. Other vehicles belong to those determined mechanics who scavenge through piles of rubble to salvage the necessary parts, welding them together with skill.

The table below does not list the speed of these vehicles because the terrain demands driving skill rather than powerful engines and acceleration and top speed depends mainly on the mechanic. The slowest vehicle is the surge tank. Even under ideal conditions, it will not move faster than 30 km per hour.

Fuel for vehicles is produced only in Neolibyan refineries. Therefore, it is difficult for Europeans to fill their tanks and the price for a liter of petroleum is accordingly steep. Only the Hellvetic regions and some Frank coastal cities still receive deliveries, while most of the European fuel is retrieved from broken-down koms or surge tanks. The cost per liter on the free market fluctuates between 100 and 500 chronicros. In Africa, at a price of 5 dinars per liter, gasoline is almost free.

Vehicle	Fuel (liters per 100 km)	Tech Level	Cost
Apocalyptik motorcycle	15	4	4,000
Surge tank	2,500	5	600,000
Scourger KOM	20	4	5,000
4-wheel ATV	30	4	5,000
3-wheel ATV	20	4	4,500
Cargo truck	40	4	6,000
Motorcycle	15	4	4,000
Car	25	4	4,500

DOMESTICATED ANIMALS

CROW

Crows are one of the few birds that managed to survive through the dark years of the Eschaton. Today, large murders of crows occupy the human territories and viciously ravage any food that is out in the open. It is difficult to train these animals, but it pays off. In battle, they plunge into their foe, raising the Difficulty of all actions attempted by the victim of the attack by 1 for each crow.

GENDO

These beasts seem to consist of nothing but teeth and muscle, driven by sheer hunger for meat. Despite their savage nature, they can be a valuable servant to mankind if raised from birth by a skilled trainer. They make excellent guard and search animals. (See *Gendos*, p. 324.)

GIGANT

Gigants are huge mammoths that mostly roam through the forests of East Borca. Taming them is not easy, but worth the effort. There is no need to worry about street thieves if you sit atop this angry beast. One problem, however, is the enormous appetite of these mammals, which is difficult to satiate outside of the forests.

HORSE

Spitalian preservists and Marshals swear by this animal as their primary mount, while Anabaptist ascetics use them as farming animals. Tribals cut them into their stews. Their uses are numerous. The quality and training of the horse raises the price.

OHOMI

Those not familiar with these animals will mistake them for dull cattle, with heavy horns twisted towards the inside and shaggy fur. But should these mammals get excited, one better search for cover. A stampede of these 800-kilogram animals cannot be stopped by a squad of Hellvetics, even if they ignore their normally frugal use of ammo.

Ohomis are kept for their meat and milk.

Animal	Cost
Crow	200
Farm horse	500
Gendo	800
Gigant	10,000
Ohomi	1,000
Warhorse	2,000

WATER CRAFT

The Mediterranean Sea belongs to the Neolibyans. Their ships are the largest, fastest, and best-equipped vessels. However, there are still pirates who resist the dominance of the Africans. They bumble into battle with sailboats or tacked-together vessels. Maybe this is courage—or maybe just a stunning

example of faith. To the Neolibyans, these individuals are violent criminals; to the Europeans, they are heroes. What one can always count on, however, is that pirates are highly peculiar.

While rusty giants drift through the Mediterranean and swift sailboats dance atop the waves, the Frank people stand neck-high in water. The land is turning into a swamp, so boats are part of the daily struggle to survive.

Craft	Tech Level	Cost
Frank scow	2	500
Catamaran	3	2,000
Neolibyan torpedo boat	4	10,000
Neolibyan transport ship	4	Tonnage x 5,000
Sailboat (single mast)	3	700
Sailboat (two mast)	3	3,000

CHAPTER 8
BURN

BURN, BABY, BURN!

Burn is a potent and mysterious drug, derived from Primer spores, that has swept through Europe like a firestorm. Using burn is described as pure ecstasy. Perhaps as a result, it is blamed for the collapse of entire communities. In some towns, a burn user is treated as a social pariah; in others she is a spiritual guru. Burn is a two-edged sword; some hold it by the hilt, others by the blade.

Burn has been completely condemned by the Spitalians. Though the Spitalians can't associate burn directly with the Earth Chakras, it is definitely derived from the Primer. Burn must be inhaled and this often results in the host's lungs becoming infested with spores. This is all the reason needed for a Spitalian to issue your death warrant.

The spores from each Earth Chakra are used to create a specific type of burn with different effects from the others. Visually, the five variants are indistinguishable, but consumption of the drug soon reveals which Earth Chakra—and sometimes even which mother spore field—birthed it.

INTOXICATION AND STIMULUS

The effects of burn are separated into two phases: intoxication and stimulus.

INTOXICATION

Once inhaled, burn catapults the individual into a close orbit of the great mother consciousness—a journey into pure, gleaming divinity.

Spore fibers fill the lungs and are absorbed into the blood stream. The effects of burn are almost instantaneous. Some burners report the sensation of being forcibly pulled back into the womb, a womb of pure consciousness. The sensation is like nothing else.

Ying and yang, karma, reincarnation—a burn addict can lecture on these subjects for hours. However, those who descend deep enough into the universal collective mind often find themselves removed from reality completely. They can no longer see the forest for the trees and they experience the great arc of humanity all at once.

Shamans maintain that, when one returns to reality, it is possible to bring shreds of this knowledge back. Those who have returned from the hyper-reality of burn intoxication try to explain the things they have seen and experienced. They will frantically scratch bizarre ciphers and arcane patterns in the dirt while their companions watch, mouths agape. It is obvious that something has collided with the burner's mind, but it is beyond the understanding of common mortals.

Some burners cannot resist the siren call—or the way reality pales to the ecstatic experience of the gestalt consciousness—and recklessly binge on burn for days at a time. After several days of firing their synapses like fireworks and wringing everydrop of neurotransmitter out with heavy burn intoxication, their brains are utterly wiped of personality. The burner has become a dried shell without emotion or need.

STIMULUS PHASE

The hangover from burn's intoxication is called the stimulus phase. Emotional numbness crumbles into unimaginable

depths of self loathing and depression. The death of a family member could hardly cause more desperation. The individual experiences this stage in different ways, depending on the type of burn.

HARVEST

Whether one wanders across the spore-infested slopes of the Souffrance Crater, stares at the bubbling primordial ooze of Pandora, or strides through the cool grottos of Balkhan—there is always a haunting feeling that burn shoots are lurking nearby. The Primer calls those who seek it.

Visions are common wherever the air is heavy with spores. They accompany the harvest and even seem to drive the process. Faint whisperings, incomprehensible and alien, call the burn harvester as they close in on their goal. The corresponding body chakra of the burn radiates and pulses and the hallucinations grow stronger.

No two harvesters share the same experience, yet there are some similarities. The Primer seems to uncover subconscious thoughts from the harvester's mind and twists them into new shapes and ideas. If the harvester is also an infested burn user, her visions will be far more extreme and seem to take her straight to the heart of the Earth Chakra.

Hordes of insects gather around the mother spore field, merging into strange patterns and shapes that almost seem to point toward the hallucinogenic buds. Dark red, fibers crisscross the spore field, forming a net. Burn shoots can generally be found where these threads intersect.

Once the burn bud is discovered, everything else happens very fast. The fist-sized shoots are easily removed from the mycelia web. This process only takes a few seconds, even if one works with the utmost care.

PREPARATION

After the burn bud dries, the husk is removed and a small knife-tip of the shoot is pulverized into a fine powder. This powder is distributed in small goat-skin bags, each equivalent to 1 dose. The user inflates the bag with their mouth and then inhales the air/spore mixture. Intoxication is immediate.

QUALITY

Burn's quality depends greatly on the degree of development its mother spore field has undergone. In an older spore field, the spores are more complex and evolved; the effects of the drug are greatly increased.

Quality determines the length of the burn's effect. The intoxication phase is measured in hours; the stimulus phase is measured in days. Therefore, a dose of burn with a Quality value of 3 would intoxicate for 3 hours and stimulate for 3 days.

Quality	Crop field
1	A young spore field, less than 20 steps in diameter
3	A juvenile spore field, shortly before its pupation
5	A mother spore field
7	A massive mother spore field
10	An original mother spore field; the center of an Earth Chakra

SPORE INFESTATION

Every dose of burn adds 2 spore points to a character's spore infestation level (see *Spore Infestation*, p. 253). Spore infestation is independent of burn quality.

PATHS TO NIRVANA

BURN: BION

Human Chakra: Lower spine

Earth Chakra: Pollen (Pandora)

Cost: Quality x 5

Without bion, it is likely that the Pollener tribals of this area would have perished long ago. They would never admit it, but this burn from the Pandora Crater is the edge they need to survive in their barren homeland.

Besides the typical intoxicating effects of burn, this variant also stimulates the body's defenses and acclimates the user to their environment: cold becomes more tolerable and heat is easier to bear. Though the human is less susceptible to inclement weather, she is tossed head first into the Earth Chakra's consciousness, risking her very identity.

Effect: Any test that might result in disease, cold, or heat damage has its Difficulty reduced by the Quality value of the bion.

BURN: GLORY

Human Chakra: Solar plexus

Earth Chakra: Purgare

Cost: Quality x 30

Glory strengthens the will and makes the body vibrate with energy. Radiating from the breastbone, tingling warmth flows through the user's limbs, giving the individual full control over every fiber of muscle.

Muscles, pliant and sleek, allow acts of strength that were unthinkable before the consumption of the drug. The user's entire body functions better and faster. Their stamina is boosted beyond normal human limits.

The effects of glory make it a perfect drug for mercenaries, but disciplined soldiers won't use it because the burn also bolsters willpower, which tends to make them far too rebellious.

Effect: Glory boosts Stamina and Strength by half of the Quality value of the burn, rounded down. This will also affect the character's Stamina and Strength Action Values (AV).

Simultaneously, the Difficulty of all Self Mastery Skill Rolls is reduced by the Quality value of the burn.

BURN: HARMONY

Human Chakra: Heart

Earth Chakra: Franka (Souffrance)

Costs: Quality x 10

This burn set in motion the avalanche of events that destroyed old Paris. Overuse of burn led to the city becoming infested with spores, which in turn attracted immeasurable hordes of insects and forced the people to flee. It's ironic that this chaos was caused by the most calming and peaceful variety of burn.

Following inhalation and the typical intoxication period, the user is overcome by a deep sense of peace. A tingling sensation spreads from the breast to all parts of the body. After about two hours, the user is flooded with compassion so strong it would cause even the most hardened warrior to swear off violence. If a dangerous situation escalates, the user will take flight or attempt to find a peaceful resolution.

The calming properties of harmony make it an important substance among the warring clans of Dustlung. It is far easier to forge alliances and set boundaries if all of the mediators are happily sedated. Nobody is afraid of losing face—any faux pas can be blamed on the drug. This substance might be the ingredient necessary to forge a new civilization from the ashes of the Eschaton.

Effect: Under the influence of harmony, the character is disinclined toward violence and will try to act as a mediator in any altercations.

The Difficulty of any Self Mastery Skill Rolls to restrain from violence or hostilities is 0.

BURN: MUSE

Human Chakra: Throat

Earth Chakra: Balkhan

Cost: Quality x 20

A user of muse experiences the world as a vibrating, living organism. Light, wind, thoughts—these things resonate with their own secret language. A mere sigh can destabilize the harmonic balance of the world and cause irreparable harm.

The muse addict understands the fragile balance of the universe. They know that they could reach out and touch the fabric of reality, but mere intoxication is not enough to seize such power.

Muse is highly addictive. Those who become dependent on it strive to dissolve the psychic barrier, hoping to shape the world with their voices. This is an absurd idea, but the Dushani fuel this myth.

Muse is not merely a delusional hallucinogen, however. If used properly, it can lead to increased mental acuity, resulting in high levels of creativity. It has also been observed that muse changes the user's voice, particularly in the lower frequencies.

Pure muse (Quality 10), directly from the Balkhan Earth Chakra, causes the user to speak in tongues. This babbling is incoherent to outsiders, but fellow muse burners relish its beauty and clarity.

Effect: The Difficulty for all PSY and INT actions are lowered by the Quality of the burn.

BURN: ARGUS

Human Chakra: Forehead

Earth Chakra: Hybrispania

Cost: Quality x 10

Hybrispania is the land of visionaries and messiahs—consuming argus will increase the consumer's spiritual acuity.

Argus weakens the body and consumes the soul; it sends the consciousness into foreign realities where time shifts and dissolves. Suddenly, the burner will see the world as it may be in a hundred years or more and then shift to a picture of life over a million years earlier. Reality blurs and the burner is incapable of separating fact from fiction.

Only humans with high Self Mastery skill can keep themselves grounded and resist the tugging whirlpool of fragmented time. They witness life in fast motion, but have the ability to experience the near future or recent past.

Effect: When facing a dangerous situation, the burner must pass a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll equal to the Quality of the argus. If she fails, she does not recognize the threat and blindly stumbles to her doom. However, should the Skill Roll succeed, she will be prescient of any dangers that approach until the burn wears off.

BURN: DISCORDIA

Human Chakra: None

Earth Chakra: None

Cost: Quality x 50

The effects of discordia burn are very different from those spores harvested from healthy Earth Chakras. While normal burn is distinguished by an intoxication and stimulus phase, discordia sucks the consumer right into an almost indescribable nothingness. Thousands of arms seem to wrap around the user's body, greedily pulling her into absolute darkness. The only thing left is the user's individuality, which is not felt, per se, but noticed from afar.

Discordia users talk of seven marks that appear on the body marking every chakra point from the forehead to the genitals. These marks are glowing points of flame, yet the user feels nothing and takes no interest in the sensation.

The burner floats off into nothingness, watching the points of light part and move away. As the energy points diffuse, the user's soul seems to leak out, forming great spiraling streaks that vanish into the gloom of nothingness.

The effects last for about six hours, after which the user is abruptly tossed back into reality. The awakening is painful and for several days the world seems alien and ungraspable—and disturbingly bright. It feels as though some part of the self was left behind in the darkness.

Effect: Discordia is a shadow of what it could have been. Since the drug results from the separation of mother spore fields from their Earth Chakra, any positive benefits are nullified. Discordia merely absorbs all of the user's energy. The user therefore suffers a Difficulty modifier on all actions equal to the Quality of the burn. This effect decreases by one point each day.

ANALYSIS

For 220 days we have examined the behavior patterns of various subjects that have undergone spore infestation using spores from the Pandora mother spore field. The process has been standardized and used in the same manner for each test subject. At this point, we would like to thank the citizens of Danzig for providing criminals for use in our experiments.

After a 10 day detox period, meant to cleanse spores from the subjects, we exposed them to our controlled experimental spore field. The field, about 400 square meters and derived from the Biokinetik Earth Chakra, is located east of our Danzig outpost. The subjects took the exposure well. Fatalities were all traced back to the subject's miserable lifestyle or unhealthy physique. Autopsies are still outstanding.

The surviving subjects have been divided into groups dependent on their exposure to the spore field.

Subjects known to have been previous users of burn were sent on a search for burn shoots. Of the subjects exposed to a 10-day spore infestation, each was able to find between 20 and 25 shoots in the predetermined time. It quickly became apparent that the subjects did not wander around aimlessly. They followed a very systematic process for their search.

BURN WITHIN THE CULTURES

AFRICA

The belt of psychovors that runs along the equator is a creation of the Primer, yet it does not much resemble the spore fields. The Maasai clans claim that the fruits of these demonic plants are as stimulating as the mushrooms of Europe. Nevertheless, the effects of burn remain unparalleled.

BALKHAN

Muse must be the strangest of all of the burn variants. The average city dweller has no idea what to do with it. Normal humans have little interest in the wild pipe dreams of babbling idiots who can barely contain the intense excitement they feel raging within them. Most citizens believe a good Balkhani should keep her feet firmly planted

The control group, who were not burn users or otherwise known to have been subjected to any previous spore infestation, meandered through the field without any method and found 3 shoots at best.

This is a clear indication that a correlation exists between the level of spore infestation and the number of burn shoots collected.

Explaining exactly why a spore field creates burn shoots as well as regular spore-carrying buds is far more difficult. According to our preliminary examinations—and I state emphatically that the following deductions are pure speculation, awaiting further evidence—it seems that the Earth Chakra produces burn as an incentive for distributing its spores. In the mother spore fields, the burn shoots are brilliantly colored flowers that attract all manner of birds and animals. The burn itself acts as the mother spore field's nectar—infested, parasitic nectar! It appears that the Earth Chakras adapt the burn to meet the needs and desires of the sporeling, an evolutionary process that follows the example set by the botanic world. It is frightening that the weak and impure human is subdued by mechanisms similar to those that have enslaved insects for millions of years. What does that say about the sporeling in general and the psychonauts specifically? Is it right that our organization should crush them, instead of working towards their salvation? Only one path is the righteous one.

on the ground or, if that is impossible, lose herself to the bottle, which produces far more coherent addicts. The only people with any interest in muse are intellectuals and spiritualists, a user base not nearly large enough to support an operation at the same scale as that in Pollen.

Organized distribution of muse is difficult not only because of the lack of interested buyers. The drug is also quite difficult to harvest. Muse can only be found in the dark caves and grottos that are inhabited by the grotesque Dushani. Communication with these beings is rare and harvesters disappear

quite frequently. It seems that the Dushani fiercely protect the drug, though perhaps they are simply annoyed at having strangers running through their homes.

BORCA

Burn from all over Europe is shipped into Borca. Scrapers buy the drug as if it were going to run out. Spitalian influence is not very strong in the Scrapper camps.

In Justitian, the situation is a bit different. Medics lurk at every corner, randomly inspecting everyone for spore infestation. A slight nervous tic and you could be branded, indelibly, as a sporeling or burn addict. You are instantly ostracized and everyone around you vanishes. The Spitalians, however, calmly pull down their breathing masks and stoke the flames on their sprayers.

At this point, there are only two options: buy their spore cleaning agent, ex, at the staggering price of 300 chronicreds per dose, or be put to the flame. There is no bluffing here. The mercilessness of the Spitalians is legendary, which is how they manage to keep Justitian so clean.

DISCORDIA ZONE

The Discordia spore fields along the Mediterranean and parts of Balkhan were rejected by the Earth Chakras centuries ago. The umbilical cord connecting this region to the Gaia collective has been completely severed.

Still, burn grows prolifically in these spore fields. The extraction of the drug is far more difficult because the effects of the spore infestation do not open channels into the Earth consciousness, which helps the harvester detect the intoxicating spores. Instead, Discordia spore fields lead the harvester into a trap, often devouring the individual, leaving no trace of her existence.

Those who successfully avoid being killed by the deadly spore fields still risk their souls to bizarre delusions that flood their minds: Kafka-esque transformations, surging seas of shiny insect bodies, and foul poison rain are some of the more harmless hallucinations. The search for discordia burn will cost either the harvester's sanity or her life.

FRANKA

The unchecked consumption of burn and the Franks' longing for inner peace led to the spore infestation of Paris. Centuries later, these people no longer need or consume the drug—the Pheromancers keep them in a permanent state of intoxication. Harmony is only harvested for export to Borca, Hybrispania, and Purgare. Cultures disinclined toward peacefulness show no interest in this substance.

HYBRISPANIA

Hybrispanian guerillas lay claim to the region's supply of burn, and the population supports them. Several families live alongside the large, potent fields and share the meager profit generated by

the drug's sales. Often, individual guerilla troops will pay them with stolen African weapons. The substandard yield is exported to Franka, then moved on to Borca and Purgare.

Although no Hybrispanian warrior would admit it, argus burn is the real hero of the resistance. The visions caused by the drug may be nebulous and indistinct at best, but it puts guerilla troops in a state of constant paranoia that keeps them alert for ambushes.

Even though true visions do occur on occasion, the drug is not responsible for the results of the resistance. Though argus may be the soul of the rebellion, the fate of Hybrispania hangs on those that fight.

POLLEN

Near the Pandora Earth Chakra, three Apocalyptik groups, the **Szenkoras**, the **Haadvars** and the **Jen**, share the distribution and sale of burn. These depraved drug addicts have an extensive network of middlemen and wholesalers that has managed to keep them safe from the Spitalians.

According to rumors, the Apocalyptiks have made an unholy alliance with the Biokinetiks, who harvest the burn for them. Because the Biokinetiks are immune to the negative effects of bion, the burn yield in this region is staggering and far higher than in other regions.

A Spitalian force of about twenty individuals, led by the Pollen preservist **Pavel Keresz**, was established to put an end to the lawless actions of the Apocalyptiks and to contain the bion shipments into Borca. So far, their success has been meager. Only couriers and middlemen have been caught and a few ragged camps put to the torch. This has not affected the flow of bion and has only managed to drive up the price of the drug. New trade routes arise like new heads on a hydra and the Spitalians are gaining no ground against the burn black market. The ball is in Keresz's court, and the responsibility hangs like an albatross around his neck.

PURGARE

Apocalyptiks tightly control the drug trade in Borca, sending couriers and farmhands to the most distant regions of Europe. They spare no expense when it comes to providing their clients with the joy of intoxication.

In Purgare, the situation is a bit more difficult. Trying to get glory into Borca is a very risky operation. It depends on the goodwill of Hellvetic soldiers as well as avoiding Spitalians, who seem to be everywhere. The only way to transport large amounts of glory is to travel along the Mediterranean and up the coast of Franka, and even this route is quite treacherous. Ultimately, the best way to get glory in Borca is to purchase it from mercenaries or corrupt Hellvetics, and then only at a grossly inflated price.

Hybrispania is by far the largest market for glory. The task of procurement is generally taken on by former guerilla troops, the maimed, or the elderly.

CHRONICLER SERVICES

The Chroniclers are the information brokers of Europe. No matter how secretive they may seem, the right artifacts or chronicreds will cause them to reveal a good deal of information.

ARTIFACT PURCHASE

The Chroniclers are dependent on the Scrapper hordes that comb the ruins of Europe and extract the treasures of the ancients. The Scappers deliver the Stream. Every artifact infused with the energy of the ancients brings the cult closer to reestablishing the Stream. Yet, not even the Chroniclers can say with any certainty how the presence of the Stream manifests itself. They rely on assumptions and pay high prices for old data modules, media, and computers.

The cult has opened chronicred exchanges in many of the larger towns of Europe. Bar codes drawn at human height with chalk identify corrugated sheet-metal huts or old buildings as outposts. At least two Chroniclers man each station and they receive and evaluate the artifacts that come their way. They accept any worthless junk and reimburse the Scappers at a flat rate. This keeps the Scappers happy, which keeps them hunting. The promising items are brought into the cluster, while the rest end up in junk shops where technicians break down the material and reuse it for the manufacturing of weapons or building materials.

CHRONICLER NETWORK

Clusters are the intersections of a widespread data network. In order to become part of this network, one must establish an “account” with the Chroniclers. This account can be used to send messages to other users. These “mailings” can be accessed in any cluster. To do so, one enters information kiosks, which are small, segregated rooms located in the entrance area of the cluster.

To access the messaging system, you must swipe a personal network card (a time-stained piece of plastic that contains a magnetic strip) across the Chronicler eye—a dim, black, palm-sized, glass plate on the wall. This is referred to as a “network greeting” and this process must be repeated until the amber-colored monitor mounted on the wall lights up and displays the user’s latest messages. If one wishes to reply, a Chronicler will hand the user a decrepit keyboard filled with ancient and bizarre symbols.

INFORMATION

The Chronicler’s knack for valuable information is legendary. Of course, they only help those who are willing to pay. Often, the information desired focuses on possible artifact sites. When evaluating the information, the Chronicler estimates the value of the item to be found. If one is looking to locate a weapon stash, the Chronicler will assume that it contains ten functioning firearms and a few dozen ammo rounds. Since the type of weapon is unknown, the Chronicler sets the arms value at a standard rate of 500 chronicred per piece, valuing the entire site at about 5,000 chronicreds. The ammo rounds are considered to be bonus items and do not figure into the calculation. The cult collects 50% of the estimated value as a fee for providing the information. If particularly precise information exists—for example, if the cult is in possession of a map that contains exact positioning data—the price rises by 70% of the estimated value.

WRITING INSTRUCTION

The Chronicler network is only of use to those who can read and write. To expand the client base, the cult teaches these skills, offering classes in Justitian. Of course, this is not a free service. The seminars last for 10 days and raise Writing by 1. The cost is fixed at 1,000 chronicreds.

Description	Chronicred Cost
Application for the network card	300
Mail forwarding	50
Receiving messages	20

SPITALIAN SERVICES

Enclave doctors can be found in many villages and towns, even outside of the Protectorate. However, those seeking the best available help should go to a Spitalian hospital.

FIRST AID

Should you drag yourself to a local Spitalian seeking treatment for a mild, fresh injury, then she could provide first aid with an AV 14.

FLESH WOUND TREATMENT

This treatment usually requires a few days. The Spitalian changes bandages twice a day and rubs the wound with a healing tonic. Following a successful First Aid Skill Roll (AV 14), with the Difficulty equal to the number of flesh wounds, the natural healing process doubles.

TRAUMA WOUND TREATMENT

Lying on a Spitalian operating table, there’s no reason to be scared, unless you happen to be a psychonaut. In every other case, the neoprene-clad physicians may well save your life. A Spitalian surgeon can treat trauma wounds with a successful Medicine Skill Roll (AV 15), reducing trauma wounds by 1. They may attempt the Medicine Skill Roll once every 4 days per patient.

DETOXIFICATION

After an exhaustive examination, the Spitalian will administer a detoxifying medicine, which reduces the strength of the poison by a value of 1 to 5.

SPORE CLEANSING

This is indeed an uncomfortable but necessary process if one is infested with spores and enters Spitalian territory. If entrusted in the care of doctors, they will perform a controlled spore cleansing using ex.

Description	Cost
First aid	50
Flesh wound treatment	200 per day
Trauma wound treatment	500
Detoxification	100 per level
Spore cleansing	1,000



BOOK 4:
FORBIDDEN
ZONE

SPRING

There was movement within the forest. The breaking of twigs and the rustling of leaves woke the old, forgotten instincts of war within the man behind the plow. Wiping gray strands of hair out of his face, he stepped through broken earth to the side of his pulling horse. This old black horse, called “Devil,” had seen as much of life as the man. With trembling nostrils, it pawed the ground with its hooves. The old man listened and gazed suspiciously into the scrambled green thickness of the forest, while absentmindedly petting the horse’s neck. Strangely united, animal and human stood in this fashion for a while, enchanted by the soft rustling of the wind, taking in the strong scent of fresh soil.

“What is wrong, Nik?” There was a thin voice behind him, off in the distance.

He did not react at first, wanting to preserve this mystical moment in his heart for as long as he possibly could. Already forgotten were thoughts of wild Balkhani or looting Apocalyptiks hiding in the bushes. Fleeting attention is both a privilege and curse of old age. Nik sighed, rubbed his aching ankles and turned around. His house sat over there, by the end of the long stretch of land that he and his sons had wrestled from nature by clearing out underbrush and transforming it into a potato field. The sturdy home looked not unlike a huge dusty beetle. The junk his oldest son Joshua had brought to the farm, hoping to sell it to caravans, piled up against the walls and formed a rusty mass, leaving only window and door openings accessible. At first, Nik could not immediately locate the voice, but then he spotted Arden on the terrace, waving her hand. Nik shook his head. His eyes were slowly failing on him with age. He did, however, note her position as strategically poor, but well camouflaged. He could not distance himself from his old life. On good days, he revisited the old successful battles that he had partaken in, measuring his losses against those of the enemy. On bad days, doubt rose up within him. Why, in the battlefields by Bucharest, did he not order the pliers strategy? How was it possible that his crew was led into the ambush near Laibach? No form of death and agony seemed unfamiliar to him.

He glanced obediently at Arden and waved back. She was no beauty like Nebe, but a good and loving wife. She had given him three sons, as well as the inner peace he so long had run away from. She knew that he would never forget Nebe and that he could never redeem himself, and she granted him this small measure of unfaithfulness.

He slapped his black horse on the neck one more time and trudged towards the house. Arden hated to talk to him over a distance. She always called him “old signal horn.”

“I thought I’d seen Joshua arrive,” Nik said as he stepped onto the terrace.

“You are getting old;” she said. “No less than five days’ he said, and that was the day before yesterday.”

He ignored the reproachful sound in her voice and looked past her towards the house. “When will there be some food?”

“As soon as Perdres returns with firewood. But first I must feed the little one.”

Nik did not care, only listening to her halfheartedly. In the past, behind enemy lines, he often went days without eating anything of substance. Pretending to have needs gave Arden a sense of being needed. One must keep a soldier motivated. Nik laughed coarsely.

“The world does not revolve around you,” Arden said with a hint of indignation in her voice. Nik smiled, then became alarmed—another crack from the underbrush! This time, the sound was far louder. Nik looked over to Devil. The animal moved nervously, rattling the harness and causing the rough wood of the plow to creak.

“Go ahead, turn away, this won’t make it any better.”

“Be quiet!” he hissed and hastily ran over to his horse. His heart beat hard in his chest, fear tingled in his veins like ice water. No weapons. Damn, they had no weapons! Years ago he gave his old steel sword to Joshua, and the remains of his arsenal of iron knives and broken swords now served peaceful tasks, either as parts of the plow or as metal door fittings.

For a moment, he remained still next to the horse. What if old age played a trick on him, if lunacy had settled in his mind? If so, he would be forgiven for it afterwards. If not, there would be no afterwards. He jumped to the side and kicked into the plow with all his strength. The construction split into pieces, the swords were now almost loose. Devil snorted with surprise and moved forward, pulling along the harness and broken wood frame. Nik was almost astonished that the wood had broken instead of his bones. From the corner of his eye, he noticed again several dark shadows in the forest—they would be here soon! Nik dropped onto his knees, ignoring the searing pain in his hip, and pulled a rust-stained sword, broken at arm’s length, from the tangled mess of wires and timber.

“Nik!” He heard Arden rush towards him. She was upset.

“Get into the house! Quick!” he yelled, and suddenly he was back at the front. He was again the leader of the crew. His fingers combed back his dirt gray hair; it was like the old days again. The three dots on his forehead tingled. It was war. Then he got up.

“Come out of hiding, the old man saw us.” The voice had an uncomfortably high pitch. It belonged to a gigantic man who now walked onto the potato field, pulling burs and lichens from his dark fur coat. Nik noticed immediately that he carried no sack, backpack, or cooking utensils. He must have left his equipment in the forest—a bad sign.

No more than ten steps away, another man broke from the underbrush, clad entirely in the dark neoprene cloth of a Spitalian. His face was hidden behind a gas mask with broken eyeglasses. But he was not a doctor: long black strains of hair grew over the straps of the mask and hung beside his head, greasy and unkempt. He was unclean and scruffy looking, like a rat. Or rather like an armed rat, for he carried a stiletto in each one of his hands.

Where was the third person?

Nik looked over to Arden, about to scream her name, when he saw the Scrapper rush at her. Before he could act, she was knocked down. She did not scream. A scream would have meant death. She only huffed a little as the air left her lungs during the fall. Her face full of soil, she coughed and spat out a large chunk of earth. With fear in her eyes, she looked at Nik, then the Scrapper knelt on her and pushed her head into the dirt again.

“Got her!” The grin on the Scrapper’s face revealed a row of rotten teeth. His eyes were too close together.

Nik fought to stay calm. “What do you want?”

The gigantic man looked at Nik with interest, but remained silent. “Are you looking for food? Distillate? We have no weapons here. We are farmers. Ascetics.” He emphasized the last word and searched for a reaction in their faces. Have these bastards never met any Anabaptists?

“We are not interested in you,” the high-pitched voice of the tall one proclaimed, “but very much so in your daughter.” Nik’s heart froze into a clump of ice. Yes, Arden was young ...

“The harvesters pay well.”

These damn Apocalyptiks! They were looking for slaves to harvest the spore fields for burn! Yet, Nik was relieved. It was not his past that had come to track him down; these were regular thugs and kidnappers.

The tall one moved next to Nik, and his large hands forced the old man onto his knees; a blade pushed against his throat. The metal felt cold. How many of his old enemies experienced a similar feeling right before their death? Nik still held on to his sword.

Suddenly, there was movement among the intruders. They looked over to the edge of the forest. The man with the gas mask rushed towards the house. Nik himself had seen nothing.

Then he heard him: “Father! Mother!”

No! thought Nik, they will not also get Perdres. With a surge of strength, he beat away the arm of the giant, who was surprised that this curious old man should put up any resistance. Nik rolled sideways and thrust the broken sword at his tormentor. There was a loud clanging sound as the blade hit and slid off the armored petticoat.

The tall man gave a feisty grin.

With a second stroke of the blade—a bit lower this time—Nik cut through the Achilles tendon. Warm blood spurted on his face, running into his mouth and eyes. The tall one screamed and fell next to Nik on the field. The scream turned into a gurgle as Nik cut his throat; then, there was only silence. The old Anabaptist knelt like an angel of revenge over the steaming corpse, his yellow eyes staring fixedly at the Scrapper, his face red with blood. The latter only looked at him in confusion, stood up, and stumbled backwards.

“Rael!”

The man with the gas mask came out of the door and saw the dead body as well as the retreating Scrapper.

“Shit!”

Then he ran towards Nik. He was fast; his movements were nimble and full of strength. Nik knew well that he had no chance against the swirling stilettos. Not anymore, at least. Tears ran down his wrinkled face. He feared for his family. He felt a deep love. Were these the feelings he had searched for so long? The Spitalian was now close and rammed a blade into his arm, pulling it out and stabbing him again. The stiletto was stuck up to the handle in Nik’s stomach. Behind his opponent, he saw how Arden kick the Scrapper in the groin, then scratch his eyes out. Good girl. He saw Perdres come into view, dropping the firewood and, as if in slow motion, running to the aid of Arden. Suddenly, the man with the mask was gone, and he beheld the faces of Arden and Perdres, crying. But Nik smiled now. This was the first fight worth fighting.

And it was spring.

CHAPTER HISTORY



A STORM OF SPORES

SPITALIAN ARCHIVE

2073: THE ESCHATON. Humanity is obliterated by the global impact of numerous asteroids. Mother Nature, however, takes this opportunity to rejuvenate.

Across the northern hemisphere, asteroids collide with the Earth and leak vestiges of the original life-forming matter, Primer, into the soil. The southern hemisphere is mostly spared, but a few massive wayward meteors cut southward through the atmosphere and incinerate a few kilometers above the ground. Molten debris rains down across enormous swathes of land depositing alloys and various sulfurous compounds as well as the Primer.

A gigantic asteroid, Colossus, plunges into the Atlantic Ocean, but manages to remain intact, carrying its alien cargo of Primer to the bottom.

Asteroid impacts in North America reactivate the Yellowstone volcano. It blasts tons of ash into the atmosphere, smothering the land with thick layers of magma and dust.

2100: Almost all of the Primer that lands in Europe and Asia gives rise to Foulness, a spore-like infestation.

North America struggles with different problems. The devastation from the Yellowstone volcano prevents the Primer from gaining a strong foothold in this wasteland and so the Foulness does not spread as rapidly as in Europe.

Humans who live near meteor impact sites are afflicted with hideous and obscene mutations. These unfortunate individuals rarely survive their genetic interactions with the Primer.

The first effects of the Primer are now visible in Central Africa. Here the Primer uses vegetation instead of fungi to reach across the continent. The infected plants spread using pollen, moss, and, to a lesser degree, single-cell organisms.

2200: All attempts to stop the Foulness fail utterly. Its influence over insects is beyond comprehension. Every impact zone in northern Europe is now a morass of chattering, diseased vermin.

Pollen is home to the Pandora Crater, which lies close to the devastated city of Warsaw. Warsaw is now a deadly breeding ground for spiders and centipedes.

Pandora itself is a vast lake—ancient life forms, once believed extinct, appear resurrected on its shores. They skitter sickeningly on the diseased beach and are eventually washed across Europe in the lake's tributaries and runoff.

Franka is home to the Souffrance Crater whose spores are a valued hallucinogenic drug throughout the country. The impoverished laborers in the revived city of Paris seem to be the drug's primary consumers.

The African plants infected with the Primer undergo a rapid expansion along the equator, separating the northern and southern halves of the continent.

2221: The first cases of widespread paranormal phenomena in humans are documented.

Psychonauts appear in Pollen and initially display nothing more than miraculous regenerative abilities. Soon, however, fertile soil decays into stinking earth at their touch. They are rejected by their tribes and families and are hunted mercilessly.

2235: A strong underwater earthquake fractures parts of the Colossus meteor. The engine of evolution begins in the frigid depths of the Atlantic. The Primer in the Colossus meteor gives

rise to ancient arthropods that spread throughout the world's oceans. Bizarre carapaces wash up on the shores of Franka—disturbing proof of strange activities in the sea.

2204: The Souffrance Crater, renowned for its twisted, burn-laden bushes, displays a new phenomenon: gigantic funnels of sepsis that tower high into the sky. They belch sickening pheromones into the air and appear to house maddening swarms of ants.

2267: This is an inauspicious year for Paris. Measurements taken over the preceding decades proved the city was sinking rapidly into the ground. Presuming that flooding and shifting water tables are eroding the ancient foundations of the city, its citizens work feverishly to shore up their fragile home. They build dykes and levees across the countryside hoping to staunch the rising floodwaters.

The real danger is far more terrifying than anyone imagined. Swarms of insects had burrowed deep beneath the city. Their hives swelled to fill the decrepit sewers and pits of ancient Paris.

The insects explode from the gutters with a vengeance. Wherever they gather in large numbers, Foulness appears. Large parts of the city are so spore infested that survival without an air filter is impossible. Burn is everywhere and many of the citizens of Paris are now soulless drug addicts. A mother spore field appears in the center of the forsaken metropolis.

At some point, the city's dykes burst, flooding a massive section. A few months later, Paris is abandoned. Broken, the Parisians surrender it to the insects and flee into the countryside. The corrupt ghetto is now called Parasite.

2270: Three psychonaut raptuses emerge in Europe: Biokinetikis in Pollen and Borca, Paragnostiks in Hybrispania, and Dushani in Balkhan. Each raptus is linked to a large mother spore field. These spore fields stem from the Earth Chakras, which are the impact craters of the largest meteors to hit Europe. They transfer their particular characteristics to the surrounding fields and corrupt all nearby life in strange ways.

2290: Africa's climate changes dramatically. Near constant rainfall in central Africa transforms the Congo basin into the world's largest lake. Fishermen advance deep into the center of the continent unharmed by aggressive plants. A passage south remains impossible.

2300: The Souffrance funnels begin to emit methane. The apparent cause seems to be a mutation in the insect population. Ants, blended with some other type of insect, form a complex interrelated community; evolution appears to happen overnight.

The Spitalians detect these subtle atmospheric variations and link it to the Foulness. Their war against the Primer begins.

2302: Neolibyans encounter the first Psychokinetics in the western slag deserts of Purgare. These twisted children can destroy an entire village when in a frenzy. This region becomes the most volatile and dangerous of all Neolibyan holdings.

2305: While performing an autopsy on the brain of a psychonaut, the Spitalians link the uncanny abilities of the psychonauts to the Foulness.

2306: For the first time, highly specialized psychonauts step into a mother spore field and repel the massive swarms of insects. They are called the Pheromancers.

Praising the Foulness, the people of Franka honor the psychonauts and chase the Spitalians out of the country. A

strange peace settles on the people, ending bitter feuds and ancient rivalries.

2312: The Menden mother spore field in Borca is obliterated by the Spitalians—though at great sacrifice. What remains is an undead land that ripples and shudders as if it were trying to grow. It is called the Festering.

The Spitalians contaminate the Festering with thousands of entropic nanites. The nanites reproduce uncontrollably and spread across the wasteland. It seems impossible to stop their advance.

2320: In Africa, the Primer finally conquers the waterways. Poisonous algae and deadly vines clog the lakes and rivers, making passage impossible. A thick layer of algae covers Lake Victoria. Large pieces frequently come loose and float down the Nile River.

2360: Life bubbles and seethes along the Nile—alien, bizarre life. Yet the Anubians take no precautions. They accept the challenge and learn to commune with the malign plants.

2390: Although the Spitalians refrain from using nanites again, their success against the Foulness in Dustlung is remarkable.

The Spitalians discover they can detect psychonauts using mollusks—spore infested muscle tissue enclosed in bottles filled with a nutrient solution. They also create new fungicides that cause young spore fields to wilt.

Oaken spiders consume all of the spore-carrying insects in the Spital without becoming infected. They are adapted to other uses as well.

2455: The fungicides of the Spitalians lose their effectiveness—the spores have adapted. The war against the Foulness grows more and more difficult.

The Discordia theory emerges. Hope returns to the embattled cult. Discordia theorizes that the Earth Chakras somehow communicate. It is believed that communication between the Earth Chakras increases the global rate of evolution by escalating the efficiency of the Primer. Discordia posits that communication problems have arisen between the Earth Chakras of Europe.

Strange occurrences and major disturbances seem to validate this theory. The Foulness produced in the main mother spore fields grows corrupt and twists the minds and bodies of those who come in contact with it. Across Europe, horribly mutated animal corpses, grotesque still births, and all types of corrupt plant life indicate a great illness with the Earth Chakras.

Anecdotal evidence also points to horrible effects on the connections between the psychonauts and the mother spore fields that seems to be driving them insane. Where once they roamed happily, they now run screaming, tearing themselves to pieces. In one case, hundreds of Dushani die almost instantaneously.

2470: The Discordia event shakes the world of humans and psychonauts alike.

The Biokinetiks' Earth Chakra produces grotesquely distorted mutations. These have disturbing and insane abilities and appear to be something fit for an alien world. Most of them die; the rest lose their mind.

As Discordia ebbs away, the Earth Chakra recognizes that there is no salvation for its deformed offspring and bans them from the collective. It then begins breeding new Biokinetiks.

2476: The Discordia phenomenon appears to be over. Near the Mediterranean Sea, some mother spore fields continue to resonate from its effects. They are shunned, and a strip of land a few hundred kilometers wide becomes known as the "Discordance Zone."

2462: The Spitalians take Danzig by force—no one really opposes them. Many of the city's inhabitants hastily pack their belongings and flee to the south. The Medics aren't plunderers and murderers, but the people of Pollen mistrust easily, and the Spitalians have a reputation for burning things.

Over the following years, the militaristic Medics reconstruct the city, transforming it into their operational headquarters in Pollen.

The Spitalian's first expeditions into the east begin.

2512: The spore belt between Europe and Asia closes. While a passage into the east seemed possible at first, the Foulness has completely choked the land.

The Spitalians build a fortress on the edge of this wasteland that seeks to decimate the insect populations that spread the Foulness through the constant and targeted use of fungicides and pesticides. The Spitalians' plan is to breach the wall of Foulness and create of a passage through the belt.

2535: The psychovors expand to cover great swathes of Africa. Genetic information is forcefully transferred via thorns and pollen to any adaptable life form. These viral genetic sequences cause cancer in regular humans.

It is far more difficult to get close to the psychovors without risking death. Survivors of jungle expeditions return decades later, seemingly younger in years and bereft of memory. They speak in tongues and cannot communicate even with body language. The tribals of Africa believe the spirits of the land have possessed these lost individuals.

2562: This is the year Vasco commits the great sin.

Supposedly, while excavating a site in the Pandora Crater region, Dr. Hernez Vasco discovers a few grams of the legendary Primer matter and begins a series of experiments. His findings and resulting theories shake the world of the Spitalians.

Dr. Vasco demonstrates that identical gene sequences can be found in all known species on Earth. This means that all life developed from the same primordial source. He discovers that the alien Primer shares these DNA strands with humanity and everything else on Earth. His ideas completely refute the Assimilation theory, which assumes the Primer copies the host DNA in order to adapt and merge with the infested organism.

In January of 2562, during a closed-door session of the Spitalian senate, Vasco declares that the Primer is pure DNA—a virus that started life on Earth billions of years earlier. He states that the fight against the spore fields is the wrong approach and asks his colleagues to accept the Foulness as a chance for mankind to evolve. He counsels the Spitalians to approach this phenomenon with expectancy and a healthy curiosity. His ideas find little support. Two days later, he and 36 like-minded followers flee into exile.

2570: Preservists finally track Vasco down. He is now entirely spore infested, considering himself and his followers the spearhead of a new species: Homo degenesis.

He surmounts near-impossible odds, defeating his pursuers and managing to escape. During their debriefing, the participating troops report that Vasco was surprisingly strong and agile.

2585: The Present. There is much that remains unexplained. The causes for the Discordia phenomena remain unclear—the Dushani remember that deadly decade and fear its reoccurrence. What is happening in the Central African plant belt? What do the people here truly face? What will happen if African psychovors cross the European spore front?

A NEW WORLD ORDER

THE STREAM

The Stream pervaded every aspect of life and connected humans with a global data network. It was omnipresent, always in the background, a common part of life; it was integral to all types of household devices, surveillance cameras, and traffic routing systems. It was implanted into every digital knick-knack—the world was alive in the Stream.

The Stream worked by using programs called agents to sift data and carry out simple tasks. With a simple command from a user, agents would swarm into the Stream, flooding digital information hot spots and doing exactly as they were told. Humans cherished the agents because of their unbelievable speed and efficiency.

Many people became fascinated with the sociological aspects of the Stream. Scientists compared the shifting patterns of the agent operations with that of migrating birds or ant colonies. Data structures were discovered that could never have been programmed by humans. There were countless digital phenomena that no one had any hope of understanding.

The question of machine consciousness was no longer just a topic discussed by geeks—it had become a serious debate. Suddenly it was ‘chic’ to concern oneself with neo-philosophical issues; computer freaks were dragged into the limelight, their credibility measured by their peculiarity.

The scientific study of the Stream was watered down to a debate that focused on digital reincarnation, global artificial intelligence, and the manifest divinity of silicon. New religions arose using these dubious proto-sciences to construct elaborate belief systems. These new ideas, repackaged in modern language and free of the ancient patina, were powerful and attractive. People flocked to these religions like moths to a candle—and the deeper one went, the harder it was to return to reality.

The Streamers were one of these groups. There were millions of them. They wore virtual reality helmets—called sensoriums—and drifted into the Stream, floating off into remote regions of human and machine imagination. Isolated and surrounded by swarms of willing agents, they hoped to gain access to a deeper understanding of the Stream.

Many spoke of intense mystical experiences. They described encounters with programs that spoke to them in unknown languages, apparently trying to establish contact. The number 2¹⁶, or 65,536, was pervasive in these digital dreams. No one could tell if it was an error code, a marker for a common data junction point, or an uncontrolled information discharge. In the months just prior to the Eschaton, the number seemed to appear everywhere. Then the phenomenon disappeared just

as quickly. The Streamers interpreted this as a sign of a divine consciousness. Stream technicians considered it a nuisance that might just cost them their job. Was it a virus? Was it an indication that the network was extremely overburdened? Did supernatural forces cause this number to appear after all? This riddle was never solved.

The meteors fell, fires raged, and the Stream dried up.

Severed from the comforting light of civilization, the survivors of the Eschaton cowered in the shadow of the valley of death; yet, they could not forget about the Stream. It had been too great a part of their lives. The technical progress of the last era had imprinted itself on the consciousness of humanity even though that time was never going to return.

A small community of Streamers from the Rhein-Ruhr area vowed to resurrect the Stream. They viewed themselves as the living manifestation of the digital construct. Some simply collected information in exchange for tools and food, others rummaged through the ruins of ancient Europe looking for intact data storage devices. Still others attempted to become the eyes and ears of the blind Stream and took it upon themselves to form a chronology of events since the Eschaton.

Many centuries passed, and their libraries and warehouses accumulated treasures beyond imagination. But the new generations of Streamers became increasingly reclusive. Instead of sharing their knowledge with other survivors, they locked it up in huge fortresses.

Rumors of occult activities behind these walls surfaced. Bizarre rituals usurped daily life. Contact with the outside world was only allowed if it promised to yield some sort of advantage for the community, and only if it resulted in a net gain for the data records.

It was then that the descendants of the Stream renamed themselves. They were now the Chroniclers.

FLASH OF TIME

2043: Tensions mount within the UN. The domineering United States, which habitually uses the UN for its own purposes, creates a rift in the already weak global coalition of nations. According to White House spokeswoman, Deborah Ann Coulter, the endless debates of the Security Council and constant bureaucratic tug-of-war bore President Trunk. He simply places no trust in the competency of the UN to make weighty decisions. Trunk announces that America is no longer willing, and certainly not forced, to conform to other nations’ desires.

The scandal is perfect. The largest European industrial nations freeze their membership dues to the UN and began

intensive talks regarding a reform of the alliance. Similar events occur in Africa.

The UN's alternate seat in Nairobi is temporarily shut down.

2045: A new world order forms. International power structures begin to crack and eventually fall apart.

The UN has split into several separate continental factions. The United European Organization (UEO) combines the industrialized nations of Europe, effectively forming a coalition to oppose the power of the USA. The UEO includes Russia and some Balkhan states as permanent and equal members.

The United Africa Organization (UAO) unifies all of the African countries that were part of the UN. There are only a few, however, since many of the North African countries are allied with the Arab League instead.

An economically muscular China offers protection to its neighbors and allies. This in turn creates a new power bloc and draws great international criticism. When both Mongolia and Kazakhstan join China in 2045, an avalanche of global treaty-making ensues.

The destruction of the UN is a political fiasco for Trunk. Instead of weakening worldwide political structures and widening the political hegemony of America, quite the opposite occurs: new militaristic alliances emerge that challenge the world power of the USA.

2046: In Novaya Zemlya, an archipelago in the Barents Sea, a well-preserved woolly mammoth is excavated from the permafrost. It's quite a sensation. The DNA of the shaggy ancient beast is harvested and shared with scientists around the world.

A genetic laboratory in Helsinki accomplishes the unimaginable: using an elephant mother, a transgenetic egg becomes a healthy mammoth calf. In December, a living animal is born—10,000 years after the last of its kind roamed the tundra.

This clone is only the beginning. In less than a decade, dozens of these giants will roam the large open-air enclosure of the Helsinki zoo. They will become the primary tourist attraction in Finland.

2047: The UN reconvenes as a forum for the new world powers. President Trunk plans to reforge the broken links of the chain, but he meets heavy resistance. The nations of the world enjoy their newfound independence. The UN will never be what it once was; Trunk fails again.

The world political restructuring has heavy consequences for other global alliances. The meaning and necessity of NATO is called into question. It begins to crack under the pressure.

The UAO and the Arab League maintain friendly relations and move closer together with each day.

2050: Fears regarding China's expansion seem unfounded. Mongolia and Kazakhstan benefit from trade with their mighty neighbor; new investment opportunities attract Chinese yuan and revive once-withering cities. Ulan Bator is now a world class metropolis with Western ideals tempered by a decidedly Asian mindset. An unprecedented infrastructure program seeks to connect all of the major cities of the new provinces. Hundreds of thousands of humans labor in Central Asia on what is arguably the largest engineering feat since the building of the pyramids.

As amazingly philanthropic as this venture seems, the sincerity of China is still in question. They now have access to the Caspian Sea and the last of its assumed oil reserves. Some critics assert that the high-speed magnetic trains that race across the barren lands will only serve the movement of troops.

THE TRANSHUMAN AGE

Before the Eschaton, most people could barely operate technology, let alone understand its founding scientific principles. A chasm developed. On one side stood the consumer, clueless about the enormous powers at work in the background—many of these were Streamers. On the other side, the educated elite and their digital agents amassed enormous warehouses of knowledge and power.

Existing computer systems began to optimize themselves. This greatly alarmed the world's experts. Though the social advancements resulting from these new data structures were undoubtedly useful, their complexity had reached a point that exceeded human understanding.

It was during this time that the legendary first nanite was born. The nanite was a programmable molecular compound surrounded by a Fullerene carbon shell. Each was essentially a nano-scale robot capable of working at the cellular level.

The Recombination Group, which led the field of nanotech research, deployed nanites in a variety of forms for various medical applications, from drug delivery to health monitoring to nanosurgery. Nanites became known as an all-round miracle healing potion. Their technique took the world by storm.

When applied, nanites were injected in large amounts into the human body and programmed via chemical signals. The nanites would flood the blood stream and developed a collective semi-intelligence that was, theoretically, capable of defeating any known illness.

Formal voting on the safety and legality of these nanomedical processes was delayed. In the meantime, thousands of fatally sick people besieged the clinics of the Recombination Group, begging for a cure.

In the end, the Recombination Group decided to take a very risky course of action: a new type of nano-solution was injected into terminally ill test subjects that was intended to prevent intercellular crystallization. This substance allowed the patient to be cryogenically frozen without suffering any permanent physical damage. The dying were put on ice in the hope that a cure for their ailment would someday appear.

2051: The rate of technological development is double that of the preceding year. Genetic implants and prosthetics are no longer fantasy, but part of daily life.

Early attempts by the Recombination Group to employ nanites in medical applications promise a quantum leap in medical science. Subsequently, the visionary and farsighted scientist Salim Mushar declares that the Information Age is over and the Transhuman Age has begun.

2053: The technological carousel spins faster and faster.

For many in the industrialized world, the Stream is a substitute reality in which one meets socially, plays games, views media, orders food, or simply relaxes.

The merging of man and machine reaches a high point with new regulations that mandate biotech implants for French nuclear power plant supervisors. The technophobic and nostalgic raise their voices in protest, though their subcultures grow increasingly isolated. Debates once again rage over the invasion of privacy raised by retinal and DNA scans and implants that carry private information such as identification numbers, medical records, and vulnerable financial data. In the end, however, the prophetic voices of those who oppose these advances carry no weight.

2055: A vaccine for HIV emerges. In theory, AIDS has been defeated.

A plan worked out by the WHO plans to eradicate the plague within 20 years. Distribution centers in Nigeria and India receive massive quantities of the vaccine. Millions of humans set out to receive the cure.

The world holds its breath fearing a global humanitarian catastrophe. This does not take place as the vaccination efforts are tightly coordinated by NATO troops. General Heshimu, a Bantu from Tanzania, is the man responsible for averting this crisis. His actions earn him the respect of many foreign countries. **2057:** This is the year of the sects. As if there weren't already enough religions in the world, two new esoteric sects vie for the hearts of humanity.

In one corner stands the self-proclaimed messiah, Jehammed, presenting his personal blend of Semitic religions. In the other, the equally charismatic and dogmatic televangelist Gerome Getrell rises to prominence with his occult-laced beliefs.

The first round of the apocalypse had begun.

2064: Africa's woes seem endless.

On the Ivory Coast, mariners from an American cruiser die of an unknown virus. The strange disease spreads rapidly and soon seizes all of Abidjan in its icy grip. Black flags flutter over this city of millions. UAO troops quickly arrive on the scene and attempt to quarantine the region, but they collapse under the masses of people that flee the city.

In June, not even three weeks after the fateful landing of the Americans, the first cases of infection are reported in Burkina Faso and Yamoussoukro. The virus spreads uncontrollably.

Many Africans consider the new plague an attack from the U.S. intended to weaken their continent after the defeat of AIDS.

In August, the Pasteur Institute in Paris announces that the mysterious mariner's disease is a new and extremely aggressive form of the HIV virus. Anti-Americans feel vindicated.

In many countries throughout Central Africa, U.S. embassies are stormed and looted. General Heshimu activates his UAO troops with explicit orders that fellow Africans are not to be harmed. American marines, traveling on the U.S.S. Washington, attempt to land on African soil. General Heshimu refuses them passage and puts them under quarantine. The once-great world power feels insulted.

2065: The virus, now called HIV-E, spreads across the continent like wildfire. It is transmitted through the air, which means that the sneezing person sitting next to you on the train might

be a killer. Air conditioners that recycle poisoned air are considered a major source for infection and are turned off in many parts of the country. With no escape from the oppressive heat, Africa's misery compounds.

Nearly every African wears a face mask in public. They hide every inch of skin they can behind gas masks and protective suits. The once warm-hearted Kenyans become withdrawn and xenophobic. Human contact becomes limited to family members; one desperately avoids strangers.

2066: The Recombination Group quietly releases statements that detail early successes in the battle against HIV-E. They suggest that an antiviral serum may soon be available. The hordes of people who originally fled across the continent start to drift toward the north.

Agadez, a city in Nigeria, which was once an important gateway to caravans traveling through the Sahara desert, explodes into a city of millions. The stream of refugees does not show signs of letting up.

The sick Africans are pinned down; there is no escape to the north. Algeria and Libya keep their borders tightly closed and rigorously prosecute illegal immigrants. General Heshimu's African alliance crumbles with every African execution.

2067: Algiers falls. Hundreds of thousands of refugees break through the minefields, barbed wire barricades, and patrol lines. The government is powerless to stop them and the UAO is stretched beyond its limits. There is nothing they can do to prevent the refugees from fleeing their disease-stricken land and seeking their final destination: Europe—home of the HIV-E vaccine.

The UEO realizes that it must stop this threat at all costs; Libya's request for aid comes at just the right moment. An impressive fleet gathers in the Mediterranean Sea and prepares for an unequal battle: armored frigates against rafts and sheer desperation.

UEO troops occupy African port cities and convert them into fortresses. Libya's deal with Europe quickly becomes a nightmare.

2068: It appears the entire bulk of third-world development aid has been used to purchase weapons. Four out of five refugees now own a Kalashnikov and are happy to use it against anyone with pale skin. What began as a blockade swiftly turns into a war with no defined goals.

The sighting of boat people off the coasts of Sicily and the Iberian Peninsula lead to paranoia and xenophobia. People of color are shunned as potential carriers of the plague.

2069: The conflict escalates beyond control. Thousands drown in the Mediterranean; thousands more perish in a hail of bullets fired by nervous UEO troops.

AMSUMOs, bipedal automated robot policing systems, are deployed in an active peace-keeping role for the first time. The Europeans hope that the intimidating machines will serve as a deterrent, but officials underestimate the sheer desperation of the refugees.

2070: An OWL (overwhelmingly large telescope) in Peru detects several unregistered asteroids on a collision course with Earth. Little attention is paid to this announcement since the war in Africa is much closer to home and more immediately disturbing.

2071: All of the world's telescopes are now calibrated to observe the impending invaders from outer space. No government agency doubts the reality of an impending collision.

On the outside, the bureaucrats appear level-headed and rational, but on the inside, panic is spreading. Plans for the Paladin satellite system developed and then trashed 20 years earlier are dragged from the archives. They were the only project designed to defend the planet against an asteroid collision such as this. They are submitted for revision and, due to a lack of any other options, set into motion.

Meanwhile, the dying continues around the Mediterranean Sea. HIV-E is rampant in Spain and Italy, but due to effective quarantine policies the scope of the virus is limited.

The efforts of the Recombination Group bear fruit: production of an anti-HIV-E serum begins. However, the facilities operate far under capacity. Unknown to the public, the Recombination group's massive resources are diverted towards a number of top secret projects. The media won't get wind of the story soon enough to make a difference.

The Maasai, nomadic people near the Ngorongoro Crater, located in northern Tanzania, seem to be immune to the HIV-E virus. Is it nutrition or lifestyle that enables them to survive the plague? Is the inactive volcano somehow responsible?

This is fodder for New-Agers and hippies, bringing about an utter Africanization of the European esoteric scene. The results are far more serious for the Maasai. They battle for their lives as thousands of refugees, half-crazed by fear, flood their territory. Some of them beg for healing, offering any sacrifice they can manage. Other invaders guzzle the blood of dead Maasai warriors, hoping to absorb whatever magic protects them.

2071: The first of 211 Paladin satellites is sent into orbit using an Ariane carrier rocket. The rest follow within the year. The Silver Shield, as the media refers to these satellites, is controlled from a secret base on the island of Spitzbergen near Norway. The large NASA and ESA centers spotlighted in the media are merely decoys for potential terrorist attacks; security is at an all-time high.

2072: Waves of computer viruses and worm infections paralyze large parts of the Stream. Data is redirected around these sick areas to ensure Stream continuity. Technicians worldwide are alarmed—the newest virus permutations all exhibit a 2^{16} binary signature. Is this the work of anarchist hackers or digital antibodies seeking to protect the Stream? Is this what the pseudo-religious technology fanatics had predicted?

Information is leaked to the press that the Recombination Group plans to cryogenically store their most competent and loyal staff members—the "Tannhauser Project" is exposed. It is determined that council member Norman Thorn is the leak. He flees to Egypt, goes into hiding, and is eventually recruited by the Anubis syndicate.

In December, something unimaginable happens. Recombination Group workers dispassionately empty the cryogenic chambers that had been preserving the terminally ill in hope of a future cure. The bodies are dumped into featureless underground caverns, which are quickly sealed shut. Victims of the Recombination Group's supposed generosity rot in unmarked tombs miles underground.

The Tannhauser Project is now in full gear; dissenters are executed on the spot. The bunkers—renamed "dispensers"—are

sealed off. There is no government reaction—no one in power expects judicial and executive institutions to survive the coming catastrophe.

The government of Switzerland, exhibiting its distrust of the Paladin defense system, reconstructs its forgotten Alp Fortress as a contingency. For months, endless lines of trucks wind their way through the land of the Swiss, waiting to unload their cargo at the entrance of the mammoth tunnel system. Weapons, medicine, and food are stored here in fantastic quantities. After the *potential* catastrophe, the facility is to serve as a future resettlement base.

2073: The Eschaton. The battle between Earth's Paladin defense system and the emotionless asteroids from deep space begins. It is a global media event of extraordinary proportions—yet nothing happens. The Silver Shield flies right past the swarm of asteroids without igniting even a single explosive charge.

The exact reasons for this failure remain a mystery and are never reasonably explained. The only hint available to the human technicians watching their hopes dissolve is a 2^{16} binary signature found within the control software of the Paladin satellites.

Pandemonium erupts. Humans flee the cities in droves, hoping the mountains will protect them from the coming apocalypse. Gridlock jams the exit routes of every major urban district in the world.

Terrible scenes unfold on the streets—violent acts of desperation ensue. Police and military units are hopelessly outnumbered.

The Swiss military retreats to its Alp Fortress. Government representatives follow them deep into the endless tunnels. The mountain closes behind them, shutting out the protesting cries of the doomed Swiss people.

The Thor laser network, constructed to defend Europe against missile attacks, is pointed towards the sky—the endeavor is jokingly referred to as "using flies to push the elephant off its track." Any real confidence in saving the Earth evaporated during the Paladin debacle. Hope has disappeared for good.

Reports on the functionality of the Thor facilities are somber and factual. Any patriotic undertone has been abandoned.

Many turn away from their technology cults. They feel betrayed and abandoned. They also feel very sorry for trusting machines instead of putting their faith into a divine being. Belief in traditional religions and end-of-the-world cults explodes.

The Kazakhstan Steppes shake violently from the thrust of monumental jet engines. It appears the twelve Recombination Group orbiters are somehow responsible. The goal of this mission is unknown and the responsible authorities refuse to provide any information.

On March 13th, the Transhuman Age ends in a sea of flames—nothing could stop the heavens from falling. The megawatt blasts of the Thor lasers dissolve into the burning atmosphere—in the face of this monumental cataclysm they are merely toys.

Never before has humanity been so aware of its inane, futile, and almost comical existence.

THE SUN BAND EVENT

While most of the major asteroids pounded craters into the northern hemisphere, one stray meteor seared the sky over Africa. Arcing several kilometers above the ground, this rogue appeared above Sudan and rocketed southwest across the Congo basin, eventually disappearing somewhere over the Atlantic. The entire fly-by event lasted only two minutes, but its destructive power altered Africa forever.

The blazing meteor heated the surrounding air to up to 30,000 degrees Celsius and emitted a blinding light. Some fell to their knees, believing they saw the face of God in its fiery trail. For many, it was the last thing they ever saw.

A putrid cloud of ionized oxygen and nitrogen trailed after the fireball. Molten stone rained down on the earth. Most of it had hardened on its fall and pelted the ground as deadly lead hail.

All of this happened without a sound.

Excitement spread through the villages and cities as the unbelievable event happened. People ran into the streets. The mid-day sun was hot, dust hung heavily in the air. The giant stone tumbled sickeningly across the sky—10 times brighter than the sun.

An aftershock of fireballs exploded along the tail of the meteor. These bright puffs of flame gleamed like pearls across the heavens. Africans who survived this event named it the Sun Band.

Minutes after its appearance, the entire region between Sudan and the Congo Basin was devoid of life. No one suspected any danger; most of them only vaguely noticed the wave of compressed air pushed forward by the asteroid. First there was a rumbling sensation, like deep and heavy thunder. Next an uncomfortable pressure just inside the ear—then gasping gaping mouths trying to swallow air that didn't exist. Fear filled every face.

Clouds raced by in fast motion and a scar of night opened in the noontime sky. The sun became a dim marble hanging guiltily in the encroaching gloom. Stars filled the evil scar. There was a bright flash in the north, beyond the horizon.

As suddenly as it began, the fantastic opening act was over—and it was time for the main event. Air pressure over 2,000 atmospheres blasted the Earth in the asteroid's wake. It wiped away everything in its path at an astonishing rate of 30 km per second, pulverizing everything. Humans, animals, vegetation, buildings, and dirt were whipped high into the air. People reported seeing the black, wavering wall of debris from as far away as Libya.

Unparalleled storms raged in the regions just outside of the path of the sonic wave. Massive sheets of rain flooded Central Africa almost instantly; its people drowned in a sea of chaos and destruction. Screams went unheard.

Hours later, a tsunami wiped out the heavily urbanized coastal regions of Northern Africa. Southern Africa was separated from the continent altogether.

It was many years before the dust cleared over Central Africa, and 200 years passed before the first humans ventured back to this haunted region. When they returned, the land had been completely transformed.

After the Eschaton, the African climate changed. Rain-heavy clouds from the Atlantic drifted over the Sahara. Water fell generously over the Ahaggar Mountains. The water dug deep furrows into the loose ground. Silt and runoff from the mountains created a rugged, fertile landscape. Vegetation exploded across the desert. Nature had decided to give the Sahara another chance.

POST-APOCALYPSE

2074: Rebuilding civilization is the all-consuming goal of humanity following the Eschaton.

Local crisis centers maintain order while local militias clear strategically important delivery routes and fortify destabilized bridges. A new sense of patriotism fills the survivors. Defeat is now far from their minds.

The electromagnetic impulses caused by the asteroids annihilated all communication and power networks. A layer of fine, ionized dust particles prevents any connection to telecommunication and GPS satellites—that is, the ones that weren't obliterated.

The Stream is considered utterly and irrevocably destroyed and has taken all of its irreplaceable data with it to the grave. Without functioning communications equipment, the rebuilding effort is a difficult endeavor.

Three crisis control centers remain in the still smoking ruins of Germany. The first is a contingency of UEO troops encamped by the Bigge Dam. They dispense water to the southern Ruhr area. People lovingly call them the Convoy.

The second city to emerge is Berlin, which becomes the hub for all humanitarian efforts. The leaders here intend to rebuild their country; their plan is doomed to fail.

The last and largest crisis control center is in the city of Koblenz. Its expansive barracks weathered the Eschaton with very little damage. People gather here in droves seeking salvation.

Other crisis control centers, in cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt and Munich are never heard from again; the news of Munich and Hamburg's utter destruction doesn't reach the authorities of Koblenz and Berlin for many years.

2075: The Reaper's Blow begins to tear Germany in half. Crossing this tectonically unstable zone has become an incalculable risk. After a food supply convoy disappears without trace, all traffic across the evil chasm ceases. Subsequently, the western crisis centers are cut off from Berlin.

2076: The Reaper's Blow widens violently, and shows no sign of stopping. Town after town is ripped apart as the earth explodes. Rivers of glowing magma blaze across the land, incinerating everything in its path.

2079: The Second Apocalypse. HIV-E, now called HIVE, decimates Italy and crosses the Alps, eventually reaching France and Germany. Only a few remote villages are left untouched.

Public order, tenuously maintained by the military, finally breaks down completely. Humans shun each other; anyone could be the harbinger of death—carrier of the fatal virus.

The medical council of the Southern Ruhr Area Crisis Task Force surrenders in the face of futility and seal themselves in their hospital near the ruins of Dortmund. The descendants of these doctors will become the Spitalians.

2080: HIVE spares no one. Europeans and Africans die in staggering numbers. The few survivors flee far from the cities.

Red crater ash wafts across Europe. Rats and roaches rule the now empty cities.

2082: Years of dusty twilight have cooled the Earth; she falls into an uneasy hibernation. Enduring snowstorms in Scandinavia push the population beyond their limits. A stubborn and hardy group of people refuse to leave. The rest head south.

2090: The Spitalians emerge from their exile and erect containment zones around their headquarters. They have finally gathered the courage to begin anew.

2095: The Janus Crater sits between Europe and Great Britain like a festering blood clot. Its presence disrupts the Gulf Stream—this is the death blow to the sensitive European climate. The North and Baltic Sea begin to freeze over.

2097: The Age of the Animal descends upon humanity: helplessness results in an explosion of bloody violence, a last futile attempt to outrun the inevitable end. Bereft of self-control, anti-social individuals release their dark sides, forming gangs and tyrannizing anyone left in the wastelands.

2102: The founding of Exalt ends of the Age of the Animal. Newly established police units ensure peace and stability in the regions surrounding the city. Lawless scoundrels are slaughtered like cattle, yet on the outskirts of Exalt, the gangs still paralyze the population with fear.

2146: Many cults and sects spring from the ruins of humanity. They feed off peoples' need to be part of a strong community—a structure they can believe in. Few of these neo-religions survive the deaths of their founders; without their guiding charisma, the message is lost.

The Anabaptists are the exception to the rule. Based on a transcript of ancient Gnostic texts, they establish a militaristic religious structure with a rigid set of beliefs. They arm their followers with weapons and fervor and send them out to fight everything that is not of God. Their cleansing fire will rid paradise of its pestilence and infertility.

Wherever the Anabaptists show up, their flamethrowers ignite the night. Terrified humans scramble like cockroaches from exposed basements and gutters, seeking to avoid tribunal punishment or, worse, compulsory enlistment in the ranks of these avenging angels.

2148: The Anabaptists attack Domstadt and take the Cathedral from the Chroniclers. Up to this point, it had been their largest database, or Cluster. It seems that the young cult might be facing its demise.

2160: The Maasai leave the Ngorongoro Crater and migrate towards the deserted land which stretches across the center of Africa.

2173: Exactly 100 years after the Eschaton, the dispensers of the Recombination Group open their doors and release the apex of human vanity into the world—the 100s have awakened. This is the first generation of Sleepers—the result of the Tannhauser Project.

These Awakened swarm from the dispensers to reclaim the Earth. While some of them manage to subjugate small settlements and establish an agrarian society, others erect base camps for the 200s who will emerge from the dispensers in

another century. These first teams establish a radio network and expansive tunnel system which they hope will form the basis of a new global infrastructure.

2185: East Borca awakes from its death-like state. In the years following the Eschaton, the climate of Europe has changed a great deal. The humidity rising off of the Reaper's Blow is carried east by the wind. Warm precipitation turns the land into a lush and massive forest.

2210: Purgare and Balkhan populations meet in the lower Adriatic regions. One side has its back to the wall—its land has been ravaged by floods and incinerated by volcanoes. The other side claims it by right of being there first. They tear at each other's throats.

2215: The Neolibyans begin to plunder Purgare. Syracuse and Bedain gain importance as waystations, resupply points, and trading posts.

2265: The Hybrispanians gather a mighty military force and march across the Gibraltar isthmus into Africa. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Africans join together anyway and manage to rout the European aggressors at Tunis.

2269: The expeditionary force of the Hybrispanians is pushed back to Gibraltar. Young fighters from the hinterlands swell the African army, hoping to get one last kick at the defeated enemy.

The winds of war change directions. In an unprecedented display of rage, the Africans not only repel the Hybrispanians, but push into Andalusia as retribution for centuries of devastation and humiliation.

2270: Borca's preeminent city, Exalt, rises as a trading powerhouse. This development is watched by many with envy. The influence of the city spreads—it becomes a bastion of order and security in a swamp filled with snakes.

2273: The 200s emerge from the dispensers of the Balkhan region, but something goes terribly wrong. The Sleepers' memories have been affected by the long cryo-stasis and their orders have been forgotten. The elite of the Recombination Group now look more like a pack of frightened rabbits, stumbling into every trap the Dushani have set for them.

The Ashen, descendants of employees of the Recombination Group, consider the clueless 200s to be long-awaited and omnipotent leaders. Skirmishes erupt between the Awakened and the proud people of the Balkhan. The earth trembles from their battles.

2305: A fleet of thirteen large sea vessels, equipped with triangular sails, lands on Franka's west coast. The locals are skeptical of the stranger's intentions and keep their distance—too often, coastal cities are targets of Hybrispanian and Welsh pirates.

Troops from Aquitaine are called up, and the people request the help of a god-like Pheromancer named Jaquar. The fear is unfounded. The invaders are apparently Chinese traders and researchers.

With the permission of Jaquar, the scholars continue east towards the rising sun to study plant and animal life.

2310: The populations of Purgare and Balkhan construct expansive fortifications along the Adria River. The fertile alluvial soil is now filled with hellish trenches and barbed-wire barricades.

The Spitalians establish hospital camps on the Purgare side of the war zone. The news spreads quickly. The Balkhani

are enraged and open a second front against the Spitalians in Borca. Medics in Balkhan are alienated from their cult—should they leave the Balkhani or maintain tenebrous relations with this region?

2320: The Ice Barrier drifts further south and forces the Scandinavians into former Germany. Their arrival revives Borca and introduces horses to the nomadic forest people.

2333: Purgare endures a sudden and nearly complete Anabaptist conversion.

2373: The 300s are set to rise from their vaults. As they fail to awaken, the emergency program that now runs most of the dispensers is called into question. Could this be the work of the mysterious 2¹⁶ binary signature? Could something that ancient and seemingly dead still be at work? Or is there some truth to the rumors about grotesquely misshapen Awakened modifying and damaging the Sleeper capsules?

Sleepers now awaken sporadically. Project Tannhauser is a failure.

2381: The first Marshal appears, bringing justice to parts of northern Borca.

2390: Argyre's ascendancy. In March, Argyre declares Britain his sovereign territory. Signs around the area warn Scrappers and adventurers, on pain of torture, to stay away from the domain of the Vulture.

AMBROSIA

People call Argyre "the Vulture." The victor of countless battles, Argyre predates the Eschaton itself. He has degenerated to such a degree that his soul is like a skeleton eaten clean by cockroaches. He is a Sleeper who never slept, who understood from the beginning the power and possibilities of the nanites. It was Argyre who designed the convoluted yoke that subdues the other Sleepers and it is he who perfected the art of their punishment.

In the mythology of the ancients, ambrosia is the food that grants immortality to the gods. The ambrosia of Argyre—and by extension the ambrosia of all Marauders—is the nanite blood of the Recombination Group. It flows through his veins, heavy and old, desperate to be renewed.

2410: The Chroniclers and Marshals establish Justitian, the city of law.

2482: The Rise of Cultrin. The Recombination Group's Sleepers were intended to reconquer the nerve centers of the new world. However, many Awakened chose instead to befriend local tribals and are no longer interested in world domination. The plans of the long-rotten corporation were unrealistic, and have long since been forgotten. It is one of the 400s who manages to destroy centuries of civil rejuvenation in a fit of insanity.

Cultrin is different from the other brainless zombies ejected from the cold dispensers. He is still controlled by his ancient conditioning. He knows about the hidden basecamps of the 100s and 200s and quickly gathers a force of like-minded

followers and mercenaries who march across the wasteland. As his army grows, cities in his path either join his crusade or fortify their walls in fear.

The Anabaptists lure this upstart into an ambush and suffer a staggering defeat. They retreat to Domstadt humiliated. Cultrin proceeds with his horde to conquer every city in Borca.

A summit with the Pheromancers of Franka radically changes his attitude. According to the legend, he swears off battle entirely and sends his troops home. Many of his followers have no intentions of giving up the fight, however, being so close to a final victory. Internal power struggles threaten to tear these highly destructive armies apart. Exalt recognizes its chance to put an end to the Pheromancer threat and assembles its armed forces. The plague, however, beats them to the battle. Cultrin's followers die like flies while the remaining troops bury empty canisters in the desert sand. The war in the west is over now.

Change comes over East Borca as well: Ottoman's janissaries defeat Cultrin's expedition troops near Berlin. The city is subsequently renamed Ottoman in honor of the leader.

2495: The Fall of Exalt. The military generals struggle internally for influence over the city council. When they move in troops to enforce their demands, the war-weary inhabitants of Exalt abandon the city to avoid being pulled into the abyss.

Exalt never recovers from this internal conflict. Without farmers to till the fields, the food supply evaporates and soldiers begin to desert their posts. The once glorious armies disintegrate. **2496:** A new diamond sparkles in the wasteland: Liqua, the city of water and play, of hedonism and quick cash. The populace swells with former residents of Exalt who revel in their new-found freedom.

2498: With the fall of Exalt, Justitian's influence grows. Marshals swarm out of Justitian and annihilate the most vicious gangs and thugs in the region. Several settlements seek the city's full-time security and clamber under their umbrella. Justitian officially establishes itself as a Protectorate.

2512: Archeologists from the Prague Republic begin building a Great Library in Ottoman. Subsequently, legions of fortune hunters swarm the unexplored wilderness of East Borca, hoping to find a mysterious ruin or some ancient document.

2515: The Ottoman library draws the ire of a group of Marauders. When the library seeks to attract more archivists from Prague, the Marauders make their move. Using subterfuge, abandoned subway tunnels, alleys, and ancient decrepit air vents, the Marauders invade the library. They slaughter the librarians from Prague and throw their bodies into a well. Local authorities cover up the massacre, spreading the rumor that the Prague librarians have handed over the library to be maintained from then on by local archivists. The reason for the Marauder's actions remains unclear.

2531: The Justitian Protectorate grows and flourishes. It now encompasses several square kilometers and continues to swallow local settlements one after the other.

The Spitalians, long mistrustful of others, ally themselves with the city. They have a number of conditions, however. They also have all of the leverage they need: the Justitian troops need

medicines and able doctors. The city itself is a breeding ground for disease. Further growth depends on the Spitalians.

Even though they formally become part of the Protectorate, the Medics remain sovereign.

2563: The Needle Tower Fiasco. The Chroniclers order 16 of their most loyal fragments to cross the Reaper's Blow to establish an information network in East Borca. They aim to use needle towers, grand structures that stretch high above Borca's forests. These are radio relay towers.

Far away from their prudish spiritual brothers and the constricting hand of the cluster, however, the influence of the cult begins to diminish. To the superstitious nomads of East Borca, the Chroniclers appear as deities.

Many of the fragments lose themselves and succumb to greed and vanity. They occupy their towers like fortresses, filling them with the vilest collection of prostitutes, thieves, and murderers. Hovels spill out around the needle towers, forming a barricade that protects the rogue fragments. The former Chroniclers rule their superstitious mobs with cruelty and technology. Displays of power are frequent and brutal.

Rumors abound that only 8 of the 16 missionaries survived the trials of the Reaper's Blow and that the remainder are evenly split into 4 loyal and 4 rogue individuals. It is uncertain if Chroniclers spread these rumors themselves to maintain the firmament of their belief in the number 2 and its exponents ($2 \times 2 = 4$, $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$). Such continuity, if it were true, would demonstrate that the Chronicler's faith goes far deeper than the clusters they inhabit.

One fact is certain. The cyclopean forests of East Borca are home to two cities established by the renegade Chroniclers: Iridium and Chromium. Sodom and Gomorrah would be more fitting names for these cesspools of human filth.

2573: This is the year that the most recent batch of Sleepers were to be awakened. Their technology failed, however, and instead of a glorious awakening, they are ejected from their cells in fits and starts. Like sheep, they step out into a dark and uncertain future.

These amnesiacs have little intention or ability to follow the dictates of the Recombination Group. They stumble helplessly through pitch black ruins. Most of them fall victim to man-eating beasts or bloodthirsty Marauders.

It is said that fully functional dispensers still wait for their time to come. Somewhere near the poles, under hundreds of meters of snow and ice, they hide their ancient and dangerous secrets.

2585: The Present. The Justitian Protectorate gains power and strength daily.

Africans are constructing a global empire and pummeling the beleaguered Hybrispansians and Balkhani on their own soil.

Argyre the wicked is definitely up to something in his secluded northern kingdom.

Terrible secrets hide in the Great Library. It must be extremely important if the Marauders are involved.

The future of Europe is completely up for grabs.

GETRELL'S LIKENESS

Getrell, founding father of the Apocalyptiks, has been forgotten by his sons and daughters. It has been many centuries now.

It is therefore quite surprising that, over the past few decades, the Chroniclers have discovered more than thirty life-sized frescos of Getrell on buildings all over southern Borca. Oddly enough, the portraits are always painted on a lime-colored background. Considering their excellent condition, they can only be a few years old. The paintings are always discovered far from civilization.

So far the artist has yet to reveal himself.

COVERT OPERATIONS

DANZIG

Danzig is a cold, unwelcoming city waiting to be entombed by the great northern glacier.

Spitalians run Danzig coldly and efficiently. The citizens view them with mixed emotions: silent resentment mingled with unabashed awe. They hate the Medics but they couldn't survive without their medicine and they know it.

Though there are a dozen more suitable places in Pollen for a hospital, the cult elders insisted on Danzig. There must be reasons, but why?

The answer is simple: spore beasts.

There is an enormous abyss beneath this ruined city. In some parts, the chasm reaches as far as two kilometers into the ground. This is the breeding ground for the offspring of the first Biokinetics.

Everything began here, and now the Spitalians are attempting to extinguish the monstrous creatures once and

for all. So far, success has been sporadic. Even though troops have managed to advance as far as 150 meters below the surface, incinerating every beast in their path, a few days after their return to the surface the tunnels are once again teeming with these strange beings.

Unfortunately, the horrible truth is obscured behind Spitalian propaganda. Admittedly, most of the spore beasts are bizarre, man-eating monsters. However, there are others who display an unsettling capacity for compassion and sentimentality. These civilized spore beasts flee from danger, care for their injured brothers and sisters, and organize the defenses of their abyssal lair. They also seem to possess some form of control over the other, more feral, spore beasts. The elders, having only a basic understanding of the spore beasts, have named the civil ones "alphas" and the aggressive ones "betas."

Why are the spore beasts settled below Danzig? The high-echelon Spitalians remain silent on this point, but, rest assured, they know the answer. They know because it was through their actions that the spore beasts fled to Danzig.

Decades ago, the Spitalians destroyed an alpha colony north of Danzig. When this happened, any sense of civility in the spore beast's society vanished. The remaining spore beasts fled north and in wild untamed bloodlust ravaged a number of Nordic settlements. They roamed the vast northern wastes for many years and eventually settled in the pits of Danzig.

As the great northern glacier expanded, more and more Nordics found their way to Borca, particularly Justitian, and integrated peacefully into the society. If it were ever revealed that the Spitalians were partially responsible for the devastating attacks many years earlier, it could be a calamity for the Protectorate and the Spitalians' untarnished reputation. The Spitalians will take this secret of the spore beasts to their graves.

PURE STRAIN

Directly after the Eschaton, the HIVE epidemic swept over Europe. The early Spitalians sequestered themselves in their hospital, hoping to outlast the disease. Though the disease eventually seemed to disappear, it had only gone underground. Humanity had developed immunities to the virus and they now carried it with them in a dormant state.

Unfortunately, the generations of doctors who lived in the hospital while the disease raged never developed these immunities. They survived by developing vaccines and strict hygienic codes. Their blood is pure, free from the HIVE virus.

Centuries later, the descendents of these first doctors are still alive. They call themselves the Pure Strain Spitalians. They are a small secret circle within the cult, unknown to most Spitalians. They exert great influence over the cult and much of Europe.

THE OTTOMAN LIBRARY

The Chroniclers would like to claim the Great Library in Ottoman as their own. To do so, they regularly send envoys to the mighty East Borcan city, seeking favor with the ancient families in order to gain some influence in the city. Allegedly, this effort has already succeeded in inducting one Chronicler into the attendants of the Ottoman family.

CONFLICT IN THE ALPS

Many Hellvetics disapprove of Neolibyan actions in Borca. On a number of occasions, these factions have entreated the Core Command to block Neolibyans from entering the

north-south passage. The Core Command has always refused, insistent on staying neutral.

This anti-African faction is still loyal to the cult, but there are rumors that soldiers near Timmelsjoch are being recruited by a young female upstart.

DANGEROUS ATLANTIC

The transport ships of the Neolibyans are solid, sea-worthy fortresses—they have absolute dominance over the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Atlantic, however, things are very different: ships that venture too far from the coast will suddenly vanish. Some run aground months later. Usually, the hull has been torn open and the ship's quarters are completely destroyed.

So far, there have been no survivors—there haven't been any corpses either.

FALLING STARS

Years ago, in Ramein, a star fell from the sky and annihilated the capitol city of the governing Taunar caste. Later examinations revealed that this "star" was a flying device of the ancients. There are now many sightings of Marauders in northern Purgare and Borca. Supposedly, even Aspera has set out for the Ramein region.

THE RESISTANCE IN FRANKA

The resistance exists, though it is heavily dependent on help from the outside. The Anabaptists in Briton are mere decoys. It is the Spitalians who are secretly fighting against the

psychonauts. Their actions in Franka, however, require vastly different methods than in Borca and Pollen.

Advocates of the Marshal cult donate military equipment to the Spitalians in exchange for their support against the protectors. If this information were to become public, the scandal would be fantastic.

The raids on Frank villages always follow the same pattern: mercenaries or resistance fighters supported by the Spitalians toss pheromone-neutralizing gas canisters into the settlements. The mental stranglehold of the Pheromancers is broken and the suppressed anger of the people explodes in a berserk orgy of violence. The mob tears any psychonaut they find to shreds.

As soon as the madness abates, the Frank resistance forces, trained by the Spitalians, begin retraining the villagers who are free of the Pheromancers' mind control. Soon another peasant army will join the war.

Once they win their freedom and see the true nature of the Pheromancers, their fervor to liberate Franka knows no bounds. They battle tirelessly to compensate for years of humiliation and slavery. The Spitalians remain in the background, pleased with their handiwork.

UNTOUCHABLE BORCA

It is a legend that Borca is free of mother spore fields. The destruction of the mother spore field near Menden is celebrated annually as a victory over the Foulness. Many Spitalians wonder if it would have developed far enough to become an Earth Chakra.

In truth, there are about a dozen mother spore fields, mostly of the Biokinetik and Pheromantic variant, still thriving in Borca. The Spitalians work to hide this fact. They have no way of destroying these mother spore fields as they consumed most of their resources in the Menden operation. All they can do is quarantine the fields and try to contain the Foulness.

NOUMENON SEEKERS

The Spitalians are ambitious and intelligent researchers. But for all of their cleverness, the origin of their knowledge is suspect. Is it possible that mollusks and noumenon vocalizers were really developed in the ancient Spital? How could the early Medics acquire this knowledge at a time when they didn't even have electron microscopes or gene sequencers to analyze the Foulness?

The records from the early days of the cult are extremely vague and disorganized. There is little information regarding the origins of their library and facilities. The only clues are references to a mysterious group called the Noumenon Seekers.

This group was apparently very important to the early Spitalians. Today, no one knows whether the Noumenon Seekers were mythical or historical.

Preservist Genef Rakoszec and his staff search for any signs of this ancient order. A commission this high shows that the elders are extremely interested in discovering more about the seekers.

Rakoszec is discrete and thoughtful, and therefore well suited for this sensitive task. Very few individuals know about this mission; its secret is worth killing for.

THE LAST SERVER

The Stream is not dead.

It is weak, verging on the brink of extinction, but it lives. Much of it is gone forever, but its spirit still has the strength to draw Chroniclers from the insanity of their hellish clusters.

Fragments speak of one surviving Stream server. It is remote and well protected, and it supposedly maintained contact with its relay stations decades after the Eschaton. When the Chroniclers discovered and analyzed one of these stations two hundred years later, they discovered the existence of the last server and soon the entire cult was in a frenzy trying to locate it. The goal seemed so near.

Generations of Chroniclers searched in vain—this was their Holy Grail. Yet the server has managed to escape discovery. Information about its location is often contradictory and clues are buried in complex algorithms. The lost server is a conundrum—why would the ancients work so hard to hide such a valuable machine?

For over three centuries, the Chroniclers have devoted themselves to discovering the whereabouts of the final Stream server. More than a few Chroniclers have sacrificed their lives for this quest, yet their names are lost to history. The fragments understand that whoever finds the last server will have the knowledge of the ancients and with it almost unimaginable power.

Because of the sensitivity of this quest, they suppress its history and reserve its truth for high-ranking members only.

WHITE SPOTS

The Chroniclers are the engine of Borca's fledgling economy. Across the region, they pay handsome fees for the artifacts uncovered by the Scappers. Even though the cult is widespread, there is an area in south-western Borca that they have, so far, refused to enter. Without their chronicreds, no Scappers venture here and the region remains impoverished. The region is about 100 kilometers in diameter and the Chroniclers call it a "white spot."

Every Chronicler knows about this white spot and the prohibition on trading here. High-ranking fragments have never supplied a good reason for the ban. It is a very curious situation.

Many Chroniclers conjecture that the advancing Neolibyans will eventually force the leadership of the cult to announce its secret plans and lift the age-old taboo. So far, however, the fragments remain silent, bitterly monitoring the progress of the Africans.

LEY LINES

In the forbidden plateau of Giza—home of the ancient pyramids—the Anubians study the records of their ancestors. These records, hammered artfully into massive brass plates, hang on the walls of the ruins that surround this ancient region. They are spread across the plateau in an odd symmetrical pattern, resembling what happens to iron filings that are sprinkled on a sheet of paper and held over a strong magnet.

There is a deep mystery behind these brass plates and the resulting pattern, but one thing is chillingly certain: since their emergence, the psychovors have grown along these same lines, heading directly toward the center of Giza: Cairo.

THE FORBIDDEN CITY

Cairo is completely entombed by the psychovors. Not even the pyramids can rise above the dense undergrowth.

The city isn't forbidden as much as it is completely inaccessible to humans. Even though most Africans have written the city off as lost, the Anubians still claim it as their own. The Neolibyans and Scourgers have no idea what lies hidden in Cairo, nor do they even think twice about the slaves who disappear from the nearby plantations never to be seen again.

There have been a few sporadic reports over the years of large Anubian slave marches that terminate where the Nile River meets the psychovor jungle. No one can corroborate these sightings and so they are generally forgotten.

CHAPTER 10

ENEMIES

THE AWAKENED

GOD'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

They are the men and women of a past age. They were torn from their friends and families to establish a new world order in the distant future. The last thing they saw, before their sleep chambers closed and the cryo-gel enveloped them, were hard and determined faces. There was no place for mourning, worry, or even humility in the face of the powerful catastrophe that was to thoroughly destroy their world.

Before they were frozen, the number tattooed on their wrist constantly reminded them of the time of their awakening. Any sane person would have been terrified at the thought of the world spinning for 100 years without them. With the numbers 200 or larger, the thought of being trapped in the sleeper capsule for a small eternity was only bearable with intense therapy and training. Every eventuality had been computed, or so the leadership of the Recombination Group assured them. The infrastructure of the new world order would be prepared. They would need only to leave the dispenser, locate the hidden supply caches, secure them, and bring their weapons systems online.

Competition with the savages of the wastelands would be a mere formality.

However, much went wrong: dispensers failed, computer systems were eroded by the 2¹⁶ signature. Some of the 300s were torn from their sleep after 120 years, while many 100s still remained in cryostasis. Those who were returned to the surface in the first 200 years were hit the hardest. They maintained the knowledge of their age, in a world that required very different approaches and new ways of thinking. They fought and died, desperately attempting to prepare the Earth for those who would come after them.

Those who awakened later began to show signs of partial amnesia—the longer they remained in cryostasis, the more their brains deteriorated. The most-recently awakened Sleepers had almost no knowledge of their own time and were lost children in this new world. They could no longer remember the Tannhauser Project, the name of their last president, or even the names of their parents and spouses. Many of them stumbled aimlessly across the barren wastes and became victims of the environment, thieving gangs, or the Marauders—grotesque humanoids who stole their blood, leaving behind empty husks.

TWIGHLIGHT OF THE GODS

The massive upheaval of the Eschaton and the emergence of the cults were not predicted by the Recombination Group leadership during the Tannhauser Project. Self absorbed and convinced of their near omniscience, the creators of the Sleepers were convinced they would quickly enslave the post-apocalyptic world. Instead it became an endless battle—a battle for identity. Though the Awakened left their capsules in perfect physical condition, their souls were cracked. Their physical training was so ingrained that they could best most of the wasteland dwellers, but their loss of memory corrupted their values and made them bloodthirsty. In the dispenser's weapon storage rooms they outfitted themselves with machine guns or assault rifles and stepped out into the daylight—ready to take the world as emergent gods.

DELUSION OF THE ASHEN

For centuries, the Ashen waited for the Sleepers to awake. Their histories and traditions conditioned them to believe in a future of wealth and prosperity in the wake of the Sleepers' bloody coup. Their generations spent in the dark depths of the dispenser facilities would end in a blaze of glory with the barbarians of the topside crushed beneath their feet.

Though not all Ashen communities adhere to these pagan beliefs, most of them do. 500 years is a long time and the history of the Ashen is one of de-evolution. As such, most Ashen greet the arisen Awakened as gods, offering them sacrifices and telling them tales about the glorious history of their bunker. The darkness in the hearts of the amnesiac Awakened absorbs this flattery greedily and soon, along with the faint echoes of their pasts, they begin to believe that they are the gods of this new age. They become frenzied and bloodthirsty and erupt from the dark earth with a terrifying vengeance, seizing villages, erecting their own kingdoms, or perishing in the crossfire of the modern cults.

FLIGHT INTO THE NOW

Not all of Awakened are deluded by the soothing words of the Ashen. They escape the lairs of these horrid trolls and set out on their own path. Some retreat to remote regions, other find a friendly community and become a part of it. Many of these former Sleepers are respected mechanics or scholars. They keep their true nature hidden, however, which requires that they remove the number tattooed on their wrist.

PROFILE: TYPICAL AWAKENED

ATTRIBUTES

AGI 6
BOD 7
CHA 4
INT 8
PSY 6

SKILLS

AGI 6 + Firearms 3 (AV 9)
AGI 6 + Land Vehicles 4 (AV 10)
AGI 6 + Reaction 2 (AV 8)
BOD 7 + Stamina 3 (AV 10)
BOD 7 + Swimming 3 (AV 10)
BOD 7 + Toughness 3 (AV 10)
CHA 4 + Domination 2 (AV 6)
INT 8 + Accounting 4 (AV 12)
INT 8 + Artifact Lore 8 (AV 16)
INT 8 + Biology 2 (AV 10)
INT 8 + Chemistry 2 (AV 10)
INT 8 + Dynamics 2 (AV 10)
INT 8 + Engineering 6 (AV 14)
INT 8 + Writing 8 (AV 16)
PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Additionally, specialists such as doctors have:

INT 8 + Biology 6 (AV 14); INT 8 + Medicine 6 (AV 14)

FLESH WOUNDS

Head 2
Torso 4
Legs 3

TRAUMA WOUNDS

7

VITALITY

10

EQUIPMENT

Machinereg (4.6 x 30 mm) (DAM 8 (8), Range 5/20/80; Inertia 2)

PROFILE: AWAKENED SOLDIER

AT TRIBUTES

AGI 6
BOD 7
CHA 4
INT 5
PSY 6

SKILLS

AGI 6 + Armed Combat 7 (AV 13)
AGI 6 + Firearms 8 (AV 14)
AGI 6 + Heavy Weapons 6 (AV 12)
AGI 6 + Land Vehicles 7 (AV 13)
AGI 6 + Reaction 7 (AV 13)
AGI 6 + Thrown Weapons 4 (AV 10)
AGI 6 + Unarmed Combat 6 (AV 12)
BOD 7 + Mobility 4 (AV 11) BOD 7
+ Stamina 4 (AV 11)
BOD 7 + Strength 5 (AV 12)
BOD 7 + Swimming 3 (AV 10) BOD
7 + Toughness 5 (AV 12) CHA 4 +
Domination 3 (AV 7) CHA 4 +
Leadership 4 (AV 8)
INT 5 + Accounting 2 (AV 7)
INT 5 + Artifact Lore 7 (AV 12) INT
5 + Biology 3 (AV 8)
INT 5 + Engineering 4 (AV 9) INT 5
+ First Aid 2 (AV 7)
INT 5 + Survival 4 (AV 9)
INT 5 + Writing 4 (AV 9)
PSY 6 + Perception 4 (AV 10)
PSY 6 + Self Mastery 3 (AV 9);

Additionally, specialists such as doctors have:

INT 8 + Biology 6 (AV 14); INT 8 + Medicine 6 (AV
14)

FLESH WOUNDS

Head 3
Torso 5
Legs 4

TRAUMA WOUNDS

9

VITALITY

11

EQUIPMENT

Flechette-Rifle (4.6x30 mm) (DAM 8 (8), Range
40/300/1500, Inertia 3); Recombination Group
Battle Armor (ARM 0/4/4, Bulletproof 1, Weight 8)

MARAUDERS

In the early centuries after the Eschaton, the Marauders found their way into myth and legend as uncontrolled berserkers. It is said that their numbers can be counted on a few hands. It is also said that they hunt Sleepers. They cover their bodies in pus-stained bandages, as though these scraps were the only things holding them together. They can vaporize opponents or entire villages by merely pointing a finger.

The vultures of old Britain and the rams of the Jehammedans are often found with them. However, information about these beings, who exist somewhere between decay and omnipotence, is sparing. Even the Chroniclers must resort to guesses.

AMSUMO

THE MACHINE MEN

Hunched, rag-covered figures trampled through the everlasting snowstorm of northern Borca. Their heads, peculiarly smooth and expressionless, jostled mechanically from side to side, moving with an eerie syncopation. With frozen, staring eyes they peered into the shifting and billowing maelstrom. They didn't speak—one wonders if they could; they marched in silence. They patrolled their city, moving as one with unrelenting discipline. No one lives here anymore—no one has for centuries—what could possibly motivate them?

Then suddenly there was a flickering movement in a darkened window. The

mass of bodies turned toward the window in one sickening lurch. They paused for a second, and then throwing their arms out, leapt toward the building as a silent unstoppable swarm. Their eyes seemed to glow with excitement as they charged.

The blackened window exploded with life as a few dozen Anabaptists leapt to their feet, pilot lights flickering on their sinister burners. "To hell with you all," screamed the Anabaptists' sergeant. A deadly blanket of blue flame spread out into the darkness, opening the gates of hell. The snowy landscape instantly became a steaming inferno. The flames enveloped the onrushing mass of assailants. Their rags evaporated in seconds, falling to the ground as glowing cinders. But they continued to swarm, undaunted. Their bodies were black from soot, but they continued their assault unaffected. Metal plates covered their bodies—their heads a single mask of steel and sensors.

"God save us," cried one of the Anabaptists. "Machine men!"

The Anabaptists renewed their fiery attack; a few dropped their weapons and fled in a panic, swallowed by the darkness as they went. The machine men reached the building and tore through the wall like it was paper. Their arms spun and twisted inhumanly as they

crushed the remaining Anabaptist soldiers. Screams and the crunching of bones filled the night air; blood exploded from the building like a freshly tapped oil well. In a few moments, the sounds of battle faded back to an eerie silence. The machine men ripped the clothing from the inert corpses and attempted to cover themselves again—a sick mockery of humanity.

The surviving Anabaptists raced through the snow, panting and praying. They were not followed. Were they saved?

The machines returned to the street and fell back into formation. For several seconds it appeared as though they had shut down, then they lifted their heads and resumed their patrol. In a warehouse, not a hundred steps away, a second troop of machine men whirred to life, stepped into the snowstorm, and began tracking the pitiful, fleeing Anabaptists. There would be no quarter given this night.

CORRUPTED LEGACY

In the days before the Eschaton, the forces of Northern Europe lobbied hard to replace their human soldiers with powerful yet replaceable beings whose death or ruin would not result in needless loss of life. The same advancements in AI, which had already been applied to semi-autonomous military vehicles, were to be used in the creation of a new combat force. These new combat drones were called AMSUMOs. They were capable of operating independently of any remote control and shared a centralized intelligence, which allowed them to operate as a distinct organism. The machine men were immediately thrown in to the conflict that had been escalating in Africa, and they were later adapted to perform police functions in the strategic German city of Koblenz.

Then everything went wrong. As the Stream collapsed under the 2¹⁶ phenomenon, digital madness crept into the control systems of the AMSUMOs, eating through their memory banks, destroying their programming, and manifesting as new command instructions. At first, the effects were almost impossible to detect, as the most serious errors were compensated for by built-in safety algorithms. Soon, however, the AMSUMOs began to display a peculiar behavior: They wrapped their blue painted bodies in clothing and old rags, ignoring any remote control and instructions. Despite this, they continued to perform their tasks. In Koblenz, they arrested hoodlums; in Africa, they protected the UEO strongholds. The shift was subtle, but effective. Soon the AMSUMOs no longer differentiated between friend and foe. They plucked weapons from the human police and then stuffed them into the same overcrowded cells as the criminals. Soldiers who had performed maintenance one day were massacred on the steps of their office as they attempted to report for duty the next.

The AMSUMOs deteriorated even further: Many painted over the identification number on their foreheads and replaced it with 2¹⁶. Others ran amok, deserting their posts. Some even deactivated themselves.

Centuries later, they are called the machine men. They are the terror of every Scrapper, and in campfire horror stories they take the lead role.

TECHNOLOGY

If one were to delve under the stinking layers of rags the AMSUMOs adorn themselves with, one would find a solid layer of ribbed metallic plating covering the body of the machine men. An intact AMSUMO presents an attacker an unbroken span of blue painted steel. The slats are pressure sensitive, opening to reveal sensors lined upon the core frame. Complex algorithms report information back to the unified AMSUMO consciousness telling the machines what is attacking them and where an attack has originated.

ENFORCERS

These are the standard variety of AMSUMO. Their programming provides them with tactical maneuvers and refined weapons knowledge. An enforcer can use any weapon optimally, be it club or attack rifle. Their accuracy is legendary.

Enforcers form groups called *hunt troops*. They roam in bands of up to ten. However, without the support of the other varieties of AMSUMOs, their total military capabilities are limited.

PORCUPINES

These highly specialized units are the eyes and ears of an AMSUMO hunt troop. Much of their armor has been replaced with a highly sensitive sensor array. Rubber-encased antennas, 3 centimeters thick and half a meter long, cover the shoulders and back of these units, giving these AMSUMOs their odd nickname. Depending on conditions, up to 120 of these antennas may be attached to the core frame interfaces where the armored plates and pressure sensors would otherwise be.

A porcupine is responsible for coordinating the sensor feeds and navigation of a hunt troop. Individual units relay their sensor feeds to the porcupine, which interprets the tactical data and transmits relevant information and sensor input to each unit as befitting their situation. Enforcers rely on the porcupine in their troop as the nexus of their coordinated group intelligence. If a porcupine is damaged, the rest of the troop is momentarily blind and inactive until they can switch over to their own internal sensors, autonomous decision-making, and decentralized networking. In normal cases, this takes less than three seconds, and as such is only slightly effective when used as a tactic against them.

TANKERS

Tankers are a specialized unit with a powerful bio-generator upon its back. With these units, the theoretical operational radius of a hunt troop is endless. At the core of the generators are three large, transparent pipes in which a green, bubbling algae broth sloshes about in rhythm with the steps of the machine. Due to the moisture and algae, portions of the tankers are covered with a mossy coating and rust spots dot what is otherwise blemish-free

blue armor. Their clothing is clammy and rotte and drags behind them like a foul cargo.

Tankers are clumsy and slow, and as such would seem unfit for battle duty, yet they are the heart of every hunt troop. The remnant of the 2¹⁶ signature in most of the machine men is only a flickering spark in comparison with the hellfire of earlier days—they could fail at anytime. Without tankers, they would have long ago.

IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS

Most machine men are loners. In the past, there was nary a foe that could challenge them—why use the energy reserved for a dozen units when only one is necessary? But there are limits to the usefulness of one unit. Due to the small capacity of their energy cells, individual units never leave the transmitting range of their base. If they wander too far, their systems fail and their emergency transponders activate. A hunt troop with a tanker unit is sent to the rescue—at least this is how they were programmed to operate. The programming is corrupt, however, and failures are not uncommon. Hardly anyone in Balkhan today remembers the true power of the ancient, dusty statues that litter the abandoned cities—woe to them if a tanker should find and reactivate them.

Hunt troops are an exception to the lone unit strategy. Their missions are clearly defined, such as combing through ruins looking for enemies or scattering an assembly of strangers in their domain. Experience has shown that such missions require a brute force that is only possible through the deployment of relatively large numbers of enforcers.

TECHNOLOGY OF THE ANCIENTS

The energy-producing technology of the tankers is not reproducible even with the technological advancements of the Chroniclers, as relevant information is still missing. The fundamental principle, however, has been unlocked.

A plate coated in algae is submerged in a tank filled with water and special nutrients and enzymes. Once exposed to daylight, the algae begin to photosynthesize. The liquid in the tanks prevents the algae from releasing oxygen and the excess heat energy is transferred to metallic plates that convert the heat into electricity. This electricity is stored in battery cells and amplified. The energy is then radiated from the tankers at low frequency and can be received by enforcer units up to 50 meters away.

NEURAL NETWORKS

AMSUMOs communicate over an encrypted wireless network, building a self-regulating association. An upper hierarchy does not exist; the computational power needed to decide and execute the best course of action is shared in equal parts by the processors and software of all AMSUMOs.

Their creators included a limited ability to learn: A weighing algorithm determines the outcome of actions based on efficiency. Furthermore, it makes predictions and compares them with previously experienced situations. The intelligence is primarily achieved through the collection of precedent and only minimally through core programming. It is purely logical. Social competence is not provided for; the few experiments in this area were long ago determined to be ineffective and removed from the machine men programming.

RENEGADES

Centuries ago, every AMSUMO was given a number that was painted on their forehead in order to identify them when in use. Some machine men painted over these numbers with the numerical equivalent of the signature, 2¹⁶—the symbol of their release from the humans' network and the beginning of their individual evolution.

Where this leads them is determined by their surroundings—they lurk, evaluate, and make decisions. A machine man that watches the rapidly alternating emotions of children, from anger to happiness, may develop an unpredictable but peaceful character, whereas an AMSUMO who studies cockroaches may develop into a hive-minded automaton.

Despite their newfound individuality, these renegades cannot stray far from other AMSUMOs, as they are too strongly tied to the tankers and the protection of the enforcers. Many attach themselves with groups of generic AMSUMOs and run their standard program. These are wolves in sheep's clothing. Through them, the signature sneaks into the group network, tying itself like a noose around the basic programming of all of the units in the hunt troop. The seeds always take root.

EMP

An important addition to the last generation of AMSUMOs is a finely woven net of thin cables, lying tightly against the body—in battle-tested machines, it likely hangs in shreds by now. This network of cables is intended to inhibit functional failures in the event of strong electromagnetic impulses.

PROPAGATION

Machine men are rare. Reports suggest dozens of them are to be found in the damned Borcan ruin of Noret (formerly Koblenz). With frightening efficiency, they have depopulated the entire surrounding area. In the meantime, signs warning about these steel watchers have sprung up in the larger circumference of the ruins. However, they have not limited themselves to Noret—they wander. Years ago, Hellvetics discovered traces of a hunt troop that had decimated a village in their holdings. In Balkhan, from time to time AMSUMOs are seen near the entrances of the Recombination Group bunkers. In the African jungles, they continue to guard ancient and overgrown military bases.

PROFILE: AMSUMO

ATTRIBUTE:

AGI 7
BOD 10
CHA 0
INT 3
PSY 7

SKILLS

AGI 7 + Armed Combat 5 (AV 12)
AGI 7 + Firearms 8 (AV 15)
AGI 7 + Heavy Weapons 8 (AV 15)
AGI 7 + Reaction 5 (AV 12)
AGI 7 + Unarmed Combat 5 (AV 12)
BOD 10 + Mobility 6 (AV 16)
BOD 10 + Stamina 10 (AV 20)
BOD 10 + Strength 8 (AV 18)
BOD 10 + Toughness 8 (AV 18)
INT 3 + Accounting 17 (AV 20)
INT 3 + Military Tactics 6 (AV 9)
INT 3 + Regional Geography 12 (AV 15)
INT 3 + Writing 6 (AV 9)
PSY 7 + Perception 3 (AV 10)

FLESH WOUNDS

Head 4; Torso 6; Legs 5

TRAUMA WOUNDS

18

VITALITY

20

EQUIPMENT

AMSUMO casing (ARM: 4/4/4, Nonflammable 4)

VARIANT: PORCUPINE

SKILLS

PSY 7 + Perception 9 (AV 16)

EQUIPMENT

AMSUMO-support casing (ARM: 2/2/2, Nonflammable 2)

VARIANT: TANKER

SKILLS

BOD 10 + Stamina 1 (AV 11); BOD 10 + Mobility 1 (AV 11)

SPORE BEASTS

HORRORS OF THE NIGHT

They came forth from the cold of the ice—chalky white, hairless caricatures of humanity. Whether they fled from the snow southward or were awakened by the ice, no one could say. They felt at home both in the fissures of the Reaper's Blow and the inhospitable frozen steppes of Pollen. Their spread thus knows no boundaries—from the north of Borca all the way to the Janus Crater. Large portions of Pollen also appear infested by their unholy seed.

Spore beasts seem to prefer to reside underground in the skeletons of the ancients' buried cities. With their knife-sharp claws they burrow tunnels through the stinking earth, digging through old cellars or destroying the land.

Their hearing and sense of smell are highly developed, and they seem highly attuned to any victims that are infected with spores, seeming to touch their very souls and sensing them before even the most finely tuned gendo nose could.

The motivation of the spore beasts is not yet understood. While some seem content to hunt gendos and deer in regions far removed from human

settlement, others gather in bloodthirsty mobs and attack targeted villages.

Their behavior confirms a grotesque intelligence that seems particularly interested in killing. Their hate is inexplicable—animals kill their prey in order to survive, spore beasts murder out of passion and pure maliciousness. It is as though they have a score to settle with humanity.

HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED

The Anabaptists see the spore beasts as the last emissaries of the Demiurge, the maggots in the rotting flesh of paradise. Now, after the fall of their master, they rise to the surface purposeless and uncontrollable, taking offense at the survivors. The Anabaptists wait with drawn swords at their tunnel entrances, ready to paint the walls with their blood.

This seems good in theory, however expeditions against the beasts are highly risky endeavors that demand a high price in blood. Despite high casualty rates, their numbers do not appear to wane. It is said many towns in northern Borca were lost to the ice, but the truth may be closer to the legends that say the spore beasts dragged the weakened inhabitants into their underworld domains.

Domstadt claims to have the upper hand against the spore beasts, proclaiming their success to all the cities of Europe. However great the victories of Domstadt, their claims are overstated and the beasts still hunt throughout the region. Regardless of how the war progresses, a spore beast head is worth a 20 chronicred reward.

AREA OF INHABITATION

Lone spore beasts or small groups can be found across Europe, but the largest broods are usually found in northern Borca and Pollen. The largest population is presumed to be underground in Danzig, but these beasts seem to be fairly peaceful. Were they to share in the aggression of their Borcan brothers, the entire region would be bereft of humans within days. Regardless of their nature, these monsters seem particularly territorial and will defend their domain to the last. Whoever descends into a cellar in Danzig is signing her own death certificate.

Aside from man, spore beasts are the only species in Europe who have managed to cross the Reaper's Blow. Amazingly, there are dozens of colonies in the web of jagged valleys and fissures that litter this zone. People don't live in the rift as they cannot tolerate the suffocating and poisoned air.

Reports suggest that Hybrispanian creature handlers have enlisted domesticated spore beasts in their conflict against the Scourgers of Africa. These reports are unconfirmed, however. The sources of these stories are rooted in the discovery of several gruesomely desiccated African corpses in the wilds of Hybrispania that were apparently ripped apart by the claws of an exceptionally large animal. No one has seen such a monster, yet they have found their way into the legends of the guerillas and are revered by them.

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

As with Homo degeneration, spore beasts are perfectly adapted to their environment. Despite their hairless bodies, they are unaffected by cold. Similarly, their robust lungs are unaffected by the poisonous fumes of the Reaper's Blow and the spore-laden air of Pollen.

Spore beasts have an insatiable appetite, which they energetically seek to quell. Meat, particularly human meat, is their favorite food.

ANCESTRY

Their similarity with humans suggests that spore beasts are, through unexplained means, descended from them. However, no evolutionary prototypes are known to exist. The first refugees from Russia to populate Pollen after the Eschaton found the spore beasts already existing there. With shimmering, bloodthirsty eyes, they greeted the newcomers. It seemed as though the land had simply produced them in one unseen moment.

Since then, hundreds of them have been dissected and examined on the steel operating tables of the Spitalians. Only limited information about this research has reached the outside, and even within the physician's order the reports are kept under lock and key. It is certain that spore beasts, like the psychonauts, live in symbiosis with the Foulness and that their internal organs are very similar to those of humans. Due to their tolerance of Foulness, psychonauts and spore beasts are held as equally damned and are hunted without distinction.

PROFILE: SPORE BEAST

ATTRIBUTES

AGI 8
BOD 8
CHA 0
INT 3
PSY 9

SKILLS

AGI 8 + Reaction 7 (AV 15)
AGI 8 + Unarmed Combat 5 (AV 13)
BOD 8 + Mobility 8 (AV 16)
BOD 8 + Stamina 4 (AV 12)
BOD 8 + Strength 4 (AV 12)
BOD 8 + Toughness 4 (AV 12)
PSY 9 + Empathy 5 (AV 14)
PSY 9 + Perception 6 (AV 15)

FLESH WOUNDS

Head 3; Torso 5; Legs 4

TRAUMA WOUNDS

12

VITALITY

12

EQUIPMENT

Claws (DAM 4 (6), Reach 1, Inertia 5); **Bite** (DAM 3 (6), Reach 1, Inertia 5, plus Poison 4 (4) and -1 Vitality per combat round)

GENDOS

THE HOUND-HEADED DEATH

Prior to the Eschaton, there was an unbelievable variety of dogs in Europe. Of these, only one would survive the next 500 years in large numbers: the gendo. In its fully grown form, a gendo's shoulder height reaches around 1.5 meters, and they are wiry with gray-black, bristly fur. One of the most surprising facts about gendos is that they do not interbreed with other canines. Either the breeds are genetically incompatible or the gendos' aggression diminishes their interaction with other dogs. Spread across Europe and even separated into different regions by the Reaper's Blow, the packs have nonetheless developed very similarly and now stand at the top of the food chain.

Gendos are extremely social creatures. Each animal has a set position in its pack and knows its role. If one is injured or killed, the next lowest in the hierarchy will take its place. Gendos hunt in packs and their ability to coordinate is mythical. From the common hunt to targeted herding in dead-end streets and alleyways, they possess an uncanny array of tactics.

MEAT

Dogs were once man's best friends, but today that picture is grotesquely distorted. Humans are now the favorite victims of gendos. Southern Borca can barely breathe, so heavy is the burden of the gendo plague on the land. The dogs are

a constant threat to daily life, having developed into an unpredictable danger for traders and locals alike. Villages are watched by the gendos, and lone individuals such as Scrappers who aren't under the protection of a larger group will end up as food for the pack shortly after leaving their protected walls. The organization and intelligence of these animals is frightening.

LEGENDARY PACKS

In the year 2556, a pack of gendos descended upon the southern town of Colmar. Not a single inhabitant survived. Since then, the entire region has lived in fear of the so-called Colmar Pack. Even the Hellvetics, who view the stricken region as part of their extended Protectorate, have been unsuccessful in eliminating this problem. The gendos learned quickly to avoid the Hellvetics' traps and seem to always be one step ahead of them. Now, thirty years later, the pack still exists and has grown considerably during this time. Their craftiness is widely known, and the region is almost entirely depopulated. The few remaining cities are well protected, and visiting caravans are heavily armed.

Occurrences similar to Colmar also occurred in the forests east of the Reaper's Blow. Villages were found abandoned,

where months before several large families worked towards a common future. Nomadic Tribals disappeared in the forests and traders never arrived for their appointments. Months later, Scrappers would find freshly gnawed bones, randomly scattered in the overgrown ruins of Wolfsburg. The gendos were never seen by anyone who survived to give a report. Clearly, however, the method with which the bones were disturbed pointed to canine involvement. The East Borcan Tribals have a saying about the forests on the outskirts of their territory: "Out there, between the trees, waits the hound-headed death." Is there something to these reports, or could the truth be even more horrendous?

PROFILE: GENDO

ATTRIBUTES

AGI 8
BOD 6
CHA 1
INT 3
PSY 7

SKILLS

AGI 8 + Reaction 4 (AV 12)
AGI 8 + Unarmed Combat 3 (AV 11)
BOD 6 + Mobility 4 (AV 10)
BOD 6 + Stamina 4 (AV 10)
BOD 6 + Strength 4 (AV 10)
BOD 6 + Toughness 4 (AV 10)
PSY 7 + Empathy 4 (AV 11)
PSY 7 + Perception 3 (AV 10)

FLESH WOUNDS

Head 2
Front Body 4
Rear Body 3

TRAUMA WOUNDS

10

VITALITY

10

EQUIPMENT

Bite (DAM 3 (5), Reach 1, Inertia 5)

HOMO DEGENESIS

Journal of Doctor Everett Tomille—March 2237

Today is the thirteenth day after having crossed the pass and entering enemy territory. The suspense among my colleagues was rising over the past week. That is, until yesterday. The excitement has now become irritation—or simply pitiless boredom. Balkhan is unbelievably annoying. It pisses rain day and night. My skin is macerated like a sponge under the neoprene, and if this itching between my toes isn't fungus then I'm a damn Tribal.

The only one who remains calm (to the point that it reminds me of rigor mortis), is our preservist. His name is Duchamps, or something—a damn Frank who seems to hold himself as better than the rest of us. He has yet to speak a single word. He's had his gas mask on during the entire expedition. He just sits up there on his horse, a green waterproof poncho draped over his shoulders, staring out into the landscape. He's like a radar transceiver, his head always moving from one side to the other.

Irina has had enough. She has rolled the upper portion of her neoprene suit down around her hips. Her white top is soaking wet. She is glaring at me. I must have been staring like an Apocalyptic burner. Look away. Shit, now I'm out of favor with her too. I have to become confrontational.

"Trainee Irina. Your uniform is out of regulation!" Damn it, how much I would love to do the same myself.

She says nothing, looks at me with her almond-shaped eyes, shoulders the fungicide sprayer, and marches on. My hand cramps up around the shaft of my sprayer. Irina 2; me 0.

I come upon a rust-eaten sign, lying before me in a puddle on the concrete.

"Maribor."

Never heard of it. The street consists of two rows of concrete slabs, long out of use. From between the cracks grows spiky gray

undergrowth that snags the clothing and rips the skin. I stamp uselessly on the bushes. It rustles lazily, mocking me. Sickly evergreens overhang either side of the road, yet nothing grows closer than fifty steps to the pavement. I'm glad I don't know what the ancients buried here at the street's edge to prevent plants from growing here over a century later.

Irina has gotten a good bit ahead and having now stepped into the shade of a concrete high rise, disappears into the shadows. I can no longer see the others either. Damn it, I'm here all alone. I'm suddenly cold in my suit. Automatically, my hand reaches to my belt, opens one of the pockets, and pulls out a brown glass vial—blessed tranquilizer. Every Medic deployed for battle has some equipped. I swallow one of the little red capsules dry. By the time we get back to the Spital I'm going to be a damn pill junkie.

I hurry after Irina. My boots tramp noisily on the hardened ground. My pace quickens. Something is in the air. The rustling of the treetops is ... unnatural. It speaks to me, telling me the story of the mountains. They are so massive, incomparable; they press down on me.

I sense a motion from the corner of my eye; I hastily look around, almost tripping over myself. Now I'm running, my breath quickens. There is nothing there. Are the trees suddenly inching closer to the street? The water in my mollusk container sloshes back and forth, the mollusk hopping up and down inside. Cold sweat runs down my back, gathering at the base of my spine. The mollusk can't be moving on its own, it's just being rattled about, I tell myself. I must know for sure!

I force myself to slow down, holding the mollusk upright and still. The spore-infected muscle cramps up, then it begins to slam against the glass, the pattern growing quicker and stronger. The rustling of the treetops and the wind solidifies into a deep

yet high melody. I don't know why, but I associate it with giant eyes filling a crystal-clear night sky.

A lizard on the ground looks at me with its head cocked to the side and speaks something to me. Then it disappears into a crack in the cement. The air gets thicker, flowing like water into my lungs. It feels like something has docked with my spirit and is corrupting it. I look up. I see the others writhing between two looming, colossal pieces of concrete. Irina is kneeling on the ground, supporting herself with one hand. Something dark is running like water from her nose. Dr. Radowan is lying on his back, eyes wide open, staring up into the sky. His mollusk container is shattered; it's nothing more than a glass-splintered layer of slime on the light gray concrete. The mollusk is vibrating uncontrollably and has moved itself a half meter away from us.

How can it do that?

Duchamps is kneeling not two steps away. His head is lowered, as though counting ants on the ground. He is captured in utmost concentration. His horse writhes on the ground, yet I hear nothing but the agonizing song.

Then I see the stranger. He appears like a mirage. His motions are so unbelievably fluid that one might think he had no joints and was made of rubber. His head is covered with dozens of small mirrors, all of which seem to stare at me. A thick mass of tentacle-like tubes of various lengths hang from his mouth, swinging hypnotically from one side to the other like an octopus searching the seabed for food.

The high-pitched song is now unbearable, rising and falling in time with the motions of the stranger. Friend? No, I am afraid not. It is a Dushani, no question. Now he is coming towards me. I hadn't noticed before, but he is naked. God! He keeps getting closer to me with his grotesque mask. He bends over me and twelve mirrored pictures of my chalky white face

stare back. They are laughing like madmen. Then their mouths form a word that I understand but do not know. I hear only the singing of the Dushani through the hoses; it sounds hollow and distant.

Suddenly, a shadow rises up behind him. I hear the sound of a staff being swung, then a dull thud. The Dushani is knocked onto his side. Duchamps stands no more than three steps in front of me, and points his splayer at the fallen Dushani. I see him work the lever on the weapon; the blades open and the dissonant sound of a thousand tortured souls breaks the silence. The Dushani screams, the tubes at his mouth stand erect like quills. He is on his feet, and as Duchamps prepares the final blow, the Dushani rips the gas mask from his face. Duchamps kicks the fallen mask away and rams the splayer into the chest of the Dushani, knocking him to the ground.

The psychonaut flaps about like a fish on a spear, thrashing his head from side to side. The screaming tubes bounce on the concrete in utter madness. Then Duchamps presses the button on his weapon. The blades snap closed, smashing the Dushani's ribs and breastplate with a sickening crack. Blood sprays from the wound as the preservist pulls the splayer out with a hefty tug. Tendons still hang from between the blades, turning the Dushani into a bloody marionette. Then they rip and the body crumples to the ground. The screaming finally stops.

Duchamps comes to my side. I see him for the first time without his gas mask. His ears and nose look like melted, pink wax. White bandages hang out from the thumb-sized holes where his ears once must have been. Only his eyes are unhindered, and they stare at me inquisitively. In the meantime, Irina is back on her feet and helps me to mine.

"Who would have thought it? This bastard is deaf," she whispers to me. Who would have thought it, indeed?

PSYCHONAUTS

ANTAGONIST

Europe was permanently changed by the devastation wrought by the asteroids. The Earth was twisted into an unrelenting wasteland and man's most formidable enemy grew from the foulness of the five known Earth Chakras—a life form suited to take the world from mankind's weakening grip.

KNOW THY ENEMY

At birth, few psychonauts are recognizable as the monsters they will later become. In their youth, not even the mollusks of the Spitalians can uncloak them. That non-psychonaut parents can give birth to a child of the Primer makes the job of the Medics even harder. The proximity to mother spore fields or a high spore content in the air seem to have an influence on the development of the embryo, yet not all children born in infected areas are born as Homo degenesis.

The first spontaneous displays of their raptus—the so-called phenomenon of the specific type of psychonaut—might be observable in childhood, but they haven't yet developed the spirit and physical characteristics of the psychonaut. This generally happens after puberty. In Spitalian-controlled or -associated enclaves, youth who are loners or seem overly wrapped in their own thoughts are observed carefully. Any who refuse group activities are particularly suspect.

Young psychonauts often reveal themselves through an unusual level of healthiness and an unprecedented adaptability to their environment. No child of the Primer needs clothing for protection—even Biokinetiks living near icy regions find the cold pleasant. The Psychokinetiks of Purgare, for example, are observed to have a natural resistance to the toxic gases of the Reaper's Blow.

CENTERS OF ENERGY

Psychonaut children often describe burning or even pleasant tickling sensations at certain points along their torsos. The exact location can tell the Spitalians which Earth-Chakra has influence over the child. The sensitive point is one of the seven human chakras, points of energy discovered in pre-Eschaton days by the mystics of India. While the seven chakras are more or less balanced in Homo sapiens, only one is active in psychonauts. As a result, it burns as bright as a torch on a moonless night. It is this chakra that determines the raptus of the psychonaut.

THE PLAGUES

Psychonauts don't just attract insects, spiders, and other creatures to themselves—they actively surround themselves with swarms. The observations of the Spitalians suggest that certain raptuses control specific species—the so-called five plagues. It is in this way that Pollener Biokinetiks control centipedes and spiders and Frank Pheromancers control ants, wasps, and termites. How exactly they manage to do this is unknown. The Spitalians have a theory they call "ether calls." The psychonauts, like their plagues, are connected to an inaudible frequency through which they can communicate both with each other and with their particular Earth Chakra.

CHAKRA CONNECTION

Psychonauts must be spore infected in order to maximize their abilities. However, if there is too much Primer in their systems, they lose their individuality and merge with the consciousness of the Earth Chakra related to their raptus. Every spore exposure further alienates them from their human roots and binds them more completely to the Earth collective. These changes manifest in both body and spirit.

For example, a Dushani with a low level of spore infestation may live for many years as a Tribal who is merely loud or capable of singing beautiful, heart-wrenching songs; with increasing spore contact, her voice will drop to a deep bass and her body will move in eerie, flowing motions, as though driven by unseen energies. Normal interaction becomes increasingly difficult, as the Dushani's voice drops below audible frequencies; instead the listener begins to *feel* her voice deep in their body. Her eyes become bottomless, inky black wells, "Prisons of the Soul," as the Balkhani call them. Eventually, the Dushani will lose all sense of individuality. Oftentimes, the physical changes are more dramatic, particularly with the Biokinetiks and Pheromancers who almost always turn into grotesque horrifying monsters.

RAPTUS PHENOMENA

The spore infestation level of a psychonaut is measured in spore points like other characters (see *Spore Infestation*, p. 253). The psychonaut's current spore level determines the *phenomena*—special abilities available only to psychonauts—available at any given time. Each phenomenon has its own Strength value. A psychonaut with 14 spore points can use all phenomena available to their raptus with a Strength of 14 or less. A strong spore infestation only increases the repertoire of phenomena available,

not the Strength of the phenomenon. A psychonaut may lose the ability to use a phenomenon should her spore infestation level drop—for example, through the fungicidal fog of the Spitalians.

Psychonauts have a special skill called *Raptus*, which is linked to the PSY attribute. If they activate a phenomenon, they must perform a PSY + Raptus Skill Roll using the Strength of the phenomenon as the difficulty value. Many psychonauts specialize in their most powerful phenomena and thus reduce the extreme difficulty of certain actions.

OVERLOADING

Psychonauts can boost the power of a phenomenon by adding points to the phenomenon's Strength (the Difficulty of the phenomenon Skill Roll). This is called *overloading* and the points added are called the Overload Value. The additional points increase the Difficulty of the Skill Roll but add more damage or lengthen the effect by the same value. The actual results of overloading vary from phenomenon to phenomenon, and are noted in each description.

The minimum Overload Value is 1.

PROFILE: PSYCHONAUTS

Though psychonauts are mentally attuned to their Earth Chakra, they can differ greatly in body condition, development, and appearance. One attribute they all have in common is a very high PSY, which is generally a value between 8 and 10. Additionally, each raptus has a second dominant attribute, which is also a value between 8 and 10.

Early in their life, many psychonauts focus on their Self Mastery skill. They must have a high AV in this skill so they can maintain the spore infestation level necessary to activate the stronger phenomena. As such, a young and inexperienced psychonaut will have achieved a Self Mastery value of 10, while an adult will have trained this ability up to 12–14. It is similar for the Raptus skill AV: young psychonauts will have an action number from 10–12, adults from 13–15.

Currently, there aren't any reports of elderly psychonauts, but if they exist they will certainly have Self Mastery and Raptus AVs up to 18 and will have developed their preferred phenomena to a specialization level of 8–10.

MUTABILITY

The phenomena listed below are roughly described and loosely defined—every psychonaut directs the energies of her Earth Chakra through her body in different ways and manifests them in a unique manner. The gamemaster should view these descriptions as a starting point and interpret the rules freely. Since the psychonauts represent an alternate evolutionary path and are the arch-enemies of humanity, by their nature, they should baffle the players with their actions being unpredictable and foreign.

FEAR

The legends of the people describe psychonauts as bogeymen who come to steal children in the night. Everyone has a story about their vile deeds, whether it involves the destruction of a village or the disappearance of a friend or relative. Wherever psychonauts appear, people recoil in fear or flee in a panic. Only a solid few remain unmoved as they advance with their splayers.

Overcoming this primordial fear demands a high Self Mastery value. The gamemaster can require a Self Mastery Skill Roll when players encounter a psychonaut. The gamemaster must use their best judgment when determining the Difficulty of the Skill Roll. If the characters have limited or no experience with psychonauts, a Difficulty of 2–6 is suggested; certain phenomenon may increase this value by half. If a character fails this roll, she suffers an Initiative penalty equal to the Difficulty of the Skill Roll. In the case of a critical failure, the character will flee.

SIMILARITIES

As different from each other as the raptuses are, there exist three phenomena that all psychonauts share:

ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

Phenomenon Strength: 0

The psychonaut is optimally adapted to her environment. For example, the poisonous gases of the Reaper's Blow will not overcome a Psychokinetic of Purgare. It is not known, however, whether a Biokinetic is as comfortable in the heat of the Mediterranean as in Pollen wastes or if a Dushani can survive near the Arctic Circle.

Rules: This phenomenon is active from birth. There is no Skill Roll needed.

PAIN RESISTANCE

Phenomenon Strength: 4

The Spitalians surmise that this phenomenon, just like the cold resistance of the Biokinetics, is a form of environmental adaptation: the psychonauts are brought into the world by their Earth Chakra in order to suffer.

Rules: This phenomenon is activated automatically as soon as psychonauts accumulate 4 spore points. From then on, the psychonaut still registers bodily pain, but is no longer bothered by it. Psychonauts with this phenomenon do not suffer Difficulty modifiers from trauma wounds.

CHAKRA COMMUNICATION

Phenomenon Strength: 6

Psychonauts can remain in contact with others of their kind, or mother spore fields, over great distances. Information is disseminated among the raptus almost immediately. How psychonauts achieve this is unknown.

Rules: With a successful Skill Roll, a psychonaut sends her thoughts to a mother spore field, where it is stored or sent on to other psychonauts of the same raptus. Distance plays no role.

BIOKINETIKS

THE SHAPE CHANGERS

THE EARTH SO NEAR

Blood, sweat, and tears—the spirit and body are one. Biokinetik psychonauts represent earth, corporeality, and survival. They possess exceptional healing powers, can enhance their own physical abilities, alter their bodies, and can quickly adapt themselves to changes in their environment. Their chakra lies at the lower spine.

Biokinetiks see themselves as a part of living nature. They are masters of self-preservation and are most often loners. They are fixated on physical work; they view thinkers, scientists, and others involved in the work of the mind with skepticism.

They live in close symbiosis with spiders, scorpions, and centipedes. Their Earth Chakra is the Pandora Crater in the icy wastelands of Pollen.

Dominant Attribute: BOD

KNOWN PHENOMENA

MASTER OF THE FIRST PLAGUE

Phenomenon Strength: 2

The Biokinetiks rule over all arachnids and other individualistic insects. Their mere presence brings forth the rabble from their holes in the ground or from behind cabinet doors; though only by applying their will can they bind the creatures to themselves.

Many Biokinetiks grow pockets in their skin in order to hold the creatures bound to them. If danger is near, these flaps of skin open like sails and release the vermin.

Rules: The Biokinetik calls 50 spiders, scorpions, and/or centipedes from the surrounding area. For every overload point the psychonaut adds, increase the total creatures summoned by 50. In areas that have been heavily sprayed with pesticides and insecticides, only a few vermin may appear, despite a high overload. The oaken spiders of the Spitalians do not, however, follow their call. Those spiders are immune to spore infestation and therefore are free from the control of the Biokinetiks.

The Biokinetik can release her plague against an enemy. She needs no Skill Roll to do this. She needs only to think of it and the swarm will fall from her and stream towards the enemy. The swarm covers two meters per combat round.

Once they reach their goal, they will crawl under the clothes of their victim, trying to get at unprotected skin to bite and sting. For every 100 arachnids on the victim, increase their Difficulty for all actions by 1 and treat the victim as poisoned each combat round (see *Poison and Disease*, p. 252). The poison has the following statistics:

- **Damage Rating:** (number of bugs ÷ 100; round down)(4)
- **Timeframe:** 1 combat round
- **Effect:** 1 trauma wound

Each successful roll with the damage dice adds one poison point. The victim must make BOD + Toughness Skill Roll using the number of poison points as the Difficulty every combat round. For each failure, the character suffers one trauma wound; for every success, reduce the poison points by one.

Those attacked by a swarm can fight the bugs; taking an action to do so will crush up to 50 of the beasts. Fire or insecticide will solve the problem instantly.

After the Biokinetik has sent her plague, she must activate the phenomenon once more to rebind the insects to her body. It should take once round to use the phenomenon and at least two rounds for a new swarm to arrive.

Example: A Biokinetik releases 200 spiders and centipedes at an unsuspecting Scrapper who is 4 meters away. The bugs reach the dirt digger in 2 combat rounds (covering 2 meters/round). The insects swarm the Scrapper and begin biting and stinging. All of the Scrapper's Difficulty values increase by 2 (200 ÷ 100) and the character must battle the effects of the swarm's poison. The poison's Damage Rating is 2 (4), so the gamemaster rolls

2 dice, getting a 3 and a 7. That's one successful roll, inflicting 1 poison point on the Scrapper. The character has a BOD + Toughness AV of 8 and must roll above a 1 and equal to or below 8 to successfully avoid taking damage from the poison. She unluckily rolls a 9 and takes 1 trauma wound! For her action, the Scrapper rolls on the ground like a crazed animal, trying to kill the swarm. This reduces the swarm to 150 critters.

Since the Scrapper has killed some of the bugs, the next round she faces poison damage of 1 (4). Luckily, she avoids another trauma wound, reduces the poison points back to 1, and squashes the rest of the bugs over the next few combat rounds.

POISON BITE

Phenomenon Strength: 4

Poison is stored in pockets on the gums of Biokinetiks. If a victim is bitten, these pockets break open and release the poison. After a biting attack, the Biokinetik needs approximately five hours for the pockets to regrow.

Rules: On a successful biting attack (Unarmed Combat 4 (5)), the victim is poisoned:

- **Damage Rating:** (Phenomenon Strength + Overload Value)
(Phenomenon Strength + Overload Value)
- **Timeframe:** 1 minute
- **Effect:** 1 trauma wound

Example: A poison bite with an Overload Value of 2 would result in poison with a Damage Rating of 6 (6). Each damage die rolled under 6 would add one poison point. Every minute thereafter, the victim must make a Skill Roll of BOD + Toughness with her current poison points as the Difficulty value. If she fails, 1 trauma wound is sustained. If the roll is successful, the poison points are reduced by 1.

REGENERATION

Phenomenon Strength: 7

The Biokinetik can heal herself by stealing energy from her surroundings. Plants dry up and dissolve into dust, insects waste away and die, and fertile land goes barren. The Danzig Spitalians attribute this phenomenon with the slow death of Pollen.

Rules: If a Biokinetik has sufficient time in a fertile area, she may heal a single trauma or flesh wound by making a successful PSY + Raptus Skill Roll. Each point of Overload Value added heals an extra wound. As with humans, all trauma wounds must be healed before any flesh wounds.

For every trauma wound the Biokinetik seeks to regenerate, she needs four hours of deep meditation. For every flesh wound she needs only two hours.

Any given location only has enough life energy to support a ten hours of regeneration. After that point, the ground is sterile in a two-meter radius and insects and plants have turned to dust. The psychonaut must then move several meters in order to continue the healing process.

CHANNELING

Phenomenon Strength: 8

Biokinetiks that are accompanied by their plague are wily fighters. Like the waves of a sea, the insects surround the body of

the psychonaut and converge on areas where she is targeted for an attack, shielding her from damage.

Rules: When channeling is activated, every damage point is mitigated and results in the loss of 100 arachnids from the Biokinetiks swarm. She can control (Phenomenon Strength + Overload Value) x 100 arachnids but must still pass a PSY + Raptus Skill Roll to succeed (only one roll is necessary; she does not need to roll for each damage point).

ABSORPTION

Phenomenon Strength: 10

Biokinetiks with this power can attempt to envelope their opponents and pull them inside themselves. It is a terrifying sight—wherever the Biokinetik's body touches the victim, it shapes itself around their body. The victim will scream for hours until they finally suffocate inside the psychonaut or have the trapped part of their body hacked off. This leaves the Biokinetik bloated for days, with boils appearing where the victim's bones begin to poke out.

In order to absorb an adult, the Biokinetik requires several days of digestion. She will be clumsy and slow during this time.

Rules: The Biokinetik can absorb any form of biomass simply through touch. A psychonaut needs time to prepare her body for the task: she must be in physical contact for (10 – Overload Value) combat rounds. The absorption begins on her next action. The character's limb or body part is pulled inside the Biokinetik's body, where it will be assimilated over several hours (exact time frame up to the gamemaster). The victim's pain is indescribable. If a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll with the Overload Level as the Difficulty is unsuccessful, the target is instantly knocked unconscious. Every hour 1 trauma wound is sustained until the limb/part is absorbed. The Biokinetik is heavily burdened during this time. She will still heal from trauma or flesh wounds, but has a Difficulty modifier of 12 for all other actions. Once absorption begins, the victim can be saved only by amputation of the stricken extremity. Even if the Biokinetik is killed, a limb or body part cannot be extracted if the absorption process has been going for more than a few minutes.

BUDDING

Phenomenon Strength: 15

The most frightening Biokinetik phenomenon. The psychonaut can store her gene sequence in a nerve point of a mother spore field. Upon death, this bud begins to grow into an exact clone of the Biokinetik.

Rules: The Biokinetik must either leave a genetic sample at a mother spore field or send forth her plague to deliver her genetic sample (skin, hair, or blood) to a mother spore field shortly before death. The budding will begin automatically, taking several months or years to complete, producing a perfect clone of the Biokinetik. The thoughts, goals, and needs of this copy are determined by the collective mind of the Earth Chakra. The clone will have no memory of her previous being—effectively a new person.

PERMANENT CHANGES

The results of most of the Biokinetik phenomena are permanent. Even if she is cleansed of the spore infestation, her outward appearance will remain unchanged.

DUSHANI

THE VOICE
OF THE FOULNESS

BABBLE TOUNGES

The Dushani experience the world through sound waves. They are the masters of shapes and form. Their chakra is, unsurprisingly, the throat. They can feel thoughts, communicate telepathically, and hypnotize people by speaking in tongues or willing them to action through subvocal commands that act upon the subconscious mind and the brain's speech centers.

Dushani are inventive and curious, always seeking out new discoveries to observe. They hold mental prowess and the ability to adapt in high regard. Their origin lies in the dark forests, high mountains, and deep seas of the Balkhans. The creatures over which they have control are also those of the deep and the dark: squid, jellyfish, crabs, and bats.

Dominant Attribute: INT

KNOWN PHENOMENA

MASTER OF THE SECOND PLAGUE

Phenomenon Strength: 1

With tones so deep and foreign that a human ear couldn't understand them, the Dushani awaken the shadows of the deep from the grottos of their Balkhani homeland—creatures as mysterious as the psychonauts themselves.

Rules: For each overload point, ten creatures of the Dushani's plague rush to her aid. On land or in caves, these will be bats, toads, frogs, and olms. In water, squid, jellyfish, and crabs will surround her. They will throw themselves against any attacker, inflicting a Difficulty modifier of 1 per 5 animals. If the intended target concentrates on stopping the attack, she may kill five animals per successful Unarmed Combat or Armed Combat Skill Roll.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Phenomenon Strength: 5

The call of the Dushani is deep and barely perceptible to humans; in this respect it resembles whale songs accompanied with cryptic whispers. Deep in their subconscious minds, however, humans understand the song of the Dushani. The subvocal tones are ignored by the conscious mind and instead resonate with the subconscious, robbing the human of her freedom of thought. Her will is now under the Dushani's control.

Rules: This is a very common phenomenon that opens the victim's mind to the Dushani. The psychonaut can request practically anything and the mentally controlled victim will listen and obey. At the beginning of each combat round, the victim can resist through a successful PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll using the Overload Value as the Difficulty.

RESONANCE

Phenomenon Strength: 6

The Dushani weaves a subvocal cage of thoughts around her victim that catches their thoughts in an ever-increasing feedback loop.

Rules: If a Skill Roll for PSY + Self Mastery (with the Overload Value as Difficulty) fails, the victim will lose one point of Vitality, +1 per point of overload.

AUGUR OF PAIN

Phenomenon Strength: 8

The song of the Dushani swings from a deep hum to an unbearably high-pitched shriek, passing through the body of her victim and threatening to tear it to pieces.

Rules: If the victim is unsuccessful at a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll (using the Overload Value as Difficulty), she will suffer one trauma wound.

OSCILLATION

Phenomenon Strength: 10

The Dushani opens herself to the deep oscillations of the human mind, reading the thoughts of her opponent. Whether hate, love, or other emotions, nothing remains unknown to her.

Rules: The Dushani can read the feelings and opinions of her victim, but not concrete information such as passwords or memorized maps of regions. The victim can attempt to block the Dushani's efforts to read her mind with a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll using the Overload Value as the Difficulty.

HARVEST OF THE MIND

Phenomenon Strength: 15

The psychonaut pulls the knowledge and skills from her victim's mind, allowing her to use these abilities herself. As long as the Dushani maintains the phenomenon, she may use the skills of her victim as if they were her own.

Rules: The psychonaut may use any abilities of the victim she desires, so long as she is not interrupted, does not release the victim, or the victim is not successful in a PSY + Self Mastery Skill with the Overload Value as Difficulty.

RESISTANCE

Only those of strong mind can resist the influences of the Dushani: every attempted influence can be resisted by PSY + Self Mastery Skill with the Overload Value as Difficulty. This roll must be made each combat round for as long as the Dushani maintains the phenomenon.

PEROMANCERS

THE PUPPET MASTERS

PEOPLE TAMER

The sense of smell is the most direct line to memory. It recognizes lovers and repudiates enemies. Pheromancers are masters of scent—their abilities can bind body and soul, balance masculine and feminine, and unite the individual with the group. Their medium is the air, their weapons sweet scents and awful stench. Their embassy is social identity and the understanding of the true ego. Their chakra is the heart.

Pheromancers are seducers and beguilers. They can control living beings through scents produced by their bodies. For them, mankind is a giant pulsating organism made up of communicating bodies, anguished by deadly but ultimately meaningless strife.

Pheromancers are social beings. They rule over colony building insects such as ants, wasps, and termites. Their Earth Chakra lies in the Souffrance Crater of Franka.

Dominant Attribute: CHA

KNOWN PHENOMENON

MASTER OF THE THIRD PLAGUE

Phenomenon Strength: 1

Ants, wasps, and termites build powerful nests for the Pheromancers out of their bodily secretions and chewed-up plant matter. The insects see them as gods, crawling across their clammy skin in order to receive new instructions from the pheromone glands that they then distribute to the rest of the colony. No other raptus has such a developed level of servitude with their plague.

Rules: The bodily developments of a Pheromancer are perfectly designed for control of her plague. She need not perform a Skill Roll to use them—every insect that a Pheromancer meets comes under her control without any resistance. Only the climate and surrounding environment determine the make-up and size of the swarm. Ants and termites are available at most times of the year in Franka, while the much more dangerous wasps appear first in the summer and disappear again in the fall (and even then they are only present in the warmer tracts of land in the south).

Swarms of wasps, potentially dangerous to man, have been noted along the Mediterranean coast, and there have even been reports that these well-fortified insects guard large Pheromancer nests. These reports, however, are the exception. No known Pheromancer is currently believed to have control over such a large and dangerous swarm.

UNITY

Phenomenon Strength: 4

Pheromancers disrupt human personality and aggression. Their pheromones dock with the mind of humans and dangle happiness and relaxation before them. They can take the rage from aggressors and turn it in their favor. Someone who wants to kill the Pheromancer one minute will be licking her boots the next.

Rules: Deep happiness befalls anyone without the will or luck to have successfully ignored the sweet scent of a Pheromancer. Use a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll with the Overload Value as Difficulty to determine if the victim can resist the intense pull of the Pheromancer's scent glands.

Anyone who is seduced by the Pheromancer will view her as a god and lay down their weapons against her. Every hour, the opportunity exists to free one's self through a new Skill Roll.

ACID

Phenomenon Strength: 6

Pheromancers can shoot a stream of formic acid from the glands on their body, blinding their victim for several seconds.

Rules: The stream of colorless but pungent formic acid has a base range of four meters; each extra meter to the target increases the Difficulty for the phenomenon's PSY + Raptus Skill Roll. If the roll is successful, the target is struck and temporarily blinded unless they are wearing a gas mask, goggles, or visor of some kind. This blinding inflicts a Difficulty modifier of 1 to all of the character's actions that rely on vision, +1 per point of overload. This disadvantage is erased only when the victim has time to wash out her eyes.

FEAR

Phenomenon Strength: 6

No one dares to approach the Pheromancer, lest they be struck with bone-chilling fear.

Rules: The pheromones released by the Pheromancer activate the flight instinct in humans and animals. Unless the victim succeeds in a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll with the Overload Value as Difficulty, she falls into a panic and is unable to think of anything other than fleeing. This feeling of helplessness and fear gives way only after the victim reaches a distance of twenty paces away from the Pheromancer.

TASTING FEAR

Phenomenon Strength: 8

The Pheromancer can track her opponents at close range, wherever they may go, so long as they exude bodily fluids of any sort. Escape is impossible.

Rules: People sweat. In the process, they leave behind invisible hormone traces that Pheromancers can taste and see with their specialized senses. With this phenomenon, the Pheromancer focuses her perception on human pheromones and hormones. For every day that the trace is old, the psychonaut needs one overload point. If unsuccessful, she will lose the trail.

BEE COLONY

Phenomenon Strength: 12

People flock to the Pheromancer, refreshing themselves on her secretions. They are powerless under her control. So long as they remain in the cloud of her pheromones, they will cater to her every whim. They will be her bodyguards, lovers, fighters, workers—and eventually drones!

Rules: The Pheromancer can litter the domain she inhabits with numerous pheromone “markers.” People who wander through these invisible chemical clouds disturb it, dragging it with them through the entire area. From the eyes of the Pheromancer, a net of pheromone trails is established in which she captures her prey. Every person who comes into contact with the pheromones will fall under her command unless they are successful in a PSY + Self Mastery Skill Roll with the Overload Value as Difficulty. The psychonaut cannot make her folk dance like puppets, but she can suppress the aggressive thoughts of her victims and replace them with a will to work for their new master and colony.

Gas masks do not offer protection from the chemicals of the Pheromancer as they are absorbed through the skin. Only an impermeable suit with its own oxygen supply can offer a suitable defense. Once under the spell of the Pheromancer, a daily Skill Roll is required to free one's self—and even if successful, one must quickly leave the area or risk falling back under her control.

PARAGNOSTIK

THE SEEING EYE

AT THE EDGE OF TIME

Seeing is believing. The Paragnostiks are the masters of vision and light and the archetypal identity of the self—that which is reflected in the mirror. Their chakra lies behind the forehead, in the location of the third eye. They are seers of truth.

Paragnostiks can see the future by way of their powers of precognition. They are clairvoyants and have the ability to project themselves mentally into the past. They are in constant danger of losing themselves in their dreams.

Paragnostiks control the oldest of all beings: mussels, starfish, sea urchins, anemones, and trilobites. Their homeland is in the middle of the war-torn region of Hybrispania.

Dominant Attribute: PSY, always 10

KNOWN PHENOMENON

MASTER OF THE FOURTH PLAGUE

Phenomenon Strength: 1

There are countless horror stories about the spiders of the Biokinetiks abducting a poor villager and dragging them out to the spore beasts. In the evening at the campfire, stories are told about the Psychokinetiks' tapeworms' preference for the flesh of young virgins or of the Frankish ant swarms that steal the supplies of entire villages. No one speaks of the Paragnostik plague, for it lies hidden out of sight in the darkness of the sea. Only when a Paragnostik sets the seas in motion, with a wave of a finger, do they reveal themselves. Normally these mussels, starfish, sea urchins, anemones, and trilobites are harmless. However, once a Paragnostik summons them, they might swarm the hull of a ship or block its propeller, causing great danger to any seafarers. No one has yet attributed these odd catastrophes to the Paragnostiks. Instead, not knowing better, sailors look to other explanations for these unusual attacks.

Rules: Very little is known about the Paragnostik plague. It is surmised that there are giant coral cities in the sea to which the psychonauts return from time to time in order to deposit their vision of the future with the anemones, but these are just rumors. In fact, no more is known than that Paragnostiks can set their plague into motion in any body of water which they touch the surface of.

PROPHECYING

Phenomenon Strength: 4

Peeking at the future is a skill every Paragnostik shares—it is a world that is much more dear to them than this present one.

Rules: The psychonaut can travel back and forth in time as easily as walking across a room. While the view into the past is clear and bright, the future disappears quickly into a dark swirl of possibilities. Many strands, each a different outcome, can quickly fan out before her like the roots of a tree, clouding her vision.

The gamemaster should see prophesying as a tool that can be used to give meaningful hints to players or to explain past events in greater detail.

SEEKER

Phenomenon Strength: 6

The Paragnostik can release a trilobite upon which this phenomenon has been used in order to seek out a person near a coast or riverbed. The psychonaut will then know instantly where that person is to be found.

Rules: As a master of the fourth plague, it only takes a few hours at most to summon a trilobite to the shore. The Paragnostik

will then take it, visualize the person sought, and set the animal back into the water. The seeker will search for one day plus one day per overload point. A single seeker is seldom successful; therefore most Paragnostik's enlist several dozen creatures.

The gamemaster should, in determining the effectiveness of the search, remember that the trilobites do not need to see the person sought. When they are within roughly 50 meters of the person, the Paragnostik will sense that they have been successful and instantly know the person's exact location.

DREAMS

Phenomenon Strength: 8

In their dreams, Paragnostiks return to their Earth Chakra, becoming one with their brethren. Thoughts and knowledge are exchanged freely, their individuality momentarily erased. Intensive dreamers have the knowledge of many and can draw upon an extremely wide array of skills—skills that they may never have learned before.

Rules: A Paragnostik can call up any chosen skill from the hive mind through these dreams, but will lose the ability the following night. The day in between she may use it freely at a level of 1 plus 1 per 2 overload points.

SECRET

Phenomenon Strength: 10

Paragnostiks use mussels to free themselves from some of their endless dream knowledge. They allow a strange netting to grow inside the mussel and deposit a portion of their consciousness into it. Should they one day break the mussel open, the knowledge will stream back into their memory.

Rules: The idea that opening a simple mussel could gift a person with secret knowledge has inspired numerous legends and myths. It has even encouraged some to place a large stack of chronicrods on the table for just such a dream mussel. As yet, no one has successfully retrieved the stored information from the mysterious netting inside.

BEYOND TIME

Phenomenon Strength: 13

For Paragnostiks, time passes slowly. Their minds move quickly, while their bodies remain under the normal physical constraints of reality. To the psychonauts, then, their bodies seem to move with agonizing slowness. Despite this, they have much more time to react. They can see that an opponent is preparing a blow or that a marksman is aiming their way with ample time, from their perspective, to raise an arm in defense or duck out of the way.

Rules: Any attacks made against the Paragnostik face a Difficulty modifier of 1, plus 1 for each overload point, for the duration of the battle. This defensive positioning does impact the Paragnostik's own attacks or actions.

PSYCHOKINETIKS

RULERS OF THE ELEMENTS

WILL IS POWER

Fire is motion. It is the rushing dance of molecules. Psychokinetics are the masters of fire, the ego, and the conception of the self. They believe in power, will, and self-sufficiency. Energy moves the world, enables great works, and makes spontaneity possible. Their goal is not to rule over others, but rather to harness the power within.

Most Psychokinetics possess a strong will and are immune to dependencies and addictions—aside from the burning belief in their raptus. It is hardly a wonder that they mostly keep to themselves.

Psychokinetics use their psychic powers to create and control force fields. They can also bestow superhuman strength, stamina, and speed on themselves and others by releasing the energy stored in their fire chakra, located in the solar plexus.

Psychokinetics rule over various parasites that drain energy from their hosts: fleas, mosquitoes, leeches, bedbugs, and tapeworms. Their Earth Chakra lies in the southern mountains of Purgare.

Dominant Attribute: Agility (AGI)

KNOWN PHENOMENON

MASTER OF THE FIFTH PLAGUE

Phenomenon Strength: 1

The swarm of the Psychokinetiks is truly hideous. It bites its way into man and beast, feasting on its victim until it falls off, full and content. The psychonaut gathers up those insects that have returned to her—and with them the life energy they had stolen. For this reason, Psychokinetiks often live in the proximity of villages where they can contaminate the drinking water with tapeworm eggs or leave fleas in the blankets. Like leeches, they attach themselves to these little towns and suck them dry.

Rules: The Psychokinetik can send forth her plague in order to regenerate herself more quickly. In the proximity of a small village of at least five people, she can heal trauma wounds twice as quickly as normal. If she is able to send her plague forth against a larger community, she can regenerate one trauma wound per day.

FATA MORGANA

Phenomenon Strength: 5

A Psychokinetik can distort the space around them, creating mirrors of air that confuse her opponents. Those most adept at this skill may appear doubled to their opponents or even seem to disappear altogether.

Rules: Attacks made against the Psychokinetik face a Difficulty modifier of 1, plus 1 for each overload point, for that combat round only.

FREEFLOW

Phenomenon Strength: 7

The Psychokinetik unloads her stored energy into organs and limbs, raising her capabilities to a superhuman level.

Rules: All of the psychonaut's combat abilities are raised by one point for the duration of the battle, plus one per overload point. In the process, however, she loses an equal amount of Vitality.

CRITICAL MASS

Phenomenon Strength: 9

A Psychokinetik can send energy from her solar plexus into the body of an enemy, hoping to overload the victim's system. This phenomenon is perceived as a strong shock.

Rules: The psychonaut pounds her fist against the chest of her target (requiring an attack roll using AGI + Unarmed Combat). This attack has a Damage Rating of (1 + Overload Value) (6). The damage points determined by this roll do not, however, cause any flesh or trauma wounds. Instead, they increase the opponent's Vitality! If Vitality increases beyond the maximum number allowed (BOD + Stamina) as a result, the victim immediately collapses with cramps and fever. They will be trapped in this state for several hours.

RAGE EQUALIZATION

Phenomenon Strength: 10

The harder the blow landed upon the Psychokinetik, the harder the returned blow will be.

Rules: Every damage point taken by the psychonaut is also added as increased damage potential on her next melee attack. This phenomenon may not be overloaded.

SHOCK WAVE

Phenomenon Strength: 13

The Psychokinetik channels her energy, sending it from the solar plexus through the arms and into the hands. A clap then releases it in a directed shockwave that tears the eardrums of its victim, knocks them to the ground, and brings their internal organs to the point of explosion.

Rules: The shockwave spreads outwardly from the psychonaut in a cone shape. At the origin it deals (1 + Overload Value) (6) damage to each of a victim's body zones. From this point outward, it loses strength at a rate of 1 point of damage potential per meter. The width of the cone is determined by the psychonaut.

CONSUMING RAPTUS

Psychokinetiks are consumed by their bodily energies—the psychonaut burns from the inside when she activates her phenomena. Where the other psychonauts can strengthen their phenomena freely through overloading, Psychokinetiks must spend Vitality for each overload point (overloading still raises the Difficulty as normal). The Vitality of Psychokinetiks, however, is much higher, equalling BOD + PSY + Stamina + Raptus. No one is as unpredictable or has more energy than a Psychokinetik.

SIGHTINGS

The aforementioned phenomena are only a small window into the rich tapestry of the Primer. Digging through the archives of the Spitalians, one discovers a huge variety of truly strange reports and sightings that seem to point at a larger world of undocumented phenomena:

- A Spitalian patrol, while searching for Apocalyptic smugglers in the root forests of Pollen, came across a Biokinetik with bony tumors extending from his flesh. From the forearms, just behind the wrists, long spurs extended that he used quite effectively in the ensuing battle.
- A squad of Anabaptist orgiasts stormed a Pheromancer's nest in the proximity of Bassham. The survivors reported that the monster, which they had finally come across in the center of the winding structure, had a row of fist-sized glands running down his back. Upon being discovered, he bent himself forward, the skin on his back becoming stiff and translucent, until finally the glands burst open and clouded the entire enclosed area in spores. The entire squad was heavily infected, while the psychonaut fled. Only several days later was he finally apprehended and executed.

SPORE VARIATIONS

Homo degeneration and countless other beings, like insects, arachnids, and trilobites, are the preferred hosts of the Earth Chakras. Their numbers are counted in legions, so losing one individual or even an entire army is both planned and unavoidable. Will it be humans that are found unsuitable? Or, against all expectations, will it be the insects and their crushing swarms? The ways of the Earth Chakras are fathomless. Only time will tell upon which leg the collective must ultimately stand. The hive minds of the mother spore fields never stop experimenting.

Every being born in the vicinity of a spore field might be the next successful vehicle for the Primer. The Foulness is not selective and will infest any creature—gendo, giant wolf, pig, marten, rat, or horse. If they exhibit the particular characteristics of an Earth Chakra, they are considered a success. The ingenuity of the Primer produces some very colorful flowers:

- In the outer regions of the Justitian Protectorate, hairless, cat-sized rats have been observed. Upon closer inspection, they appeared to be cursed with unusual physical

mutations: both the hind and front legs were unusually long. The people of the region have dubbed them “ashen rats,” though they have nothing in common with the bunker inhabitants of the same name.

- Brilliant red crabs, the size of a young gendo, have made the northern snow-covered tributaries of the Rain River their home. Apparently, they are completely resistant to the extreme cold. Two Spitalians are stationed to observe them and study their activities. According to the latest reports, the crabs are slowly wandering south along the ancient path of the river.
- Gendos in the vicinity of Franka seem to have taken up a symbiotic relationship with a wasp species. The dog's bodies seem to serve as a breeding ground for the insects, yet they do not appear to be bothered by the larvae that infest them. Believe it or not, in return, the wasps protect the gendos, swarming themselves upon their enemies.

DISCORDANCE VARIATIONS

Years ago the Discordance threatened the finely spun web of the Earth Chakras nearly to the point of collapse. Countless spore fields along the Mediterranean were caught in a deadly genetic feedback loop. Sick fields were expelled from the collective by the Earth Chakras, but remained in contact with each other. They pumped bizarre genetic information into the environment, creating monstrosities that could have come from alien worlds.

Since then, this discordant network of sick spore fields has produced mutants not quite suitable for life, most of which survive only for seconds or a few days before succumbing to the hostile atmosphere or genetic illnesses. In this Discordance Zone, anything seems possible—very little of which one would care to meet.

DISCORDANT SPORE FIELDS

The discordant spore fields are very particular, wild regions. The fist-sized spore buds are almost unnoticeable, hidden amongst the wild vegetation. Only the very full buds are easily distinguishable, due to their reddish color. Every ten days, they empty themselves in an explosion, covering a wide area with their highly infectious freight.

In the center of the spore field one will find the breeders—massive birthing sacks, buried half way into the ground. Inside, grotesque genetic information is imprinted on pure virgin

biomass and then reared in the pulsating, warm, and humid climate in order to produce an abnormality that almost certainly dies after being born.

Discordant fields lack the support of insect swarms, which generally help carry spores out into the world while simultaneously returning with nourishment. The fields would have starved, had they not found an alternate solution. Instead, they create carnivorous plants that lure unwitting creatures using attractive colors and scents. Insects and small mammals wander, seemingly against their will, into the enticing opened funnels. The nutrients are then dispersed to the whole spore field.

DISCORDANT RESONANCE

Even for psychonauts, the discordant spore fields present an immense danger. Spore infestation works as a catalyst for the sick impulses of the fields. Like an all-consuming firestorm, they rage through the head of the infected psychonaut, corrupting their mind and soul and turning them

into rage-fueled killing machines. Only through a complete disinfection can psychonauts fight off and defeat this foreign, chaotic influence.

MEMBRANE BEINGS

In the vicinity of the Discordance, several so-called “membrane beings” have been sighted. They float at approximately thirty to one hundred meters, propelled by the wind. They have no discernable body or visible sensory organs. They consist of semi-transparent membranes that are layered, slat-like, on top of one another, all flowing together and meeting in a thick point on one side of the being.

These creatures are often carried several kilometers inland before they die. The disintegration begins in the air; the membranes begin to separate at the edges, eventually ripping apart. Once on the ground, the remains of these beings are barely distinguishable from the dry steppe grass.

CHILDREN OF HELL

THE CZAR

.....sleeeeeeping.....eeeeeating.....groooowing.....

EIDOLON

He is the voice—the voice that created the world, keeps it, and will eventually destroy it. He is Eidolon, the high self of the Dushani, an enigma beyond even the understanding of his brethren. His homeland is the concrete monoliths of Ljubljana. Someday, Triglaw will accept the song of Eidolon, and free the life held for centuries in his rotten heart. The final confrontation is inevitable. Ljubljana will be shaken to the ground.

MACHIAWEN

He is a giant among the Pheromancers, both in stature and size. His domain in Franka is a palace of peace; clay chimneys tower high into the sky, billowing gasses and pheromones. People are no more than drones in his insect city—bereft of mind and soul.

The lustful mind of Machiawen twists the bodies of his servants, forcing them to copulate in a never-ending orgy. The only ones spared from this scourge are the Apocalyptiks of the Solarwind tribe. They are his lifeguards, his ever-reaching arm.

ENIGMA

She sees the future, she sees the past. But in the present, she is helpless. The Tribals of old Portugal see her as a god and surround her mountain temple, keeping her alive. Her sanctum, however, they cannot reach. It is a fortress of coral and fossilized ancient beings. Supposedly, stored in the deep black waters are the memories of tomorrow.

CORONA

Fist-sized rocks and slivers rise from the ground, dancing in a sedate flight around Corona. Then they accelerate. Ever more quickly, dust is driven into the air, becoming a dirty whirlwind that roars, cuts through her enemies, and listens only to her command. She refracts the light, commands the matter, and it forms itself. For many years, she has incubated her abilities near the Purgare Earth Chakra, but now the psychonaut is moving out, following the voice of the collective. She seeks her destiny in the north.

PHASE BEAST

The Discordance generates many strange beings. Most don't exist long enough to see both the sunrise and sunset of the same day.

The phase beast recognizes the flaming sphere overhead, but it looks so different from how the monster remembers it. Perhaps it was due to the beast absorbing the wrong meat. But was this not exactly what kept it alive?

CHAPTER 11

TELLING

THE STORY

AT THE END OF THE WORLD

AND I WILL SHOW YOU SOMETHING
DIFFERENT FROM EITHER
YOUR SHADOW AT MORNING
OR YOUR SHADOW AT
EVENING RISING TO MEET YOU;
I WILL SHOW YOU FEAR
IN A HANDFUL OF DUST.
[T.S. ELIOT]

AT THE BEGINNING

Congratulations! You have chosen to leave the safety of the everyday behind, to journey several centuries into the future and resurrect what remains of mankind—an imposing task, but not impossible. Though, when taken as a whole, the source material contained within these pages is hard to digest, don't be dissuaded. The best advice is to simply take it a step at a time!

Likely, you have already read one roleplaying rulebook or another and view this gamemaster chapter as a necessary evil. It is clear to you that the role of gamemaster, like directing, dramatic composition, or writing, can only be learned only partly through books. What we can offer you is twenty years of experience and a ton of tricks to bring the best out of you, your players, and this game.

In case you have never led a roleplaying game: it doesn't matter. Naturally it won't be easy at first and you will make mistakes, but don't let it ruffle your feathers. As long as you and your players are having fun, you are on the correct path.

BRICOLAGE: THE ART OF BUILDING A CAMPAIGN

There is a simple trick to making the role of gamemaster in *Degeneration* easy: It is called bricolage, or tinkering. The term comes from the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and describes a form of “wild thinking:” the direct, sinful, and unmitigated interaction with the world, without the detour of abstract or theoretical mentalities; therewith comes the ability

to create a whole from unconnected pieces that is more than the sum of them. With this term, Levi-Strauss was describing the thought process of so-called “primitive” cultures and the creation of mythology—and this makes it ideal for a roleplaying game such as *Degeneration* in which the laws and thought processes of our civilization have regressed to a more “primitive” form and where new myths and heroes must arise.

When playing *Degeneration*, free yourself from abstract terms and concentrate on that which can be experienced—the visual, the tangible. Though the apocalyptic future of the game is fictional, that is not to say one shouldn't be able to sense it as though it were real. Quite the opposite, in fact! Bricolage, meaning: take that which you know, have experienced yourself and can describe, mix it with your ideas, and build it into your own world.

The art of bricolage and this wild thinking are your main tools for building a campaign for *Degeneration*—the framework around which your game will revolve. Along with the helpful hints presented in this chapter, you will have everything necessary to easily get busy and use the collective creative energy of your players to lead an unforgettable and thrilling evening of play.

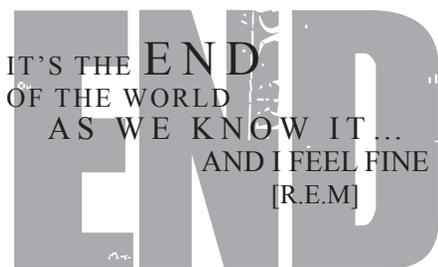
THE END OF A WORLD— AND A NEW BEGINNING

Degeneration deals with themes such as loss, the endless battle for survival, and clinging stubbornly to hope. Many residents of these end-days curse their very existence and mourn for a happier past: a time from which only legends and rumors have

survived. As gamemaster, you have it easier: the time of the ancients lies before you—make the best of it.

Look around you—in your city, region, or street: how much of what you know will still remain in 500 years, present in the hearts and minds of people? How much will they still understand? Which things will have become mysteries—god-like, occult, and not understandable?

Imagine a primitive, animated folk, who call themselves the "Hand Dies." Their shaman try, with the help of handy, sometimes blinking devices, to contact the gods and spirits. Sometimes this works, sometimes not, but only the old and wise can decipher the lights and tones that emanate from these unusual apparatus. You have by now, of course, figured out that we are talking about handies (cell phones in German lingo). Think about what you'd like to save from our world for the world of *Degeneration*, and what effects the centuries will have had on them.



DO IT YOURSELF END TIMES

Before you and your players begin to create characters and begin to play, we suggest you create an idea list containing possible objects, themes, persons, and experiences that you would like to use in the game. Don't forget to think of your players and what their interests might be or be afraid to draw inspiration from films, books, or comics. Here is an example of a possible idea list:

- Land scarcity
- Hunger
- Brutal slave traders
- Heavily fortified city states
- Mysterious strangers
- Bizarre mutations
- Xenophobia
- Border regions
- Creeping madness
- Hope
- Religious fanaticism
- Ongoing warfare
- Spies
- Opulent wealth in the face of bitter poverty

YOU'D LIKE TO START RIGHT AWAY?

No problem. In case you don't have the time or energy to create your own campaign, there are two possibilities. You could begin right away using the adventure, *Sought, Found, Killed*, in the following chapter. Simply adapt the relevant elements to fit your group of players. There is certainly enough material there for several evenings of game play.

CHOOSING YOUR SETTING

Now that you have some themes, you should decide how they apply themselves in the world of *Degeneration*. The first step is to choose a setting that fits the adventures you want your players to have. Pick somewhere that you are drawn to or that peaks your interest and that you think evokes the concepts you have chosen. For example, the first point would fit very well with the wastelands of Pollen, "ongoing warfare" to the Adriatic Sea, or the "brutal slave traders" to Africa.

Let's assume you choose the wastelands of Pollen for your game. There you have the icy city of Danzig, with its heavy Spitalian presence, and the free city of Breslau, which has always distanced itself from the influence of the cults. An open conflict could begin between these two cities at any time—especially if Danzig's Medics lose their fight against the encroaching Arctic Circle and thus choose to claim Breslau as their new base for operations.

Perhaps this doesn't do anything for you. No problem, simply make up a new settlement—for example, an eternal oasis led by an Apocalyptik exiled from her flock. Made bitter by the endless woe of the Pollener, and driven by the self-destructive passions of her clan, she has taken control of this oasis with a number of her followers. These people are her new family now. She will attempt to protect them with any and all means at her disposal. Meanwhile, other nomadic tribes lurk, waiting for their opportunity. As a result, perhaps the Apocalyptik has entered into an unholy pact with a burn-dependant Spitalian. This Medic has been infecting gendos with an ancient, long-thought overcome illness and her henchmen have caged the animals in poorly guarded kennels at the edges of the oasis. Will the nomads steal the animals for food and in their feast infect themselves? Where did the Spitalian find those small ampules she uses on the gendos and which bear ancient-looking labels? The preservists of Danzig would be rather interested in them ...

A good approach would be to take a sheet of paper and write down all the possible centers of power: the occupants of the oasis, the thieving nomads, eventually the preservists of Danzig, or even possibly the original flock of the Apocalyptik from which she was exiled. Then use arrows to help illustrate the relationships between these groups. Take note: these groups need not just be enemies.

At this point, it's not necessary to figure out all the details. A rough overview will suffice. What is far more important is to make a mental picture of the setting you've chosen: Lean back and try to imagine fitting images for these places:

A figure with long hair, unshaven, wearing a Spitalian outfit patched-up with tape, staggers over the snow-covered plains toward a group of hills. She looks suspiciously about, searching the white horizon for little black dots. No pursuers in sight. Once at the hills, she kneels and, brushing the snow aside, uncovers a thick spider web. With both hands she reaches in and destroys the web. Frightened spiders are brushed aside thanklessly as she descends into the now unobstructed hole. In the darkness, web-covered wrecks wait on her—the Spitalian cross flaunted upon the rusty gates.

A woman kneels upon a small field, digging in the darkened earth with bare hands. Over twenty men and women in heavy fur coats surround her, staring earnestly. A small child cries. The woman has uncovered a tuber and reaches for it. Rotten. She lets it fall, looking resigned. The gathered crowd glances at one another and then disperses.

The scream of the giant is deafening. The Pollener have placed chains around his front legs and over his neck. In a rage, the beast tries to stand, his trunk lashing against the chains, tusks first raised menacingly in the air, then suddenly slammed into the ground—the creature handlers having pulled him down. Quickly the chains are slung around massive pegs and secured.

Silently the snow flurries fall from the sky in a dance, coming to rest on small, dark green leaves. A forest—in the middle of the dead wastelands of Pollen. The trees are just barely tall as a man, but already covered by thick layers of leaves as though they knew their time was short. Between their smooth trunks grows shrubbery, whose red berries stand in sharp contrast to the endless gray and white of the surrounding landscape. This green island, adrift in its barren sea, is jealously surrounded by rusty carts, upon which Tribals armed with spears sit.

Gray, dead buildings press against the streets of Danzig, the snow piled high on all. Not a footprint disturbs this perfect white coat. Large portions of the city are devoid of people, as many residents fled years ago from the cold. Five fur-covered residents trample from house to house, knocking down doors, dismantling cabinets and beds. The wood will later be dragged to their camp.

Simply write down quickly what comes to mind about your ideas. This will make it easier to later describe scenes in these regions while playing the game. The more details you can have prepared, the more real and multidimensional the places will seem to your players.

CONFLICTS AND HOOKS

Now, you have loosely defined the overall situation and setting for your campaign. Missing still is a conflict that sets the situation in motion and hooks which pull the players into the action.

Most conflicts in *Degeneration* are physical or social in nature: Man is pitted against nature and other groups are rivals for the scarce resources of the world. Beyond this, several cultures are exceptionally aggressive towards strangers. However, psychological and philosophic conflicts exist as well in these post-Eschaton times. People lose themselves to drugs such as burn, spore infection, or other poisons, or are driven to madness through extreme situations and stresses. Also, the power of new messiahs in such uncertain times is a rich cache of material for conflict scenarios.

Again, remember to think of your players: If the real players are uninterested in the conflict you are preparing, their player characters will be no more interested. However, if you know, for example, that two or three players have a personal grievance with religious zealots, you could use this for the game and create a powerful religious group against which the player characters will gladly enter into conflict.

DESTROY THAT WHICH DESTROYS YOU

In case it doesn't interest you to play in an entirely made-up world, we suggest you set your game in your hometown, favorite city, or place that you have visited. Take a map of that place, and compare it with historical maps—in the span of only a few hundred years the countenance of a city changes entirely, yet many buildings and landmark are still very recognizable.

Armed with this knowledge, destroy your city. 500 years is a long time—decide how much shall remain. In the process, keep an eye on the geography of the region. Does your chosen city lie by a river or sea? What effect would it have if the waters rose beyond their current shores? How accessible would the city remain? Were it hard to reach, would it become a mere shadow of itself, or might it grow quickly as a highly defensible bastion? Which cults might be interested in securing it? Are there spore fields in the area? Psychonauts?

Here, the input and creativity of your players can be put to great use—they are as tied to the place as you. One possibility would be to let each player create a portion of the city, perhaps even from where their character originates: as gamemaster you then simply combine these areas into the whole.

A side note: *Degeneration* is a game, not a post-apocalyptic geopolitical simulation. Orient yourself on historical and geographic features, but don't feel slavishly tied to them. If something seems exciting or might have a shocking consequences, then go for it. What would "Planet of the Apes" have been without the Statue of Liberty poking through the sand?

HOLD TIGHT
WAIT TILL THE PARTY'S OVER
HOLD TIGHT
WE'RE IN FOR NASTY WEATHER
THERE HAS GOT TO BE A WAY
BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

[TALKING HEADS]

CONFLICT POTENTIAL

The world of *Degenesis* is swimming in conflicts. While you may have an idea that doesn't use an existing conflict, these well-established and often ancient sources of tension can be used to drive the action in your game. Several that you might use are listed below.

HOMO SAPIENS vs. HOMO SAPIENS

Sadly, many people don't like living peacefully. A reason for altercation is quickly found: scams, unrequited passion, or the well-known, oh-so-human, greed—particularly when people have very little; a little corner of riches can stir up a lot. And don't forget this other age-old theme: revenge. Those who own little more than their honor will protect it, even if it might spell their doom.

HOMO SAPIENS vs. HOMO DEGENESIS

The psychonauts threaten to knock humans off the evolutionary ladder, but all is not yet lost. The Spitalians fight vigorously on all fronts, and the Anabaptists do the same. Will it be enough to send this strange breed back to the hell from which they sprang?

CULTURE vs. CULTURE

Mistrust and sometimes even open hatred exists between the different peoples of Europe and Africa. Africa threatens Hybrispania and Balkhan; the Spitalians keep a close eye on the broder between Borca and Franka. In the Adriatic lowlands, the Purgar and Balkhani have dug themselves in and eagerly await a chance to slit the throats of any rivals.

CULT vs. CULTURE

Ideas can become dangerous when they are imposed upon others through the use of force. The Spitalians support the Anabaptists of Purgare in order to gain a bridgehead in Balkhan. Neolibyan Scappers comb the wastelands searching for old technology. The Anabaptists swarm upon Borca to convert non-believers and strengthen the might of Domstadt, while the Jehammadans attempt to do the same in Hybrispania.

CULT vs. CULT

Power is a rare commodity—and easily lost to another organization. The groups with power in *Degenesis* don't often openly fight, but conflicts are inherent nonetheless. The Marshals of Justitian, at the behest of the Chroniclers, oppose the Neolybian Scrapper gangs who travel through their lands. The Anabaptists often attack the Apocalyptiks for undermining the morals of society. The Chroniclers and the Scappers have a pact with one another to drive the Tribals from their hunting grounds so as to reach the holy cities in which they surmise further bunkers and depots of the ancients to be.

CONCEPT vs. CULT

The one and the many: not everyone is happy in a large family. The rigid structures of the end-times belief systems produce more than enough defectors. Many a Spitalian questions the regulations of her colleagues and second guesses the machinations of her superiors. How does it look for the Tribals who has lost her belief in the traditions of her folk and seeks her happiness in a foreign civilization?. Even a Scrapper can get tired of the nomadic lifestyle and ask herself if her place might not be better in the chief's house.

CULT vs. MARAUDER

Who really pulls the strings? Many organizations, cults, and cultures fight for supremacy, but are they all perhaps just playthings of the mysterious Marauders. For centuries, these human gods have fought one another. Who can say for sure they aren't simply a piece in their greater plan.

STASIS vs. EVOLUTION

Who shall inherit the Earth? Will the peoples of Europe and Africa develop into worthy heirs to the ancients, or are they simply the deplorable remains of a species whose time has past? Many end-times cultures fear development and change and as so limit freedom as a reward for greater security.

Almost everywhere in this shattered Europe, the psychonauts are hunted, but is it not they who have reached another level in evolution? The past or the future—which destiny will mankind choose?

CIVILIZATION vs. BARBARITY

Is advancement really only steps in the dark? Are the technological wonders of the past really superior to the wild constructions of the Scappers or the spore poison-tipped weapons of the Tribals?

In *Degenesis*, civilization has not yet won, it is only one alternative to many, and perhaps not even the best one. Might the solution to the problems of the post-Eschaton time be found not in the data centers of the Chroniclers, but rather than societies and settlements of the survivors themselves? Their unruly life force could be the fuel to set the world back into motion.

THE INDIVIDUAL vs. THE ENVIRONMENT

Not every danger comes from man. A harsh winter, a drought, or a storm could bring ruin and make years of development for naught.

This is just the beginning: The dust buries the last remnants of the ancients, the pheromone-soaked air of Franka brings bizarre lusts to the surface, and the unrestrained digging of the Scappers and Chroniclers releases entropic nanites, turning the landscape into a surreal hell. Spore fields transform earthly flora and fauna into nightmarish plants and horrific beasts.

Even without the influence of the Primer, the wild can be deadly. Bears, mountain lions, wolves, or mammoths can bring a quick end to unwary travelers.

ENVIRONMENT vs. PRIMER

Uncontrollably, the Foulness spreads. Spore beasts wander the wild. New spore fields blanket the countryside. Millions of infested insects scour the land, gathering in tunnels beneath settlements, ready to absolve mankind from its place on the evolutionary ladder. Even people, gendos, and oxen serve as the raw materials for the experiment-friendly Primer and are mutated into the will-free tools of the Earth Chakras.

STREAM vs. PRIMER

Intelligence is not solely the privilege of man. The great plan of the Primer finds its opposition in the singular manifestations of the 2¹⁶ phenomenon.

The chroniclers are on the trail of the Stream and are working at reactivating it. Will access to the databases of the ancients herald a new age and return mankind to the throne of creation? Will humans reign over a horde of AMSUMOs and root out the cancer of the Foulness? Or will the Stream turn against its creators?

And what is the Primer? Is it just a program made from amino acids that has poisoned the atmosphere—or is it a form of accelerated evolution, willing and ready to include humans as an equal partner in the Garden of Eden? Perhaps the Primer is the cure and mankind the disease that must be isolated and not allowed to infect other systems?

CHARACTER vs. DRUG ADDICTION

In a world with no future, intoxication offers release: The flight into the artificial paradise of burn removes the burden of existence from the shoulders of its users and helps them come to terms with the world.

Many cultures of *Degenesis* have made their peace with the drug and its effects—the demand and profits are too great. Who is to say what is poison and what is medicine?

Others seek their salvation in responsibility, in reaching self made goals. There is no way out of this world, only further into it. Burn alienates people and replaces connections necessary for life with a tragic feeling of mental enlightenment. True knowledge is not to be found in the spores, however, it will only be found when people make the choice to simply deal with it.

ARTIFACTS vs. AVARICE

Even the past brings death. The ruins are notorious for their dangers. What price is a player character willing to pay for the might of the ancients?

In the catacombs of the Ashen, weapons and machines can be found, watched over by security mechanisms, which may have just recently been reactivated by the Awakened.

SHOW, DON'T TELL

With the help of pictures, you can firmly frame your campaign: A theme, such as “freedom,” is much more effectively illustrated in this way and thus far more subtly integrated into a story. When something is seen, it is easier to imagine and carries a far greater emotional impact.

Find images or pieces of art that convey the theme you want your players to embrace. If you can't find something, use evocative words to paint the picture for them in their mind's eye. Take, for example, each of the following and how they evoke a scene.

- Herds of hungry children sent by the Apocalyptiks into the spore fields to harvest burn buds.
- Pollener Tribals sit peacefully around a campfire, while the oldest tells a hunting story.
- Two rag-covered figures, huddled together, crossing a seemingly endless desert of ice.
- Two preservists in full armor, upon their demonic black horses, trampling a woman in the snow.

A monologue by a non-player character explaining the theme would likely have a far weaker impact—unless you as gamemaster are endowed with an exceptional oratory faculty.

FROM CONFLICT TO CAMPAIGN

Once you have chosen and illustrated a central conflict for your campaign, all that remains is creating a plan to give your campaign its structure. We implore you to only loosely sketch this framework—your players will likely throw you many curveballs due to the freedoms the game provides them.

What you really do need is a beginning and end for your campaign ... and a name.

THE NAME

The name of the campaign is like a handrail you can support yourself on, that you reach for in the darkness to make it safely down the stairs. It is the main theme of your campaign. For example, were your campaign to focus on a region which was standing up against the tyranny of a group of rebel Marshals, a title such as “Broken Chains” would be appropriate. Your time will be well spent looking for a fitting name. Don't be afraid to do so. If you are stuck, perhaps flip through a program guide and use the titles of films as inspiration.

FROM THE BEGINNING ...

Starting anything is difficult. The first scene typically involves melding the individual player characters into a group. Give them a common goal and then leave them free reign to develop

the personality of their characters. At the beginning of a campaign, one should sniff around a bit. The relationships between the player characters will be developing themselves. Who is in competition with whom? Who gets along? Who distrusts the others? If you watch carefully, soon you will have a multitude of ideas to test the group with. Salt in the wound is often also salt in the soup, so to speak.

From there it can really begin. Once in the game, provide variations to the balance of power by introducing various powerful groups: The Spitalians, who are investigating reports of a spore infestation; a trade consortium of Scrappers who have, for unknown reasons, declared the land in which the players find themselves as their own; Chroniclers who have laid an eye upon one of the characters and decide to approach her; A group of Tribals; a gang of Anabaptists; etc. The further along that the campaign develops, the more active the involved groups will become—and, as a result, the more exciting the game will become for your players. Be careful not to make things too complicated, as your players will likely accomplish that for you. Simply pay attention to how the characters react when they discover they aren't the only ones working toward achieving their goal. Then decide how to make their worst fears become a reality.

UNTIL THE BITTER END

Every campaign must come to an end. However, you need not decide how this end will look until you have seen where the player's actions have taken the story. Are they victorious? Everyone loves a happy ending. You don't yet need to decide how this great story will end, but pay attention to what is possible through the evolution of the scenarios and what the players might desire. The proper climax can only be determined once all are emotionally involved in the story. Accept that your players will have an active role in the story and don't be surprised or disappointed when the campaign develops in a way you didn't intend. All that matters is that your players are engaged and enthused by the opportunities of their characters. If that is the case, you are on the right path.

STEPPING INTO THE CAMPAIGN: THE FIRST ADVENTURE

Having a campaign outlined in your mind is a good thing, but how do you really start? With an adventure, naturally—there your players will experience a story in which their characters can participate and interact.

The simplest method follows the format of a movie. There is an introduction, which serves to introduce the main protagonists, and typically three acts that serve to develop tension. The acts are comprised of individual scenes that take place in various settings. Each scene revolves around something, either serving to give the players a further insight into the plot, experience some conflict, or make friends and enemies. Finally, there is a conclusion that offers resolution of the tension created in the prior scenes and brings the plot to a close.

FROM IDEA TO PLOTLINE

Every good story begins with a simple idea. In most cases this idea should be able to be expressed in one sentence.

- A man seeks revenge for the murder of his family (Mad Max)
- A stranger helps save a group of people terrorized by bandits (Road Warrior)
- A group travels into a war-torn land to kill a renegade soldier (Apocalypse Now)

For the first adventure, a story is needed that draws the player characters into the campaign. For example, the beginning of a campaign whose prime theme is freedom could start with a lack of freedom:

- A slave caravan is set free by rebels.

This starting point has the advantage that it is a scenario in which all the characters are already acquainted and must work together to survive and achieve their freedom. With such a scenario it would be helpful to prepare your players for it already during the character creation phase. A character whose motivations and views are well fitted to the theme allows the player to involve herself in the action straight away, waking her interest immediately and providing guidance in creating a character that fits with your theme.

Not all players will immediately embrace your ideas and some may come to the table with another idea of what they want for their characters that does not match with your plot. Don't simply block an apparently unfitting character proposal. Instead, try to steer the creativity of the player in a slightly more compatible direction. Take care to include a few interesting "hooks" in the character's background. These can be returned to for future adventures.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ADVENTURE

Once you have an idea about the player characters and what the players are looking for from the game, you can create a first blueprint for your adventure. To do so, you must simply tie three things together effectively:

- A gripping story
- Interesting characters
- Exciting locations/settings

A thrilling story is the pulse, the plot line that supplies the excitement and action during an adventure. Without it your players have no pressure, working through individual scenes with no greater purpose. A good story revolves first and foremost around the players. If they are interested in it, their characters will be excited to actively participate.

At the heart of every adventure story there is at least one conflict—someone tries to achieve something and in the process encounters resistance. In many adventures the players are the protagonists (they explore a ruin complex of the ancients) who run into problems (a group of Tribals has declared the complex part of their domicile). In other stories, the characters are the problem (the characters were witnesses of a brutal attack and are now being hunted by the perpetrators).

Every story needs mighty heroes, and it is your players who will be these heroes. They are the stars of the show and as such they should each be allowed to shine. Make sure you plan adventures that allow your players to use their strengths and take center stage. Part of this is making sure that they are not overshadowed by your non-player characters. Part of it is also making sure that they face real challenges and adversaries that are equal to the characters. Don't just give them pushovers and cannon fodder, but give them opponents that bring out their best. Their enemies should have goals and motivations as well that bring them into conflict with the player characters and create tension that drives your plot.

Interesting characters bring life into your world. They ensure that things happen and that every action has a reaction. Without characters—other actors—the actions of the players would have little meaning, as there would be no one to praise or damn them. The non-player characters who appear in the game are more than decoration, they are the mirror that the actions of the player characters are held up to.

Stories and characters don't exist in a vacuum, they need a setting. Only with the description of a place do we first get a picture of it. This first impression stirs real emotions. It doesn't need an endlessly long description; the secret is in the details. It is sufficient to provide a sketch of a setting and to sprinkle it with a few selective hooks—the rest will be filled in much more effectively than any flowery description you might provide by the imagination of your players.

THE ARC OF YOUR ADVENTURE

Before you and your players begin the adventure, you should have a good idea of what should actually happen. As we mentioned earlier, approach the adventure like it is a movie or a book and make sure you have a part that introduces the conflict and plot, scenes that provide action to move it along, and finally a resolution that ties everything together and perhaps lays the seeds for the next session.

Each act is also subdivided further into scenes that make individual plotlines the subject of discussion. It is suggested that these scenes are tied to different settings—they can be better remembered and separated from each other this way. When the player characters leave one setting, so ends that scene and leads to the next one.

FASCINATING PLACES

The world of *Degeneration* is full of interesting places. To find them, however, one needs to know where to look. Read through the culture descriptions and think about the regional details. In Balkhan, we have abrupt hills, whipped by the wind and sought out by the Dushani. In Pollen, there are the rotting overgrown forests. Borca is defined by its broad fields of ruins, encroaching glaciers, and the Reaper's Blow. Hybrispania is a wild jungle full of fanatical fighters. Africa is slowly being consumed by the psychovors. Franka is drowning in its swamps, and Purgare is overrun by Psychokinetics in the west and a war-torn paradise in the east. Now think about how people or devices are changed by the extremes of these regions. How would a settlement built at the edge of the Reapers' Blow look? What if a Spitalian convoy were overrun and captured in the webs of the Biokinetics? Don't spare the superlatives. The market of Tripol is brighter and louder than any place of trade, the brooding grounds of the spore beast gigantic, and the greenery in the endless gray of Pollen no more than an oasis. And that Spitalian convoy ... it counts as missing for hundreds of years now.

THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL

Every setting must belong to a scene, but not every scene is firmly tied to one setting. Say you had a scene located in a cave in a backwoods region, but the the player characters are vehemently opposed to going into the cavern you had chosen for their big fight. No problem, simply move the scene into that dark forest the characters are trying to cross through. In this way, you are flexible in how you incorporate scenes, and your players will still feel as though they are acting freely. No one said that you must stick to your original pictures. Trying too hard to force the player characters into doing exactly what you have planned will end up making everyone unhappy as the players feel like they are not being allowed to play and you end up feeling as though you are fighting them every step of the way. Learn to improvise based on what they players want their characters to do, and be flexible in changing your scenes to accommodate their desires.

TO LIVE AND LET DIE

Players can be very attached to their characters, as they only have one. As gamemaster, you should be inclined to let your non-player characters be put to the sword. Part of their job is like that of the red shirts in *Star Trek*: to be sent out when it gets dangerous so as to make the real level of danger apparent to the players. This doesn't mean that they should all be soulless automatons with no personality, however. To make it work, the red shirts you have given a death sentence must be viewed sympathetically by the players, otherwise they may simply think the NPC "had it coming."

When a player becomes interested in one of your characters, it is time to flesh her out with further attributes. Now you can decide what the character has experienced, who she likes, and

who not. Don't be afraid to let one of these non-player characters be run by one of your players. As gamemaster, you will have plenty to do already and you should use opportunities to let your players share the load.

A MATTER OF THE CHARACTERS: THE CASTING

Having worked out the plot, you should turn your attention to the non-player characters and their relationships between each other and the player characters.

Three things make up an interesting figure: a name, an exciting description, and a background complete with motivations and goals. The name should invoke a feeling and sound authentic. An Ottoman should have a Turkish name; in the Protectorate, one would come upon a name that is a mixture of Nordic, German, Russian, or Polish. Tribals would choose short, powerful-sounding names that relate to their profession or standing, perhaps referring to ancient Greek mythology: Hufer or Ambass for an ironsmith, Trejba for a herder, Barabie or Allegra for a pretty girl.

The description is intended to make the character memorable to the players: Think of one or two special features (hook nose, balding, big hands), give this figure a notable way of speaking (laborious speech, rapid speech, a lisp, always looking for better sayings), and quickly notate what motivates this figure and what their goals are.

Here, you can pull from you favorite shows and movies to your hearts content. Don't be afraid of clichés, either, as they have the advantage of being memorable and easily understood. Cockiness, the urge for importance, dark secrets, forbidden love, and feelings of rage are all good starts for the characterization of a figure. Later, pay attention to and remember that people can change. What happens when someone achieves their goal—or fails in the end? What do their loyalties look like? Keep these possibilities in the back of your head—they can make for an interesting end to an adventure.

CHARACTER SKETCHES: LESS IS MORE

Character statistics and lavish descriptions are really only needed for a very small amount of non-player characters—start with a rough sketch, determine the culture, concept, cult, and list the most important values and principles. In the course of the game, you can elaborate the character at any time. In contrast to your players, you aren't tied to the rules set forth in the chapter on character creation. When you character needs a skill, simply give it to her. You should, however, develop a view to what is truly necessary. If all your non-player characters are vastly superior to your player's characters, then they will steal the show. Do you want to be one of those directors that destroys the film through their own vanity? You can let a character fear for her life or die while keeping a clear conscience—naturally, the player in question still has her own main character with which to enact her revenge.

SETTINGS AND SCENES

The plot is now set and you know who is involved. All that is missing now is the setting. Like the story and characters, this too should be highly interesting. Don't get caught up with boring stuff, rather jump to the spots where something is really happening. This possibility is where the greatest and most exciting difference between roleplaying and the real world can be found.

Think about movies. The main character goes about leaving the room. In the next scene she is getting out of a car at the airport. You shouldn't do it any differently. When one scene ends, ask your players what they would like to do now and then jump right into the next scene.

When your players want to travel from A to B, describe their departure and any interesting or dangerous situations along the way. Remember that not every situation needs to be threatening. Perhaps the player characters simply meet a fellow traveler on their journey with whom they can speak and interact—and who, in the next adventure, is revealed to be a highly dangerous adversary.

Longer journies should be divided into segments that are distinct from one another. For example, should the trip require crossing a river or mountain range, then it might be good to use these landmarks as settings.

You should inform your players, through a scene or description, when they are entering into a region controlled by a particular enclave, group, or organization. Give them an impression of who lives there and what they are like. Even the people of these end-days create border markings. If the characters can't decipher these signs, it is usually bad for them, but good for the game. Ignorance doesn't protect against penalty; your words describe a scene and it's up to the players to understand and react to what is going on around them

WELCOME TO YOUR IMAGINATION

You should know the setting as well as you know your own pant pocket—in other words, know exactly what you've put in there (and just like your pocket, the setting might also provide some interesting, unexpected discoveries). To begin, a list of important details is all that is necessary to traverse your setting. In the process, you should remember that people perceive more than just what they can see with their eyes. Sounds and smells can help create a mental image of a place. As gamemaster, you are the eyes and ears of the player characters; highlight your description with so much sensory information that the imaginations of your players will do the rest.

SOMETHING IS COLLAPSING
OVER OUR WORLD
THE HOUSE OF LIES IS FALLING.
EVERYTHING THAT SEEMED CERTAIN IS BEING
DESTROYED
ONE SHOULDN'T
WAKE SLEEPING DOGS.

[JANUS]

Before you describe something, you should yourself know what it looks and feels like. Through the technique of visualization you can conjure up your fantastical images—then, it will be easier for you to later describe the scene in words. You will need a quiet and comfortable place, something to write with, and perhaps small inspirations such as music, a novel, or a book of quotes (as quotes are verbalized images). Think about the word you will use to describe a location, a person, a building. What does it look like, but also what does it sound and smell like? If the characters touch it, how does it feel? Think about what you actually want to present. For example, take a veteran Scrapper camp in the ruins: a meeting point for the lost and hopeless of a shattered world. What might such a place look like? Close your eyes and think about the camp. Imagine the people for whom it is their everyday life, the pitiful buildings that protect the inhabitants from the elements. What do the houses look like? Are they one on top of the other or wide apart? Are the people happy or despondent? Keep going, it's your scene. Don't forget that the budget for your own imagination is unlimited!

TACTICAL TERRAIN

Be careful to make sure your settings contain enough material that if an armed conflict erupts it might seem right out of the movies: tall piles of debris that can serve for cover or hiding; carts that might be knocked over or rolled towards an enemy; trees one could bring down on your opponent, and so on.

Use the possibilities of the terrain, and motivate your players to do the same. When possible, have enemies duck behind the ruin of a stone wall or crawl through ditches to surprise the player characters. You can be sure your players will notice and use the knowledge to their own benefit at the next opportunity! Reward the commitment of your players and don't be afraid to reward reckless or crazy plans that make use of terrain or features you have pointed out to them. Let them engage in the kind of action sequences they see in their favorite movies or comics, granting successes through unusual means: "The wagon that you gave a push to rolls down the slope faster and faster, directly at the guard! With an awful racket, the soldier disappears beneath the vehicle, after which a dull thump is heard, replaced by anguished cries of pain."

TIPS FOR GAMEMASTERS

These tips are just guidelines. You can try them, but finding your own path is also important. First and foremost, the goal is to have fun. If you know exactly what makes your group tick, and every evening of gameplay is a rousing success, then don't change a thing. The old rule for mechanics applies here: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

WITH A VIEW TOWARD YOUR PLAYERS

One of the most important abilities of a gamemaster is knowing expectations. In other words, having an intuitive sense of what the players are currently feeling or hoping to experience. This ability has a lot to do with careful listening and reading the body language of your players. Are your players chomping at the bit or are several sinking into the sofa, occupied with arranging their dice by numbers of dots? Are your players currently not sure how to proceed and are walking in place? Or are only a portion of your players occupied, and the rest damned to uselessness or simply following along like slaves to the auction?

Think of your task as entertainment. You are to a large degree responsible for the enjoyment of the players! Therefore, you should think about why they are even playing and what they want from the game—for themselves and their characters. Try to plan games that get everyone involved and keep the entire group engaged. Don't let one player monopolize the game session; roleplaying games are about the group experience. With that in mind, it's good to know your players and what they want to get out of the game.

PLAYER DESIRES AND PLAYER TYPES

Players hope for successful experiences from a round of *Degenesis*. Unfortunately what these are varies greatly from player to player. One attacks every battle with fire, in order to prove herself through her character, while another would like to converse with even the most evil villain, because she loves any

form of communication in which a sword isn't needed. Another player would like to find out what it is like to be an Ashen in a world made up entirely of the ruins and shadows of her past. Yet another player is happy just to tag along, in order to be with her girlfriend or boyfriend.

These are all, of course, fine reasons to play *Degenesis*. Every one of these players has a right to have something about the game jump out at her. In order to help identify the wishes of your players, we have presented five typical player types that you are most likely to encounter in running your game. Don't forget that these are just ideals, and very few players will be so easily characterized. Most will likely be a mix of many different types.

THE BRUISER

This player type derives her enjoyment from conflicts, mostly of a violent nature. She isn't so interested in a highly developed story or interesting side characters, but rather in the possibility of proving herself through the physical abilities of her character. Often she is most interested in a new special weapon or combat ability far more than any other form of reward. In order to satisfy this player, really all you need is to provide a steady diet of one type of action sequence or another, be it battle, chase, or running the gauntlet.

THE SPECIALIST

Players belonging to this type always slip into a specific character type. This is often a figure from their favorite novel or film, which they may try to replicate in every character they create.

They are difficult only when the character they want to play has no place in the world of *Degenesis*. Here you must find a suitable counterpart. A chevalier might become a Hellvetic, a ninja an Ashen or Anubian. In this case it is up to you to find out what about the original makes your player happy—most of these qualities can be found in the cults or somewhere in the world of *Degenesis*.

THE STRATEGIST

The strategist is, like the bruiser, interested in conflicts and combat. They look to do more than just survive these battles, preferring to solve them through some exceptional plan. For the strategist, the perfect adventure is one in which the characters are protected from all difficulty through her machinations.

Unfortunately, you can't satisfy the strategist completely if you are keeping the enjoyment of the other players in mind as well. You can, however, provide her with much enjoyment if there are secrets to reveal and puzzles to solve—and, when she doesn't simply develop her own plan, but uncovers the grandiose master plan of the villain.

THE ACTOR

For the actor, it is of utmost importance to embody her chosen role down to the very last detail—unfortunately, often without regard for the other players and the development of the story. For the actor, it might be much more interesting to spend hours haggling with the water dealer from Liqua. Luckily, however, the figures of the actor often reveal a unique, tragic story. As gamemaster, you must simply find a possibility to tie this past of the player character with the adventure or campaign. Perhaps

the dealer offers the actor a shrunken head that is a stolen idol of her clan? Don't hesitate as gamemaster to interrupt the actor if you sense that the other players are hoping to move the game along: "OK, you buy the shrunken head. The following morning, your group moves on." But don't ignore the actor entirely, just give them encouragement and hints for how they can adapt their character's personality to the overall plot you have and the desires of the other players.

THE TAG - ALONG

Many players of this type only roleplay because they can meet with their friends or acquaintances this way. This could, however, also describe an inexperienced roleplayer who doesn't yet know how to handle herself with the other players and the game. Give the tag-along the possibility to become more involved in the game, and don't chide her if she doesn't take the opportunity to do so. If you notice at some point that she jumps out at a particular occurrence, then encourage her by using it to bring her into the center of the story for a time. Remember also that it is perfectly all right if the tag-along wishes only to be there and soak up the experience. Simply being there can be fun as well.

EVERY PLAYER CHARACTER IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT

Along with the various player types, you should also think about the motivations and goals of the player characters. Many players develop an interesting background story for their characters and are thrilled when the background aspects are touched upon in game. Take a look also at the history of the player characters and see if this material can be used in the game or how you can bring it in further down the line. Think about how the individual player characters can be made into a well-functioning group. Every character, regardless of their equipment and abilities, should have a role to play in the adventure. If your adventure is made up entirely of conflict and combat, mechanics or diplomats will have little success in an evening and feel unnecessary. Encourage your players to talk to each other as they develop their characters and to make links between them so that they are not all strangers at the start of your story. Also be sure that every figure has the opportunity to stand in the spotlight at some point in every session. Create a challenge for every player that is best solved by their character. In the process, remember to consider other possible solutions, as other players might derail your plan by splitting up or finding unexpected solutions to the problem.

Every adventure is a collection of extremely varied conflicts that yearn to be resolved. Conflict needn't mean combat, however! A situation in which the player characters must bring an enemy over to their side might be far more interesting than a brutal, all-out skirmish. The actors in the group might become the heroes of the evening. Alternatively, develop a scene in which a Scrapper player character must repair a vehicle under the pressure of time; the other players must protect her from discovery or attack in the meantime.

THE GAME IS THERE FOR EVERYONE

Make it clear to your players that it is their game too. Encourage them to develop settings, figures, and plots of their own and incorporate them into the game. For example, if a player has developed her hometown and would like to visit it in the course of the game, you could ask her to describe it to her taste and create the figures that the player characters will meet there. Don't forget that the details that the player doesn't reveal can still always be further developed or altered by you. In case a player tries to use this storytelling power too much for her own benefit, you can turn things around at anytime. Perhaps there are still unpaid bills or broken promises which suddenly leave the player character in a totally different situation?

Explain to your players that as gamemaster you always have a right to veto, but that you only intend to use it if you feel it will improve the enjoyment of the game. What is fun for the players may not be fun for the characters. Often what might make for a more enjoyable session may at first seem unfair or difficult to the players but becomes more enjoyable in the resolution for the tension the difficulty causes.

As gamemaster, you will constantly need to present many types of figures in the form of NPCs. If the players introduce new ones themselves, it can get tough for you. Don't let this be too great a source of stress. Let some characters be run by a player and give her some of the secret information about this non-player character. If the player lets this character say or do something she shouldn't, you can always invoke your veto—or simply say that the character turned out to be incorrect in what they said.

FRIENDS AND FOES

A variation of this technique is the so-called friend-foe system. In this system, every player not only creates her own character, but also a friend or foe. These figures are then trusted to other players to develop in detail. "Foe" might only mean opponent or rival: someone that is simply in conflict with the player character. This could be a jealous brother, an ex-lover bent on retaliation, or a Marshal who has made it her life's work to put the player character on trial for an act she never committed.

In this way, every player has a rough idea of her friend and foe, but only the player in charge of them knows the exact details.

GAME PREPARATION, PLANNING TIME, AND OTHER PROBLEMS

How you plan your evening of *Degeneration* gameplay is up to you. Some gamemasters plan the entire evening, developing countless settings and non-player characters, while others begin simply with a rough idea and improvise the rest.

PLAN THE EVENING!

Decide beforehand roughly how much time you have at your disposal. This will give you the possibility of molding the structure of your adventure to the amount of time on hand. If you know ahead of time that you can play for four full hours, you should structure your adventure so that you can, for example, get through the first act in one evening.

Stay flexible, however—if your players need more time, it's not a big deal. Problems only arrive if your players don't know how else to move forward. In this case you should try to quickly end the scene in question and begin on a new situation—perhaps through the arrival of an old acquaintance or rival.

If you notice that it is already late and your players are noticeably tired, do yourself and them a favor and don't rush through the plot. Stop at a riveting point. Here is an example cliffhanger:

You push the manhole cover aside and climb to the surface. No one there! You are just about to be on your way when you hear the sound of at least a dozen shotguns being cocked and a familiar voice saying, "Hello, my pretties. Now your little flight finally has an end." Enough for today!

By the next session, the players will have had enough time to figure out how to escape the situation. On the next evening of play, you can get right to it!

PREPARATION LESSENS STRESS

However you can manage it, attempt to deal with as much work as possible before the gameplay begins. If you can't think of the names of recurring characters, have a list ready. Do you find it difficult to describe interesting locations or persons? Write down a few crucial details beforehand or reach for photos from magazines, comics, picture books, or the internet.

Do all of your non-player characters seem one-dimensional to you? Take a look through a detective novel or let someone give you a recap of the latest episode of a good soap opera—you'll then have plenty of methods of entwinement and strange character peculiarities to draw your own unusual characters from.

Make notes during and after the sitting. Even if it is just chicken scratch on post-it notes—it will help you call back places, people, and occurrences you have improvised into your memory. If you do happen to forget something, ask your players. They also gain an advantage by taking notes, as one can never know if when that warning from three weeks ago in the Apocalyptic camp might again become important.

CONFLICT WITH OR BETWEEN THE PLAYERS

If a player gives you a hard time, speak with her alone. Ask them what the reason for the conflict is and try to clear the air. Sometimes roleplaying and the real world are hard to keep separate—and nothing is more aggravating than a personal issue that comes to light through the cover of gameplay.

Sometimes discussion doesn't help. If the difficulties don't end, it might be that nothing else helps but removing the player from the group. Though annoying, this isn't a horrible tragedy. It happens in every band and sports team, and most of the time this solution turns out to be the best for all involved.

IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE

Even gamemasters make mistakes. Don't be bothered if your players make you aware of inconsistencies ("Wasn't that guy's name Drugan last time, not Druger?"), simply correct your mistake. If there is a rules question involved, then you have the power to handle the decision as you see fit. Should a player show you where and how a rule is stated in the book that contradicts your decision, then simply tell them this:

The gamemaster is always correct, regardless.

What you should try to hinder are such discussions during the course of play. If a topic or decision can't be handled in a few sentences, then save it until after the game. Give reasons why you have made the decision as such, given the situation, and talk to your players about it. You can then still come to a final decision after the discussion. A last sentence to end with: being the gamemaster can be a difficult and unappreciated job. All of these tips and guidelines should be a way to make your job easier.

CHAPTER 12

OUT INTO
THE DUST

THE FALL OF FERROPOL

Once the forge hammers of Ferropol labored ceaselessly for the warlords of Exalt. The weapons it produced were not pretty, but renown for their practicality and effectiveness. The tireless suburb of Exalt made its citizens wealthy beyond measure—small reward for a hard and dreary life in the barren wastes of Borca.

Then, the Exalt city wars began and the metropolis was abandoned; Exalt fell and Justitian ascended. The hammers of Ferropol fell silent; its skilled steel crafters left to work in the factories of the Marshals.

As Justitian expanded, the Marshals ferreted outlaws from their camps and hideouts and chased them into the wasteland. With nowhere else to go, Ferropol became their refuge. The criminal element now lay beyond the reach of Justitian, managing a meager existence on the fringes of civilization.

CROW'S SCREAM

For a few years, the Protectorate ran a prison camp in the tunnels below Ferropol. The camp was run by a ruthless Apocalyptic named Apok. Apok was not specifically qualified to run the prison, but his stranglehold over Ferropol made it a convenient decision for the Marshals.

Thinking that the doors had been flung open for them, Apocalypstiks came from across the wastes to take advantage of the proximity to Justitian. They assumed Apok would merely

slap them on the wrists were they ever caught by the Marshals. Unfortunately for them, Apok held commerce with Justitian in higher regard than any loyalty to his cult. He treated his prisoners like cattle, no matter if they were strangers or family.

Unrest in the ranks of the Apocalypstiks grew and a few words of dissent soon blossomed into murderous plots. Apok caught wind of the schemes to end his tyranny. He staged a dinner for his family and friends; all of his closest advisors were in attendance. He announced that he would be passing the mantle of leadership to his second in command. As he raised a toast to the future an army of assassins broke into the room murdering every last dinner guest. None of his family or relations survived the night. The Marshals turned a blind eye; Apok's total control over Ferropol was christened with blood.

YEARS OF DECLINE

Over the following years, the food convoys that supplied the prison camp dwindled. The Marshals stopped sending convicts, they no longer felt society should be burdened by taking care of prisoners. The trade agreements with Justitian expired and Apok threw open the gates of the Ferropol prison camp. Officially, the prisoners were granted amnesty and sent on their way, but no record of any surviving prisoners has ever been located, which indicates a far more sinister ultimate solution.

HELL'S MOUTH

Justitian seemed to have forgotten about Ferropol. Marshals visited the town only long enough to collect the annual taxes they owed the Protectorate. Apok gladly paid the taxes to keep the Marshals satisfied. These tithes were nothing to him—he made his fortune as the baron of the criminal underworld. His brothels and gambling houses brought him more wealth than he could spend in a lifetime.

Since the city was ancient and loaded with refuse and ruins, Scrappers settled in the area hoping to hit pay dirt. The trade in scrap provided a façade of legality to the city's seedy economy.

FALSE GAME

If the Marshals knew of the conspiracies that were growing in Ferropol, they would have wiped out the city long ago—or would they? A rumor is spreading that Marshal spies have already infiltrated the underground resistance movement.

For Justitian, Ferropol is a buffer zone, an outpost behind enemy lines. It is too far away and too unimportant to establish control over, but its involvement with the Borcan underworld provides the Marshals invaluable information. The city is a Mecca for the lawless, a melting pot of the marked. As a result, it is kept on a long leash by the Marshal—one that is regularly yanked as a reminder of whom is in charge.

The Marshals dominate Ferropol through intimidation and starvation. Food deliveries are irregular. The grain is moldy, the meat rotten; stray dogs have better meals. Occasional raids stir up the filth of Ferropol, abusing guilty and innocent alike. The terrible treatment from the Marshals has finally pushed the citizens over the precipice. A dangerous rebellion is brewing in the alleys led by an exiled Marshal named Sikorski.

THE ROAD TO FERROPOL

Ferropol squats in the dust of the Wupper Crater. The ever-blowing dust has obliterated any proper highway that might have existed between it and Justitian. Instead of a road, debris has been gathered into piles of rubble to mark the route. The piles are situated about 200 steps apart and during fair weather one can easily march from one pile to the next. During a full-blown dust storm, it is considerably harder to stay on course, but the piles offer some slight protection from the raging dust.

During the era of the prison camp, a term was coined by the prisoners of the Marshals. They called the journey "the Long Walk to Ferropol," a phrase that is now commonly used to describe the judicial process in Justitian.

IRON BEETLES

Palm sized beetles covered in steely armor have been drawn to the Wupper Crater for centuries. The Scrappers call them *iron beetles*, the Spitalians call them *ferrites*. Research conducted in Spitalian hospitals has revealed that this obscure species secretes an acid that corrodes iron. The rust is then consumed and accumulates in the insect's red-colored shell.

WALLS OF RUST

All of the junk of Exalt was brought to Ferropol: old car wrecks, bent steel beams, street lanterns, etc. Simply put, if a magnetic crane could lift it, it was shipped to be melted down in the furnaces of Ferropol. Soon, the scrap exceeded the capacity of the furnaces and it began to stack up. The junk piled up along the streets and created new rusty alleys throughout the city. At times, the walls of metal would collapse and crush anyone unlucky enough to be under them.

The rusty metal was used as building material after the fall of Exalt. Without the protection of the city militias, the citizens of Ferropol built a stout and deadly wall around the city. Dust filled the gaps and crevices turned the Junk Wall into a deceptive and evil obstacle: anyone daring to climb it is likely to be viciously cut by razor-sharp refuse or buried alive under the shifting heaps of car chassis and wrought-iron scrap.

When the wall was finished, Apok erected the *dust catchers*. The dust catchers are steel beams that protrude from the wall like enormous spikes. Tarpaulins are hoisted up between them to protect the city from the oppressive dust storms.

SCORCH

While experimenting in his laboratory, Apok made an interesting discovery: insects are attracted to burn. Most significantly, this included the iron beetles that proliferated in Ferropol. "Nature never acts without reason," he told himself, and along with the Apothecary, an old corrupt Spitalian, he went about examining these infected creatures.

They discovered that the iron beetles could easily digest burn and their cells absorbed the active chemicals of the drug. In the interest of science, they crushed the insects into a pulp, boiled them for a number of minutes, and distilled the evaporated liquid into a pungent reddish-gray paste. This new substance has the same stimulus effects of burn without the unwanted intoxication phase. Furthermore, there are no spores that settle in the users' lungs and pollute their bodies. Though it is weaker in comparison to genuine burn, it is not nearly as dangerous.

For Apok, this was a thrilling breakthrough: his clients no longer had to fear the Spitalians and their mollusks, nor deal with the unwanted side effects of burn. The new drug *scorch* was born.

ADVENTURE 1: THE HALLS OF DECEIT

The *Halls of Deceit* is an adventure that takes place almost exclusively in the dusty streets of Ferropol. The PCs will eventually find themselves untangling a knot of intrigue and deception that may cost them their lives.

ACT 1

Upon arriving in Ferropol, the PCs should be introduced to the city as described under *Setting the Scene*. They should have a small chance to explore the city (see *Locations*, p. XX) and may participate in any of the encounters listed below in the *Atmosphere* section (p. XX). Eventually, however, they will be approached by a Chronicler named Integer who desires to hire them for an important and secret task (see *Intrigue*, p. XX). A complete timeline of the adventure can be found in *Time-Lapse*, p. 373.

SETTING THE SCENE

The gamemaster should read the following to the players:

Ferropol: dusty, filthy, forsaken. When its rusty towers of scrap first crested the horizon, your spirit soared—days of aimless wandering would soon be rewarded. Now, as you approach the city gate, dread and foreboding color your hopes.

The city walls are over 20 meters high. It's a massive and depressing sight. The city has been constructed from the rusted husks of ancient automobiles and is held together with glass, wire, and filth. Ramparts have been chiseled from the imposing scrap heap and grim soldiers stolidly watch the seething mass of people below.

Outside of the city gate, a large community of squatters has set up an encampment. The people are practically skeletons; their eyes are empty and lifeless. They reach toward you without any pretense of hope and you brush them aside like cobwebs. Truly, humanity at its lowest.

The gate of Ferropol lies open and shabby merchants and Scrapers line the road just inside, hoping to sell their garbage and delay starvation for another day.

LOCATIONS

The entire adventure occurs in the city of Ferropol. Below are key areas of the city:

The Bud

The city center is the old furnace of Ferropol, which squats next to a decrepit factory. It is tall and conical and resembles an unopened flower bud. Its outside is dirty and cracked; in some spots, the outer ceramic layer has fallen off, revealing blackened and

partially glazed brickwork. Buildings crowd around the massive oven and absorb the heat it emits.

The largest of these buildings belongs to Apok, the ruler of Ferropol (p. XX). Here he lives, surrounded by his treasures: oil paintings, marble busts, and faded wall hangings. His followers live in the adjacent buildings, though his favorite servant, Gram, is never more than a few meters away.

The Exchange

While there are no worthwhile ancient ruins in the wasteland around Ferropol, valuable artifacts can still occasionally be found hidden in the red dust dunes. All it takes to reveal this flotsam of the past is the occasional wind storm, though in most cases one must dig and poke through layers of filth to retrieve anything. The yield is small, but to the Chroniclers, any chance to find an artifact must be seized. In their view, you never know when a relic may turn out to be a key to the lost Stream. It would be sacrilege for such a gem to rust away on the sweaty breast of a Scrapper dirt monger.

The Chroniclers have ordered two mediators, Integer (p. XX) and Access (p. XX), to establish an exchange station near the gate of Ferropol. They are also responsible for radio communications in the city, which is monopolized by Apok. Although they know nothing about his connection with the Marshals, they have their suspicions. As well-paid service providers, they know better than to ask questions.

The Hives

Most of the inhabitants of Ferropol live in the giant scrapheap that dominates one part of the city. Shredded rags and rotten carpeting cover openings in the debris, giving the residents some semblance of privacy and decorum.

Some of the spaces are superficial, but many lead deep into the heart of Ferropol. It's not uncommon to stumble upon the grizzly remains of Scrapers. There is often something to be learned from these corpses—sometimes even the location of their secret stashes.

The Underground

Ferropol is one enormous scrap dump. It's hard to tell if there is even any ground beneath the city. It's almost impossible to tell where you are.

Crossing into the underground is barely perceptible. The air becomes slightly less stifling; the walls are smooth and almost dank. The twisting hell of the Hives changes into an organized system of corridors and rooms. Pounding music and squeals of ecstasy echo through the halls. This is Apok's Tavern: the most notorious brothel in Borca.

Pestule

Though many venture to Ferropol, not all have what it takes to make it in the city. Many are rejected, and these losers in the city of the lost find nowhere better to go than the foul camp of misfits directly outside the city gate. Soulless junkies and diseased cripples lay about, begging for scraps. Pestule makes city living seem desirable.

INTRIGUE

The Chroniclers have had a very valuable artifact stolen from them. If this item were to fall into the wrong hands, it could set off an unprecedented political scandal. If the Marshals discovered what was contained within the item, they would seriously question their relationship with the Chroniclers. If the people of Ferropol found out about it, a civil war might erupt. What began as a simple robbery could soon hold Ferropol by the throat. The Chroniclers are running out of time. They need the artifact back **immediately!**

Integer will approach the PCs, seeking to hire them to find and retrieve a stolen device. A few hours after the artifact has been deposited in a predetermined car wreck, the Chronicler will be authorized to pay the characters 500 chronicreds. If the PCs accept the job, the Chronicler will provide the following information:

- An Ashen is believed to have stolen the artifact.
- Most likely, the Ashen will have the item identified in Ferropol, and try to sell it there as well.
- The artifact looks like a faded black key with a box attached to it.

After accepting the mission the PCs should explore the city to gather information about the Ashen and his priceless treasure.

The Eavesdropper

The artifact the Chroniclers seek is a listening device with a recorder. The device consists of a black plastic extension piece attached to a small box with a plastic screen. The small box is a magnetic tape recorder specifically constructed to record audio information.

The Chronicler in charge of communications in Ferropol used it to record a secret meeting that took place between High Protector Rutgar, second in command in Justitian, and his loyal

followers. During the conversation, the identity of Sikorski (p. XX), the leader of the resistance in Ferropol, is revealed, tying him directly to the protector faction of the Marshals. The tape is definite proof that the protectors control the resistance and that they use it to attack convoys of their rival Marshal faction, the advocates.

ATMOSPHERE

To begin the adventure and get the PCs introduced to the seedy world of Ferropol, consider using one or more of the following encounters:

Drug Craze

A burn addict in Pestule begs the characters to give him a pinch of burn and falls into a rage if they refuse. He is weak but belligerent. If not dealt with swiftly, he may attract other vagrants and addicts. Strangers are uncommon in Ferropol and this commotion will quickly draw attention to the PCs.

A Failed Deal

While exploring the alleys of Ferropol, the characters walk into the middle of a doomed drug deal taking place between some Apocalyptiks and a group of extremely agitated Spitalians. The Spitalian drug addicts are paranoid because their lives would be forfeit if their cult leaders found out about them. They see spies everywhere.

They two parties are in tense negotiations when the PCs appear. The sudden arrival of unknown interlopers is too much for the paranoid Spitalians to bear. They lose control and point their splayers at the strangers. The Apocalyptiks use this opportunity to flee. A fight can still be avoided, but if the PCs don't do everything within their power to pacify the paranoid Spitalians, the affair will take an uncomfortable turn.

If the PCs win the combat and the corpses are discovered, the city will soon teem with bloodthirsty Spitalians looking to avenge their comrades.

Addicted Spitalians

Attributes: AGI 6, BOD 5, CHA 4, INT 6, PSY 4

Skills: AGI 6 + Armed Combat 2 (AV 8), AGI 6 + Initiative 1 (AV 7), BOD 5 + Mobility 1 (AV 6), BOD 5 + Stamina 3 (AV 8), BOD 5 + Strength 3 (AV 8), BOD 5 + Toughness 3 (AV 8), PSY 4 + Self Mastery 3 (AV 7), PSY 4 + Perception 3 (AV 7)

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 8

Vitality: 8

Equipment: Splayer without mollusk (DAM 6 (4), Inertia 8, Range 2), Spitalian suit (ARM 0/1/1)

Beetle Invasion

While traveling through the Hives, the characters suddenly hear a wild patter and shuffling above their heads. A moment later, thousands of iron beetles rain down from above and envelop the group. The insects are not interested in the humans and the horror has passed almost as soon as it begins.

The PCs need to make a Self Mastery Skill Roll with Difficulty 5. If they fail, their Initiative is reduced by 2 points for the rest of the day.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

APOK, RULER OF FERROPOL, BORCAN APOCALYPTIK

Apok is the unchallenged ruler of Ferropol. Since arranging the slaughter of his own family, he is also a Raven without kin. During the massacre, he lost his left eye; a smooth black stone now sits in his eye socket.

Apok's struggle for dominance has obliterated his soul. He is as paranoid as a rabid dog. When he is home, he keeps his back to the wall and endlessly walks the halls and rooms of his compound. He always varies his route and schedule. Every window is covered with a thick drape and he is only comfortable skulking about in the dark.

Apok is vital to the adventure and must not die. As the GM you are responsible for making sure this character survives.

Attributes: AGI 4, BOD 4, CHA 6, INT 4, PSY 5

Skills: AGI 7 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 11), AGI 4 + Firearms 5 (AV 10), AGI 7 + Reaction 5, (AV 12), BOD 4 + Stamina 3 (AV 7), BOD 4 + Strength 2 (AV6), BOD 6 + Toughness 3 (AV 10), CHA 6 + Intimidation 3 (9), CHA 6 + Domination 3 (9), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 3, Torso 5, Legs 4

Trauma Wounds: 10

Vitality: 7

Equipment: Pistol 9 mm UEO (DAM 8 (7), Range 5/20/80, Inertia 5), Scourger flak jacket (ARM 0/4/0), Stiletto (DAM 4 (3), Range 1, Inertia 6)

GRAM, APOK'S BODYGUARD, HELLVETIC MERCENARY

Gram was once a promising Hellvetic. He was destined to join the upper echelons of the sacred Alps fortress. His battle skills were extraordinary, his marksmanship legendary. At 25, he was one of the youngest staff sergeants to ever work in Region 2.

Sadly, he became afflicted by merciless migraine headaches. His headaches reduced him to a slaving beast, and when he accidentally slew a fellow officer, his military career was over. Confused, wretched, and unarmed, he crawled out of the Alps fortress.

Gram hired himself out as a mercenary. Though he couldn't salvage his trailblazer, he kept his harness, and his amazing marksmanship compensated for the inaccuracy of his new Russian assault rifle.

Stumbling from one painful seizure into another, he took on every job that came his way until his disease made him an incalculable risk to anyone near him. He crossed the Marshals numerous times and was eventually branded. The protectors considered him an incurable social leech and locked him in the vaults of Ferropol. This placed him at the mercy of Apok, who took an immediate interest in him. Watching him sweat and scream his way through an agonizing migraine, an idea came to Apok: he would try his experimental burn therapy on Gram.

Amazingly, it worked. Apok's special burn derivative, scorch, eased Gram's agony and lifted his veil of insanity. He learned how to anticipate the migraines and treat them with the new drug—the animal in him, though not necessarily tamed, was put in chains.

As the Marshal's neglect of Ferropol grew, Apok freed the Hellvetic and took him on as his personal bodyguard. Gram had little choice. Though forced into servitude by his need, he has never regretted his decision.

Gram has now seen 42 winters. His gaze is as piercing as ever. He keeps his hair short and proudly displays his brand for everyone to see. In the dangerous streets of Ferropol, a little intimidation can be a powerful defense.

Gram is deeply loyal to Apok. He never questions his captain and speaks only when necessary. Apok defers to his superior military tactics as Gram is the master of Ferropol's extensive arsenal. Gram is always at Apok's side and only leaves after his master is safely in bed or when he feels a migraine coming on.

Gram is vital to the adventure and must not die. As the GM, you are responsible for making sure this character survives.

Attributes: AGI 7, BOD 6, CHA 3, INT 3, PSY 5

Skills: AGI 7 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 11), AGI 7 + Firearms 6 (AV 13), AGI 7 + Reaction 5 (AV 12), BOD 6 + Stamina 4 (AV 10), BOD 6 + Strength 4 (AV 10), BOD 6 + Toughness 3 (AV 10), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 3, Torso 5, Legs 4

Trauma Wounds: 10

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Richter Musket (DAM 7 (7), Range 10/40/100, Inertia 10), Helvetic Harness (ARM 2/3/3, Fireproof 4), Pistol 9 mm UEO (DAM 8 (7), Range 5/20/80, Inertia 5), Stiletto (DAM 4 (5), Range 1, Inertia 6)

SIKORSKI

Sikorski would be an inconspicuous person if not for the hideous brand on his forehead. He was marked for the attempted murder of two protectors. The exact circumstances of this deed are hazy, and those who look into Sikorski's hardened face and cold eyes are too intimidated to ask him any questions.

Sikorski's history is shrouded in mystery. Some claim that he once was a Marshal himself. The only thing that is certain is that his campaign against Justitian began almost 10 years ago. His leadership has never been questioned—most consider the brand on his forehead sufficient proof of his legitimacy.

This is all a complete lie.

Sikorski was and is a Marshal protector. The brand is not a symbol of his grizzly past but rather his relentless devotion to the protectors of Justitian. He marked himself for authenticity and appears to be the perfect resistance fighter. Justitian never abandoned Ferropol and will never surrender it to the mob. Justitian can rely on Sikorski. He recruits the lawless, schemes with them, and then betrays them to the Marshals. The Chroniclers supply him through the Neolibyans or by enlisting the help of Justitian's political enemies. The thugs of Ferropol serve unwittingly as the Marshals' assassins.

Sikorski is vital to the adventure and must not die. As the GM, you are responsible for making sure this character survives.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 6, CHA 5, INT 5, PSY 4

Skills: AGI 5 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 8), AGI 5 + Firearms 3 (AV 18), AGI 5 + Reaction 5 (AV 10), BOD 6 + Stamina 3 (AV 9), BOD 6 + Strength 4 (AV 5), BOD 6 + Toughness 3 (AV 10), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 3, Torso 5, Legs 4

Trauma Wounds: 10

Vitality: 9

Equipment: Shotgun (DAM 10 (6), Range 5/20/40, Inertia 7), Battle Knife (DAM 4 (4)), Mesh Vest (ARM 0/4/0)

SATO, THE BALKHAN ASHEN

Bald, long nose, reddened eyes, and pale skin—superficially, Sato is a typical Ashen. However, Sato chose the path of a demagogue: his voice is a deep baritone far more powerful than his scrawny features indicate.

Sato dresses in a black, white, and gray camouflage suit representative of the Recombination Group. His outfit is moth-eaten and tattered. He wears a patched coat made of gendo fur around his shoulders. Symbols of his tribe, called oculars—metal figures made from mirrored glass—dangle from his belt. When in strange company, he keeps these objects hidden from the greedy glances of strangers by pulling leather pouches over them.

Sato is a "waker." He is ultimately searching for one of the remaining dispensers. His quest brought him to Justitian and the Central Cluster. The Chroniclers' refusal to even hear his needs offended him greatly. He couldn't understand why the Chroniclers wouldn't help him and became incensed.

Over the years, he has been reduced to petty larceny and manages to scrape an existence in the margins of society. Stealing the artifact and fleeing to Ferropol was as much an act of revenge as it was a natural instinct.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 5, CHA 6, INT 5, PSY 4

Skills: AGI 7 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 11), AGI 5 + Projectile Weapons 3 (AV 8), AGI 4 + Stealth 4 (AV 8), AGI 5 + Thievery 3 (AV 8), BOD 6 + Stamina 3 (AV 9), CHA 6 + Domination 5 (AV 11), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 5

Vitality: 9

Equipment: Crossbow (DAM 5 (7), Range (10/30/100), Inertia 10), Club (DAM 3 (2), Inertia 6), Leather Armor (0/2/0)

RAEDE, A POLLENER TRIBESMAN IN PESTULE

Raede has long, matted hair that seamlessly melds into his fur cloak. He leans on his great stone hammer, carelessly surveying the strangers who pass through the gates of Ferropol. He is the eye of Apok. He is also rowdy and quick to anger. He is as slow with the tongue as he is fast with the fist. He concentrates and chews on every single word before he spits it out. Flattery is useless but he demands respect.

Raede saw Sato enter the city—he sees everyone enter. To him, Sato was just another pale dwarf, rare and comical. After sundown on the first day, he will jokingly tell Apok about the Ashen. Something out of the ordinary? Certainly not.

Apok knows nothing of the Ashen's importance. But after Raede reports back to him, he will instruct Raede to follow and monitor the stranger. People seem to be asking a lot of questions about him.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 7, CHA 3, INT 3, PSY 6

Skills: AGI 5 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 8), BOD 7 + Stamina 3 (AV 10), AGI 5 + Reaction 5 (AV 10), BOD 7 + Strength 5 (AV12), BOD 7 + Toughness 3 (AV 10), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 1 (AV 7),

Flesh Wounds: Head 3, Torso 5, Legs 4

Trauma Wounds: 10

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Stone Hammer (DAM 7 (6), Range 2, Inertia 7)

THE MOLE, A BORCAN SCRAPPER IN THE HIVES

The Mole is an aged scrapper living in a cluttered cave. He is like an ancient primitive rock, wrestling his way through a mass of beams and cables. His fingers are callused and his fingernails are overgrown and splintered. Dirt is his second skin. Until recently, he still poked through the dust dunes outside of Ferropol, but his bones are failing and he is often too weak to move. Though he is helpless, Apok is reluctant to let him die since he knows as much about the strange artifacts that pass through Ferropol as the Chroniclers. The Mole is given a weekly stipend of bread and water that sustains him and his bitterness.

During the day, he tinkers with defective relics and hurls obscenities at anyone foolish enough to come anywhere near him.

Sato has visited him, shown him the eavesdropper, and received an explanation of its functions. Hence, Mole also knows about Sikorski's relationship with the protectors of Justitian. He chased Sato out of his house like a sporeling, refusing any payment for his information. He is well aware how dangerous this information is and will deny having had any contact with the Ashen.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 3, CHA 4, INT 6, PSY 6

Skills: AGI 5 + Thrown Weapons 3 (AV8), BOD 3 + Stamina 3 (AV 6), CHA 4 + Negotiation 4 (AV8), INT 6 + Tinkering 5 (AV11), PSY 6 + Perception 3 (AV9), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 1, Torso 3, Legs 2

Trauma Wounds: 3

Vitality: 6

Equipment: Scrapper club (DAM 5 (1), Inertia 7)

IRINA, A BALKHAN APOCALYPTIK

Irina is one of Apok's finest prostitutes and works in the underground brothel; she is Sato's favorite girl. She knows everything that happens in Ferropol and secretly serves as the eyes and ears of the resistance. Sato told her of the recordings and she swiftly passed this information on to Sikorski. She knows nothing about Sikorski's duplicity. She will pay for this ignorance with her life.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 4, CHA 3, INT 7, PSY 6

Skills: AGI 5 + Armed Combat 5 (AV 10), AGI 5 + Reaction 4 (AV 9), AGI 4 + Stealth 4 (AV 8), BOD 4 + Stamina 2 (AV 6), CHA 3 + Seduction 5 (AV 8), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 4 (AV 10)

Flesh Wounds: Head 1, Torso 3, Legs 2

Trauma Wounds: 3

Vitality: 5

Equipment: Apocalyptic blade bracelet (DAM 4 (2), Inertia 5)

RANDOM SCRAPPERS

Numerous Scrappers have seen Sato. An Ashen sticks out like an albino thumb. He had asked some of them to examine a strange artifact. They all referred him to the Mole.

Attributes: AGI 4, BOD 4, CHA 3, INT 5, PSY 6

Skills: AGI 4 + Armed Combat 2 (AV 6), AGI 4 + Projectile Weapons 6 (AV 10), AGI 4 + Reaction 4 (AV 8), BOD 4 + Stamina 3 (AV 7), BOD 4 + Toughness 4 (AV 8), PSY 6 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 8)

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 8

Vitality: 7

Equipment: crossbow (DAM 5 (8), Range 10/30/100, Inertia 10), leather tunic (ARM 0/2/0), scrapper club (DAM 5 (1), Inertia 7)

ACT 2

Within a few hours of the eavesdropper's theft, the proverbial shit hits the fan. Immediately after Sato told Irina about the eavesdropper, Sikorski knows everything is in danger of falling apart around him. He starts to panic.

Until now, only three people knew about his connection with the Marshals, and they weren't able to make much use of the information. So far, nobody is asking any questions, however, Sikorski sends radio communications to his trusted ally among the protectors. His friend promises to take care of the situation. A few hours later, three individuals appearing to be Scappers ride through the gate of Ferropol. They head directly into the Underground, barely pausing to dismount from their horses. They are really Black Marshals—High Protector Rutgar's hand-picked henchmen. A bloodbath ensues. Sato will be one of the first victims; Mole and Irina are also on the hit list. The PCs are targeted as soon as they begin to ask conspicuous questions or somehow become connected with this case.

When the dead NPCs are discovered, different factions begin to take measures to protect themselves. Apok seals the city, and the Chroniclers send in their own special forces. Everyone fears for their reputations and their lives.

SETTING THE SCENE

The gamemaster should read the following to the players:

An eerie hush has descended upon Ferropol and is soon broken by the pounding of hooves. Three figures ride purposefully through the streets and head straight toward the Underground, the most popular brothel in the city. Though they appear to be Scappers, there is something odd about them—they move with resolute purpose, and their faces are hidden behind well-oiled gas masks.

The riders dismount with practiced precision and hand their steeds to a few grubby street urchins nearby. They give the children a slip of paper and descend into the underground.

INTRIGUE

Before the Marshals enter the Underground, they hand their horses to a handful of grubby Scapper children. They pay them 20 chronicreds for their trouble, but have neglected a few important details which the children notice almost immediately: the horses are shod with shoes distinctive to the Marshal cult and marked with the hammer of justice.

ATMOSPHERE

Probe

Sikorski's resistance movement is painfully aware of the PCs and their investigation. In order to assess the new arrivals Sikorski assigns one of his agents, Janod, to look into the strangers. Janod is an old Anabaptist orgiast. He was stripped of his rank and kicked out of the cult because of his excessive alcoholism. He is now Sikorski's main recruiter and informant.

He fits every stereotype associated with an alcoholic: long greasy hair, oversized pores, and he is both simpering and belligerent. He stumbles around the city like a lunatic, but this is merely a façade. His act is so convincing that no one suspects his true allegiances.

Janod will eventually find the PCs and ask them questions to assess their involvement with the missing Chronicler device and their allegiances. Depending on how the group responds, Janod will either ignore them, mark them as dangerous, or try to recruit them into the resistance movement. He reports everything to his liege, Sikorski.

New to the City

A group of burn addicted Apocalyptiks are unhappy about the PCs traveling through their turf and harassing the locals. One of them pretends to have some important information and attempts to lead the PCs into a dead-end alleyway in the Hive labyrinth for an ambush. Four Apocalyptiks block the only exit and try to extort money from the PCs. If the PCs refuse, a fight will ensue.

Burn-Addicted Apocalyptiks

Attributes: AGI 6, BOD 7, CHA 4, INT 3, PSY 5

Skills: AGI 5 + Reaction 2 (AV 7), AGI 6 + Unarmed Combat 3 (AV 9), BOD 7 + Mobility 3 (AV 10), BOD 7 + Stamina 3 (AV 10), BOD 7 + Strength 3 (AV 10), BOD 7 + Toughness 2 (AV 9), PSY 5 + Perception 2 (AV 7), PSY 5 + Self Mastery 1 (AV 6)

Specializations: Unarmed Combat (*blade bracelet*) 2

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 9

Equipment: blade bracelet (DAM 4 (5), Range 1, Inertia 5), black leather pants and coat (ARM 0/1/1)

Recruitment

If Sikorski is content with the talk Janod had with the group, he will recruit the PCs into the resistance movement. A meeting will be arranged in a chamber by the Junk Wall.

Thunder Over Ferropol

When Mole's body is discovered, everything changes. The PCs are now viewed with suspicion and open hostility. If they choose to attend the recruitment meeting of the underground resistance forces, nobody will be there to meet them.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

BLACK MARSHALS, BORCAN PROTECTOR SPECIAL AGENTS

The Black Marshals have tried to disguise themselves in Scapper garb, however they look out of place. Their clothes are too clean and new, they look too healthy, and their weapons are too well cared for. They wear gas masks and there is no way to tell them apart. Their appearance is intimidating and they seem to be everywhere at once.

Marshal 1 goes into the brothel and takes Irina into a private room. He interrogates her, asking who she has told about the Ashen and the eavesdropper. Once he has the information he needs, he slits her throat. After this, he calmly exits the brothel and wanders through Pestule, trying to locate anyone else who might be involved in the fiasco.

Marshal 2 looks for the Scrapper who appraised Sato's stolen treasure. He doesn't know what the device is or what it does, nor does he know the name of his prey. Other Scrapers will eventually reveal what they know, pointing the Marshal towards Mole. Mole, however, will use his knowledge of Ferropol to disappear into the labyrinth of junk.

Marshal 3 sets himself on Sato's tracks. His first priority is to salvage the artifact. His second is to kill the unfortunate Ashen. He will not find Sato before the PCs.

Once they have accomplished their initial goals, they will tie up any loose ends. Most likely, the PCs are involved and will fall into this category. Soon enough, they will be confronted by these menacing characters.

Attributes: AGI 7, BOD 7, CHA 3, INT 4, PSY 5

Skills: AGI 7 + Armed Combat 2 (AV 9), AGI 7 + Firearms 4 (AV 11), AGI 7 + Reaction 3 (AV 10), BOD 7 + Mobility 3 (AV10), BOD 7 + Stamina 2 (AV 9), BOD 7 + Strength 2 (AV9), BOD 7 + Toughness 2 (AV 9), PSY 5 + Perception 3 (AV 8) , PSY 5 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 7)

Specialization: Firearms (*pump shotgun*) 2

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 9

Vitality: 7

Equipment: Pump gun (DAM 8 (9), Range 5/20/80, Inertia 7), 10 shots, battle knife (DAM 4 (4), Inertia 6), leather coat with metal netting (ARM 0/3/3), gas mask (ARM 1/0/0),

SHUTTERS, BORCAN CHRONICLER SPECIAL AGENTS

To outsiders, the Chroniclers are peaceful with no militaristic ambitions. However, when the situation in Ferropol turns dire and the corpses start piling up, the Chroniclers enlist the services of some battle-tested, retired mediators.

The Shutters are experts in all sorts of offensive techniques, but they cannot count on any overt support from the local Chroniclers. When they reach Ferropol, they investigate the murders and interrogate the characters. So far, however, they have not received any order to attack—just to find the eavesdropper.

The Shutters appear to be little else than former Chroniclers. They still wear their old cloaks, but the bar code is cut from the cloth. They were also forced to hand in their vocoders and instead of leather masks, they wear gas masks with oversized filters. The Shutters can't talk. Instead, they communicate via hand signs.

Attributes: AGI 5, BOD 4, CHA 4, INT 7, PSY 4

Skills: AGI 5 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 8), AGI 5 + Firearms 3 (AV 8), AGI 5 + Initiative 2 (AV 7), AGI 5 + Stealth 3 (AV 8), BOD 4 + Stamina 2 (AV 6), BOD 4 + Strength 1 (AV 5), BOD 4 + Toughness 1 (AV 5), PSY 4 + Perception 3 (AV 7), PSY 4 + Self Mastery 2 (AV 6)

Flesh Wounds: Head 1, Torso 3, Legs 2

Trauma Wounds: 5

Vitality: 5

Equipment: Signal pistol (DAM 2 (9), Inertia 8, Range 5/20/80, ammo: 6), shocker (DAM 5 (9), Range 2, Inertia 8), ammo: e-cubed, 20 charges, paralysis, superstition (8)), cape (ARM 0/0/0), leather coat (ARM 0/1/1), gas mask (ARM 1/0/0)

Special equipment: *Impulse radio equipment:* This device is built into the casing of an old wristwatch and consists of a small red light, a transmitter, and a pushbutton. If a Shutter pushes the button, the devices of all members of his team light up. Thus, the Shutter can send Morse-code messages to each other over large distances.

Screamer: This artifact resembles a metal pipe. There is a button on one end of the device while the other end must be forced into the ground. Pushing the button activates the device. It immediately emits an ear-splitting sound that increases the Difficulty of every action within 15 meters by 5. Deaf characters or those who have taken precautions to protect their hearing are unaffected. The Screamer also becomes very hot. Anyone who touches the device will suffer a flesh wound to the torso.

APOK'S BAILIFFS, BORCAN APOCALYPTIKS

Apok's bailiffs are led by Gram. There are 25 individuals who openly serve Apok and another 100 that serve him in secret. They include smugglers, prostitutes, counterfeiters, and mercenaries. Their loyalty is doubtful, however, they are sufficiently afraid of Gram's psychotic fits and Apok's long arm to do as they are told.

When Irina's body is discovered Gram will have the gates of the city closed and the walls manned with his people.

Attributes: AGI 4, BOD 5, CHA 4, INT 3, PSY 5

Skills: AGI 4 + Armed Combat 3 (AV 7), AGI 4 + Initiative 2 (AV 6), AGI 4 + Projectile Weapons 3 (AV 7), BOD 4 + Mobility 2 (AV 6), BOD 5 + Stamina 2 (AV 7), BOD 5 + Strength 3 (AV 8), BOD 5 + Toughness 2 (AV 7), PSY 5 + Perception 2 (AV 7), PSY 5 + Self Mastery 1 (AV 6)

Flesh Wounds: Head 2, Torso 4, Legs 3

Trauma Wounds: 7

Vitality: 7

Equipment: Spear (DAM 6 (4), Range 2, Inertia 8, fragile (1)), bow (DAM 5 (4), Range 16/32/48, Inertia 8, ammo: 20 arrows), black leather pants and coat (ARM 0/1/1)

Special equipment: *bone whistles:* these are small pipes carved out of human finger bones. Every bailiff carries one on a string around their neck in order to raise an alarm if necessary.

ACT 3

Act 3 begins when the players finally meet Sato. He believes them to be the murderers of the Mole and Irina and runs for his life. At this point he is well acquainted with the Hives of Ferropol and dashes into its depths. If the PCs follow him, he will begin shouting to the Scrapers who live there that he is being pursued by the Mole's killers.

The GM must decide how the other NPCs will react. Perhaps the group is noticed by a Black Marshal or a Shutter. Perhaps they manage to wrest the stolen item from Sato. Will they be able to return it to the Chroniclers before the Black Marshals find them? What will Apok's bailiffs do if they witness the chase?

If the PCs are able to deposit the eavesdropper at the predetermined location in time, the adventure concludes. This is also the case if the listening device is somehow destroyed or removed from Ferropol. If successful, the characters withdraw and wait for their payment from the Exchange of Ferropol. This will only happen after the eavesdropper is successfully returned.

The characters will remain under surveillance—and one last fight against the Black Marshals may ensue. If the GM feels the PCs have suffered enough, or if they have already defeated the Black Marshals, then they can rest and distribute their experience points.

SETTING THE SCENE

The gamemaster should read the following to the players:

Everyone's nerves are on edge. So much has happened in the past 12 hours that it is hard to know who to trust and where to turn. Strange masked figures roam the dark corridors of Ferropol and everyone you talk to seems to wind up dead.

The townspeople avert their eyes as you approach, but you know they are watching your every move.

With apprehension, you turn into another dark and narrow alley and run headlong into the source of your hardship: the Ashen Sato. He looks up at you, lets out a strangled yelp, and sprints back down the alley, screaming for help.

INTRIGUE

For the characters, much hinge on the outcome of this scenario. During the past few days spent chasing after the Ashen, they may have easily ended up on the black lists of the most important cults of Borca.

The Marshals of Justitian will mark them if they kill a Black Marshal, thwart the transfer of the eavesdropper, or join the resistance. If the characters are looking to make enemies for life, the protectors easily fit that role. However, the advocates might provide them certain benefits if they receive information implicating the protectors in a debacle at Ferropol.

If the group recovers the eavesdropper, the Chroniclers' mercenary database will classify them as trustworthy. It does not matter much if significant information has been handed

on to the protectors—lower-rank Chroniclers are unaware of their cult's duplicity. However, should the group fail in its task and not be able to prove that they have nothing to do with the murder, then it will be difficult for the players to clear their soiled reputation.

Apok will observe every movement of the strangers, as much as he will monitor the Marshals and the Shutters. If the PCs are somehow implicated in the murder of Irina, Apok's revenge will be swift and brutal.

The resistance can act as a powerful ally if the characters become recruits. They will be sent on raids and may even accumulate considerable wealth. However, Sikorski will hand them over to the protectors the very moment they become a threat to Justitian. Either way, the group is under intense scrutiny.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

ADVOCATE TARGATE

The advocate order of the Marshals have suspected the protectors of shady dealings in Ferropol for many years. With the recent swell of activity, they send one of their own to investigate. Advocate Targate is a hardened advocate who excelled in every exam during his years in the academy. Corruption and vice are his bane and he scours Ferropol for evidence of wrongdoing. It does not take him long to discover that something is seriously amiss. Rumors of a Chronicler listening device and the damning information it contains soon reach him, and he makes plans to purchase the device from its hapless owner.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The experience points depend on how the players acted:

- For every Black Marshal killed by the PCs, each receives 2 XP towards AGI, 1 XP towards BOD
- if the players were able to disprove any responsibility for or connection to the murders, each PC receives 3 XP towards INT and 2 XP towards CHA.
- if the players correctly interpret the recording on the listening device, they receive 3 XP towards INT.
- if the eavesdropper is returned to the Chroniclers, 3 XP can be applied toward any attribute the players choose.

If the players have accomplished the given tasks mostly through physical exertion and battle, then they will receive an additional 3 XP toward BOD and AGI. On the other hand, should they have shown empathy and displayed great communication skills, then each player can assign 3 XP toward CHA and PSY.

TIME - LAPSE

A simple theft—unforeseeable consequences. Numerous groups are pulled into the chain of events that unfold; a conflict between the mightiest cults of Justitian ensues. The following timeline provides a chronological overview to the GM.

DAY 1, MORNING

Sato arrives in Ferropol with the stolen eavesdropper. Raede notes his arrival.

Sato shows the eavesdropper to various Scrapers. They all tell him to talk to the Mole.

DAY 1, MIDDAY

Sato has the functionality of the device explained to him by the Mole. He doesn't understand the full meaning of the information the eavesdropper contains, but the harsh reaction of the old Scrapper speaks volumes.

DAY 1, EVENING

Raede informs Apok of the Ashen's arrival, among other affairs.

Sato goes Underground where he meets Irina and tells her everything. Then he ventures off in search of someone who might want to purchase the device.

Irina rushes to Sikorski and tells him about Sato and his discovery; she does not suspect his treachery. Sikorski subsequently warns the protectors in Justitian of their danger. They send the Black Marshals to Ferropol.

DAY 2, MORNING

The PCs arrive in Ferropol.

The Chroniclers at the Exchange receive word that an Ashen who stole the eavesdropper is likely to be in Ferropol. They are instructed to find it.

DAY 2, MID - DAY

The Chroniclers hire the PCs and order them to recover the artifact and deposit it in a wrecked car.

DAY 2, EARLY EVENING

The Black Marshals arrive in Ferropol and begin their search.

Irina goes with a Black Marshal to a small room off the side of the main hall. Minutes later, she is dead. Her corpse will not

be discovered until later in the evening when the brothel gets more active.

One of the Black Marshals tracks down the Mole, but the Scrapper escapes into the Hive.

Apok, hearing that many people are looking for an Ashen, sends Raede to find and observe him.

A disguised advocate named Targate investigates the protector's dealings in Ferropol. He secretly hopes that they are not fulfilling their duties but finds out more than he bargained for. Word of a valuable Chronicler device reaches him and he arranges a meeting with Sato to purchase the device.

DAY 2, LATE EVENING

Irina's body is discovered.

The Chroniclers become suspicious. Mere hours after they have put the PCs on the case, the first corpse turns up. Additionally, the artifact has not been delivered. The Central Cluster activates the Shutters and send them into Ferropol to investigate.

Sato hears of the murder and withdraws into the Hive.

Sikorski dispatches Janod to investigate the PCs.

DAY 3, MORNING

The three Shutters reach Ferropol.

One of the Black Marshals finds the Mole. The thunder of his rifle echoes throughout Ferropol. Other Scrapers find the Mole a few moments later with a fist-sized hole in his chest.

Janod approaches the PCs.

DAY 3, MID - DAY

Apok is furious. Gram is ordered to catch the Mole's murderer at any cost.

The gates are shut, the Bailiffs are put on high alert. Nobody enters or leaves the city. Meanwhile, Gram interrogates the prostitutes of the underground brothel and hears of Irina's last customer. He immediately begins searching for anyone matching the Black Marshal's description.

DAY 3, EVENING

The Shutters find the PCs and tail them cautiously. They will not intervene unless it appears they can secure the eavesdropper and put the Central Cluster's fears to rest.

The Black Marshals are narrowing in on Sato and a race to find the Ashen in the Hive ensues.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The characters may have completed *The Halls of Deceit* more or less successfully, but this is only the beginning of the crisis in Ferropol.

Various groups secretly work against each other. Mistrust, public curfew, and assassinations—fear has descended upon Ferropol like a fog. Even though the eavesdropper has been returned to the Chroniclers, excerpts of the recordings have made their way around town.

Advocate Targate knows that a few protectors are cooperating with the leader of the resistance. Subsequently, Targate consults his closest colleagues. Together, they conclude that resistance activists must be located and interrogated, without the protectors' knowledge. Thus, Sikorski is identified as the underground leader and must be kidnapped. Targate hires the PCs to accomplish this.

Since knowledge of Sikorski's affiliations is Apok's license to act freely, it is in his interest to protect the wayward Marshal. If he were to be replaced by a genuine resistance fighter, the Marshals would burn Ferropol to the ground.

In order to protect Sikorski and smuggle him out of the city, High Protector Rutgar will station a garrison of loyal Marshals in Ferropol and enforce martial law. The city folk will become incensed and begin rioting throughout the city. The PCs must be on the lookout for Marshals and locals alike. If a conflict ensues, use the character stats provided for the Random Scrappers and the Black Marshals.

Will Apok and Sikorski manage to hold onto their influence and their lives? Or will the city finally be liberated?

A war between the Marshals and the resistance threatens to tear the city apart. Meanwhile, the protectors struggle to destroy every piece of evidence that links them to the underground cause. In doing so, they act without prudence or restraint. If need be, they will have Sikorski removed. But will he passively accept his fate? All these years spent among thugs and the common mob, and this is his reward?

Should the players' characters survive this confrontation, they will go down in history.